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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INVESTIGATING THE INCLUSIVE PRACTICES OF
TEACHERS WITHIN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

by

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Mary Little

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological investigation examined the inclusive practices used to instruct students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms by educators within a large Catholic diocese in the southeast US. This study used phenomenological research methods to examine the perspectives, practices, and policies of Catholic school educators in inclusive settings through interviews, observations, and artifact reviews of school data to triangulate findings within this research. Surveys completed by administrators and faculty members provided initial knowledge and perspectives of inclusive practices for instruction of students with disabilities (SWDs) within inclusive settings. Structured interviews and classroom observation were then completed with participants at the school to investigate the inclusive practices used within their classrooms and school for SWDs. All data were collected and analyzed from the observations of students with disabilities and educators in inclusive classrooms at the Elementary School site of this study, along with the data from surveys and interviews with the administrators and key faculty members at the school. The analyses across data sources resulted in five key themes attributed to inclusive practices within the school setting. The five themes that emerged were: (a) Catholic educators' belief to educate all students; (b) support provided of inclusive education; (c) planning for inclusive education; (d) differentiated instruction; and (e) consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and throughout the school. This study exposed the key factors and practices that educators in a Catholic school attributed to successful inclusive practices for students with moderate to severe disabilities. This research provides initial research and data about inclusive practices in Catholic schools.

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved Papa, who taught me the value and importance of education and continued knowledge. He taught me to pursue my dreams. His wisdom, generosity, and love are things for which I am forever grateful for. Although you are no longer here on earth to be there when I accept my diploma physically, I know spiritually you will be there right beside me. Forever grateful for your support and guidance, I love you Papa!

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“I’ll love you forever, I’ll like you for always, as long as I’m living, my baby you’ll be”

– Robert Munsch.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Because of the growing number of students who are identified with disabilities, education for the students with disabilities (SWDs), both in public and private institutions, has become an important issue in education. When Public Law 94-142 was passed in 1975, it guaranteed the rights for students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their specific needs. It was also passed to provide guidance to states regarding the education of students with disabilities and to assess the effectiveness of efforts to educate students with disabilities.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, local school districts do not have the authority to oversee or control the curriculum or academic programs of private schools, which include Catholic schools. (S. 1002.42(2)(h), F.S.). Durrow (2013) noted that public schools, unlike Catholic schools, are bound by legislation and policies of the federal and state departments of education focused on accountability for the achievement of all students. Catholic schools are often not bound by the same reporting and testing requirements as public schools. However, educators within the Catholic schools are still held responsible to educate students of all abilities, which include students with special needs and disabilities, by their constituencies (Durrow, 2013). Long's (2006) research concluded that special education in Catholic schools is implied, as education for all students affects any Catholic community member. With all decisions based on Catholic dogma, a contemplative educator must consider the message that is being sent out to the faith community, especially to those with special needs in the Catholic community. When the Catholic educational experience excludes students identified with

disabilities from Catholic educational experiences, the message is that students with disabilities are somehow not welcome and that is the exact opposite mission of the Catholic Church (Long, 2013). In their 1972 Pastoral, the American bishops described the Catholic Church's mission as "an integrating ministry, embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache), which the church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); and service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia)" (as cited in McDermott, 1997, p. 10). Based on this mission, ministry of the Catholic Church includes the entire Christian and human community. Therefore, it stands to reason that Catholic schools should ensure every student receives services based on their individual and personal needs in the classroom (McDermott, 1997).

Problem Statement

Students with disabilities are enrolled in Catholic schools and classrooms throughout the Diocese in which the research was conducted. However, the Associate Superintendent of this Diocese stated that accommodations and modifications to the curriculum and instruction have not been implemented in all schools for students identified with moderate to severe disabilities (Personal Communication, 2016). This Dissertation in Practice investigated the instructional practices of educators to address the needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities within their classrooms in a Catholic school setting. This Dissertation in Practice will look specifically at the lived experiences of educators in a Catholic elementary school that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Significance of the Problem

The education of students with moderate to severe disabilities within the Diocese is important to investigate because the mission of the Catholic Church is to serve the entire

community, including students with disabilities. Therefore, there is a need to identify and expand the types of educational services needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities to address the Catholic Church's mission. There are few research studies that have investigated the educational services for students with disabilities within Catholic school settings. One national study, conducted by Bello in 2006, investigated the educational services for students with moderate to severe disabilities within 300 Catholic high schools. The findings showed that 5.6% of the schools serving students with disabilities included students with moderate to severe disabilities. Burke and Griffin (2016) conducted a study in which they described the development of educational services for students with moderate to severe disabilities within two Catholic elementary schools. Although the students were included in the Catholic elementary schools, educational services were provided in self-contained settings in both schools. The authors described that in order to promote inclusive Catholic education, it is necessary to obtain necessary funding, develop necessary supports and resources, and encourage family involvement and support. In addition, faculty and staff must be willing to include students with disabilities and be dedicated to inclusive practices (Burke & Griffin, 2016). Burke and Griffin (2016) concluded that more steps and research are needed to better understand the effectiveness of inclusive programs in Catholic schools. Information and research regarding successful implementation of inclusion within classrooms is clearly limited. Burke and Griffin (2016) suggested that future research include classroom observations, interviews with involved stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, students with disabilities, and student peers without disabilities. The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice was to review the literature focused on inclusive education, expand the research about inclusive programs in Catholic

schools, and investigate the lived experiences and perspectives of the educators within Catholic schools and classrooms for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Bimonte (2004) noted that some Catholic elementary schools have not yet begun to modify their curriculum and instruction to serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. The lack of change has been due to the freedom of choice that each school and parish has based on the governance model of the Catholic schools. McDonnell, author of the Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA), reported that Catholic schools, historically, have followed a standard style of governance where the elementary schools were attached to the local parishes and led entirely by the pastor. High schools, however, were typically established by the Diocese and led by the bishop or a religious order (McDonnell, 2014).

Long (2006) reflected in his *Rationale for Special Education* that the Catholic Church teaches that each person is a reflection of the Divine. Because of this, all members are bound together in a community of faith to respect and care for one another. Therefore, it is the obligation of all members of the Christian community to work with, serve, and understand people with disabilities. This is a responsibility and obligation of the Catholic Church to include students with special needs into the Catholic schools and parish education programs (Long, 2013).

Based on this rationale, Catholic beliefs would suggest a goal within each Catholic Diocese to educate and include all students, including those with moderate to severe disabilities. To accomplish this, school personnel need to identify the types of special needs they would be serving, decide how these students with special needs can best be served when included, and determine the additional costs and sources of funding of special needs' services so that all

students in the schools are educated in inclusive schools (Long, 2013). This Dissertation in Practice investigated the current educational services provided to students with moderate to severe disabilities, including the instructional practices, in a sample of classrooms in one elementary school within the diocesan setting of this research. The school and educators within this study met the following criteria: the school and educators within the identified Diocese currently serve students with moderate to severe disabilities and the students with moderate to severe disabilities receive instructional services in inclusive classrooms with diverse student populations.

Organizational Context

This Dissertation in Practice took place in a large Diocese in the southeastern United States. All information regarding the Diocese was found on the website (Diocese's Schools, 2016) and confirmed by the Associate Superintendent of the Diocese through interview. The Associate Superintendent also provided additional information about the Diocese and schools during interviews. The Diocese was established in 1968. It consists of 79 parishes, 12 missions, two basilicas, 42 schools, and more than twenty-seven ministries and entities. It is led by its fifth Bishop, numerous clergy and religious women, as well as other church members. The Diocese is a community of the Catholic faith and represents many different ages, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and income and education levels. Of the 42 schools in the Diocese, there are 31 elementary schools (Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade), 5 high schools, 5 free-standing (not attached to a parish school) early learning centers, and one self-contained school for students with significant intellectual/cognitive disabilities. The schools range in size from smaller to larger schools to meet the needs of the community. There is a Superintendent and two Associate Superintendents of Schools. Each elementary school has a principal and pastor that exercise the

leadership roles in their parish community. The teachers report to the principal and pastor of their school (Diocese's Schools, 2016).

Catholic schools are not required to provide additional or individual special education services for students with disabilities through an individual education plan (I.E.P.), a Section 504 plan, or a Service Plan (Diocese, n. d.). However, educators and parish clergy in individual schools within the Diocese do provide a variety of learning environments and programs for students with special needs and disabilities based on available resources at individual schools. These services are determined through the admission processes at each school.

The admission process starts by reviewing the records of any student who has already been identified with special needs. Before admittance, the school personnel evaluate the student's needs to determine if the school has the necessary resources and ability to provide appropriate support. The administration of each school reviews all the documents, conducts an interview with the student and parents, and then makes an admission decision. When students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) are accepted and choose to enroll in a private institution, the students may not have the same rights and services due to federal state mandates. Once enrolled in the private institution, the local public school district converts the IEP into a Service Plan (SP). This is due to the procedures for private (Catholic) schools as per *Public Law 94-142* (Statutes & Constitutions, 2016). The Statute 1002.20 reviews the parents' rights and responsibilities for making the appropriate arrangements within the school district in order for this process to begin. A Service Plan outlines the services and supports to be provided by the public school personnel. Without the parent's consent, this cannot happen. Within the Catholic school setting, students with special needs are expected to follow the procedures and policies of

the school's Parent/Student Handbook. Parents are required to meet service hour contracts, attend parent conferences, and participate in any fundraising obligations of the school.

As McCann (2014) stated, parents have a daunting challenge finding an institution that is able to provide quality education and services for their child's unique need. In addition, financing those services can be an even greater challenge because throughout history, the needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) were not met regularly, sometimes not even at all. Parents basically had little direction when it came to the education system (McCann, 2014). McCann (2014) reported that almost 6.5 million students are classified as requiring special education in the United States, ages 3 through 21. The students requiring special education have either physical, emotional, or developmental disabilities and require specialized services and resources. The federal government allocates funds to states based on the latest 2004 reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)* (McCann, 2014). McCann (2014) reported that currently, states can receive up to 40 percent of the country's average per-pupil expenditure, adjusted for changes to both the state's population of children ages 3 through 21 and its share of children living in poverty, and multiplied by the number of children with disabilities identified by the state. Based on the 2016-2017 Student Enrollment in Public Schools Survey 2 report from the Florida Department of Education website, there were 377,115 students with disabilities out of 2,816,824 total students enrolled. The federal government provides for only about one-third of the needed special education funds of its original commitment in the legislation, which has placed a financial burden on the state and local governments, therefore creating a need to refine their school-funding formulas (Griffith, 2015).

Funding for SWDs in this Diocese often comes from fees paid directly by the parents of the SWDs. Another option is through state funding through School Choice initiatives, provided

by McKay and Gardiner Scholarships, through the state education agency of this Diocese. It is necessary for schools to seek additional funding for special education services, as it is a much needed resource for inclusive education. Burke and Griffin (2016) stated that inadequate funding is one of the main barriers to inclusive education within schools. McCann (2017) noted that special education enrollment and aggregate costs have increased significantly in recent years and yet there have not been proportionate increases in federal special education (*IDEA Part B*) appropriations or state education spending. Under *IDEA*, local communities must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to students with disabilities, regardless of federal and state special education funding (McCann, 2017). Local communities and districts must make up the difference in order to support students with disabilities in their schools, which for Catholic school often comes from fees paid directly by the parents of the SWDs, as mentioned earlier or through School Choice options like McKay and Gardiner's Scholarships.

A Catholic education provides high academic achievement within a community of faith of students and their families, faculty and the Church. Members of the Diocese believe that these attributes prepare young people to live in a global world by sharing Gospel values and living Christ's message of salvation. Members of the Diocese believe that a Catholic education is a challenging education, one with high standards, effective discipline, and a caring atmosphere, which help each child reach their potential (The Diocese's Schools, 2016). Data from the identified Diocese include the following: Catholic school students score significantly above national and state averages on standardized tests; 98% of seniors attended college this past year; and the seniors earned more than \$25 million in scholarships. Nineteen Catholic schools in the Diocese are Blue Ribbon schools as designated by the U.S. Department of Education. This

designation is awarded to schools that display excellence in leadership, teaching, curriculum, student achievement and parental involvement. Catholic schools are committed to the development of the whole person. A variety of choices are offered to reflect the uniqueness of each student, generate a healthy sense of competition, create a spirit of cooperation and foster leadership and creativity.

Catholic schools within the Diocese conduct evaluation, certification, and accreditation processes. All teachers must be certified through the Catholic Conference and the Florida Department of Education. All Catholic high schools are accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (The Diocese's Schools, 2016). Each school has a School Improvement Plan, also referred to as a School Strategic Plan. It consists of Standards in the four following areas: Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. The standards and benchmarks pertaining to this study that focus on inclusive education relate to the Mission and Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence Standards. Standard 7, Benchmark 7.6 under the Academic Excellence section states, "Classroom instruction is designed to engage and motivate all students, addressing the diverse needs and capabilities of each student, and accommodating students with special needs as fully as possible" (Strategic Plan, 2016). See Appendix A for Strategic Plan.

Setting

The elementary school chosen for this study from the Diocese will be referred to as the "Elementary School" throughout the investigation. The administrators and educators at this Elementary School have made the effort and choice to support students with disabilities, even though they are not necessarily required by federal mandate. This specific school was chosen for this study through discussion with the Associate Superintendent of the Diocese. It is the only

elementary school in the Diocese practicing full inclusion with students that have moderate to severe disabilities. The Elementary School serves students in grades prekindergarten through eighth grade. It has 243 students currently enrolled and 75 have been diagnosed with a disability. These disabilities include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Hearing Impairment (HI), multiple disabilities (including Intellectual Disabilities-InD), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and speech or language impairment (SpL). There are 47 students that currently receive the McKay Scholarship, five students currently receive the Gardiner Scholarship, and 60 students in the elementary school are eligible to receive Title I funds.

The Elementary School's mission is to "proclaim the Gospel message, recognizing that each person is a unique creation of God, we endeavor to provide a strong spiritual, academic, and emotional foundation enabling students to realize their full potential" (website address withheld due to confidentiality reasons). The principal described the school as "not a special needs school, but rather a school that accepts students with special needs".

The principal provided demographic information on the students and staff. Administration consists of a pastor and a principal, one PreK teacher, one Kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, one second grade teacher, three third grade teachers, one fourth grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher. The middle school department consists of two eighth grade homeroom teachers, one seventh grade teacher, and one sixth grade teacher. Each middle school teacher plans and teaches one core subject. The Student Services Team consists of four members: a Guidance Counselor, two full-time Support Services Personnel, and one part-time Support Services Personnel. Out of the fourteen teachers at the school, nine attended the Conference for Exceptional Students in Catholic Schools, four of which went on to do the additional requirements for certification. All teachers are mandated to attend two to three in-

service meetings per year focused on inclusion. Members of the Student Service Team attend full day in-service meetings on inclusive practices twice a year. Outside resources and ESE trainings are provided, as needed.

There are several services provided to support students with disabilities at the Elementary School, which were all listed and explained in detail on the school's website. These include such programs and services such as: Title I, *Think Tank*, Speech and Language Therapy, Response to Intervention or RTI, and *Learning Lab*. Title I is a program through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools that have high numbers/percentages of children that come from low-income families to support the learning of the state academic standards. The Elementary School uses *Catapult Learning*, which is a provider of educational support services to religious schools nationwide through individualized assessment, direct instruction, guided and independent practice, and student motivation programs. *Think Tank* is an academic support and homework program for students in grades first through eighth grade who have been referred by a teacher or parent. Its purpose is to help students that struggle with completing homework, need additional support, or do not have access to a home computer by providing support in a structured environment by certified teachers in the Technology Center, Innovations Lab, and Media Center. Speech and Language Therapy is provided to students in need of these services as documented on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and an active Service Plan (SP). Response to Intervention (RTI) (also known as Multi-Tiered system of Supports-MTSS) is a multi-tiered framework to the early identification and support of students with learning needs. RTI includes high-quality, evidence-based interventions and continued progress monitoring. The *Learning Lab* is a program available for both elementary and middle school students with an IEP, SP, or

504 Plan. Through the *Learning Lab*, students are supported by the elementary and middle school Student Service Team (SST) members on their specific curriculum they have been assigned through their specific plans or in their general education classes. The elementary students in the *Learning Lab* are guided by their shadows or the SST teacher on their specific activities and lessons for the day. The middle school students in the *Learning Lab* typically use computers or iPads to assist them in completing their assignments. They are also taught strategies and given tools such as: study skills lessons, test taking skill lessons, organizational support, on-going access to current grade reports, and tutoring on concepts to help them reach their academic goals. Students in middle school participate in the *Learning Lab* daily as part of their afternoon schedule; similar to a study hall, if it is part of their academic plan and this is where they receive most of their accommodations, as needed. The elementary students participate in the *Learning Lab* in the morning and receive their accommodations or modifications for Language Arts and Math when there, and then they join their regular general education classes for lunch, recess, Social Studies, Science, and Religion.

This Dissertation in Practice investigated the educational services that support students with moderate to severe disabilities within inclusive classrooms in an elementary Catholic school. The Associate Superintendent of the Diocese stated there is a goal to improve the schools' instructional practices for improved inclusive services to serve additional students with disabilities throughout the Diocese (Personnel Communications, 2016). In addition, this goal is shared at the school, as there are specific benchmarks and goals to ensure all students, including students with special needs, receive effective instruction included in the Elementary School's Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan, 2016).

Positionality

The researcher is currently employed as a teacher within an elementary school in the Diocese in which the research was conducted. The researcher has been actively leading intervention services and supports for students with increased academic needs and conducting earlier research regarding additional educational services for students both with and without disabilities. From personal interviews with classroom teachers at various schools in the Diocese, many have expressed difficulty in meeting the needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities in an effective inclusive classroom. They have expressed the need for more training and more support. Data are currently collected and are needed to determine the causes, such as an organizational, structural, human resource, political, or symbolic problem. However, my hypothesis was that providing inclusive educational services was organizational as the need is throughout the Diocese.

History and Conceptualization of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities

Federal Legislation

Public Law 94-142 was established in 1975 and guaranteed students with disabilities the rights to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) through special education based on individual needs. *Public Law 94-142*, also known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975)*, has been reauthorized multiple times since its initial passage to address critical issues within special education. Each revision has added provisions to address issues stemming from policy implementation, research, or trends in the field. Provisions within this law have further clarified and defined terms, outlined processes and procedures, and included guidelines for the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. The roles and responsibilities of special educators have evolved with each reauthorization as

teachers must be prepared with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to effectively teach students with disabilities.

Six main provisions within this legislation continue to frame the educational guarantees for students with disabilities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). These provisions guarantee the rights to: (a) free and appropriate public education (FAPE), including related services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech/language therapy) regardless of the disability category; (b) education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as determined by individual student needs within a continuum of placements; (c) an appropriate education through an individualized education plan (IEP) which addresses specific criteria including the student's present level of performance, annual goals, and service delivery modes and lengths; (d) procedural due process; (e) non-discriminatory assessment; and, (f) parental participation that is meaningful within the decision-making process. Interpretations of these provisions have been clarified through court cases, research, and policies, which have modified and expanded interpretations of this original legislation. However, these six provisions remain at the foundation of each reauthorization.

Therefore, students with disabilities were guaranteed access to a free and appropriate public education based upon individual educational programs (*PL 94-142*, 1975) within public school settings. In addition, this legislation included the responsibility of finding, evaluating, and identifying students with disabilities to ensure eligible students were provided with appropriate educational services for an identified disability as determined by members of multi-disciplinary teams. The disability categories were defined in the legislation and included deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech

or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. To be eligible for special education services, it must be determined that a student meets the eligibility requirements for a disability as defined by one of the categories and their disability adversely affects academic performance. Therefore, it must be demonstrated that a student's educational needs cannot be addressed through evidence-based instructional strategies in the general education classroom and requires specially-designed instruction guaranteed by an individualized education program (Daly, Xanthopoulos, Cooper, Stephan, & Brown, 2007).

Regardless of disability category, access to public education was guaranteed to all students with disabilities (SWDs). School personnel were required to meet the varied educational needs of students by providing specially-designed instruction. In 1962, Reynolds created a conceptual framework for special education services that outlined a continuum of services based on student needs for specially-designed instruction from the most to least restrictive environment. This provided a framework for states and school districts to make appropriate placement decisions to meet individual needs of students with disabilities from restrictive to inclusive settings (Deno & Mirkin, 1977).

Catholic Education

The U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2014) stated there are seven basic themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) which establish a case for inclusion in Catholic schools (Carlson, 2014). CST is a teaching dependent on sacred Scripture, dating back to 1891. CST could be called officially Church-sanctioned teaching on social issues. The seven basic themes expressed by Carlson (2014) are: (a) a consistent code for life that commits to love each person (made in the image of God); (b) the right for all to participate in community, family, and social/political/religious life to reach the full potential of humanity; (c) the responsibility of

Catholics to strive for the common good and basic human rights are guaranteed to all; (d) a better option for the poor, which is based on Matthew's gospel (Mt 25: 31-46) that we will be judged on the way we have treated the "least"; (e) the right to work, as well as the rights of workers to be treated with dignity that ensures a decent standard of living; (f) solidarity of the world for peace and justice; and (g) the stewardship of all of God's creation (Carlson, 2014).

Catholic education originally began with the focus and intent on providing and serving all of humanity, particularly children with special needs. DeFoire (2006) wrote that historically, Catholic education has developed along two paths. One path describes a segregated education, which is specifically for students receiving specialized services. The second path describes students receiving specialized services for students in inclusive or regular, general education settings. The second is known as inclusion (DeFiore, 2006). With the passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* at the federal level, Catholic schools also began to review their services to students with disabilities (DeFiore, 2006). Bishops encouraged the expansions of services for students with disabilities and between 1975 and 2000 local parish initiatives began to provide these services (DeFiore, 2006).

The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) identified examples of Catholic schools that were meeting the needs of students with disabilities, as well as disseminating this information as a way to address the issue (DeFiore, 2006). In doing so, the NCEA started to provide suggested strategies to support students with disabilities in Catholic schools. However, specific models for students with disabilities continue to be limited (DeFiore, 2006). Recent data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) stated the overall percentage of children in the United States with an intellectual disability between the ages of five to fifteen was 4.2 percent or 1,901,700 of the 45,435,200 base populations of individuals. Assuming the same ratio

of attendance within the Diocese, 597 students out of the 14,213 are students with an intellectual disability. There are 37 schools in the Diocese, which potentially, based on these numbers and percentages could be serving 16 students per school with an intellectual disability. This need to serve students with disabilities in public or private institutions is evident.

As Bello (2006) suggested, Catholic dioceses should establish a “guiding framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusion” (p. 478). Establishing a solid, cohesive program based upon a guiding framework for students with disabilities among all the Catholic schools will remain a challenge, however, unless clear and dedicated coordination efforts of each individual school occurs (Bello, 2006). Burke and Griffin (2016) described barriers to implementing inclusive education in Catholic schools. One of the barriers reported was a lack of a centralized office that oversees the inclusion and support of students with disabilities. This can result in little uniform direction and implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities across Catholic schools. Funding is also a barrier that Burke and Griffin (2016) described. The experiences and examples of other private schools that have successfully implemented inclusive practices would be beneficial, as well as a collection of literature focused on the union of religion and special education. However, there is very little available, which leaves little guidance for a successful implementation of inclusion of students with disabilities (Ault, 2010; Carter, 2007).

Purpose for the Study

Vision for Inclusive Education

Villa and Thousand (2016) described inclusion as an ongoing journey. Snyder and Dillow (as cited in Villa and Thousand, 2016) noted that 61% of students with disabilities (SWDs) spend 80% or more of their day in general education settings. The goal is for nearly 100% of SWDs to

spend 100% of their day in general education settings, which based on the national data mentioned, suggests there is still a distance to go in this journey for many schools (Villa and Thousand, 2016). Effective inclusion within schools and districts occurs when administrators take action, articulate the new vision publicly, build agreement about the vision, and lead stakeholders to be actively participating in the vision (Thousand and Villa, 2003). McGregor and Vogelsberg, (1998) stated that effective inclusion involves collaboration of general educators and communication that occurs in terms relative to the needs and benefits of all students. Inclusion must be a professional value that encompasses all students, with support and acceptance of student diversity a common goal (McGregor and Vogelsberg, 1998). Villa and Thousand (2016) recommended three sources to provide high-quality inclusive practice. The first source was research findings which documented effective inclusive schooling practices (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2015). The second source was experiences of inclusive educators. The third source of information about inclusive practices stem from interviews of 20 nationally recognized leaders throughout the United States in the field of inclusive education who provided regular consultation and training of inclusive practices.

In the state of Florida, another researched source of inclusive practices, products, and resources is compiled through the Florida Inclusion Network. The mission of this state-funded professional development agency is to collaborate with all districts and schools and provide customized services and supports ensuring all students with disabilities have the same educational, social, and future opportunities as their peers (Florida Inclusion Network, 2017). One of the products is the *Best Practices of Inclusive Education (BPIE)-District-Level Self-Assessment* (2013) which includes 30 indicators of specific, inclusive educational practices (FDOE, 2014). These practices are based on current literature of peer-reviewed research in

inclusive practices. Contributions from experts in the field, district and school-based educators and stakeholders across Florida contribute to the BPIE indicators. These indicators can be used as a guide of best practices and strategies to investigate the lived experiences and current practices within this research (*Best Practices for Inclusive Education; BPIE*, 2013). Jones (2014) utilized the *BPIE* to develop greater inclusive practices in an elementary school. Results showed that the value of *BPIE* was perceived high by the team members, as well as its applicability to practice. Therefore, Jones (2014) concluded that based on the survey responses, the most fundamental component was the development of a shared common vision of inclusive education. The team members from this elementary school also affirmed that a facilitated process, which supports participation in truthful conversations about the school's inclusive policies and practices, was important. Lastly, educator involvement in planning was beneficial towards greater inclusive policies and practices.

This study looked at the instructional practices at an Elementary School within the identified Catholic Diocese. This Dissertation in Practice needed the assistance of the Associate Superintendent, other administrators in the Diocese, as well as faculty who are employed in the Elementary School that met criteria for this research study. A systems approach is the best way to effectively implement inclusion education into schools (Thousand and Villa, 2003). The systems-level approach includes connection with other organizational best practices, visionary leadership, as well as administrative support, redefined roles and relationships among the adults and students in the classrooms, collaboration, and additional adult support, when needed. The goal was to investigate key elements that Thousand and Villa described in the Elementary School. This qualitative research proposed educator and administrator interviews; surveys of key

faculty, administrators, and staff; and classroom observations within the Elementary School to triangulate findings of this research.

The timeline of this project initiated with data collection in February, 2017. Data analyses continued through May, 2017. Completion of the Dissertation in Practice, including defense, was proposed to meet the deadline for a summer, 2017 graduation.

Exploratory Questions

The exploratory questions that were addressed in this Dissertation in Practice guided the type of qualitative methods to explain and describe the phenomena investigated. As such, this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) to investigate the lived experiences of elementary educators in a private, Catholic school setting in a large, diocesan school district in the southeastern United States. To fully understand the experiences, this study explored two fundamental exploratory questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of elementary education educators whose students with disabilities are included in a private, Catholic elementary school?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within this setting?

Exploratory questions may change as data are collected (Creswell, 2013) related to the phenomena investigated.

Key Terms and Concepts

Best Practice for Inclusive Education: Best Practices for Inclusive Education is a district level assessment product developed by the Florida Inclusion Network. It was funded through the State of Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services,

with federal assistance under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, Part B. It was designed as a technical assistance (TA) tool to identify and prioritize critical areas of need for aiding schools in their inclusive practices, to ensure all SWDs reach their highest potential.

Catholic Elementary Schools: Refers to private institutions that are connected to a Catholic parish and serves students from Pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. It is led by a school principal and the pastor.

Constituents: Refers to any of the following: administrators, faculty, staff, governing body, students, parents, alumni, and parish or community members that regularly interact with the school (i.e. Serve on the School Board or volunteer).

Continuum of services: A range of services that must be available to students within a school district for them to be served in the least restrictive environment.

Gardiner Scholarship: The Gardiner Scholarship (PLSA) program allows parents the ability to individualize educational plans of their children with special needs. The program was previously called the Personal Learning Scholarship Account, but named the Gardiner Scholarship in January of 2016. The name now honors the Florida Senate President Andy Gardiner, who led the legislative effort to create the program. \$10,000 was awarded in the 2016-2017 school year for most students, and is based on a matrix level of 253 (How The Scholarship Works, 2017).

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, also known and referred to as *Public Law 94-142* and *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975)*. Thus, legislation was passed in 1975 and guaranteed students with disabilities the rights to a free and public education. Beginning in 1975, federal legislation guaranteed a public education to students with disabilities

through special education and it has been reauthorized multiple times since its initial passage to address issues that persisted over time to remain current with research, and to respond to critical issues within special education.

Inclusive Education: Florida lawmakers enacted § 1003.57(1)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.), in July 2013 and defined inclusion as: “a student with a disability receiving education in a general education regular class setting, reflecting natural proportions and age appropriate heterogeneous groups in core academic and elective or special areas within the school community; a student with a disability is a valued member of the classroom and school community; the teachers and administrators support universal education and have knowledge and support available to enable them to effectively teach all children; and access is provided to technical assistance in best practices, instructional methods, and supports tailored to the student’s needs based on current research”.

Moderate Disabilities: Refers to the second largest group of special education students under IDEA, as those identified with speech or language impairments, as well as mental retardation, emotional disturbances and other health impairments (Boser, 2009).

School Choice: Enables all parents to enroll their children in a school of their choosing, based on their individual needs, be it public, private, public-charter, or home (Kafer, 2005).

Sectarian or nonsectarian: Sectarian refers to a group that is associated or affiliated with a particular group, such as a religious or school group, whereas nonsectarian refers to a group that is not affiliated with any particular group or religion.

Severe Disabilities: Includes students who are identified with disabilities in the most severe disability categories under IDEA; autism, students with multiple disabilities, and students with traumatic brain injury (Boser, 2009).

Shadowing: The term describes the process of a new student orientation at the Elementary school within this case study. All possible new students are required to shadow for a day as part of the admission process.

Shadows: Paraprofessionals at the Elementary school used in this case study which are funded through the McKay or Gardiner Scholarships or have been privately funded by parents for students with disabilities requiring one-on-one assistance.

Students with Disabilities (SWD): IDEA of 1997 describes students with disabilities as students identified with mental retardation; autism; traumatic brain injury; vision impairments, hearing and speech or language impairments; serious emotional disturbance; orthopedic impairments; other health impairments; and specific learning disabilities (Darrow, 2013).

Students with an Intellectual Disability: IDEA defines as “...significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” [34 CFR §300.8(c)(6)]

Title I: Program under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides financial assistance to schools that have high percentages of children that come from low-income families to ensure that all children meet the state academic standards (Title I, Part A Program, 2015).

Tuition tax credits: Tax credits allow individuals and corporations to allocate a portion of their owed state taxes to nonprofit, private scholarship-granting organizations that issue scholarships to students in grades K-12. This scholarship allows the student to choose among a list of private schools, which are approved by the scholarship organization. The scholarship is used to pay tuition, fees, and other related expenses. This enables the state to avoid having to appropriate per-pupil education funding for the students receiving scholarships (Scholarship Tax Credits, 2017).

Voucher Programs: Florida has developed voucher programs, which allows students to receive vouchers to transfer out of public schools and provides them with tuition scholarships for attending eligible private schools (Taylor, 2005).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Due to the growing number of students identified with disabilities, education for students with disabilities (SWDs), both in public and private institutions, has become an important issue. *Public Law 94-142* (1975) guaranteed the rights for students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their specific, individual needs. The legislation also provided guidance to states regarding the education of students with disabilities and established procedures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to educate students with disabilities. A study by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) indicated that seven percent, roughly 185,000, of the nearly 2.6 million students that are enrolled in Catholic schools have disabilities (USCCB, 2002a) and recent data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) conveyed that the overall percentage of children in the United States with a cognitive disability between the ages of five to fifteen was 4.2 percent or 1,901,700 of the 45,435,200 base population of individuals. This Dissertation in Practice focused on inclusive education particularly in the Catholic school setting. Federal mandates have different implications for private schools; Catholic schools are not bound by legislation like public schools for their curriculum or testing requirements (Durrow, 2013). This review of literature provides an overview of the history of the federal legislation as it relates to special education. It also includes a detailed account of the history and conceptualization of Catholic education, including evidence to support the responsibility of the Church to provide education to students with disabilities (SWDs) based on Catholic Law and beliefs. Next, a description of evidence based practices in inclusive education will follow. Also, a review of literature of inclusive education will be

discussed, professional development, funding, and lastly catholic inclusive educational studies follows.

History of Federal Legislation

Public Law 94-142 was established in 1975 and guaranteed students with disabilities the rights to a free and public education. Beginning in 1975, federal legislation guaranteed a public education to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). *Public Law 94-142*, also known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975)*, has been reauthorized multiple times since its initial passage to address issues that persisted over time, in an effort to remain current with research, and to respond to critical issues within special education. Provisions within this law have further clarified and defined terms, outlined processes and procedures, and included guidelines for the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. Each reauthorization responds to issues and needs of students at the time and resulted in implications for provision of services and special education teacher preparation. The roles and responsibilities of special educators has evolved with each reauthorization as teachers must be prepared with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to effectively teach students with disabilities. Provisions addressed in the reauthorization of *Public Law 94-142* were: defining the manner in which services are provided to children in private schools, state and local funds must supplement proportionate amount, maintenance of records children evaluated and found eligible as part of Child Find, adds requirements for the provision of services to this population, adds requirements for control of funds and property, requires Child Find in private schools, equitable participation, activities, cost, completion period, additional consultation requirements, requires written affirmation, and provides a right to complain to the SEA and appeal to the secretary.

Six main provisions within this legislation continue to frame the educational guarantees for students with disabilities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). These provisions guarantee the rights to (a) free and appropriate education (FAPE), including related services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech/language therapy) regardless of the disability category; (b) education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as determined by individual student needs within a continuum of placements; (c) an appropriate education through an individualized education plan (IEP) which addresses specific criteria including the student's present level of performance, annual goals, and service delivery modes and lengths; (d) procedural due process; (e) non-discriminatory assessment; and, (f) parental participation that is meaningful and inclusive of the parent in the decision-making process. Interpretations of these provisions have been clarified through court cases, research, and policies which have modified and expanded interpretations of this original legislation; however, these six provisions remain at the foundation of each reauthorization.

Students with disabilities were now guaranteed access to a free and appropriate public education based upon individual educational programs (*PL 94-142*, 1975). In addition, this legislation included the responsibility of finding, evaluating, and identifying students with disabilities to ensure eligible students were provided with appropriate educational services for an identified disability as determined. The disability categories were defined in the legislation and included deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. To be eligible for special education services, it must be determined that a student meets the eligibility requirements for a disability as defined by one the categories and their disability adversely affects academic performance. Therefore, it must be demonstrated that a

student's educational needs cannot be addressed through evidence-based instructional strategies in the general education classroom and requires specially-designed instruction guaranteed by an individualized education program (IEP; Daly et al., 2007).

Regardless of disability category, access to public education was afforded to all students as schools were required to meet the varied educational needs of students by providing specially-designed instruction. In 1962, Reynolds created a conceptual framework for special education services that outlined a continuum of services based on student needs for specially-designed instruction from the most to least restrictive environment. This provides a framework for states and school districts to make appropriate placement decisions to meet individual needs of students with disabilities (Deno & Mirkin, 1977).

History of Catholic Education

Catholic education began with the focus and intent on providing and serving children with special needs. DeFoire (2013) wrote that historically, Catholic education has developed along two paths. One path describes a segregated education, which is specifically for students receiving specialized services. The second path describes students receiving specialized services for students in inclusive or regular, general education settings. The second is known as inclusion (DeFoire, 2013). Buetow (1970) stated that the Catholic education of Special education can be documented as early as 1842 in Louisville, Kentucky, where the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were working with socially maladjusted girls. Another early example was St. Coletta's School for Exceptional Children, which was founded in 1904 in Jefferson, Wisconsin (Buetow, 1970). DeFoire (2013) noted that there was still little activity in the parochial schools serving students with disabilities, but one of the earliest efforts was to establish a Department of Special Education, within the Archdiocese of St. Louis in 1950. The National Catholic Educational

Association (NCEA) established a Department of Special Education in 1954, which supported the work of the day schools and residential centers of these institutions (DeFoire, 2013). Buetow (1970) declared that almost every Diocese had made some type of provision for one or more schools by the mid-1960s. Examples included 14 schools for the deaf, which operated under auspices of the NCEA and enrolled more than 2,000 students in 1960. In addition, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) identified 71 schools which were serving almost 7,000 students in special institutions at that time.

After the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* was passed at the federal level, Catholic schools began to review their services to students with disabilities (DeFiore, 2006). Between 1975 and 2000, the bishops encouraged the expansion of services to students with disabilities. Local parish initiatives brought about the ability to provide these services to SWDs (DeFiore, 2006). A study conducted in 2002 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) indicated that seven percent, roughly 185,000, of the nearly 2.6 million students that are enrolled in any type of Catholic schools have disabilities (USCCB, 2002a). It was estimated that children with disabilities comprised about 7% of the students in Catholic schools compared to more than 11% in public schools (USCCB, 2002a). Carlson (2014) provided five models that Catholic schools could use to offer services to students with disabilities. Carlson (2014) provided five categories, which are: (a) consultant models (Durow, 2007; Scanlan, 2008) where Catholic schools employed consultant services offered to teachers in private schools serving children with IEP's, which was funded by *IDEA*; (b) collaboration models (DeFiore, 2006; Russo et al., 2002), where Catholic schools join together to offer services of a specific type at each school, cognitive services at one, speech services at another for example; (c) teacher's assistant or tutor models (Crowley & Shawn, 2007; Durow, 2007), where assistants or tutors are trained to work

individually with children diagnosed with special needs; (d) resource room models (DeFiore, 2006; Durow, 2007), which hire licensed special educators and follow the public school resource room model; and (e) retraining models (MacDonald, 2008; Scanlan 2009; Storz & Nestor, 2007), which retrain faculty and staff members to be fully inclusive using methods like universal design or modeled after Response to Intervention (RTI).

The majority of the cost in Catholic schools for providing special education services is provided by the parents or from the general tuition fees of all families. Thirty-four percent of all services provided to students with disabilities are supported by tuition. The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (2002) stated that service delivery for students with disabilities is typically provided within resource, pullout, and within-class accommodations for students in Catholic school settings (USCCB, 2002a).

The following table gives a brief overview of the evolution of educational legislation and resulting services for students with disabilities as guaranteed by federal legislation and described within Catholic education. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Development of Catholic Education in Comparison to Federal Legislation for SWDs

Federal Legislation	Catholic Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975)</i> enacted to guarantee educational services for students with disabilities within public schools. • PL 94-142, which later became IDEA guaranteed a “free, appropriate public education” to children with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment” • IDEA regulates a portion of federal funds serve private school students, including Catholic schools. • Schools provide services to students with disabilities within a continuum of services (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). • Inclusion encourages educators to bring the needed supplemental support and services into the general education classroom (Villa and Thousand, 2016). • In 2004, approximately 6 million schoolchildren between the ages of 6 to 21 had received special education services under IDEA and about two-thirds of these students had specific learning disabilities or speech or language impairments (Education Week Research Center, 2006). • Provisions of IDEA were changed in 2004 re: enrollment of children into private schools and took effect on July 1, 2005. • Provisions addressed: defining manner in which services are provided to children in private schools, state and local funds must supplement proportionate amount, maintenance of records children evaluated and found eligible as part of Child Find, adds requirements for the provision of services to this population, adds requirements for control of funds and property, requires Child Find in private schools, equitable participation, activities, cost, completion period, additional consultation requirements, and requires written affirmation, and provides a right to complain to the SEA and appeal to the secretary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the earliest efforts was the establishment of a Department of Special Education, which was done by the Archdiocese of St. Louis in 1950 (DeFiore, 2006). • In 1954, NCEA established a Department of Special Education to support the work of the day schools and residential centers of these institutions (DeFiore, 2006). • Catholic education services to students with specific disabilities are provided in two ways: segregated education, which is specifically for students receiving specialized services, and students receiving specialized services for students in inclusive or regular, general education settings, who are provided special services based on their specific needs. The second is known as inclusion (DeFoire, 2006). • Almost every diocese had made some type of provision for schools by the mid-1960s (Buetow, 1970). • When public schools were mandated to serve all students with disabilities in public schools (1975), Catholic schools also expanded their services to students with disabilities (DeFiore, 2006). • Between 1975 and 2000, the bishops encouraged expansion of services to students with disabilities (DeFiore, 2006). • U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) indicated that seven percent, roughly 185,000, of the nearly 2.6 million students that are enrolled in any type of Catholic schools, have learning disabilities (USCCB, 2002a). • Entitled Catholic School Children with Disabilities make up about 7% of the students in Catholic schools having disabilities compared to more than 11% in public schools (USCCB, 2002a). • Services provided to these students with disabilities are through resource room and pullout programs and in-class accommodations (USCCB, 2002a).

Evidence-Based Practices in Inclusive Education

Whitehurst (2002) defined evidence-based practices as those supported by empirical research and professional wisdom so that research-based instructional methodologies are able to be implemented in the preK-12 public school systems. It is important for educators to understand evidence-based practices because as Tanner (2013) proposed, teachers are “architects of the learning environment in... classrooms, (and)...structure the classroom learning environment” (p. 322). Hentges (2016) stated that engagement is an active process, which requires the student to be committed to the task, therefore teachers need to craft classroom environments which cultivate student “engagement and participation” (p. 327). If students are to become fully involved in the learning activity, some key factors must be considered. In turn, research offers instructional practice that includes a mixture of providing students with a safe learning environment where they are provided with authentically real world experiences. This type of a learning environment will encourage students to be more engaged in the learning process (Faria et al., 2012, p. 37).

Grim-Farrell, Bain and McDonagh (2011) are also interested in bridging the gap between research-to-practice and focus on inclusive education. They noted in their investigation that Carnine (1997) believed the ‘research-to-practice’ (RTP) gap exists because research has not been designed to make a practical difference and identified three factors; usability, accessibility and trustworthiness of research, influence RTP efforts. Carnine’s factors were developed from earlier claims made by Guba (1967), Eash (1968) and Coleman (1979), who identified concerns related to transferring research to practice, which were inadequate links between universities and schools, inadequate training, and infrequent use by practitioners. Grim-Farrell, Bain, and McDonagh (2011) used Toch’s (1982) conclusion that the failure of researchers and educators to

cooperate contributed to their lack of communication, which negatively impacted the research in schools and this lack of collaboration was later presented as critical for trustworthiness by Carnine (1997). Grim-Farrell, Bain, and McDonagh (2011) reported consistencies they discovered in their research on ways to make research useable, accessible and trustworthy. They noted that these factors were summarized into six principles by Carnine (1997) and Sydoriak and Fields (1997). The six principles are: (a) importance of practicality and specificity of research-based practices; (b) the scope and magnitude of intended change should not be too broad or too vague; (c) linking research ideas to classroom situations with opportunities to experiment with feedback; (d) collaboration and joint problem-solving between researchers and practitioners, ensuring links to real-life situations; (e) frequent and substantive interaction to give teachers the opportunity to discuss new practices; and (f) relating research applications to improvements in learning for all students. In addition, Sydoriak and Fields (1997) believed joint involvement and ownership between researchers and practitioners would increase the likelihood of research reaching the classrooms in ways that promote real-world circumstances (Grim-Farrell, Bain, and McDonagh, 2011).

Burns and Ysseldyke (2009) conducted a study that examined the frequency of evidence-based practices in the education of students with disabilities to address the research-to-practice gap in education. Research should be the foundation from which teaching and learning practices are developed and improved (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The federal government became directly involved in the research-to-practice debate with the mandate included in the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001)*. Legislation required implementation of evidence-based practices. Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) noted that two of the *NCLB* provisions had implications for special education: assessments in reading, math, and later science; and an expectation for Annual

Yearly Progress (AYP). The Council of Exceptional Children posited that one of the most significant ways *NCLB* affected policy for education of SWDs was through the AYP requirement. Because of this mandate, schools have to demonstrate that students in grades three through eight are making AYP toward 100% progress in math and reading, including students with disabilities (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003). Burns and Ysseldyke (2009) stated that with all the literature available on effective instructional practice, the research-to-practice gap in special education most likely is not due to the lack of research on effective practice. Therefore, their study focused on practitioner perspectives, practices that are effective and ineffective, and an examination of evidence-based practices in special education through surveying special education teachers and school psychologists, in order to investigate the prevalence of practices which had large, medium, and small effects in previous meta-analytic research (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009). Their study focused on the following evidence-based practices: applied behavior analysis; direct instruction; formative assessment; mnemonic strategies; modality instruction; perceptual-motor training; psycholinguistic training; and social skills training (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009). The results of their study to the first research question, which looked at the frequency of practices with large effects in the education of children with special needs, showed that almost 90% of the participants used direct instruction at least once a week; about 75% of the respondents used modality instruction, formative assessment, and social skills training once a week; and 70% of the respondents said they used applied behavior analysis at least weekly. Psycholinguistic training and perceptual-motor training were the two least-used practices (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009). The second research question in Burns and Ysseldyke's (2009) study asked whether practices with large effects were used more often than those shown to be ineffective when educating SWDs. The comparison of behavioral approaches resulted in applied behavior

analysis being rated higher than social skills, the comparison of instructional approaches resulted in direct instruction being rated higher than modality instruction, and mnemonic strategies were rated higher than psycholinguistic training.

Odom and Wolery (2003) described the theories of practice in early interventions/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) and the related evidence-based practices. Among these tenets of practice and evidence-based practices were: families and homes are the primary nurturing contexts; strengthening relationships; children learn through modeling; adults mediate children's experiences to promote learning; goals should be individual and dynamic; transitions across programs are enhanced by a developmentally instigative adult; and families and programs are influenced by the broader context (Odom & Wolery, 2003).

The Inclusive Education Checklist: A Self-Assessment of Best Practices (Villa and Thousand, 2016) included four decades of the research to initiate and implement best practices in inclusion. Villa and Thousand (2016) described 15 educational best practices that inclusive schools should possess. These essential components are: understanding inclusion and what it is and is not; collaboration between home and school communities; support from administration in inclusive educational practices; redefined roles and responsibilities of educators and staff at the school; collaborative planning and problem solving for school; co-teaching; student-centered and strength-based assessment; strategies for facilitating access to the general education curriculum; differentiation of instruction; student supports and empowerment; Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) or Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI); positive behavioral intervention supports; integration of delivery for related services; transition planning; and continued site-based planning to sustain inclusive educational best practices.

Inclusive Education

Villa and Thousand (2016) defined inclusive education as not just a belief system, but a value where the schooling is welcoming, supporting, and empowering to students. Inclusive education commits to provide the students the right to belong and not feel excluded and assumes that learning and living together will benefit everyone, not just students with a disability (Villa and Thousand, 2016). Villa and Thousand (2016) stated that an inclusive vision should drive all decisions and actions of a school that has implemented the inclusion model. This inclusion vision started with the enactment of *Public Law 94-142*, which guarantees students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, specifically ensuring that students with disabilities are educated with students that are not disabled and the removal of students with disabilities from the general education classroom be avoided at all costs and occurs only when the severity of the disability causes education to not be achieved satisfactorily even with the use of supplementary aids and services. Villa and Thousand (2016) pointed out that all reauthorizations of this law reiterated the preference by the U.S. Congress for students with disabilities to be educated in the general education classrooms with peers of similar age unless a compelling reason exists that they cannot. Madeline Will (1986) was a proponent of inclusion and termed the concept of students with mild disabilities being served in regular, general education settings as the “Regular Education Initiative” (REI). However, it did not take long for this idea to expand and include students with moderate to severe disabilities, as well. As noted by Villa & Thousand (1988), this concept continued to change and grow into what we now know as inclusion, where all children are educated together in the general education setting with the needed supports and services. The traditional model of schooling was shifted with modifications being made to the curriculum and instruction for all students (Thousand and Villa, 2000). The

movement toward inclusion gained much momentum and by 1993, almost every state was implementing inclusion at some level (Webb, 1994). As Thousand and Villa (2000) noted, inclusion is not just special education, but a part of the total school reform movement and major educational organizations (e.g., Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992) have passed resolutions supporting schools to retrain teachers, revise funding formulas to support inclusive practice, and create a new belief system of inclusion.

The Council for Exceptional Children (1995) (as cited in Thousand and Villa, 2000) noted that ten of the most prominent national educational associations acknowledged schools implementing inclusive schooling practices successfully (see Appendix B for list of associations). These associations identified the following characteristics as being present in these successful inclusive schools: principal is an active and supportive leader; all students work toward the same high standards based educational outcomes; diversity is valued and celebrated; a sense of community is present; there is a variety of services provided; flexible groupings, authentic and meaningful learning experiences, and developmentally appropriate curricula are accessible to all students; research-based instructional strategies are used, and natural support networks are encouraged across students and staff; staff has developed more collaborative roles; new forms of accountability have been developed; necessary technology and physical modifications and accommodations have been made accessible; and a partnership with parents has been established. These characteristics are similar to those Kugelmass (2006) identified in schools striving to become more inclusive: an uncompromising commitment and belief in inclusion; differences among students and staff perceived as a resource; teaming and a collaborative interaction style among staff and children; willingness of staff to struggle to sustain practice; inclusion understood as a social/political issue; and a commitment to inclusive ideals

communicated across the school and into the community (as cited in McMaster, 2014).

Thousand and Villa (2000) summarized what we have learned from the nearly 25 years of implementation of *P.L. 94-142/IDEA* for achieving successful inclusive education through eight factors. These eight factors came from the analysis of reports from over 1,000 school districts on their inclusive education efforts in the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion's National Study (1994, 1995): visionary leadership, collaboration, refocused use of assessment, support for staff and students, effective parental involvement, the implementation of effective program models, effective classroom practices, and funding (Thousand and Villa, 2000). (See Appendix C.)

Table 2 gives a comparison of the critical components of inclusive practices as identified by Thousand and Villa, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the *Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE)* that was developed by the Florida Inclusion Network. Barton (2000) suggested that in order for inclusion to be done well, it will take a coordinated effort of all levels of Catholic educators from elementary to universities, it will need to be well planned, have a long-range strategic plan in place at the diocesan level, and there needs to be collaboration among the Dioceses. Barton (2000) believed that in order for inclusive education to be implemented, it is necessary to take the following steps: identify what we already know and are already doing well across Dioceses; recognize that multiple models will be needed to address diverse needs and situations; professional development must be intense, ongoing, and multilevel; and support is paramount.

Table 2: Comparison of Critical Components of Inclusive Best Practices

Villa and Thousand (2016): A Self-Assessment of Best Practices	Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)	Best practices of Inclusive Education (BPIE): School Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what inclusion is and is not • Home, school, and community collaboration • Administrative practices supportive of inclusive education • Redefined roles and responsibilities • Collaborative planning and problem solving • Co-teaching • Student-centered strength-based assessment • Strategies for facilitating access to the general education curriculum • Differentiation of instruction • Student empowerment and natural supports • MTSS and RTI • Positive behavioral supports • Integrated delivery of related services • Transition planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal is an active and supportive leader • All students work toward the same high standards based educational outcomes • Diversity is valued and celebrated • A sense of community is present • There is a variety of services provided • Flexible groupings, authentic and meaningful learning experiences, and developmentally appropriate curricula are accessible to all students • Research-based instructional strategies are used • Natural support networks are encouraged across students and staff • Staff has developed more collaborative roles; new forms of accountability have been developed; necessary technology and physical modifications and accommodations have been made accessible; and a partnership with parents has been established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and Decision-Making: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Leadership team analyzes data to identify barriers and initiate improvements for SWDs -Efforts to implement and improve inclusive educational practices are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) -Key person oversees, coordinates, and monitors implementation of inclusive education -Administrators advocate for SWDs for same options as students without disabilities, through resources, school choice options, job interviews which evaluate knowledge and beliefs regarding diversity and inclusive practices, transportation means, professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) for school personnel for inclusive practices, and collaborative planning time for educators to plan for effective instruction of inclusive practices. -Data reflects SWDs receive their education and related services in general education contexts 80% or more of the day -All SWDs have the same opportunities as students without disabilities to participate in all school sponsored activities and graduation activities, and given equal consideration for recognition through honors, awards and other designations offered by the school.

Villa and Thousand (2016):	Council for Exceptional Children	Best practices of Inclusive Education (BPIE):
A Self-Assessment of Best Practices	(CEC)	School Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site-based continuous planning for sustainability of inclusive education best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction and Student Achievement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Specials, electives, and career technical education (CTE) teachers have regularly scheduled meetings to collaborate with special education teachers and related service providers to implement strategies that support the learning of all SWDs in their classes. -General and special education teachers use the Florida Standards as the foundation for instruction of all SWDs. -A multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS) and problem-solving process is consistently used to ensure progress in curriculum, for all students. -All instructional and related services personnel use formative assessment processes and tools to gather, analyze, and evaluate data about effective instruction and behavior interventions. -Teachers of SWDs who spend less than 80% of their day in general education classes use formative assessment data to identify effective instructional/behavioral interventions that allow SWDs to make progress toward meeting IEP and learning goals. -School wide approach to facilitate positive, interdependent relationships and social responsibility among all students, and an approach for Universal Design for Learning. -Variety of service delivery models in place, across all grade levels, to provide instruction and related 	

Villa and Thousand (2016): A Self-Assessment of Best Practices	Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)	Best practices of Inclusive Education (BPIE): School Indicators
		<p>services to SWDs.</p> <p>-All paraprofessionals have received PD that includes clear descriptions of their work responsibilities and strategies for support SWDs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and Collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All special education teachers are full, collaborative members of a general education curriculum team and use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time with general education teachers to clarify roles and responsibilities and plan effective instruction and assessment for all students. -Family members of SWDs are contributing members of school decision-making groups. -Learning opportunities and resources are provided to families of SWDs as a result of needs assessments and student data. -All personnel consider family members as a resource and obtain their input in planning and problem-solving. -The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is disseminated to families, school district personnel, and community members annually. -The school uses a person-centered planning process for SWDs and a team decision-making process to ensure SWDs transition from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district to ensure placement in the LRE.

Professional Development

Mangope and Mukhopadhyay (2015) stated that continuing professional development of teachers is crucial to implementing inclusive education, as well as improving the quality of services delivered to all students. The study Mangope and Mukhopadhyay (2015) conducted on teachers' perceptions and beliefs on professional development for inclusive education produced findings which clearly indicated that teachers were not interested in 'one-shot' seminars or workshops as a professional development model, but rather, as David & Kuyini (2012) suggest provide teachers on-going professional development opportunities because they found them to be more effective (as cited in Mangope and Mukhopadhyay, 2015). Mangope and Mukhopadhyay (2015) believed that it is, therefore, important for schools to design professional development programs which consider local contexts and the teachers' needs and develop and use a cooperative team model for on-going professional development. They suggest that this model moves away from the authoritarian model where special education professionals are seen as the experts, but instead facilitate a partnership model in which special education professionals, general education teachers, parents, as well as the students with disabilities are involved in the collaborative process (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004).

Barton (2000) believed professional development to be one component for implementing inclusive education in Catholic schools, and it needs to be intense, continual, and multilevel. Barton (2000) suggested that all educators should be provided with a clear understanding of the components of the learning process, as well as different models of intelligence, in order to develop alternative ways of teaching to match that unique child's learning. Educators should also be provided professional development that offers components of teaching, learning, and knowledge that is congruent with theoretical and philosophical perspectives of inclusive

education (Barton, 2000). Barton (2000) suggested professional development should be long-term, reflective, and intense, developing their understanding in transfer and application of classroom practices, which cannot be accomplished in a one-time inservice program. Barton (2000) believed educators should also be engaged in ongoing problem solving and consultation with other school colleagues and the principal, and sharing between schools and even Dioceses would be beneficial.

Professional development can have a variety of definitions. Showers, Joyce, and Bennett (1987) stated that the purpose of professional development is to increase levels of knowledge to sustain and support new practice until it becomes embedded into the daily practice. Fishman, Marx, Best, and Tal (2003) defined the term professional development as the cornerstone for reform. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) stated that professional development is typically delivered through a “sit and get” approach, which relies on an expert in the field who models and disseminates various information to the participants. This method relies on the participants taking the new knowledge gained and implementing that information individually (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Nishimura (2014) suggested that when professional development is delivered in the form of a single event, it may be difficult to sustain or penetrate into the system because the teachers may change their practices individually, causing a varied approach that often does not in turn effect the school structure itself.

Wilkins and Nietfeld (2004) suggested that infrequent trainings and workshops about inclusion have a limited effect on changing attitudes, but Wilkins and Nietfeld (2004) argued that investing the time, quality resources, daily interactions, and modeling are what is needed to change attitudes regarding inclusion. Professional development is needed for the transitioning of

schools to an inclusive education setting, where all faculty and staff; teachers, administrators, and specialized personnel develop the necessary skills and attitudes for implementing and maintaining inclusive practices (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Waitoller and Artiles (2013) believed that a critical need for developing inclusive school systems is the ability to develop and support teachers that have the skills, necessary sensibilities, understandings, and contextual awareness for providing quality education, participation, and results for all students. They went on to say that teachers can have a significant impact on students' learning. Professional Development is an essential component in education, including inclusive practices. Hadar and Brody (2010) wrote that meaningful PD for educators is directly tied to their level of engagement through active participation in modeling, teaching, supporting, and assessing student learning. It is important to create a culture centered in collaboration that includes questioning and support, allowing teachers to engage in vital conversation centered on student learning (Hadar & Brody, 2010). Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Jones, and DeRousie (2009) believed that effective professional development gives teachers that ability to set meaningful goals related to their own practice and allows them time to self-evaluate. Nishimura (2014) stated that general and special education teachers who learn differentiated instruction practices together with instructional coaches can focus on what works best to influence student achievement, therefore empowering teachers to modify their teaching.

Corkum, Bryson, Smith, Giffen, Hume, and Power (2014) stated that educators reported difficulty meeting the varied and wide-range of needs of children with ASD within an inclusive classroom. Corkum et al. (2014) also stated that educators consistently stressed the need for multileveled and multipronged professional development, which is available as needs arise and in a timely fashion. They conducted a mixed methods study to identify the professional

development needs of educators in order to determine the best ways to support them in order to provide quality programming for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) within an inclusive educational system. The learning opportunities for teachers and teacher assistants of ASD students that Corkum et al, (2014) provided are: at least one full course focused on ASD through formal training, course focused on special needs that included information about ASD, media opportunities, parents of ASD students, colleagues with experience working with ASD students, board in-services focused on ASD, Department of Education professional development opportunities on ASD, workshops outside of the Department of Education, hands-on training or shadowing for ASD, or specific books and videos on ASD.

Waitoller and Artiles (2013) reviewed the research on professional development (PD) for inclusive education between 2000 and 2009 to answer how inclusive education is defined in PD research, how PD for inclusive education is studied, and how teacher learning is examined in PD research for inclusive education. Waitoller and Artiles (2013) found six types of PD were provided for inclusive education: university class, action research, online courses, on-site training, professional development schools, and a special educator's weekly newsletter focusing on including SWDs. The most frequently used form of PD was action research and in these studies, faculty and teachers improved their inclusive practices by working together in inquiry-based projects (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Bull and Buechler (1997) and Desimone (2009) believe the most effective professional development qualities include individualizing based on the teachers and the school, using follow up procedures like mentoring or coaching, practicing collaboration, and embedding practices into the daily lives of teachers (as cited by Nishimura, 2014).

Funding

Funding is a necessary component of education and has been known to cause much controversy. It is also a much needed, but scarce resource for inclusive education for students, as it was one of the main barriers that Burke and Griffin (2016) pointed out in creating an inclusive education model for school. McCann (2017) noted that special education enrollment and aggregate costs have noticeably increased in recent years, and at the same time, there have not been proportionate increases in federal special education (IDEA Part B) appropriations or state education spending. Under IDEA, local communities must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to students with disabilities, regardless of federal and state special education funding (McCann, 2017). McCann (2017) explained that since the 1960s, special education spending for local districts has used 40 percent of increased education funding nationally, as a result. McCann (2014) reported that federal dollars do not make up the majority of spending for special education services. Federal funding contributed to only nine percent of the funding for special education between the years 1999 and 2000, according to McCann (2014), forty-six percent came from the state, and forty-five percent was locally funded. McCann (2014) reported that the current law under IDEA, which last reauthorized in 2004, has allocated funds to states in basically the same way since the 1997 amendments' permanent formula took effect. The 2004 formula was due to concerns with over identifying students for special education, and now states can receive up to 40 percent of the country's average per-pupil expenditure, which is adjusted based on changes to both the state's population of children ages 3 through 21 and the state's share of children living in poverty, then it is multiplied by the number of children identified with disabilities by the state for the 2004-2005 school year (McCann, 2014). McCann (2014) explained that the states are limited by

minimum and maximum award amounts. These award amounts are what form the basis of their annual federal IDEA allocations (McCann, 2014). The state award minimums are based on the greatest of three calculations: a) fiscal year 1999 award levels, plus one-third of one percent of the difference between the state's prior-year award level and its 1999 award level; b) prior-year award levels, plus the prior-year amount multiplied by any percentage increase in total IDEA funds from the prior year over 1.5 percent; or c) prior-year award levels, plus the prior-year amount multiplied by 90 percent of the percentage increase in total IDEA Part B funds from the prior year (McCann, 2014).

The quick growth in students identified with disabilities, as well as the overall growth in special education, McCann (2014) reported, has been cause for the depletion of states' willingness to contribute more and more resources. Therefore, school districts have to take on a larger share of the costs. States have each developed funding formulas for allocating their own funds to school districts (McCann, 2014). The states use the same formula as Congress allocates funds to states, but using different data sources at times in order to distribute federal dollars to local educational agencies (McCann, 2014). However, McCann (2014) stated that these formulas could further weaken the impact of the federal population-and-poverty formula by compensating districts that receive fewer IDEA funds with state dollars, which is detailed under IDEA. McCann (2014) reported the IDEA data analysis showed some substantial disparities in resources throughout the states and among school districts. The analysis showed major inconsistency in the resources which the federal government allocates to students with disabilities, with more than 50 percent fewer dollars per student available to some districts than others (McCann, 2014). It also indicated that school districts in states with the lowest-population had higher per-child allocations than districts in other states, whereas, the school districts in the

states that had the highest populations had lower average per-child funding (McCann, 2014). Another thing the analysis revealed was in the last 15 years, districts that have had the largest declines in enrollment have higher per-child allocations due to provisions in the funding formula (McCann, 2014). The across-the-board cuts implemented first in fiscal year 2013. Lawmakers, unable to reach a compromise on replacing the sequester with targeted budget cuts, claimed they were powerless to stop the cuts. At the same time, neither the Department of Education nor states and school districts had much flexibility in implementing the cuts, because the law was written to create across-the-board reductions at the program level. As a result, funding for IDEA state grants fell from \$11.6 billion at the start of fiscal year 2013 to \$11.0 billion in March of that year. It is a seemingly small drop, but districts that serve large numbers of students with special needs, especially students with particularly costly disabilities, disproportionately faced the cuts.

The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) reported that Catholic schools utilize minimal, incremental state and federal funding (as cited in Durow, 2007). The National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated that "...costs must never be the controlling consideration limiting the welcome offered to those among us with disabilities, since provision of access to religious functions is a pastoral duty. (NCCB, 1998, p.1)". Unfortunately, Catholic school tuition continues to rise and decreased access to federal flow-through dollars through special education programming is a reality that reveals a difficult issue to overcome for the Catholic school administrator (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Since Catholic schools have not generally provided the resources for services to students with special needs in the past, Powell (2004) observed that financial cooperation between the school and parents is becoming typical on the elementary level (p. 89). Durow (2007) reported that in one Catholic school, the extra costs that were associated with providing inclusive education needed was financed through student tuition, with special

needs students paying the standard tuition rate; subsidies from Catholic Charities, and fund-raising, in order to pay salaries for three full-time special education teachers, three teacher assistants, and a number of therapists. Durow (2007) shared that the majority of the cost in Catholic schools for providing special education services is paid for by the parents, for their child's specific service, or the cost comes from the general tuition fees paid by all families of the school. Thirty-four percent of all services provided to students with disabilities are supported by tuition (Durow, 2007).

Public funds, through the means of vouchers, provide related services to special needs and Title I students in private schools, currently (Taylor, 2005). However, there is debate over the use of tuition tax credits for parents paying private school tuition because some parents with students attending public schools believe the education is better in a private school and want that option for their child (Taylor, 2005). Taylor (2005) also noted another issue is for special educators determining whether SWDs have equal opportunity to participate in "school choice" programs and preserve their legal right to an appropriate education. Unfortunately, they may only receive a small amount of federal funding under IDEA and subsequent reauthorizations, for the students with disabilities they educate (Eigenbrood, 2010). Often, federal funding does not even sufficiently cover the services needed by SWDs the schools are serving (DeFiore, 2006). In IDEA's 1997 renewal, states were required to adopt policies that do not break the law's LRE program mandate placement. The funds must go wherever the student goes, regardless of placement and be sufficient in providing the needed services. Parrish (1997) noted that based on district reports, inclusive education programs generally are no costlier than the segregated models (as cited in Thousand and Villa, 2000). However, as Thousand and Villa (2000) noted,

districts need to anticipate the one-time fee it will take to transition to an inclusion model, primarily needed for planning and professional development of faculty and personnel.

There are programs and federal funding available to students with disabilities attending Catholic schools. *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – 2004* states that students enrolled in private schools who identified with disabilities through Child Find are able to receive publicly funded special education services (Spivey, 2015). IDEA also states that students who attend private institutions do not have the same legal rights as students enrolled in public schools to special education services and may not receive as many services (Spivey, 2015). Public school districts designate funds from the state and federal governments each year to fund special education students who are enrolled in private schools, as well as meet with the administrators of private schools in their LEA (local education area) to discuss the services they can provide (Spivey, 2015). Spivey (2015) noted that funds can fluctuate from year to year, however the amount is not typically sufficient to provide a significant number of services.

School voucher programs allow parent choices. Fleming, Cowen, Witte, and Wolf (2006) stated that voucher and school choice programs are indeed a choice and many components of school choice programs depend upon the individual decisions of students, parents, and schools. Private schools may choose to participate in the voucher program, school leaders may choose to market their schools, and parents may choose to participate in the school choice plans (Fleming, Cowen, Witte, & Wolf, 2006).

Based on the Florida Department of Education *School Choice* website (2017), the state of Florida actually leads the nation in school choice options. School choice allows parents the opportunity to ensure their child get the best education possible. These programs are growing

due to the high demand of families wanting to take advantage of their right to choose the most suitable learning environment for their child. Florida's State Board of Education has a strategic goal to "Improve K-12 educational choice options." School choice lets parents make the decision about how and where their child will be educated (School Choice, 2017).

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2017) stated that another funding program developed by Florida are tuition tax credit programs, which allow corporations to apply for a tax credit for donations made to a nonprofit scholarship-funding organization that is eligible ([F.S. 220.1875](#)). The value of the credit is 100 percent of the donation made is deductible and a corporation can apply for a credit worth up to 75 percent of its total income tax liability (*The National Conference of State Legislatures*, 2017). The state of Florida awards at most \$140 million (FY 2011) in scholarship tax credits, but Florida's statewide limit is flexible. This means if corporate donation amounts exceed 90 percent of the tax credit limit (\$140 million), it will automatically increase by 25 percent (*The National Conference of State Legislatures*, 2017).

Scholarships must be awarded to students who qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program and are either entering kindergarten or first grade, or attended a public school the previous school year. Eligible nonprofit, scholarship-funding organizations can spend only 3 percent of collected donations on administrative expenses. Additionally, qualified private schools must administer or make arrangements to allow scholarship recipients between grades 3 and 10 to take an approved standardized test. Scholarships can also be awarded to low-income students that attend a public school outside of their own district. This scholarship is intended to cover travel expenses and any other related educational expenses ([F.S. 1002.395](#)).

According to the Florida Legislature's website, *Welcome: Online Sunshine* (2017), the John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program is another funding program that has been established to provide a scholarship for students with disabilities to a private school of choice. These students need to have an individual educational plan (IEP) which has been written in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education or a 504 accommodation plan which was issued under s. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (S. 1002.39, F.S). The John M. McKay Scholarship remains in effect until one of the following occurs: the student returns to a public school, graduates from high school, or reaches the age of 22.

In order for eligibility in the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, a private school must comply with all requirements for private schools participating in state school choice scholarship programs pursuant to s. [1002.42](#); however, they may be sectarian or nonsectarian. They must also provide all documentation required for a student's participation to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), including the fee schedules. If the private school fails to meet this deadline, the student is not eligible to receive their quarterly scholarship. Private schools are also held academically accountable to the parent, meeting the educational needs of the student by providing the parent a written explanation of the student's progress annually. Parents must also stay in the physical location where a scholarship student regularly attends classes. If the private school is unable to meet these requirements, it constitutes a basis for ineligibility of the private school to participate in the scholarship program.

By applying for a John M. McKay Scholarship, parents are exercising their parental right and option to place their child in a private school. The parent is responsible for selecting and applying to the private school for their child. After they do this, they must request the scholarship at least 60 days before the due date of the first scholarship payment. The Florida Department of

Education does not regulate private schools. Therefore, the parent is giving up the educational rights of the child and is now responsible for making sure the child receives the educational, as well as any therapeutic supports, necessary (School Choice, 2017). The School Choice Office verifies that private schools participating in the McKay Scholarship Program are in compliance with any health, safety and financial requirements. As mentioned, however, private schools are not required to adhere to the same rules that apply to public schools, such as adhering to the Florida Standards' curriculum, providing services in a child's IEP (Individual Education Plan), administering standardized testing to measure annual progress, providing transportation to and from school, and meeting accreditation standards (School Choice, 2017). The parent is also responsible for making sure the school provides the services, curriculum, and educational approaches the child needs (School Choice, 2017).

Students participating in the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program must follow certain rules or terms. They must remain in attendance throughout the school year, unless excused by the school for reasonable cause. They have an obligation to comply with all published policies of the private school they attend. Parents are also responsible for the transportation of the student to any assessment site, if they have requested that the student takes all statewide assessments. This is in accordance with s. [1008.22](#).

There are several specific terms that eligible students with disabilities must follow for the payment of services to the private school. The eligible SWDs receive only the maximum amount equivalent to the base student allocation in the Florida Education Finance Program multiplied by the appropriate cost factor for the educational program that would have been provided for the student in the district school the student was assigned and multiplied by the district cost differential. Also, a share of the guaranteed allocation for exceptional students is determined and

added to that amount. The amount of the John M. McKay Scholarship is determined by looking at whichever is less between the calculated amount above or the amount of the private school's tuition and fees. Any assessment fee required by the participating private school can be used from the total amount of the scholarship. The school district needs to report any students who are attending a private school that are using the John M. McKay Scholarship program. When the student enters the program, school personnel must ensure that all required documentation and fee schedules are provided at least 30 days before the first quarterly scholarship payment is made for the student. The first payment is made once the department has verified admission acceptance. All subsequent payments are made upon verification of continued enrollment and attendance at the private school. The payments must be made payable to the student's parent and mailed by the department to the private school the student is attending. The parent endorses it to the private school for deposit into the private school's account. After each scholarship payment, the department can request a sample of endorsed payments to review and confirm from the Department of Financial Services.

Catholic Inclusive Educational Studies

Literature and studies that focus on inclusive education have been valuable to this case study; however studies pertaining specifically to inclusion in Catholic schools are even more beneficial. One such study was conducted by Michelle Wechsler. Wechsler (2013) conducted a qualitative research study of one Catholic elementary school in Los Angeles who has had an inclusion program running for five years. Wechsler's (2013) study focused on the teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education, as well as what the teachers and administrators perceived to be the best ways for fostering acceptance of inclusive education in the school. Wechsler (2013) conducted her research using a case study methodology

through three qualitative methods: in-depth, semi-structured interviews, one focus group, and analysis of documents. Five teachers and two administrators participated in the interview portion of this case study. The focus group consisted of eleven teachers, and then school documents were reviewed in order to gain and analyze teachers' perspectives on inclusive education and disability in a Catholic school setting (Wechsler, 2013). Four main themes were discovered by Wechsler (2013) after the data had been collected and analyzed: inclusion is the "Catholic Thing To Do"; Inclusion as "Other" Education; Support and Acceptance of Inclusion; and Quality Technical Teacher Training. A finding from the Wechsler (2013) study showed that although teachers embraced inclusion, it was a real challenge having enough time or enough "hands in the classroom" to meet the needs of the inclusion students with the way the schools was currently structured. They did say they felt that being Catholic held them to a higher standard of accepting and teaching students with learning challenges, however, they shared that the realities of the school structure and staff situation were a challenge, especially for teaching students with moderate to severe disabilities (Wechsler, 2013). Wechsler's (2013) analysis indicated that more expertise and training in special education for Catholic educators and administrators for inclusive education was needed to expand inclusion of students with moderate to severe disabilities. Wechsler (2013) reported that the teachers and administrators believed that the involvement of parents was one of the most positive ways to nurture the acceptance of inclusion in schools. Administrators also expressed the need for the Archdiocese to take steps for stronger, more regulated efforts in providing guidance and training, along with needed resources to all Catholic schools that accept students with disabilities or require individualized academic plans (Wechsler, 2013). The general consensus of the participants in Wechsler's (2013) study believed that with the right resources, support in the classroom, and teacher training, inclusion was beneficial for all

students in the classroom, both with or without disabilities. Wechsler's (2013) study also revealed that despite many obstacles, teachers and administrators believed that helping all students succeed at school was important to meet the challenge of inclusion in a Catholic school.

Boyle and Hernandez (2016) conducted an investigation of Catholic school principals' perceptions and attitudes about serving students with disabilities (SWDs) within a Catholic school context. The participants in the study included 81 of 342 principals who were contacted through email. The participants were only from schools in one Midwestern state because researchers wanted to minimize any variance due to various regulatory practices of special education programs in different states. The principals were asked to complete an online survey adapted from the *Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)* (Praisner, 2000). Overall, Boyle & Hernandez (2016) found the majority of principals surveyed had a positive attitude toward including SWDs, which was related to principals' past experiences with SWDs. Principals reported their willingness to enroll students with mild disabilities was not related to whether or not they had a history of children with those disabilities. However, there was a significant association between principals' willingness to enroll students with more severe disabilities and the principals' personal reasons. Funding for additional, necessary services to address the educational needs of students with severe disabilities was often cited, which could be taxing for a Catholic school (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). The researchers noted that principals who had positive experiences with a student with severe disabilities were more willing to include those students in the Catholic school setting, even though it would most likely require additional resources (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Forty-four percent of the principals said they would be willing to include more students with disabilities if the necessary funds were available (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). In addition, the study reported that about half of the principals conducted

professional development with explicit topics related to inclusion in Catholic school settings (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016).

Durow (2007) conducted an investigation of 19 Midwestern Catholic Dioceses on their missions, educational practices, and financial means for serving students with disabilities in Catholic schools. The findings of Durow's (2007) study produced some common themes related to school mission, practices and resources. One theme was that the mission of most Catholic schools is inclusive and promotes the availability of programs to all students, but the schools were found to be somewhat inconsistent in the actual practice of serving students with special needs. The data in Durow's (2007) study showed that Catholic schools were serving more students with special needs than was commonly perceived. Findings showed that Catholic schools employed special needs identification processes, students with special needs received additional services, and students with special needs comprised approximately 8-9% of the population of all Catholic schools in the study. However, of the reported population of students with disabilities in this study, few reported serving students with serious or complex needs, such as students with severe and profound disabilities. Resources to fund the programs were reported as tuition and parish subsidies, as well as other sources (e.g., benefactors, grants, fundraising). Durow (2007) found that the most significant barriers to improved service of students with disabilities in Catholic schools were reported as inadequate funding, insufficient teacher preparation and confidence, inaccessible buildings, and inconsistent commitment from parishes and boards. Durow (2007) reported that the suggested solutions included obtaining training grants for teachers, improving federal and state support, and leading more effective education of parents, pastors, and boards regarding the reasons for including students with special needs in Catholic schools.

Summary

The review of literature revealed that there are limited research studies having been conducted on inclusion in Catholic schools. However, results from available research offer valuable information and themes for other Catholic schools. To increase and enhance the education of students with disabilities in inclusive Catholic school settings, long-term, intense professional development is needed for educators to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms, and resources and funding for students with disabilities are necessary. Further research and investigations are needed on inclusion in Catholic schools, as there appear to be gaps in the literature available on inclusion in Catholic schools. More studies are needed to investigate how best to implement an inclusion model in a Catholic school, as well as the best professional development opportunities and experiences Dioceses and schools should provide for teachers of inclusive classrooms within a Catholic school setting.

Chapter three details the methodology for this qualitative investigation and how the data collected related to the two exploratory questions: (a) what are the lived experiences of elementary education educators whose students with disabilities are included in a private, Catholic elementary school; and (b) what meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings. Chapter three also discusses how the data were coded, analyzed, and categorized into common themes. The following chapter includes a detailed explanation of hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, as well. Lastly, it outlines in detail the process used to collect data through surveys, interviews, and observations of administrators and educators that participated in this qualitative investigation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS, PROCEDURES, AND RATIONALE FOR DESIGN

Introduction

The exploratory questions addressed in this Dissertation in Practice guided the qualitative methods to explain and describe the phenomena investigated. This study investigated the lived experiences of elementary educators in a private, Catholic school setting in a large, diocesan school district in the southeastern United States. This investigation was needed because the number of students with disabilities is increasing, and Catholic schools have a responsibility to teach all students, including students with severe disabilities. Therefore, an understanding of inclusive practices implemented by educators who teach students with severe disabilities was necessary. To fully understand their experiences, this study explored two fundamental exploratory questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of elementary education educators whose students with disabilities are included in a private, Catholic elementary school?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings?

The research design used for this investigation was the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). This was the most appropriate method for this investigation because it focused on the lived experiences of the educators at an elementary Catholic school setting that practices inclusion. A phenomenological approach suggests that if the problem requires or needs a description of the lived phenomenon, then it is the best-suited design (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) explained, phenomenology draws from education for the discipline background, studies several individuals who have shared experiences for the unit of analysis, and uses

interviews, observations, and document analysis as the primary data collection sources, which are all characteristics of this particular investigation. There are different types of phenomenology, but for this particular investigational study, hermeneutical phenomenology (Creswell, 2013), which describes research as oriented toward lived experiences and interpretation of the texts of life, was used. Creswell (2013) described that in hermeneutical phenomenology, a researcher first looks to the principal matter of interest and then reflects on the primary themes that constitutes the nature of the lived experience. The researcher then writes a description of the phenomenon, focusing on the topic of inquiry in order to make an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences to address the phenomenon or problem to be studied (Creswell, 2013).

To investigate the lived experiences of educators' implementation of inclusive practices within Catholic schools, this Dissertation in Practice included a survey of administrators and faculty members within the Elementary School to gain knowledge and perspectives of inclusive practices for students with moderate to severe disabilities. A survey was chosen as a source for data collection because it provided a convenient way for participants to take part in this study, allowing for a large participation and response rate. Individual, semi-structured interviews with the administrators and faculty members at the school were conducted to investigate the inclusive practices used within their classrooms and school for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Pertinent artifacts (documents) were reviewed from sources within the diocese and school. Finally, classroom observations at the school were conducted to observe the inclusive practices implemented within classrooms that included students with moderate to severe disabilities.

All data were collected and analyzed from the artifact reviews (documents), observations of students with disabilities and educators in inclusive classrooms at the Elementary School site of this study, along with the data from surveys and interviews with the administrators and faculty members at the school. The survey used within this investigation was adapted from the *Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE)-District Indicators* (FDOE, 2013) regarding the three main domains: leadership and decision making, instruction and student achievement, and communication and collaboration (See Appendix D). In addition, the survey included questions from the published survey, *Survey of Teacher Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education within an Urban School District* (Kern, 2006), to gather data related to beliefs and perceptions of educators about inclusive education.

This research consisted of case study methodology focused within one Catholic elementary school that served students with moderate to severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Key decisions for this research study were made with involvement and approval from the Diocese's Associate Superintendent and followed specific criteria for this research study. The criteria for the selection of the elementary school as the case study for this research stipulated that students with moderate to severe disabilities were enrolled and included in general education classrooms for at least 80% of the school day. The educators selected for the interviews, observations, and surveys were a non-randomized, convenience sample of educators within the elementary school who taught students with moderate to severe disabilities in their classrooms.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate the beliefs, instructional practices, and supports for inclusion of students with moderate to severe disabilities at one elementary school

within the identified Diocese. The investigation utilized multiple data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations, artifact reviews) to triangulate data collected within this research. The results of this investigational study employed hermeneutical phenomenology research methods to collect and analyze multiple sources of data focused on the provision of inclusive practices in Catholic schools.

Problem

Catholic schools and classrooms throughout the Diocese have enrolled students with increasingly more complex and severe disabilities. However, modifications to the curriculum and instruction have not been implemented in all schools for students identified as having moderate to severe disabilities (Associate Superintendent of the Diocese, personal communication). Due to recent federal mandates and implications for private schools, this Dissertation in Practice investigated the educational solutions by educators to address the needs of students with severe disabilities within their classrooms in a Catholic school setting. This Dissertation in Practice looked specifically at the lived experiences of educators in a Catholic school that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms using hermeneutical phenomenology research methods.

Phenomenology

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). This investigation focused on the experiences of a collective group of educators at a Catholic school practicing inclusion. A phenomenological research design seemed the most appropriate design to investigate and understand trends or themes that were commonly experienced by the educators implementing inclusion. Moustakas (1994) explained that in a phenomenological

study, the researcher collects data from participants who have experienced this phenomenon in order to gain an understanding for all individuals of what and how they experienced it (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) focused on several key defining features of phenomenology, which he mainly had taken from Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990). One feature of phenomenological research is the emphasis of a phenomenon or single idea being explored, such as an educational concept. Another feature is that the phenomenon being explored with a group of individuals is one that all experienced. It could also be a philosophical discussion about the fundamental ideas involved in conducting phenomenology, which becomes the subjective and objective experiences of the individuals participating in the study and the lived experiences they have in common with one another. Another key feature is the use of bracketing by the researcher, which allows the researcher to not fully remove himself or herself from the study, but allows for prior knowledge to not be engaged while determining the experiences of the participants. Data collection procedures involving such interviews, observations, and documents are also a crucial feature of phenomenological research. Data analyses follow systematic procedures that eventually summarize the “what” the individuals have experienced, and the “how” they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). This is also a key feature to phenomenological research. Lastly, a descriptive passage discussing the essence of the experience, which incorporates the “what” and “how” of the phenomenological study, is also a fundamental feature (Creswell, 2013).

Rationale for Research Design

A phenomenological study using a mixed methods design was chosen for this investigation, as it identifies the meaning of the lived experience of individuals related to a specific phenomenon and then develops a composite description of the phenomenon (Creswell,

2007). Quantitative research tests a theory and analyzes the relationships between the variables through statistical procedures (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2013) noted that qualitative research is often used when the goal is to encourage individuals to share their stories and experiences. Qualitative research aims to gather in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern it (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods seek to understand the contexts and setting in which the participants of the study address the issue (Creswell, 2013).

The investigation utilized multiple data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interview, observations, artifact reviews) to triangulate data collected within this research. The results of this investigational study using hermeneutical phenomenology research methods provide data, analyses, and recommendations about inclusive practices in Catholic schools. Although surveys are not a direct observation, they do provide measurable and direct information (Davison, 2014). Davison (2014) noted that the validity of surveys is reinforced due to the ability of the researcher to limit contact with the participants. Creswell (2007) stated that a survey does not provide the extensive data of a qualitative investigation, but Carr (1994) noted that the separation a survey does provide helps to lessen the researcher bias (as cited in Davison, 2014). A survey can provide numeric descriptions of trends or opinions of a group by studying a sample of participants from that population, and then from that sample, the researcher is able to generalize themes about the population (Creswell, 2009).

The research questions dictated the need to explore, understand, and study a group of Catholic educators who practice inclusion. Since the goal of this investigation was to examine the lived experiences of elementary educators in a private, Catholic school setting, conducting a qualitative study was warranted. These qualitative methods would most fully investigate the

experiences of the elementary education educators whose students with moderate to severe disabilities are included in private, Catholic elementary schools, as well as the meanings these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings seemed the most appropriate. Creswell (2013) explained that a researcher conducting a qualitative study needs to be willing to do the following: commit to extensive field research; engage in complex data analysis; write long passages to explain the evidence, claims, and perspectives of the participants, along with quotes from the participants; and participate in a form of social and human science research. Using document analysis, as well as surveys, observations, and interviews, data were drawn from several different contexts, and triangulated in order to learn and understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the educators and administrators of an inclusive Catholic school.

Procedures

Patterson & Williams (2002) suggested that when selecting a specific methodological approach for a study, the researcher must consider three key issues: the research goals, assumptions about the research being studied, and conclusions from both the relative importance of the research goals along with the relative significance of the study's different threats of validity. In addition, a study's methodology is more than simply a statement of process or technique. It actually represents an explanation of the specific testing logic that explains the relationship of empirical observations to research concepts. In hermeneutic case studies, Patterson and Williams (2002) used the following steps: (1) adopt a forestructure of understanding, (2) decide about data representation, (3) choose a sampling principle, (4) data collection, and (5) data analysis. Sanders (2003) provided guidance when conducting phenomenological research using Colaizzi's (1978) seven step method. The purpose of step one

of Colaizzi's method is to acquire a sense of each transcript or gain a sense of the participants' experience. Step two is extracting significant statements from the transcripts of interviews and identifying the participants' experiences after reading them. Step three is to formulate meaning from the significant statements, also referred to as "bracketing". Bracketing can be done by keeping a journal of assumptions and preconceptions to explore the ideas, themes, and feelings throughout the data analysis process. It enables the researcher to focus direction of the analyses. Step four organizes formulated meanings into themes, and step five describes the investigated phenomenon by integrating the resulting ideas into an exhaustive description. Step six describes the fundamental structure of the phenomenon discovered, which includes a description of the processes and meanings derived from the previous steps. Lastly, step seven of Colaizzi's (1978) methods is to return to the participants to check for rigor, trustworthiness, and validation by interviewing them again to ensure that the data represent their experiences. This also assures trustworthiness of the data and results.

For this Dissertation in Practice, procedures as described by Colaizzi's (1978) and Paterson and Williams' (2002) methods were utilized. A thorough review of literature was conducted to gain understanding of inclusive practices in public and private schools, primarily Catholic schools, as well as federal and Catholic laws pertaining to special education. Then, a plan for the collection and representation of data were decided, based upon published research and recommendations for additional research on this topic of inclusive practices. As previously described, the research design used for this investigation was the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). This was the most appropriate method for this investigation because it focused on the lived experiences of the educators at an elementary Catholic school setting that practices inclusion. It was determined that surveys, interviews, observations, and artifact reviews

would be the best way to collect data to address the research questions of this Dissertation in Practice. The sampling population was chosen based on specific criteria. Observations used the *Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE)* indicators as a checklist of inclusive practices (See Appendix D). Data were analyzed using the methods described in the previous section. Once all interviews were completed, data were transcribed. The reports were read thoroughly several times, prepared for interpretation, and then coded, based on themes and trends in participants' responses by the researcher. Once all the data were collected, the researcher then shared the initial findings with the individual interview participants to assure the validity of the content. The interviewer did not disclose the identities of any of the participants throughout this investigation or report, but used a pseudonym throughout the report. All data collected were secured both electronically and physically. After all observations were completed at the Elementary school, the researcher prepared a report documenting the observations and analyzed the reports by interpreting the results and coding them based on the *BPIE* indicators (See Appendix D), Villa and Thousand's (2016) *Inclusive Education Checklist of Best Practices*, and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). After the development of the themes, meaning was extracted across the multiple data sources to uncover and report findings, recommendations for practice and future research.

Human Research Procedure

The research design for this study used procedures offered for implementing a phenomenological study by experts in the field including, but not limited to, the procedures proposed by Creswell (2013). The approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida (UCF) was obtained prior to beginning the study (See Appendix E), as well as approval from the Associate Superintendent of the Diocese (See Appendix F).

Minimal risks to students, participants, and the Elementary School existed in this study and informed consent was obtained from the district, school, and school-based participants, as appropriate. All participants in this study were sent an invitation to participate via email, which included a Summary Explanation of Research, stating the purpose, procedures, and duration of the study (See Appendix G). It also included a description of expected benefits from participating in this study and contact information of IRB personnel to receive any answers to pertinent questions or concerns about the research. Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. The confidentiality of participants, students, and of data was protected through multiple means and consistent with the procedures described by the UCF IRB office. Access to data was limited by password protections for digital data and hard copies of any data were locked in files. Data will be disposed of after the allowable amount of time.

Survey

Researchers conducting a phenomenological study tend to primarily use interviews and observations to collect data (Creswell, 2013). However, as Harvey (2012-2017) noted, surveys can be used as part of a multi-stage research design in phenomenological research. Surveys may not be direct observations, however they provide measurable and direct information (Davison, 2014). Davison (2014) noted that the validity of surveys is reinforced due to the ability of the researcher to limit contact with the participants. The survey provided quantitative data of the attitudes and opinions of the educators at the Elementary School that contributed to resulting generalizations and themes.

A survey was chosen to collect data on the perceptions and experiences of the teachers and administrators at the Elementary School. The survey allowed for the largest and most convenient response. An Internet web survey was created using the Qualtrics service. An invitation to participate was sent to all teachers, academic support personnel, and administrators in the inclusive elementary school. If they agreed to participate and take the survey, they were sent a link to the survey consent form and the survey (See Appendix H). Participants could withdraw from the study at any time, if they wished. However, the identities of the participants were confidential. Therefore, the risk was minimal. The Qualtrics service facilitated the data collection for the surveys and upon participants completing the survey, an automated e-mail was sent, thanking the participant. Surveys did not disclose the identity of the participants as each participant was assigned a pseudonym to be used throughout this investigation. All electronic and print data were secured. The survey sample included sub-populations of three types of employees at the Elementary school site: administrators, teachers/teacher assistants, and Academic Support Personnel.

Document Analysis

Document analysis enables researchers to obtain an “insight into participants’ lives” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 117). It was necessary to examine Catholic law and archdiocesan policy documents about inclusion and services to students with disabilities to answer the exploratory questions of this investigation. The Elementary School’s Strategic Plan was also explored because it provided insight into the goals for students with disabilities in this investigation. Document analysis was particularly important because it provided vital information about how the Catholic Church, the Diocese, as well as the Elementary School view the teaching of students with disabilities and inclusive education in a Catholic school setting. In

addition, document analyses also provided information on the functions and procedures impacting educational services for students who attended the Elementary School, including students with severe disabilities.

Observations/Field Notes

Observations are often used in phenomenological approaches to develop theory; test theory; identify the meanings of the participants; discover how communities operate for empathetic interpretation; analyze everyday life of participants; and establish identity (Harvey, 2012-2017). Observational data are regarded as providing invaluable insights to theoretical development in a phenomenological approach (Harvey, 2012-2017). Observational research involves ‘looking hard’ at social situations and being systematic in noting what is occurring. The researcher observing does not just observe and record the behavior, but notes all interactions and events, forming detailed accounts that emphasize depth and fullness of reported dialogue, along with observations. Field notes are extremely important and valuable to observational research (Harvey, 2012-2017).

The data recorded during observational research depends on the purpose of the research, and how much to include depends first on the research questions, and second, the depth of the research (Harvey, 2012-2017). Knowing exactly what to look for makes it easier, as the researcher would only need to take notes on the things observed that are directly relevant to the investigation and questions being explored, or to add distinctions to the interpretation of meanings (Harvey, 2012-2017). The purpose of conducting observations for this research investigation was to learn the life experiences of the participants who work in an inclusive Catholic school setting and discover the meanings the participants make of these lived

experiences. Observations of interactions with students, both with disabilities and without; instructional modifications or accommodations for students with disabilities; and the roles and responsibilities of teachers, support instructional personnel, and paraprofessionals were completed. Data from observations were collected and recorded in a systematic way: included a heading for where, when, and what times the observations took place; noted when the observations were written down; included a list of people observed (pseudonym); and kept any comments on what was observed separate from the actual observations (Harvey, 2012-2017). For this investigation, notes were taken while observing, and details were added after the observation took place. Observations included dates, times and the names of those being observed. Additional meanings were later written on a separate sheet, along with notes taken regarding the actual observations.

Although phenomenologists are more likely to use observations to develop theory, investigational research often involves using observations with other data collection methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews, in order to provide a more detailed depiction (Harvey, 2012-2017). This investigation used several sources in order to best capture the most accurate information and triangulate the findings, including semi-structured interviews of multiple faculty members and administrators from the inclusive Elementary School.

Interviews

Interviews are used in qualitative research to provide meaningful information from the perspective of the participant and their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009; Wechsler, 2013). Harvey (2012-2017) explained that in-depth interviews can vary from simply an informal conversation to more formal interviews, being either structured, unstructured, or semi-structured.

In a semi-structured interview, which was used for this investigation, a set of broad questions are typically asked mostly in order, with some flexibility to adjust to the participant's responses and is primarily a one-way data collection technique (Harvey, 2012-2017). Interviews are typically comprised of a few main questions, but include several more detailed, supporting questions to follow-up. This is to prompt the participant to provide more in-depth information, if needed (Wechsler, 2013). Creswell (2009) explained that the goal of interviews is to ask open-ended questions that are not leading, allowing the participant to choose the direction of the answer. These questions should be broad enough not to limit the responses.

As Harvey (2012-2017) explained, researchers using a phenomenological approach tend to make extensive use of in-depth interviews for gathering detailed information on the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. Since this study focused on investigating the lived experiences of Catholic school educators within an inclusive setting, interviews were an appropriate source of data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to stay focused on the main points related to the exploratory questions, with some flexibility for the participants to add extra information. Phenomenological methods use in-depth interviews in order to identify the meanings, perceptions, or behaviors of the participants, analyze their everyday life, and understand how the participants developed specific ideas (Harvey, 2012-2017). The interview process allowed the degree of depth of the analysis to be expanded (Drummond, 2011).

Bracketing

Creswell (2013) explained that in a phenomenological study, often times, researchers will use bracketing to remove themselves from the study by discussing personal experiences of the

phenomenon. However, it does not take the researcher completely out of the study, but simply serves to identify personal experiences and set them aside partially so that they can focus on the participants' experiences. Giorgi (2009) believed this is not a matter of researchers forgetting what they have experienced, but of avoiding past knowledge influencing or determining experiences (as cited in Creswell, 2013). However, as LaVasseur (2003) suggested, bracketing may need to be redefined as a suspension of understandings in a reflective manner which cultivates curiosity (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Fischer (2008) explained bracketing can be presented in two forms: one with data and the other with evolving findings. The first form, with data, is the identification of the researcher's assumptions and temporarily setting them aside. The second form is the hermeneutic form, in which there is revisiting of data and of the researcher's understanding of the data (Fischer, 2008). Both of these forms of bracketing are an ongoing process and include careful development of language to represent the findings (Fischer, 2008).

Since this is a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the bracketing followed that form, which followed two aspects of meaning-making (Fischer, 2008). All distinct characteristics need to be understood as they relate to each other, as well as the whole phenomenon being studied. So, with any new insights or changes that occur from the original understanding, the researcher must go back and see how this development changed the understanding of other characteristics and the overall meaning of the phenomenon (Fischer, 2008). Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher needs to follow this procedure in order to express findings in ways that indicate the relationship between the characteristics of the findings to the whole phenomenon (Fischer, 2008).

Fischer (2008) explained that when looking at data from varying ranges of qualitative methods, it is beneficial, in a sense to review other documents related to what the participants

shared and reported. As Fischer (2008) suggested for an investigation like this one, bracketing can be used as a reflexive, hermeneutic discipline in order to revise the understandings of the participants and the research on inclusion, as it evolved, in order to promote the highest quality research on the lived experiences of teachers. The researcher thoroughly read and reread the interviews and observations; reviewed the documents (artifacts); looked at the previous research on inclusion; and considered the survey responses to form new understandings, revise these understandings, and relate them to the entire investigation. These findings and the collected data were then shared with individual participants in order to assure the validity of the content.

Sampling Recruitment: Participants

Criterion sampling was used in this qualitative study. The Elementary School chosen as the research site for this investigation was based on a convenient and purposeful sampling strategy. This school was chosen after discussion with the Associate Superintendent of the Diocese because the school is the only elementary school in the Diocese that has an inclusion program for students with moderate to severe disabilities in place. In addition, the selected school site for this case study has a diverse population of students with varying disabilities, and the students are included in general education classrooms for most of their instructional day. The Elementary School has a total of 243 students, and the principal reported that more than 30% of the students (75 total students) are diagnosed with a disability. Based on classroom teacher survey participants' responses, every participant (100%) reported having a student identified with a disability in the classroom. Also, based on participants' responses on the survey and interviews, students with disabilities included those identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), hearing impairment (HI), multiple disabilities (including intellectual disabilities-InD), specific learning disabilities (SLD), and speech or language impairment (LI). As Patton (2002)

explained, purposeful sampling is used for an in-depth study when a densely information-rich case is desired. Hatch (2002) stated that some reasons to choose a specific site for research is due to its accessibility, as well as its familiarity. Selection of this Elementary School was chosen because it met all criteria established for this study.

The sample of participants was composed of nonrandom, purposeful sampling of educators within the selected school. The participants consisted of two administrators, a guidance counselor, a student service leader, and 12 teachers from inclusive classrooms within the school site. All the participants in this study had either interacted with or taught students with moderate to severe disabilities. The demographics of the participants in this study included gender, age, and ethnicity/race of the participants, as well as, participants' highest level of education, special education courses they have taken, total years they have taught, and their current position/role in the Elementary School. Specific information on the demographics of the survey participants are detailed in Table 3, which can be found in chapter 4.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is a current employee within one of the elementary schools in the Diocese in which the research was conducted. The researcher has been developing and implementing intervention services and supports for students with academic needs. In addition, the researcher has conducted earlier research regarding the services for students both with and without disabilities in need of additional educational services. From personal interviews with classroom teachers at various schools in the Diocese, many educators have expressed difficulty in meeting the needs of students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom and implementing an effective inclusive classroom. Many teachers expressed the need for more training and more support to fully accommodate the students with disabilities. This investigation

and the data collected from the Elementary School for this investigation explored the lived experiences of educators in inclusive classrooms of an elementary Catholic school setting in order to gain knowledge and understanding of inclusive best practices for other schools for consideration for implementation throughout the Diocese.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for data collection were based upon the *Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) - District Indicators* (FDOE, 2013) to guide survey development, observations, and interview questions (See Appendix D). The purpose of the *BPIE* process is to evaluate the current status of inclusive best practices, identify priority needs for improvement, develop measurable goals and action steps to improve or increase inclusive practices, validate strengths in the implementation of best practices for inclusive education for all students with disabilities, as well as monitor and report progress toward the implementation of inclusive practices, and analyze data to determine the status of the inclusive practices (FDOE, 2013). There are a total of 34 indicators that were used to form questions for the survey and interviews. The indicators are divided into three domains: leadership and decision making; instruction and student achievement; and communication and collaboration. The survey was adapted from the *BPIE* and in addition, Kern's (2006) *Survey of Teacher Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education within an Urban School District* was used to target teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives. The format of the questions included Likert scale format, multiple choice, yes/no, and open-ended (See Appendix H).

Data Collection

The purpose of the survey, interview, and observations was to gather information about the life experiences and perspectives from administrators and teachers about students with and without moderate to severe disabilities that are in the inclusive setting.

In order to gather the demographics and to measure the teachers' and administrators' feelings, beliefs, and perceptions regarding students with disabilities, an online survey through Qualtrics was sent to all faculty, staff, and administrators at the Elementary School (Appendix H). The survey contained 19 total questions: one question sought consent to take part in this research study; 13 questions sought demographics and educational history; and four sections included 8 to 15 Likert scale questions, each regarding feelings and beliefs about students with disabilities and inclusion. The final question asked for participation in the observation and interview portions of the study. Ten classroom teachers, two special education personnel, two staff positions, and one administrator responded to the survey (83% participation). One administrator, three classroom teachers, and two special education personnel agreed to participate in the interviews. Seven classrooms were observed and two student services classes were observed. The responses to the survey were used to analyze the education, training, and experience the teachers have had with students with disabilities, as well as their age, race, and teaching experience.

In the qualitative interviews, a small sample of administrators, faculty, and staff members from the Elementary School were solicited based on whether they taught or worked with SWDs. The Associate Superintendent of the Diocese assisted in gaining access to the contact information of the educators and administrators of the Elementary School. Once potential participant names and contact information were gathered, the potential interview candidates were

contacted first by e-mail with an invitation to participate in the study/survey. The solicitation included the purpose and significance of the study. If the candidate responded affirmatively, an appointment was set to meet in person in a conference room, other private room on the school campus, or by phone. If the candidate responded no, a follow-up e-mail was sent after one week. If there was no response after one more week, the candidate's name was eliminated from the list. The face-to-face interviews were held at the school site in a pre-arranged conference room or over the phone, allowing for a confidential and private discussion during February, 2017 (See Appendix I for Administrative and Educator Interview Protocol). The participants were advised of the nature of the study through the survey they completed. The interviewer conducted the session by taking brief handwritten notes during the discussion on the protocol document. After the session ended, the interviewer transcribed the data documenting the interview and recording the responses of the participant.

Nine observations took place at the Elementary School site for this phenomenological study. The classes observed were the elementary and middle school *Learning Lab*, two third grade classes, a fifth grade class, a fourth grade class, a kindergarten class, a sixth grade religion class, and a seventh grade social studies class. The observations took place both in the morning and in the afternoon over the course of two days. The classes were chosen based on the principal's suggestion and the teacher's agreement to participate. The mixture of grades and types of classes, specifically with students with moderate to severe disabilities included, were chosen for maximum variability to observe the educators' methods and instructional practices, especially related to inclusive educational practices. All classrooms observed had at least one student with a disability. Detailed information of the observations is described through the themes in chapter 4. The *BPIE* indicators were used as an observation tool and checklist, but no

specific form was used. Notes were taken as the researcher observed teacher and student behaviors, noting time, date, class size, teacher or staff members present, student and teacher behaviors and interactions, procedures, lessons/skills being presented, teaching practices, and researcher specifically looked for the criterion listed on the *BPIE* indicators form (See Appendix D).

Data Analysis

For this phenomenological research study and Dissertation in Practice, steps created by Colaizzi (1978) and Paterson and Williams' (2002) methods were used to analyze the data. Colaizzi's (1978) first step is to acquire a sense of each transcript and gain a sense of the participants' experience. Therefore, in this study, the first step to analyzing the data was to read through the results of the survey, each interview, and the observations, paying close attention to the participants' feelings and making a mental note of any common trends or themes while reading the transcripts. The second step of Colaizzi's (1978) analyses methods are to extract any significant statements when reading the transcripts, which was completed next. Significant statements in the interviews were highlighted. Data from observations and survey responses were also similarly reviewed to explore similar meanings. The third step in Colaizzi's (1978) method is to formulate meaning from the significant statements or conduct "bracketing". In order to do this, a log was kept recording any assumptions or meaning from these statements and responses. It focused the direction of overall theme development. Step four of Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis process is to organize the formulated meanings into themes. During this step, the focus on the themes was emerging from the survey responses, the interviews, and the observations, as well as from the research and information from the document reviews and the review of literature. Based on the highlighted statements and the meanings formulated, five key themes

emerged while conducting step four of the analysis: (a) Catholic educators' belief to educate all students; (b) support provided of inclusive education; (c) planning for inclusive education; (d) differentiated instruction; and (e) consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and throughout the school. These five themes were recorded, as specific data and statements from the interviews, survey responses, observation notes, and items from documents were reviewed that supported each theme as a tertiary theme. Those statements were recorded under the corresponding theme's heading in a chart (See Appendix J and K for examples of the data and theme development). This is similar Colaizzi's (1978) step five of his analysis process, which is to describe the investigated phenomenon by integrating the resulting ideas into an exhaustive description. Step six of Colaizzi's (1978) process is to describe the processes and meanings that were derived from the previous steps. In order to do this, rich descriptions of data detailed and described the common trends recorded for each theme that were based on the survey responses, interview statements, and the observations in the results (See Appendix J). Colaizzi's (1978) last step is to check for rigor, trustworthiness, and validation. Colaizzi (1978) suggested doing this by interviewing the participants again to ensure that it accurately represents their experiences. Once all data were gathered, transcribed, and recorded, initial findings were shared with the participants, individually to assure the validity of the content prior to reporting it. This clarified and validated any of the interview responses or observations conducted. The identities of the participants were not disclosed throughout this report or process. Instead, a pseudonym was used throughout the report. All data collected were secured both electronically and physically.

Summary

In summary, this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) to investigate the lived experiences of elementary educators in a private, Catholic school setting. This study explored the lived experiences of elementary education educators who taught or interacted with students with disabilities in a private, Catholic elementary school and the meanings these participants made of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings in order to fully understand the experiences. One of the primary sources of data were results on the Qualtrics survey, which used a combination of the *BPIE* indicators and Kern's (2006) *Survey of Teacher Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education Within an Urban School District* to create questions about the beliefs and perceptions of educators in a Catholic, inclusive setting. Interview questions provided open-ended responses, which further illuminated teachers' perspectives, practices, and beliefs on inclusive education in the Catholic school setting. Observations were also conducted in classrooms of educators who taught students with disabilities, as an additional source of data to illustrate the lived experiences of the educators serving SWDs in an inclusive education setting.

Chapter four details the research findings from the case study and organizes the data, providing detailed explanations of how the data was analyzed. Key themes and trends that were discovered upon analysis, as well as the outcomes of the case study into the lived experiences of the educators and administrators of inclusive education in a Catholic school setting are also reported in the following chapter. Chapter four also synthesizes the primary themes that emerged from analyzing the data upon completion of the data collection through surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This Dissertation in Practice investigated the beliefs, instructional practices, and support at an Elementary School identified as an inclusive school site serving students with moderate to severe disabilities within a Catholic diocese. Five themes of the phenomenon were identified from analyses of the data. The five central themes uncovered in this study included: (a) Catholic educators' belief to educate all students; (b) support provided for inclusive education; (c) planning for inclusive education; (d) differentiated instruction; and (e) consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and throughout the school. Tertiary themes emerged within each of the five themes and are also presented.

The following research questions were addressed:

(a) What are the lived experiences of elementary education educators in this case study whose students with disabilities are included in a private, Catholic elementary school?

(b) What meanings do these participants make of their experiences teaching students with disabilities within these settings?

The first part of chapter four provides descriptions of the school setting, its inclusion program, and the demographics of the teachers and administrators who participated in the study. The second part of chapter four states the findings of the study after the data were collected, organized, and analyzed from the survey, observations, interviews, and artifact reviews. This section is further organized by theme and tertiary theme. To answer the research questions, each theme is supported by detailed, thick, rich descriptions using the words, phrases, and statements of participants, along with their experiences provided through verbatim descriptions. Lastly,

chapter four includes a summary to discuss conclusions from the findings and key themes of this study.

Background

The selected, inclusive Elementary School serves a total of 243 students in grades prekindergarten through eighth grade, 75 of which have been diagnosed with a disability. Based on survey and interview data, students with disabilities included in the Elementary School were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), hearing impairments (HI), intellectual disabilities (InD), specific learning disabilities (SLD), speech or language impairments, and dyslexia. The severity of the diagnosed disabilities ranged from mild to severe within each of the specific categories. The administrative team consisted of a pastor, a principal, and the PreK director, who also served as second in command if the principal was absent. She was also a member of the Student Service Team. All three completed the survey and the principal and PreK director were both interviewed. The classroom teachers at the Elementary School consisted of one Kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, one second grade teacher, two third grade teachers, one fourth grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher. The middle school department consisted of two eighth grade teachers, two seventh grade teachers, and two sixth grade teachers. All the classroom teachers completed the survey. The Kindergarten teacher, both third grade teachers, the fourth and fifth grade teachers, one sixth grade, and one seventh grade teacher were observed. A total of three teachers agreed to be interviewed: the Kindergarten teacher, the sixth grade religion teacher, and the seventh grade social studies teacher. The Student Service Team consisted of four members: a Guidance Counselor, two full-time Support Services Personnel (one for elementary and one for middle school), and the PreK director, who served in this role part-time. Two of the Student Service Team members were interviewed and observed during

their *Learning Lab* class. As previously mentioned, the PreK director was also interviewed. Out of the fourteen teachers at the school, nine attended the Conference for Exceptional Students in Catholic Schools (CESCS). Four of the teachers who attended the conference completed the certification process, providing them certification in inclusive practices through CESCS. Out of the five educators interviewed, three of them were certified through this conference. All teachers are mandated to attend two to three in-service meetings per year on the topic of inclusion, and the Student Service Team members attend full-day in-service meetings on inclusive practices twice a year. Outside resources and ESE trainings are provided, as needed.

Survey

The demographics of the survey participants are detailed below in Table 3. Demographic data were collected for all the participants that completed the survey, specifically gender, age, race, years of experience, grade levels taught, and educational training and CESCS certification. From the 18 individuals solicited to participate in the survey, 15 participants or 83% completed the survey. A detailed table was created to report the frequencies of total individual responses within each domain of the survey (See Appendix L).

Table 3: Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Position	Total Years Taught	Special Education/Inclusive Education Background (certification/training)	Currently teaching SWDs in Inclusive Setting	Highest Level of Education	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Interviewed
1	Administrator	12	Special Education and Inclusive Education	N	Master's	46	W	F	Y
2	Guidance Counselor	Between 10 and 20	Special Education and Inclusive Education	N	Master's	Between 36 and 45	W	F	N
3	Student Services Team Member and Resource Teacher	11	Special Education and Inclusive Education	Y	Master's	33	W	F	Y
4	Pre-K Director and Student Services Team Member	Between 5 and 10 years	Special Education and Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Between 36 and 45	W	F	Y
5	Classroom Teacher	Less than 5 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	Did not specify	F	N
6	Classroom Teacher	Less than 5 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	W	F	Y
7	Classroom Teacher	Between 10 and 20 years	No	Y	Bachelor's	Between 36 and 45	W	F	N
8	Classroom Teacher	Between 5 and 10 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	W	F	N

Participant	Position	Total Years Taught	Special Education/Inclusive Education Background (certification/training)	Currently teaching SWDs in Inclusive Setting	Highest Level of Education	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Interviewed
9	Classroom Teacher	Less than 5 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	W	F	N
10	Classroom Teacher	Less than 5 years	No	Y	Bachelor's	Between 36 and 45	Did not specify	M	N
11	Classroom Teacher	Between 5 and 10 years	No	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	W	M	N
12	Classroom Teacher	Between 10 and 20 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Master's	Between 36 and 45	W	F	Y
13	Classroom Teacher	>20 years	No	Y	Bachelor's	Between 36 and 45	W	M	N
14	Classroom Teacher	Between 5 and 10 years	Inclusive Education	Y	Bachelor's	Under 36	W	F	N
15	Classroom Teacher	>20 years	No	Y	Bachelor's	Over 45	W	F	N

Participant Biosketches

Participant biosketches are offered to provide detailed background for each of the seven educators who participated in the interview process and were observed in their classrooms. General participant backgrounds were provided above in Table 3 based on survey responses. However, the biosketches include additional information not provided from the survey. The seven participants from this study consisted of one administrator, two Student Service Team members, the PreK director, and three classroom teachers. The educators were selected to participate in this study because they teach or interact with students with disabilities and are employed at the Elementary School. All participants in the interview process during this investigation were nonrandom, self-selected participants. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face at the school site or by phone, as preferred by each individual participant. A series of protocol questions, using a semi-structured interview process, were asked of each participant during the individual interviews that lasted from 35-45 minutes. For confidentiality, the name of all participants has been changed.

Kasey

Kasey is a 42 year old, Caucasian female. She has her Bachelor's of Education degree from Ohio University. She took several special education classes in college, which were required for graduation. She has also attended several workshops and in-service trainings on teaching students with special needs from the Diocese. She currently teaches kindergarten and teaches all subjects. Her instructional strategies and accommodations include working in small groups, although she also teaches whole group (depending on the subject). She works with and gets advice from co-workers and the Student Service liaison for instructional methods for students with and without disabilities. The direct services for students with and without disabilities

include implementing accommodations and modifications on students' Service Plans, requesting behavior plans, if necessary, and/or referring students for support through the school-wide RTI process. Kasey reported that her class setting typically consists of students working one-on-one with her 75% of the time and at their own pace. When planning instruction for her students, Kasey aligns her lessons with the Common Core and Florida State Standards, depending on the subject. She also uses personalized, individual assignments that include activities that focus on specific skills and concepts and uses varied forms of delivery of instruction to meet individual student needs.

Margaret

Margaret is a 45 year old, Caucasian female. She has her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, as well as an Autism certificate through the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). Margaret continues her professional education by attending workshops focused on special education topics through the state-funded Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) and in-service trainings from the diocese. She is currently the PreK director, a member of the Student Service Team, and second in command to the principal when needed. Margaret manages the services provided through the Elementary School's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, provides direct services to the third graders within the Student Service Team, as well as manages the testing procedures for SWDs. As part of her administrative responsibilities, Margaret shared that she communicates with the other professionals at school regarding the instructional and assessment needs of any SWD through monthly lists and continued communications (e.g., a purple binder in every classroom). These binders contain a list of all students with a documented disability that has an IEP, SP, or 504 Plan and their accommodations and modifications, so that any teacher,

administrator, teacher assistant, or substitute can easily determine and address their academic and behavioral needs.

Patrick

Patrick is a 33 year old, Caucasian male. He has his Bachelor's degree in Social Science education from the University of Central Florida. In addition, Patrick has an ESE certificate, which was obtained through in-service trainings. Patrick shared that he was motivated by personal reasons to attain the ESE certificate. He currently is the Resource Teacher for fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and also facilitates the *Learning Lab* and Title I programs at the Elementary School. His typical responsibilities focus on instructional support for fourth and fifth grade students within the classrooms, in the Elementary School's *Learning Lab*, and after school tutoring programs. In addition, he participates in the school's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) meetings to problem solve solutions with other educators to continuously provide support to students who are struggling. During the MTSS process, he also shared that he may participate in classroom observations, and then provides feedback, help, and support based on those observations. His instructional strategies and accommodations include whatever is included on the students' IEP, SP, or 504 Plan. He shared that the typical strategies or accommodations are discussed with the ESE specialist.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a 33 year old, Caucasian female. She has her Master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis. In addition, Stephanie has recently completed a special education course, which was required for her teaching certification. She has over 11 years of experience working with students with autism in clinical and school settings. Stephanie serves as one member of the Elementary School's Student Service Team. The Students Service Team consists of four people:

Stephanie (elementary *Learning Lab*), Patrick (middle school *Learning Lab*), Margaret (third grade focus), and the school's guidance counselor. Stephanie provides support for behavior and behavior plans throughout the school and additional resource support for students in grades K-2. Her primary area of training has been in behavior management, skill acquisition, social skills training and teaching communication. She is currently the Student Service and Resource teacher and provides small group instruction in reading and math for students with varying disabilities, including ASD. Her instructional strategies and accommodations for the students include small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, reduced work, repeating or clarifying directions or questions, presenting questions in a variety of ways (multiple-choice, using pictures), and testing using read aloud.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a 29 year old, Caucasian female. She has a Master's degree from Florida Gulf Coast University in American History. She currently has her Autism Certificate from IBCCES that was funded by the school. Kimberly shared that her interest in additional certification in autism was a personal choice. She is currently the middle school Social Studies teacher. Her classes consist of students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade with a wide diversity of academic levels and backgrounds that include gifted, high performing students to students struggling and performing at a third and fourth grade reading level based on their STAR reading tests. (STAR reading test is a computer based assessment that assesses student's reading fluency and comprehension level).

Kimberly described her teaching style as a mixed methods approach for her classes, implementing both direct and cooperative learning teaching methods. She differentiates her

instruction and assignments for students' individual levels. She uses formative and summative assessments to determine their level and needs. Students may receive extra time, supplements for projects or activities, and whatever accommodations or modifications are specified on their IEP, SP, or 504 Plan. Course content is based on the Common Core and Florida State Standards, but she differentiates instruction and assignment expectations according to student abilities.

Wendy

Wendy is a Caucasian female in her 40s. She has been the principal at the Elementary School for five years and taught for 12 years prior to her administrative role. She was influenced to become an administrator at this Elementary School due to her knowledge, experience, and passion for inclusive education. She has a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. She holds a certificate in Autism and has attended numerous trainings in special education through the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) and the Diocese. Wendy shared that the demographics of the students at the Elementary School vary widely, both academically and financially. This contributes to how instructional content is delivered to the students. However, the curriculum content is the grade level state standards, both Common Core and Florida State Standards. She also explained the specialized instruction and interventions at the school are provided through modifications or accommodations to the instruction and are provided to students if there is documentation. She shared that the Diocese and school district provide resources for accommodations and modifications implemented at the Elementary School.

Study Findings

The data collected produced five main themes once the surveys, interviews, and observations, along with the documents, had been analyzed. These five key themes are: Catholic educators' belief in educating to all students; support for inclusive education; planning for inclusive education; differentiated instruction; and consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across grade levels and the entire school. The following sections of chapter 4 give detailed explanation of the organization and reduction from the data analysis, which was collected from surveys, interviews, observations, and documents from the Diocese and the Elementary School. It focused on the experiences and perceptions of educators teaching inclusive practices in an elementary Catholic school. These themes are listed and described in the following sections and discussed in detail, as they relate to the five major themes that emerged once the data were analyzed, triangulated, and summarized.

Theme 1: Catholic educators' belief to educate all students

The first theme emerged through the document review of Catholic law and Catholic education and triangulated through interviews and observations. Many documents described inclusive education in Catholic schools, and this theme was supported through research from the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) message, which is at the center of the mission for Catholic education. It says we are called "to teach as Jesus did" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops [NCCB], 1973, p. 3). Further promoting the Catholic belief to educate all children was Pope Benedict XVI's 2008 address to Catholic educators at the Catholic University of America, in which he stated, "No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation." These statements, along with the United States Council of Catholic Bishops for Catholic schools to follow Catholic Social

Teaching, as well as the federal public school initiative, *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* and the reauthorization of *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, builds a strong theme for promoting, supporting, and implementing inclusive education in Catholic institutions.

This theme was supported through the survey, as educators at the Elementary School reported that they had a duty to educate all students, regardless of whether or not they had a disability. Teacher responses showed that 87% of teachers disagreed that regular education teachers should not be responsible for teaching children with disabilities, revealing that the majority of teachers at this Elementary School believe teachers should be responsible for students with disabilities (SWDs) and 87% of teachers disagreed with the statement “general education teachers should only be responsible for teaching students who are not identified as having disabilities”. Furthermore, 87% of teacher participants responded that they agreed that both regular education teachers and special education teachers should teach students with an IEP.

Through the interviews, each participant shared what they did to accommodate each student with a disability in the class, as well as a willingness to do them. From observations and visitations at the Elementary School, the culture of the school appeared as an inclusive setting where teamwork was promoted and lived. The common themes from the interviews revealed all students being included and the belief in helping all students, wherever needed. The principal, Wendy, provided the following statements about her beliefs: “all students should be included and part of the Catholic school community” and “my goal is to provide the best education possible to all students with and without disabilities and to ensure that the Mission Statement holds true.” Wendy continued, stating that the “school is open to all, in order to implement inclusive practices, and we must have all hands on deck”. She went on to explain that “all the teachers help wherever and whenever needed, and it is really a team effort”. Kimberly stated there has

been “a lot of time and attention taken to make inclusion work at the Elementary School and help students get where they need to be”. She said it really is a “top, down approach” and “the principal has been a huge asset and proponent for the implementation of inclusive practices” at this school. Stephanie explained that the implementation of inclusion began to develop because they started “accepting more students with disabilities”. Patrick shared that “more admittance of students with serious needs is a common goal” of the school and that he “helps wherever needed”. Margaret said the main goal of the Elementary School regarding SWDs is that they are “included and treated like everyone else”. She used the term “one” to describe the student body and school atmosphere. She also shared that faculty members “help out where needed” and after she finishes her PreK duties, she rotates between seventh, sixth, and third grade as extra support when needed and works in a “flexible capacity” with the Student Service Team, “working wherever needed”.

Through observations, I witnessed teachers’ genuine love, instructional practices, and attention was focused on all students. Teachers actively engaged all students within their classrooms, included all students, and went above and beyond to accommodate and meet the needs of each and every student in their classroom. The teachers were not “performing” or acting due to my presence, as procedures and interactions were clearly established. The student’s behavior and interactions with the teachers during the observations appeared completely normal and routine. Within the *Learning Lab*, students with more severe disabilities worked one-on-one with a shadow (paraprofessional). After the students attended *Learning Lab* and finished their more intensive, individualized ELA and Math lessons, they were mainstreamed into the general classrooms for Social Studies, Religion, and Science. Upon visiting and observing the other general education classrooms, all the students with or without a disability in all classrooms were

working on the same level, skill, and lesson, but they were differentiated and individualized, as needed.

Theme 2: Support of Inclusive Education

It was evident through the Elementary School's Strategic Plan, survey responses, interviews, and observations that the educators within the Elementary School supported inclusive education. The educators not only supported inclusive education, but they also felt supported by the Diocese and administration to implement inclusive practices and teach students with disabilities.

Key benchmarks in the current Strategic Plan support inclusive education as a significant theme. Specific data from the Strategic Plan, which support this theme included: **OLL.7.14** Wireless technology throughout the campus will be upgraded to support assistive technology and a one to one Chromebook program for middle school; **OLL.7.15** Curriculum restructuring will occur with the implementation of a "modified curriculum" classroom for 2nd -4th grade; **OLL.7.16** Instructional practices will be implemented to better engage students with the curriculum, including flipped math classes for middle school and expansion of Enrichment program; **OLL.7.17** Additional electives and courses will be offered to enhance the core curriculum; **OLL.7.18** High quality professional development in the areas of classroom management, communication, technology, 21st Century Skills, and Common Core State Standards implementation will be provided to faculty and staff once a month by leader/leadership team or outside source; **OLL.7.19** Character education and social skills classes will be fully integrated into the "Virtue of the Week" curriculum to meet the needs of all students; **OLL.7.20** The student service team will offer a learning lab to middle school students

for additional academic support, and to improve organizational and study skills based on student's needs; **OLL.7.21** The student service team will provide additional academic support, use of technology, and skills reinforcement through an after school program for students who are considered "at risk"; and **OLL.8.8** The Student Services Team will consist of two fulltime resource teachers and a guidance counselor, along with additional support staff, in order to better monitor academic, emotional, and social needs of the students.

Survey responses from educators within the Elementary School reported 87% of educators felt their administrators supported them when students with disabilities in their classrooms presented challenges to them. Support came in the form of training for the teachers, diocesan support, and parental support. The principal also shared what a huge asset and support the pastor was for inclusive education. Due to the governance model of Catholic schools, this is very important. The pastor and principal are the leaders of the school, therefore their willingness and support of inclusive education is a critical and key component. The majority of teachers (60%) who took the survey responded that they believed they were provided with enough time, monetary support, and sufficient materials at their school to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. Forty percent of the teacher participants that responded to the survey agreed their diocese provides sufficient out-of-diocese training opportunities to appropriately teach students with disabilities. This may be an area in which some improvement could be made. Also, 67% of teacher participants that took the survey agreed that their diocese provides sufficient in-service training through their school for teaching students with disabilities. Fifty-seven percent of the participants shared that all paraprofessionals at their school have also received professional development, which included strategies for providing support to SWDs in general education classrooms. Eighty-seven percent of the survey participants agreed that administrators

and the school encourage teachers to use resources to implement best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.

Data from the interviews and observations within classrooms strongly supported this theme of support for inclusion. Participants commented that they received training, there was a support system with the Student Service Team (SST), and the inclusive program worked “from the top, down”. Kasey reported that she “gets advice from co-workers and the Student Service liaison for instructional ideas for students with and without disabilities”. She went on to say that the SST members “provide strategies to the teacher and provide push-in and pull-out services to students, based upon their needs”. Margaret shared that the teachers feel truly supported at the Elementary School. One reason for this was “because of the training they receive”. She told me the “Student Services Team trained the teachers on how to provide accommodations and modifications to their curriculum and instruction, as well as how to use the purple binders,” which includes much data and information about individual student needs. Patrick, who is the middle school *Learning Lab* teacher and one of the Student Service Team members, informed me that the typical strategies or accommodations the teachers use are “discussed with the ESE specialist” for support. In addition, he participates in classroom observations of general education teachers”, and then “provides feedback, help, and support based on those observations” to the teacher. When interviewed, Stephanie explained that she “provides support for behavior and behavior plans throughout the school and additional resource support for students in grades K-2, which includes RTI/MTSS”. Margaret also shared that the “teachers, administrators, and the Student Service Team went and observed other schools that implemented an inclusion program” to acquire ideas and see the practices those schools used, then came back and developed their own program. Two teachers at the Elementary School specifically shared

during their interview that the support the school received financially came from parishioners' donations, as well as parents' financial support for students' shadows and tuition. In addition, financial support also came from state-funded scholarships, such as McKay and Gardiner, which the school received for students with disabilities to attend the Catholic Elementary School. When interviewed, the principal shared that support for inclusive education was received through "McKay and Gardiner scholarships, parishioners' donations, and parents". She also shared that support came through "donations", which helped get students with disabilities items, materials, and other resources the teachers needed. These included items and materials used to create the sensory room, the trampolines, the swivel desks, hearing impairment resources, books, desks, computers, and much more. These provided various supports for the unique needs of students with more severe disabilities. Stephanie shared that administration and the Student Service Team members "ask teachers what trainings are needed for them to experience success in the classroom and planning". She went on to share that "hands-on training is provided to teachers for them to implement differentiated instruction" in their classrooms.

During classroom observations, each room included evidence that the educators were supported in providing inclusive education. The *Learning Lab* had many resources educators were able to use to assist students in their learning and their specific needs, such as: a trained ESE teacher, trained shadows (paraprofessionals), leveled readers, a sensory room, chair bands, mouth pieces, and stress balls. Some of these items were used in other classrooms during the classroom observations, as well. In the fourth and fifth grade classrooms, a teacher assistant was in each of the classrooms for the students with moderate to severe disabilities who needed one-on-one instruction in these classrooms.

Theme 3: Planning for Inclusive Education

Planning was a common theme that emerged from the data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations. Teachers were prepared, they were well-trained, and they planned their lessons and instruction according to the needs of the students in their class to meet grade-level standards. The school planned well for effective implementation of inclusive education through the purple binders; progress monitoring; weekly meetings; collaboration; and frequent communication among staff, administration, and parents. The Elementary School's Strategic Plan included clear goals and plans for implementing inclusive practices in their school (See Appendix A).

Several questions from the survey revealed the use of planning through creating goals and developing steps needed to effectively provide instruction to the students with and without disabilities. A majority of the participants that responded to the survey agreed that administrators analyze data in order to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps to increase the number of students with disabilities in the school. The majority of teacher participants agreed that the School Improvement Plan (SIP) has short and long term goals for implementing and improving inclusive educational practices. Ninety-three percent of respondents agreed that there is a lead person who oversees and monitors the implementation of best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs. The Student Service Team was planned and organized to help achieve inclusive education at the Elementary School. In addition, the roles of the SST members are also in place to help teachers plan their instruction for students with disabilities. Most teachers completing the survey (87%) revealed this was true, when they responded that their school has regularly scheduled opportunities to consult with special education teachers and related service providers to assist in implementing strategies to support the learning of all SWDs in their classes. Eighty

percent of the respondents to the survey agreed the analysis of school data is used to determine what professional development and training is needed for faculty and staff to implement inclusive practices effectively. A large percentage of teachers (73%) felt that collaborative planning time is used productively and is scheduled and reflected in their instructional plans for both the general and special education staff. Sixty percent of teacher survey participants responded that general and special education teachers have and use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time to plan effective instruction and assessment for all students. The majority of teacher survey respondents agreed that the Elementary School uses a person-centered planning process for SWDs and seventy-four percent agreed that their school uses a team decision-making process in order to ensure SWDs transition from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district with placement in the least restrictive environment. Eighty-seven percent of the teacher survey participants shared that the Florida State Standards are used as the foundation for instruction of all SWDs at their school, revealing that teachers must plan their instruction carefully to ensure these standards are taught.

During an interview with the principal, she shared with me that she tried to prepare students, especially SWDs, for “transitioning from elementary to middle school grades, and then from middle school to high school”. The principal also informed me that they “work closely with the high school to learn what expectations they have in order to best prepare their middle school students for the transition”. During the interviews, teachers also shared the common need to plan for instruction and student needs. Kimberly said that she used “formative assessment, the accommodations listed in the purple binders, and the standards to plan” her instruction. She also shared that the “information from the scheduled PLC meetings or the meetings with the Student Service Team also helped when planning to meet students’ needs” during instruction. Stephanie

shared that she plans her interventions and lessons “based on the Florida State Standards and formative assessments, as well as student’s documented accommodations”. She also shared during her interview that teachers are asked what trainings in inclusion or other educational areas are needed, so that administration can plan according to the needs of the teachers and school. Wendy, the principal, shared with me that “ESE trainings and inservices are planned to support inclusive education” in the school. During their interviews, Margaret, Patrick, Stephanie, Kimberly, and Wendy shared that the school planned how to best facilitate testing for students with disabilities during the standardized assessment week to ensure they receive their proper testing accommodations, enough rooms are available, and there are enough test administrators or proctors.

During observations in all the classrooms, it was evident that the teachers planned their instruction carefully. Students appeared to know the expectations for the class and students with disabilities had the appropriate accommodations they needed. Shadows (see key terms in Chapter 1) in the *Learning Lab* had a specific, detailed plan and/or interventions for the student they were instructing. Shadows (paraprofessionals) that were present in the classrooms had a plan for instruction for their student or group and implemented them without any issues. Objectives, behavior charts, and schedules were posted and displayed in almost every classroom.

Theme 4: Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction was a common theme that emerged across the different data sources. Upon observing the different classrooms, especially the *Learning Lab*, there were numerous instances where students were working on the same standards and skills, but tailored the activity to individual student’s ability level and needs. Teachers were willing and had

implemented different instructional strategies to present the curriculum to the students. They adjusted assignments and projects to meet the needs of the students. This differentiation appeared to foster student engagement and learning of all the students included in the classroom. Almost every participant that was interviewed described the different ways they adjusted, modified, or differentiated their instruction to meet the needs of the students in their classes. Some reduced the workload; some presented the material in multiple ways, such as using visual supports, in small groups, or in whole group settings; and some used different resources. The survey revealed that a large majority of teachers (73%) agreed that the multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS) and problem-solving processes are used by faculty at their Elementary School on a consistent basis. Eighty-seven percent of teacher survey respondents shared that all instructional and services personnel at their school use formative assessment processes and tools to gather, analyze, and evaluate data about effective instruction and behavior interventions for all students with and without disabilities. Sixty-two percent of classroom teachers responded that they did agree that teachers of students with disabilities use formative assessment at the Elementary School, and 38% neither agreed nor disagreed.

When interviewed, Stephanie described the “curriculum for the students in the *Learning Lab*, as coming directly from the standards and then adapted to their ability level”. She said that she keeps the lessons “standards-based”, and “uses access points on the standards to create lessons and activities that are geared to the students’ abilities for Math and Science”. Stephanie also shared that the school provides “hands-on training” so that teachers experience how to implement “differentiated instruction”. Kimberly said her teaching style is a “mixed methods approach” for her classes. Sometimes she uses a “lecture style approach and other times students work independently or in small groups”. She “differentiates instruction and assignments for

student's individual levels" and uses "formative and summative assessments to determine student's level and needs". Kimberly said students may receive "extra time, supplements for projects or activities, and whatever accommodations or modifications are specified on their IEP, SP, or 504 Plan that is found in the purple binder". When interviewed, the principal also stated that she ensures the teachers stay abreast with any changes to the "individualized plans" that the students with disabilities may receive through communication or the documents in the purple binder.

During the observation in the kindergarten classroom, students were completing different letter and letter sound activities for their interactive notebooks based on their level. In the elementary and middle school *Learning Labs*, students were working on different leveled assignments and activities. Their assignments were based on their personal ability level and the interventions they needed. During observation of the middle school *Learning Lab*, students were given differentiated instruction and assignments based on their needs and accommodations. These methods of differentiating instruction were also evident during observations in multiple classrooms, such as the seventh grade social studies classroom. Some students worked in groups, others independently, and some were offered support on the test review they were completing by the teacher.

Theme 5: Consistency of Vision and Goals for Inclusive Education

Across Grade Levels and Entire School

Consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and the entire school was the fifth theme that emerged from the survey responses, interviews, and observations. In every classroom there were the recommended accommodations (purple binder)

that contained the documents for any student with a disability within a differentiated classroom. It was evident that all teachers and administrators used this system and followed the accommodations and modifications for the students that had documentation. Ninety-three percent of the teacher respondents to the survey agreed that their school has a school-wide approach that facilitates positive, interdependent relationships among all students with and without disabilities across all general education and natural contexts. Eighty-seven percent of teacher respondents agreed that their school has a school-wide approach for planning and implementing Universal Design for Learning across all school contexts. Also, 87% of respondents agreed there are a variety of service delivery models in place at the school and across all grade levels to provide instruction and related services to SWDs in general education classes.

From the data analyzed from the interviews, consistency throughout the school was a theme that emerged. Teachers shared that the same system was used for all students, including students with disabilities. Every interviewee mentioned “the purple binders” to communicate individual needs of students with disabilities to classroom teachers and other educators with direct instructional responsibilities. Wendy, the principal, shared how the school uses “shadows” (paraprofessionals) for one-on-one instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Kasey said the school used “Common Core and Florida State Standards when planning instruction”. Jason, Stephanie, Margaret, and Wendy all shared that there are assessment procedures in place for standardized assessments. Stephanie said, “The Student Service Team provides training on inclusive education practices for teachers and the shadows”. Kimberly shared that there are “scheduled meetings and frequent communication and collaboration between classroom teachers, administration, Student Service Team members, and parents” which

assures school-wide communication and implementation of inclusive procedures and practices within the Elementary School. Another supportive, tertiary theme described by each teacher during the interviews was that all students “are a part of the school community”. Wendy said she wanted all students to feel “included and part of the Catholic school community”. Margaret used the term “one” to describe the student body and school atmosphere.

During observations, every classroom had a purple binder in their room which contained the documentation stating what accommodations or modifications students with disabilities received. Not only were the binders present, but each educator could discuss the contents. Observations confirmed the accommodations were used within the classroom for individual students with disabilities. The support staff and paraprofessionals (e.g., shadows) in the *Learning Lab* and also the fourth and fifth grade classrooms demonstrated instructional knowledge and skills consistent with the school-wide plan for students with disabilities. This also applied to any student that needed occasional one-on-one assistance or instruction.

Summary

Throughout this study and upon reviewing the literature through detailed research, five main themes emerged: Catholic educators’ belief in educating to all students, support of inclusive education, planning for inclusive education, differentiated instruction, and consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across grade levels and the entire school. Within this chapter, the important key findings and themes of the inclusive policies, beliefs, and practices were described from educators at the Elementary School. In addition, detailed descriptive characteristics of the school and examples from its educators and administrator at the Elementary School provided additional findings and supported the themes that emerged from this study. The

investigation utilized multiple data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interview, observations, artifact reviews) to triangulate data collected within this research. The results of this investigational study using hermeneutical phenomenology research methods provide data, analyses, and recommendations about inclusive practices in Catholic schools. In an effort to assure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings of this research, collected data were reviewed with individual participants to ensure the content was valid. Data sources and themes were triangulated across four different sources of data collection. Using the information from the data, participants' responses and some of their own words, each theme was presented with its relative sub-theme, giving each an equal emphasis. All the themes addressed the exploratory questions. The final chapter of this Dissertation in Practice provides a synthesis of the findings, any limitations or recommendations based on the findings, and answer the exploratory research questions for this investigation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to discover and understand educators' lived experiences of inclusive education and to reveal what meanings these educators hold as their experiences of teaching students with severe disabilities within an inclusive, Catholic elementary school. This final chapter summarizes the findings from this case study related to the exploratory questions for this Dissertation in Practice. The chapter includes a restatement of the exploratory questions, followed by a discussion of the significance of the findings and analysis based on the five themes presented in chapter four. Limitations of this study and the implications of the findings are also discussed. Lastly, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Restatement of Exploratory Questions

The exploratory questions of this Dissertation in Practice guided the type of qualitative methods used to explain and describe the phenomena investigated. As such, this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) to investigate the lived experiences of educators in a private, Catholic elementary school setting from a large, diocesan school district in the southeastern United States. To fully understand the experiences, this study explored two fundamental exploratory questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of elementary education educators whose students with disabilities are included in a private, Catholic elementary school?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings?

Significance of the Findings

This Dissertation in Practice explored the lived experiences of educators within an inclusive, elementary Catholic school setting to understand and describe the meanings of these experiences. After reviewing the literature, I discovered several studies which focused on inclusive education in public schools, but very few studies had been conducted in Catholic schools. More specifically, there were no research studies that investigated teachers' perceptions and lived experiences of inclusive practices in a Catholic school setting. This phenomenological case study investigated the lived experiences of teachers and administrators through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) using multiple data sources, including personal interviews, survey, observations, and artifact reviews related to the perspectives and experiences of teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive, Catholic elementary school.

After analyzing all the data and reviewing the literature on inclusive education and evidence-based practices, one fact became clear: inclusion in a Catholic school setting is absolutely possible. Inclusive education in Catholic schools, as well as in public schools, is challenging to implement due to limited funding, lack of effective training, and lack of necessary resources. However, the educators at the selected Elementary School in this case study implemented inclusive practices in their school despite having many odds against them. This school was set to close down and had been suffering from extreme financial difficulties. However, the support, desire, and willingness of the principal and pastor to serve diverse students with disabilities, including students with more severe disabilities, not only improved the school, but also developed inclusive practices to meet the students' needs. This Elementary School faced tremendous financial challenges, had very limited resources, and their staff had not been trained or certified in special education; however, they found a way to thrive in the

implementation of inclusive education. This indicates that certainly schools that are in far better financial positions and have access to more resources could implement inclusive education, as well.

Five main themes emerged from the investigation from the data analyses. The five themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Catholic educators' belief to educate all students; (b) support of inclusive education; (c) planning for inclusive education; (d) differentiated instruction; and (e) consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and the entire school.

Participants shared varying inclusive practices pertaining to their specific classroom and the specific students, both with and without disabilities, included in their classroom. The most prevalent theme, triangulated across each of the data sources, was an overall understanding and feeling from participants that all children should be included and made to feel like they are part of "one" body, whether it's the school body or the church body. For example, all of the responses by participants on the survey indicated the belief to include students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. This theme was also clearly identified in the interviewed data in which participants expressed their desire to help all students learn and succeed in the classroom. They also expressed willingness to try various instructional methods in order for all students to achieve their goals. Through the literature and documents reviewed for this case study, Catholic Church teachings and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) revealed the connection between what the Church teaches as goals for Catholic education, and the ongoing message to teach as Jesus would teach, inclusively. The USCCB's message is at the center of the mission for Catholic education and says we are called "to teach as Jesus did" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops [NCCB], 1973, p. 3).

The findings described important resources necessary for implementation of inclusive education from the participants in this research. Collaboration and planning, school-wide consistency for accommodations and assessment of students with disabilities, support from administration and co-workers, and differentiation of instruction were key factors of successful inclusion. This theme was evident and triangulated across each of the data sources. For example, the teachers' responses on the survey demonstrated that 67% of teachers agreed that their diocese provided sufficient in-service training through their school for teaching students with disabilities and 87% believed that collaborative teaching of children with disabilities can be effective, particularly when students with disabilities are placed in a general education classroom. Eighty-seven percent of teachers agreed that both regular education teachers and special education teachers should teach students with a disability. The majority of teachers (60%) believed they are provided with enough time, monetary support, and sufficient materials at their school, in order to attend conferences/workshops in teaching students with disabilities.

This theme also emerged from the data analyses of the teacher interviews. Planning, collaboration, student-centered assessment, data analysis and differentiated instruction emerged as important and key factors for creating and sustaining a successful inclusion program in their school. Every participant interviewed shared that communication and collaboration occurred regularly. Kasey said teachers meet "monthly with the Student Service Team" and that there are "regularly scheduled times to discuss instruction and interventions that the students are receiving through staff meetings and in-service days". Margaret said that "the Student Service Team collaborates every Friday to go over IEPs for current and incoming students". Stephanie also shared that the "Student Service Team meets weekly to discuss students' IEPs or other plans, incoming students, and students' progress, as well as referrals from teachers for students that

may need testing”. They also shared that instruction was planned using the Common Core and Florida State Standards. Stephanie described the “curriculum for the students in the *Learning Lab* as coming directly off the standards and then are adapted to their ability level”. She keeps the lessons “standards-based” for Math and Science, while she also uses “access points on the standards to create lessons and activities that are geared to the students’ abilities”. In addition, each individual student’s needs and accommodations were met as evidenced by examination of school artifacts (the purple binder documentation) that triangulated participant interviews and classroom observations. Also, each teacher shared that the assessment procedures were planned and students with disabilities received the accommodations and testing procedures that were specified based upon their individual needs.

Differentiated instruction to meet the individual needs of each student, including students with disabilities, was a recurring and prevalent theme for successful inclusive education within the school and classrooms of this investigation. The artifact review of the Elementary School’s Strategic Plan provided insight into answering the exploratory questions regarding teachers’ lived experiences and resulting meanings by teachers in a Catholic and inclusive school setting, illuminating the themes of meeting high standards for individual student with differentiated instruction. The goals and benchmarks of the Strategic Plan show the value and beliefs they have regarding student learning. Standards 7 and 8 in the Strategic Plan provided insight on the focus of meeting the needs of all students in their school. The following examples from the document review illustrating this theme included: wireless technology and assistive technology throughout the campus; curriculum restructuring with the implementation of a “modified curriculum” classroom; instructional practices for better engagement of the students with the curriculum; high quality professional development in the areas of classroom management, communication,

technology, 21st Century Skills, and Common Core State Standards; fully-integrated social skills classes; *Learning Lab* provided additional academic support and organizational and study skills; additional academic support, use of technology, and skills reinforcement with an after school program for “at risk” students; increased vertical planning to monitor instructional practices and assessment of students; additional faculty and support staff to monitor academic, emotional, and social needs of the students; student portfolios and data maintained from one grade level to the next to monitor student progress and performance; and evaluation of software for remediation and Response to Intervention (RTI) to serve the needs of the students. Interview respondents also shared that instruction was also differentiated based on students’ needs and accommodations. For example, during Stephanie’s interview she shared that “differentiated instruction is a school-wide approach to instruction” and “all students with disabilities throughout the school that have an IEP, SP, or 504 Plan have accommodations and modifications listed and kept in a purple binder” in each classroom for easy access. Descriptions and suggestions for instruction are also included to assist educators with how and what to do for the child. During Kimberly’s interview, she shared that she “differentiates her instruction and assignments for students’ individual levels” and she uses “formative and summative assessments to determine their level and needs”. She went on to say that students may receive “extra time, supplements for projects or activities, and whatever accommodations or modifications are specified on their IEP, SP, or 504 Plan that is found in the purple binder”.

Data from observations in the classrooms supported the finding that the school provided differentiated instruction to students. For example, in the third grade classroom, the teacher asked both higher order thinking questions to stretch some of the high leveled students and recall questions. When a student didn’t know the answer, she stopped and gave a mini lesson. The

fourth grade teacher provided differentiated instruction by completing group activities and center-style teaching with frequent, ten minute rotations. She also used visual supports in her instruction, books on tape, and accommodations. In the middle school *Learning Lab*, there was small group instruction which consisted of nine students who all appeared to be working on individual assignments and different subjects. In the elementary *Learning Lab*, each paraprofessional had a folder/binder which contained the specific, targeted interventions and individual lesson for the student to address individual needs, varying in age, grade, and disability.

Summary of Discussion

After conducting this research with the faculty, staff, administration, and students at the Elementary School, it was evident that the entire school community is filled with compassionate and dedicated people who desire to educate all children that are a part of the Elementary School. There was a strong sense of community and team work at the Elementary School. The children were respected; the teachers and administrators were well-liked; and faculty spoke highly of each other about their peers. The school was student-centered and focused on ensuring all students received the necessary accommodations, enrichment, or supports needed to succeed and feel a sense of accomplishment. The educators at the Elementary School were dedicated to develop an environment in which all students could learn and be a part of the community. They were able to achieve this through the use of shadows for students with moderate to severe disabilities, so these students could work and be included in the general education classrooms. They also allowed all students enrolled at the school to join the sports teams or clubs they offered. The services they provide for students with disabilities (e.g., *Learning Lab*, MTSS, Think Tank) ensure each and every student that attends the Elementary School is receiving an education that is specific and

differentiated to their needs. Based on what the educators shared with me in the interviews on how they plan their instruction, this differentiated instruction is still aligned with the Common Core and Florida State Standards. Teachers reported feeling supported by administration with resources and training needed to provide instruction to students with disabilities. Teachers also reported that they felt the Diocese supported them in those areas, as well. This indicates that other schools would also receive the same type of support and training, in order to successfully develop, implement, and maintain an effective program for inclusive education. As Villa and Thousand (2016) suggested, the following components are needed to implement inclusive education in schools: understanding of what inclusion is and is not; collaboration between home, school, and community; an administration that is supportive of inclusive education; redefined roles and responsibilities; collaborative planning and problem solving; co-teaching; student-centered strength-based assessment; strategies for facilitating access to the general education curriculum; differentiated instruction; student empowerment and natural supports; MTSS and RTI; positive behavioral supports; integrated delivery of related services; transition planning; and site-based continuous planning for sustainability of inclusive education best practices. The Elementary School in this case study possessed many of these components Villa and Thousand (2016) believe are keys to an effective inclusion program. The Elementary School did understand and believe in inclusive education, they did practice collaboration, and they did have strong support of inclusive practices from administration. They also differentiated their instruction, practiced student-centered assessment, provided MTSS and RTI, and planned to maintain inclusive practices at the school. I highly recommend the Diocese in this case study uses this Elementary School and their inclusive practices to model these components to implement effective and successful inclusion programs at other Catholic schools in their Diocese.

Limitations

This study focused on the lived experiences of the educators in one inclusive, elementary Catholic school. However, since this study was a qualitative case study and focused on the teachers' experiences and beliefs, there are limitations to the results of this research. Saturation (Creswell, 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) was achieved with this sample of consenting participants from one elementary school within one Catholic diocese. However, there were limitations with the findings that must be mentioned which allow opportunity for continued research and additional information regarding inclusion and inclusive practices in Catholic schools to be examined and uncovered. Limitations in this study stemmed from: (a) recruitment of study participants; (b) homogeneity of sample; and, (c) researcher as principal instrument of data collection and data analysis. Since there is only one Catholic elementary school in the Diocese that is fully inclusive, it limited the scope of data from participants from one specific school and their practices. All participants in the interview of the investigation were nonrandom, self-selected participants. It also only looked at inclusion in an elementary setting, whereas a high school setting with inclusive practices could certainly have added to the research and offered a broader perspective on the lived experiences of teachers. Therefore, recruitment of a more diverse pool of participants from multiple settings would address the limitation of the homogeneity of the current sample.

My role as a teacher in the Diocese allowed me a unique insight into the general procedures, beliefs, and culture of the Catholic schools in the Diocese. However, it also created somewhat of a challenge to maintain objectivity because I work at another elementary school in the same Catholic diocese and have developed my own personal opinions regarding the views, services, programs, and acceptance of students with disabilities. Therefore, a third limitation of

this study was the researcher as the main instrument for data collection and data analysis. Creswell stated (2013) data collection and bias management are major challenges for qualitative researchers employing interviewing as a data generation method in their studies. According to Creswell (2013), the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is dependent on the capacity of the researcher and their individual skills. Data collected through interviews can be extensive, difficult to manage, and time consuming to interpret and analyze (Creswell, 2013). Further, researcher bias can affect the interpretation of the results (Chenail, 2011). To address these concerns, the researcher followed Colaizzi's (1978) methods: (a) completed bracketing procedures; (b) checked for rigor, trustworthiness, and validation by sharing the initial data review with the interview participants individually, to check and assure the validity of the content; and (c) reviewed coding, themes, and findings with faculty.

Implications for Organization and Practice

This case study explored Catholic educators' views, beliefs, and experiences of inclusion in one Catholic elementary school to foster the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Based on research supporting inclusion in Catholic schools, the findings and themes uncovered through the surveys, interviews, and observations of this investigation clearly demonstrate the characteristics, components, and qualities necessary to implement an inclusion program for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The five themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Catholic educators' belief to educate all students; (b) support of inclusive education; (c) planning for inclusive education; (d) differentiated instruction; and (e) consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across the grade levels and the entire school. From the multiple sources of data uncovered within this study, the well-articulated and aligned vision, goals, support, and dedicated resources to implement inclusive education for all students, including

students with severe disabilities, was a shared belief and continued focus among all educators within the school. Administrators, teachers, and support personnel shared the vision and belief for “one” school for all students. Artifact reviews of policies (e.g., School Improvement Plans, diocesan procedures) outlined the inclusive policies that were observed in classrooms and throughout the school. Multiple resources were dedicated to support student learning and achievement and were observed throughout the school. Within each of the classrooms observed, differentiation of instruction, curriculum accommodations and modifications were apparent. Interviews with the teachers described the instructional strategies, differentiation of instruction, and accommodations provided. Also, faculty described the resources and professional development to learn and implement these strategies to meet student’s individual needs. Alignment of vision, resources, and support throughout the school personnel and structures was evident throughout, as all efforts were focused on student success and support within a unified, inclusive school and each classroom setting.

These practices and procedures that were implemented and practiced at the Elementary School also aligned with the critical components of inclusive education from Villa and Thousand (2016): *A Self-Assessment of Best Practices*, Council for Exceptional Children, and the *Best Practices of Inclusive Education* (FDOE, 2013). Specifically, the school indicators include : (a) ensure faculty and staff fully understand and are trained in inclusion; (b) provide collaboration and communication opportunities among administrators, special education team members, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents; (c) provide diocesan and administrative support of inclusive education; (d) develop, communicate, and implement clearly defined roles and responsibilities for faculty and staff; (e) implement co-teaching and other supportive instructional approaches; (f) conduct student-centered assessments; (g) implement differentiated

instruction; (h) develop and implement student support structures, such as MTSS and RTI; (i) implement student behavioral plans and supports; (j) integrate inclusive related services; and (k) dedicate a school culture of continuous growth and planning for maintaining evidence-based best practices for inclusive education. The findings indicated that other Catholic schools can adopt their inclusive practices and procedures, so that the Church's teachings can be spread through all Catholic schools in the diocese. The findings imply that other schools in the Diocese could implement national and state components of inclusive education within other schools in the diocese, as demonstrated through the case study and research completed at this Elementary school regarding inclusive practices and procedures.

Taking a look at the governance model of the Catholic schools would be worth considering, as each Diocese would then have an easier time implementing inclusion in all the Catholic schools. As mentioned in chapter one of this dissertation, the lack of change was due to the freedom of choice of each school and parish because of the governance model used for Catholic schools. Catholic schools, historically, have followed a standard style of governance where the elementary schools were attached to the local parishes and led entirely by the pastor, but the high schools were typically established by the Diocese and led by the bishop or a religious order (McDonnell, 2014). If all the elementary schools were under the diocese and led by the bishop, as well similar to public schools being led by the district and superintendent, then perhaps implementing inclusion in all elementary schools using a similar model as the Elementary School in this case study could prove very helpful in creating inclusion throughout the Diocese. This is similar to what Burke and Griffin (2016) noted as one of the barriers of creating inclusive education models. They reported the lack of a centralized office which oversees inclusion and support of students with disabilities can result in little uniform direction

and implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities across Catholic schools (Burke and Griffin, 2016). One of the components of effective inclusion within schools and districts that Thousand and Villa (2003) pointed out was administrators taking action and articulating their new vision publicly, as well as building agreement about the vision and leading stakeholders to be active participants in the vision. This, along with the support I witnessed when observing the involvement and vision of the Elementary School's administration, shows how impactful that can be. Therefore, including leaders from the Diocese would most likely have an even greater impact on implementing these inclusive practices throughout all the schools in the Diocese.

As Thousand and Villa (2003) stated, a systems approach is the best way to effectively implement inclusion education into schools because it includes connection with other organizational best practices, visionary leadership, administrative support, redefined roles and relationships, collaboration, and additional adult support, when needed. Ten of the most prominent national educational associations, noted by The Council for Exceptional Children (1995) (as cited in Thousand and Villa, 2000), acknowledged schools which implemented inclusive practices successfully had the following characteristics present: principal is an active and supportive leader; all students work toward the same high standards based educational outcomes; diversity is valued and celebrated; a sense of community is present; there is a variety of services provided; flexible groupings, authentic and meaningful learning experiences, and developmentally appropriate curricula are accessible to all students; research-based instructional strategies are used, and natural support networks are encouraged across students and staff; staff has developed more collaborative roles; new forms of accountability have been developed; necessary technology and physical modifications and accommodations have been made

accessible; and a partnership with parents has been established. These were components exhibited in the Elementary School from this case study. Therefore, other Catholic schools interested in implementing an inclusive education program should model their inclusive practices and take an approach similar to this Elementary School's method.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following topics are suggestions for further research in inclusive education within Catholic schools based on this investigation and the research from the study:

1. Additional case studies about inclusion programs in both public and Catholic schools, focusing on student progress, growth, and/or achievement in the following areas of academics, behavior, emotional, and social are needed. These case studies could serve as models for other schools to develop effective inclusion programs using the procedures and practices these schools show that exhibit success for their students.
2. A study that focuses specifically on the roles of ESE specialists, paraprofessionals, special education team members, or inclusive program administrators in multiple school settings, but especially the Catholic school settings, would be beneficial to help other schools learn and model on how best to use their support personnel.
3. A study on the current professional development in both public and Catholic schools about inclusion and/or ESE would be helpful to provide ideas on how schools can effectively train their teachers and other educators in order to implement and facilitate effective inclusion programs in schools.

4. A study focusing on the impact and importance of the pastor and principal's support and involvement, as well as the governance model of Catholic schools, related to the success of an inclusion model in schools could provide important structural and policy considerations.

5. A study looking into the transitioning of students with disabilities into a high school or university after attending a Catholic elementary or high school with an inclusion program would investigate long term results.

Conclusion

The Catholic schools in the Diocese are guided by the following the mission of the Catholic Church which the American bishops described in their 1972 Pastoral as “an integrating ministry, embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache), which the church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); and service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia)” (as cited in McDermott, 1997, p. 10). Although there is certainly a gap between the Catholic Church's beliefs on including all, and the number of Catholic schools that actually do implement inclusion in their schools, survey responses along with the interviews and observations conducted, revealed that teachers and administrators at the Elementary school desire to include all students and ensure all students, with or without disabilities, get the accommodations and assistance they need to succeed.

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLAN

*Please note: diocese name, school name, and names of individuals have been removed to uphold their confidentiality.

Executive Summary

The following Strategic Plan sets out the direction for _____ Catholic School in accordance with *The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools*, (Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, School of Education, Loyola University Chicago, in partnership with the Barbara and Patrick Roche Center for Catholic Education, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, 2012). Any specific Diocesan requirements are specifically marked as D.O. (the Diocese of _____). Additional Florida Catholic Conference requirements are included near the end of the Plan. In consonance with our mission, vision, guiding principles, and expectations, we dedicate ourselves to continued improvement in the evangelization and education of the Catholic youth entrusted to us.

The development of the Strategic Plan began with a meeting of members of _____ Catholic School community: principal, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and parishioners, as the school developed its School Improvement Plan for its accreditation process.

The results of surveys completed by parents, staff, and the Strategic Planning Committee were reviewed and categorized into various elements from the responses. These areas included: Catholic Identity, Campus Life, Curriculum/Academics, Faculty and Staff, Administration, Governance, Finance, Enrollment, and Marketing and Development.

As the Committee reviewed the strengths, weaknesses, traditions, and critical issues facing the school, five focus areas surfaced:

- Provide opportunities for service to the community
- Meet the academic and social needs of all students
- Offer means of instruction that meets variety of learning styles
- Increase technology facilities
- Expand marketing and communication

The Strategic Planning Committee developed Action Plans in each of the areas listed to provide for the continued growth and strengthening of the school. What follows are the plans developed by the Strategic Planning Committee.

Pastor

School Board Chair

Principal

Strategic Planning Committee Chair

_____ **CATHOLIC SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN**

**(BASED ON THE NATIONAL STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS FOR EFFECTIVE
CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS 2012)**

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Introduction

January 2016

To support and build on the continuing successes of _____ Catholic School, we are implementing the _____ Catholic School Strategic Plan based on the *National Standards for Catholic Schools*.

The development of the Strategic Plan began with a meeting of selected members of _____ Catholic School community as we began to plan for our School Improvement Plan for our accreditation process. Monthly monitoring and reporting of the action plans contained within the Plan will occur throughout academic year. Unlike most strategic plans, no completion dates are assigned; all standards and benchmarks are expected to be worked on and continuously improved upon annually. Revisions to this plan will be made as needed based on the recommendation of the Strategic Planning Committee.

I would like to thank everyone involved for their hard work and dedication to _____ Catholic School. I would like to especially thank the committee for their great insights and inputs to the plan over the last year.

Principal of _____ Catholic School

The committee consisted of the following:

Committee Chair – VPK Director, Middle School Religion
Middle School Religion and Social Studies
Director of Student Services
5th Grade Teacher
Enrollment Coordinator and Public Relations
Principal

Brief History of _____ Catholic School

_____ School held its first classes in September 1953. The school consisted of a one-story building with an enrollment of 150 students. Comprised of the Adrian Dominican Order of Sisters and lay teachers, it served as the only Catholic school in south Brevard County.

As the population and needs of Melbourne and the surrounding Catholic community grew, the need to expand was evident. Under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Barry, capacity was doubled in 1957 when a second building was added. The remaining classrooms were constructed in 1964. The parish purchased the Oak Street building in 1988, thereby incorporating a pre-school serving three and four year old students.

December of 1991 saw the groundbreaking of a new church replacing the original church site. The ensuing renovation to the Fee Avenue structure made possible a multi-purpose hall.

Physical facilities remained the same until 1999, when Fr. William Hanley led the effort to purchase and renovate the South Brevard Sharing Center building. Renamed the William Hanley Technology Center, this facility serves as the school's Media Center and Computer and Science Laboratories. Included in the renovation was a covered pavilion and covered walkways connecting campus buildings.

Beginning in 2003, a project to upgrade the playground was undertaken. The original playground equipment was replaced and upgraded. In addition, the track was resurfaced and benches, picnic tables, a mini-baseball diamond and mulch were added. The chain link fence was replaced with a black aluminum security fence.

In January of 2009, the Technology Lab was refurbished with new computers and video production equipment. During this year, an aluminum fence with a magnetic adult lock and a perimeter wood fence were installed at the Child Development Center.

Due to the commitment to Catholic education by Fr. Karl Bergin who came to the parish in 2010, many upgrades to the school were completed by 2012. The inside, as well as the outside, of all of the buildings were painted. New carpeting was laid in all of the classrooms. The entire school campus was landscaped, as were other predominant areas. Bushes were removed and replaced attractive pavers, restructured the entrance of the school. The statue of _____ was repainted, and the area where the statue sits was remodeled. An aluminum fence with security gates and a security camera was installed in the front of the school. The electrical system in all of the school buildings was upgraded. SMART boards were a welcome addition to all of the classrooms. The teachers received iPads and training to enhance their curricula.

_____ School, located in Downtown Melbourne, is a landmark on Fee Avenue, where its Catholic character is evident. With the church to its south, Parish Hall to its

east, and Ministries Building to its west, the statue of Mary welcomes parents and students to her halls and classrooms. Catholic identity is truly present on this campus.

The students at _____ have had a direct impact on the community. As part of their faith-based education, students are active in many local outreach programs. By organizing donations of food, clothing, gifts, or money, students spread the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. The campus facilities are used by many groups within the parish and outside the immediate school community.

With a capacity of 300, enrollment has continued to present a challenge. Between the years of 1999 through 2003, enrollment declined by 10% per year. The tide of decline seems to have turned and enrollment has been consistently growing each year. We are currently at 238 students for the 2015-2016 school year. Enrollment statistics for the pre-school have remained steady for said time period.

Since the inception of the standards program as directed by the Florida Catholic Conference, _____ has maintained its accreditation status. Self-evaluation, goal setting, and standards achievement have provided the impetus for continued improvement of the facilities and curriculum.

Mission and Vision

Mission Statement of _____ Catholic School

Mission Statement

“_____ School exists as a ministry of the Catholic church to proclaim the Gospel message. Recognizing that each person is a unique creation of God, we endeavor to provide a strong spiritual, academic, and emotional foundation enabling students to realize their full potential.”

Diocesan Educational Strategic Plan Vision Statement

Catholic schools in the Diocese of _____ advance the Gospel values by uniting parents, students, families, faculty, staff, and clergy as partners in the evangelization and education mission of our students through:

Instilling a Strong Catholic Identity

Ensuring Academic Excellence and Rigor throughout the Educational Process

Enhancing the Professional Development of Our Leaders

Increasing Enrollment

Improving Financial Stability

Guiding Principles Statement of _____ Catholic School

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of _____ aim to ensure the success for all students in the 21st century global world based on the principles of Catholic doctrine and the living Tradition of the Church. Catholic Schools in the Diocese promote a Christ-centered environment which fosters the total formation of each child. The schools, in concert with parents, prepare students to develop leadership skills to meet the global challenges, as well as, to be of service to others.

Catholic formation is the hallmark of the Catholic school. As such, the philosophy of a Catholic school is founded on the four principles of Gospel, Message, Community and Service, proclaimed by the pastoral message of the Bishops in the document, “To Teach as Jesus Did.” Based on these principles, the members of the administration, faculty, staff, clergy and parents are committed to teach the whole child with love, understanding and compassion.

_____ Catholic School administration, faculty, and staff are committed to academic excellence and to teaching tolerance and social justice principles to the school community. In order to evangelize Christ’s message and educate the students to become the hands and feet of Christ, an attitude of service permeates every aspect of school life.

Catholic education is Christian value-centered and teaches students by guiding them to share their God given talents, treasure and time with their neighbors in a spirit of friendliness, respecting the diversity within the community and promoting Gospel values.

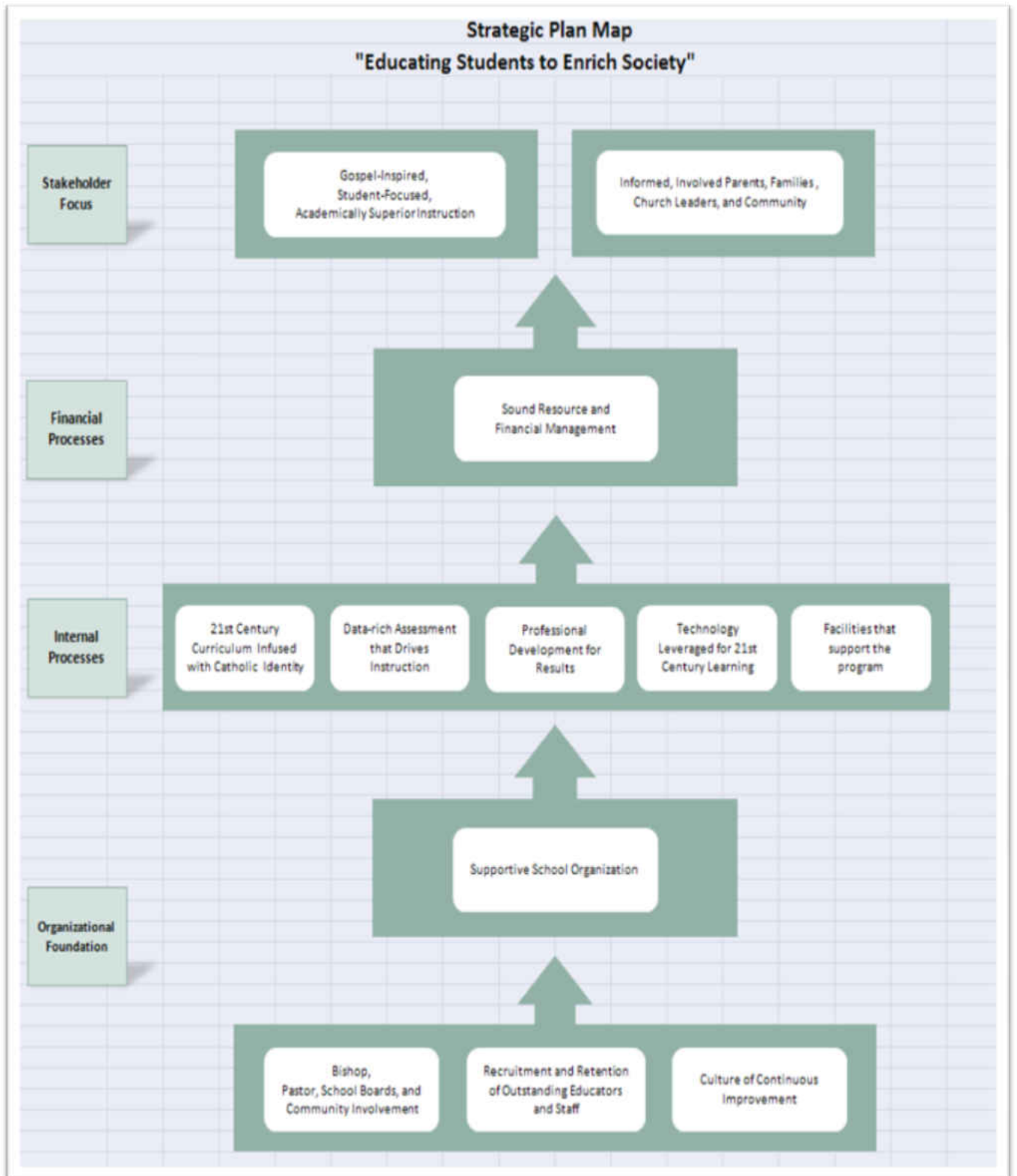
In keeping with Vatican II, _____ Catholic School aims to cultivate the mind, develop the capacity for right judgment and develop in our students a strong sense of relationship with Christ. Catholic Schools in our Diocese are committed to promoting a love of learning in order to prepare students as life-long learners and stewards of this world.

In these challenging times, the Catholic school calls together parents and all stakeholders to stand firm and work diligently to develop both the strong Catholic Identity of the school and the excellence in academics that will prepare students to meet the challenges of the global world in the 21st century.

Expectations of _____ Catholic School

Expectations are those activities which a Catholic school system could reasonably be expected or required to do, stated or not. The minimum activities for principals and their schools in the Diocese of _____ are incorporated in The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools* (2012).

Strategic Plan Map: The following Strategic Plan Map provides a pictorial representation of the near-term priorities of the Diocese of _____ Catholic Schools.



Standard 1

An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic Identity rooted in Gospel values, centered on the Eucharist, and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.

Benchmarks

- 1.1** The governing body and the leader/leadership team ensure that the mission statement includes the commitment to Catholic identity.
- 1.2** The governing body and the leader/leadership team use the mission statement as the foundation and normative reference for all planning.
- 1.3** The school leader/leadership team regularly calls together the school's various constituencies (including but not limited to faculty and staff, parents, students, alumni(ae) to clarify, review and renew the school's mission statement.
- 1.4** The mission statement is visible in public places and contained in official documents.
- 1.5** All constituents know and understand the mission.
- D.O. 1.6** Dominant and primary symbols of the Catholic faith are present throughout the school.
- D.O. 1.7** All elementary and high schools must be accredited by a Diocesan-approved accrediting agency.
- D.O. 1.8** All elementary and high schools must be in compliance with the Diocesan School Policy and Administrative Manual.

Standard 2

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.

Benchmarks

- 2.1** Religious education curriculum and instruction meets the religious education requirements and standards of the (arch) diocese.
- 2.2** Religion classes are an integral part of the academic program in the assignment of teachers, amount of class time and the selection of texts and other curricular materials.
- 2.3** Faculty who teach religion meet (arch) diocesan requirements for academic and catechetical preparation and certification to provide effective religion curriculum and instruction.
- 2.4** The school's Catholic identity requires excellence in academic and intellectual formation in all subjects including religious education.
- 2.5** Faculty use the lenses of Scripture and the Catholic intellectual tradition in all subjects to help students think critically and ethically about the world around them.
- 2.6** Catholic culture and faith are expressed in the school through multiple and diverse forms of visual and performing arts, music and architecture.

2.7 The theory and practice of the Church's social teachings are essential elements of the curriculum.

D.O. 2.8 Academic rooms have a sacred space containing both a Bible and crucifix which highlight the importance of the Catholic faith and which function as a place of prayer.

D.O. 2.9 The school begins and ends each day with prayer.

D.O. 2.10 The school annually administers the NCEA's Assessment of Catechesis Religious Education (ACRE), or NCEAIFG: ACRE Addition.

D.O. 2.11 The school will issue a student handbook, in accordance with the Diocesan School Policy and Administrative Manual.

OLL.2.12 The Virtue of the Week curriculum is integrated throughout the parish and school community, and is formally introduced through instruction of weekly lessons.

Standard **3**

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice.

Benchmarks

3.1 Every student is offered timely and regular opportunities to learn about and experience the nature and importance of prayer, the Eucharist, and liturgy.

3.2 Every student is offered timely, regular, and age appropriate opportunities to reflect on their life experiences and faith through retreats and other spiritual experiences.

3.3 Every student participates in Christian service programs to promote the lived reality of action in service of social justice.

3.4 Every student experiences role models of faith and service for social justice among the administrators, faculty and staff.

OLL.3.5 Every student will be provided an opportunity to serve others in the community through the partnership with Hibiscus Court Senior Living Facility and various community events.

OLL.3.6 School-wide opportunities for reflection will be provided with school wide, class, and seasonal (such as Lenten) retreats.

OLL.3.7 Students will have the opportunity to participate in outreach projects in conjunction with the Virtue Program.

OLL.3.8 Students will have the opportunity to participate in service collections to benefit our local community and Sister Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic.

Standard **4**

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for adult faith formation and action in service of social justice.

Benchmarks

- 4.1** The leader/leadership team provides retreats and other spiritual experiences for the faculty and staff on a regular and timely basis.
- 4.2** The leader/leadership team and faculty assist parents/guardians in their role as the primary educators of their children in faith.
- 4.3** The leader/leadership team collaborates with other institutions (for example, Catholic Charities, Catholic higher education, religious congregation-sponsored programs) to provide opportunities for parents/guardians to grow in the knowledge and practice of the faith.
- 4.4** All adults in the school community are invited to participate in Christian service programs to promote the lived reality of action in service of social justice.
- 4.5** Every administrator, faculty, and staff member visibly supports the faith life of the school community.
- D.O. 4.6** In the case of a parish school, the pastor fosters participation of the school community in appropriate parish and multi-parish projects and celebrations.

Standard 5

An excellent Catholic school has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school's fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.

Benchmarks

- 5.1** The governing body, representing the diversity of stakeholders, functions according to its approved constitution and by-laws.
- 5.2** The governing body systematizes the policies of the school's operations to ensure fidelity to mission, and continuity and sustainability through leadership successions.
- 5.3** The governing body, in collaboration with or through the actions of the leader/leadership team, maintains a relationship with the Bishop marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, continuing dialogue, and respect for the Bishop's legitimate authority.
- 5.4** The governing body, in collaboration with or through the actions of the leader/leadership team, maintains a constructive and beneficial relationship with the (arch) diocesan Education Office consistent with (arch) diocesan policy pertaining to the recognition of Catholic schools by the Bishop.
- 5.5** In the case of a parish school, the governing body, in collaboration with the leader/leadership team, maintains a relationship with the canonical administrator (pastor or designee of Bishop) marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, and continuing dialogue.
- 5.6** The governing body engages in formation and on-going training and self-evaluation for itself and the leadership team to ensure the faithful execution of their respective responsibilities.

Standard 6

An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision.

Benchmarks

- 6.1** The leader/leadership team meets national, state and/or (arch) diocesan requirements for school leadership preparation and licensing to serve as the faith and instructional leader(s) of the school.
- 6.2** The leader/leadership team articulates a clear mission and vision for the school, and engages the school community to ensure a school culture that embodies the mission and vision.
- 6.3** The leader/leadership team takes responsibility for the development and oversight of personnel, including recruitment, professional growth, faith formation, and formal assessment of faculty and staff in compliance with (arch)diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies.
- 6.4** The leader/leadership team establishes and supports networks of collaboration at all levels within the school community to advance excellence.
- 6.5** The leader/leadership team directs the development and continuous improvement of curriculum and instruction, and utilizes school-wide data to plan for continued and sustained academic excellence and growth.
- 6.6** The leader/leadership team works in collaboration with the governing body to provide an infrastructure of programs and services that ensures the operational vitality of the school.
- 6.7** The leader/leadership team assumes responsibility for communicating new initiatives and/or changes to school programs to all constituents.

Standard 7

An excellent Catholic school has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction.

Benchmarks

- 7.1** The curriculum adheres to appropriate, delineated standards, and is vertically aligned to ensure that every student successfully completes a rigorous and coherent sequence of academic courses based on the standards and rooted in Catholic values.
- 7.2** Standards are adopted across the curriculum, and include integration of the religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions of learning in all subjects.
- 7.3** Curriculum and instruction for 21st century learning provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to become creative, reflective, literate, critical, and moral evaluators, problem solvers, decision makers, and socially responsible global citizens.
- 7.4** Curriculum and instruction for 21st century learning prepares students to become expert users of technology, able to create, publish, and critique digital products that reflect their understanding of the content and their technological skills.

- 7.5** Classroom instruction is designed to intentionally address the affective dimensions of learning, such as intellectual and social dispositions, relationship building, and habits of mind.
- 7.6** Classroom instruction is designed to engage and motivate all students, addressing the diverse needs and capabilities of each student, and accommodating students with special needs as fully as possible.
- 7.7** Faculty collaborate in professional learning communities to develop, implement and continuously improve the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction to result in high levels of student achievement.
- 7.8** The faculty and professional support staff meet (arch) diocesan, state, and/or national requirements for academic preparation and licensing to ensure their capacity to provide effective curriculum and instruction.
- 7.9** Faculty and professional support staff demonstrate and continuously improve knowledge and skills necessary for effective instruction, cultural sensitivity, and modeling of Gospel values.
- 7.10** Faculty and staff engage in high quality professional development, including religious formation, and are accountable for implementation that supports student learning.
- D.O. 7.11** The curriculum is horizontally aligned to ensure every student receives similar content instruction in the same grade level.
- D.O. 7.12** Media centers shall provide the technology and the physical layout necessary to support student learning.
- D.O. 7.13** The school shall follow Diocesan Subject-Time Allotments located in the Diocesan School Policy and Administrative Manual.
- OLL.7.14** Wireless technology throughout the campus will be upgraded to support assistive technology and a one to one Chromebook program for middle school.
- OLL.7.15** Curriculum restructuring will occur with the implementation of a “modified curriculum” classroom for 2nd -4th grade.
- OLL.7.16** Instructional practices will be implemented to better engage students with the curriculum, including flipped math classes for middle school and expansion of Enrichment program.
- OLL.7.17** Additional electives and courses will be offered to enhance the core curriculum, including Christian leadership, video production, science research, and options to take courses through Florida Virtual School.
- OLL.7.18** High quality professional development in the areas of classroom management, communication, technology, 21st Century Skills, and Common Core State Standards implementation will be provided to faculty and staff once a month by leader/leadership team or outside source.
- OLL.7.19** Character education and social skills classes will be fully integrated into the “Virtue of the Week” curriculum to meet the needs of all students.
- OLL.7.20** The student service team will offer a learning lab to middle school students for additional academic support, and to improve organizational and study skills based on student’s needs.
- OLL.7.21** The student service team will provide additional academic support, use of technology, and skills reinforcement through an after school program for students who are considered “at risk”.

Standard 8

An excellent Catholic school uses school-wide assessment methods and practices to document student learning and program effectiveness, to make student performances transparent, and to inform the continuous review of curriculum and the improvement of instructional practices.

Benchmarks

8.1 School-wide and student data generated by a variety of tools are used to monitor, review, and evaluate the curriculum and co-curricular programs; to plan for continued and sustained student growth; and to monitor and assess faculty performance.

8.2 School-wide and aggregated student data are normed to appropriate populations and are shared with all stakeholders.

8.3 Faculty use a variety of curriculum-based assessments aligned with learning outcomes and instructional practices to assess student learning, including formative, summative, authentic performance, and student self-assessment.

8.4 Criteria used to evaluate student work and the reporting mechanisms are valid, consistent, transparent, and justly administered.

8.5 Faculty collaborate in professional learning communities to monitor individual and class-wide student learning through methods such as common assessments and rubrics.

OLL.8.6 The admissions process will continue to be evaluated and improved so that a tier-system will be in place to ensure that the needs of the incoming student will be met appropriately and adequately.

OLL.8.7 Vertical planning will be increased to monitor instructional practices and assessment of students.

OLL.8.8 The Student Services Team will consist of two fulltime resource teachers and a guidance counselor, along with additional support staff, in order to better monitor academic, emotional, and social needs of the students.

OLL.8.9 Student portfolios and data will be maintained from one grade level to the next to monitor student progress and performance.

OLL.8.10 Evaluation of software for remediation and Response to Intervention (RTI) will be completed each year to serve the needs of the students.

Standard 9

An excellent Catholic school provides programs and services aligned with the mission to enrich the academic program and support the development of student and family life.

Benchmarks

9.1 School-wide programs for parents/guardians provide opportunities for parents/guardians to partner with school leaders, faculty, and other parents/guardians to enhance the educational experiences for the school community.

9.2 Guidance services, wellness programs, behavior management programs, and ancillary services provide the necessary support for students to successfully complete the school program.

9.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities provide opportunities outside the classroom for students to further identify and develop their gifts and talents and to enhance their creative, aesthetic, social/emotional, physical, and spiritual capabilities.

OLL.9.4 The Student Services Team will consist of two fulltime resource teachers and a guidance counselor, along with additional support staff, in order to better monitor academic, emotional, and social needs of the students.

OLL.9.5 The guidance program will consist of services in the classroom, as well as individual counseling, classroom interventions, parent collaboration, community resources, and small group interventions such as conflict resolution, grief counseling, and team building to ensure the emotional and social needs of all students are met.

OLL.9.6 Additional electives and courses will be offered to provide students added opportunities to identify and develop their gifts and talents, including, but not limited to, video production, enrichment classes, Christian leadership, and science research.

OLL.9.7 Partnerships with outside entities including Hibiscus Court Senior Living Facility and Florida Institute of Technology's Scott Center for Autism Treatment will provide additional opportunities to support the development of student and family life.

OLL.9.8 Behavior management systems will be evaluated to ensure that positive behavior systems are in place to support all students. Behavior plans will be implemented as needed by the student service team.

OLL.9.9 Cross-grade-level activities will be promoted throughout the academic school year to develop a strong relationship within the school community.

OLL.9.10 The Virtue program will be expanded to include a month-long celebration of diversity and acceptance, as well as, anonymous method of reporting bullying and other necessary guidance services that need to be addressed.

OLL.9.11 Parents will be provided with opportunities to attend workshops that target relationship building and life skills within the family, such as Calm Parenting University, Sheriff's -It's Time to be a Parent Again, and Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University.

Standard **10**

An excellent Catholic school provides a feasible three to five year financial plan that includes both current and projected budgets and is the result of a collaborative process, emphasizing faithful stewardship.

Benchmarks

10.1 The governing body and leader/leadership team engage in financial planning in collaboration with experts in nonprofit management and funding.

10.2 Financial plans include agreed-upon levels of financial investment determined by the partners involved who may include but are not limited to parishes, dioceses, religious orders, educational foundations, the larger Catholic community, and responsible boards.

10.3 Financial plans define revenue sources that include but are not limited to tuition, tuition assistance/scholarships, endowment funds, local and regional partnerships, public funding, regional cost sharing, (arch) diocesan and/or religious communities' assistance, foundation gifts, entrepreneurial options and other sources not listed.

10.4 Financial plans include the delineation of costs for key target areas such as instruction, tuition assistance, administration, professional development, facilities, equipment, technology, program enhancement/expansion, capital projects and other planned projects.

10.5 Current and projected budgets include a statement of the actual and projected revenue sources, indicating an appropriate balance among revenue sources, and a statement of actual and projected expenditures including the actual cost per child, benchmarked compensation/salary scales, and other health benefits and retirement costs.

10.6 Financial plans include educational materials for distribution to all members of the community explaining the total cost per child and how that cost is met by identifying the percentage of cost that is paid for by tuition and the remaining amount of cost that is supported by other sources of revenue.

10.7 The governing body and leader/leadership team provide families access to information about tuition assistance and long-term planning for tuition and Catholic school expenses.

10.8 The governing body and leader/leadership team ensure that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices as a means of providing good stewardship of resources.

OLL.10.9 Tuition assistance provided by the second collection at mass and the Angels for Catholic Education (ACE) program will continue to be encouraged.

OLL.10.10 The Enrollment Coordinator/ Public Relations person will be made available to assist all families in obtaining scholarships, such as Step Up for Students, McKay, and PLSA, should they qualify.

Standard **11**

An excellent Catholic school operates in accord with published human resource/personnel policies, developed in compliance with (arch) diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies, which affect all staff (clergy, religious women and men, laity and volunteers) and provide clarity for responsibilities, expectations and accountability.

Benchmarks

11.1 Human resource programs are professionally staffed at the appropriate level (i.e. central office, school office) and ensure full compliance with human resource policies.

11.2 Human resource policies delineate standards for position descriptions including staff responsibilities and qualifications, hiring, compensation, and benefits, as well as standards for professional development, accountability, succession planning and retirement.

11.3 Human resource policies ensure that competitive and just salaries, benefits, and professional growth opportunities are provided for all staff.

11.4 Human resource policies ensure that institutional planning includes investment in personnel growth, health care and retirement.

D.O. 11.5 The school will forward to the Office of Catholic Schools no less than annually a list of teachers who they recommend for teaching positions who have been released through a reduction in force.

D.O. 11.6 The school and the Diocese will provide mentoring programs for new teachers.

D.O. 11.7 The school will comply with the Diocesan salary schedule or discuss exceptions with the Superintendent.

D.O. 11.8 The school will comply with state, local, and Diocesan legal requirements for Child Abuse and Safe Environment Policies.

FCC D.5 In schools with an enrollment greater than 300 students, there shall be at a minimum a part-time assistant principal. In schools with an enrollment of over 500 students, there shall be at a minimum one full-time assistant principal.

FCC D.16 Each full-time teacher shall have the equivalent of five planning periods per week.

FCC E.5 There shall be a systematic and written performance review of administrators, teachers, and staff.

FCC G1.2 The school shall have a full- or part-time school counselor with a minimum presence of one full day per week.

FCC H.5 The school shall have adequate administrative facilities including space for counseling services, workrooms, an adequately-equipped clinic, faculty/staff lounges, and lavatories.

Standard **12**

An excellent Catholic school develops and maintains a facilities, equipment, and technology management plan designed to continuously support the implementation of the educational mission of the school.

Benchmarks

12.1 The school's facilities, equipment, and technology management plan includes objectives to support the delivery of the educational program of the school and accessibility for all students.

12.2 The school's budget supports facilities, equipment, and technology management with specific funds for capital improvements, depreciation, and replacement.

12.3 The school's purchasing, and physical and technological improvements are, by design, done in alignment with the mission and the school's planning and curricular goals, and consistent with environmental stewardship.

D.O. 12.4 A school facilities plan is written and followed, which includes maintenance checklists and facility checklists as well as Risk Assessment Codes (RAC).

D.O. 12.5 A written technology plan includes infrastructure upgrades, training, and replacement planning for hardware. Employees shall follow the Diocesan Network Acceptable Use Policy and students shall follow the Student Responsible Use Policy.

D.O. 12.6 The school meets health, safety, and building codes, including timely addressing of RAC's.

D.O. 12.7 The school shall have a dedicated space for technology which meet the needs of the students and teachers.

FCC H.10 School grounds shall be well supervised and large enough to provide for the location of safe parking, safe play, and physical education activities.

OLL.12.8 The Facilities and Technology plan will be evaluated annually to ensure that educational program is accessible to all students.

OLL.12.9 Wireless technology throughout the campus will be upgraded to support assistive technology and a one to one Chromebook program for middle school.

OLL.12.10 The playground will be replaced with new equipment and renovated to ensure safe play, and promote create and physical activities

Standard **13**

An excellent Catholic school enacts a comprehensive plan for institutional advancement based on a compelling mission through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.

Benchmarks

13.1 The communications/marketing plan requires school leader/leadership team and staff person(s) to insure the implementation of contemporary, multiple information technologies to reach targeted audiences, and to establish reliable and secure databases and accountability to stakeholders.

13.2 The enrollment management plan requires the governing body to review and the school leader/leadership team to supervise annual and continuous measurement and analysis of both enrollment and retention patterns for all student groups.

13.3 The development plan requires school leader/leadership team, in collaboration with the governing body, to insure that key strategies are in place to identify, grow and maintain significant funding prospects, including alumni(ae), over time and when appropriate.

D.O 13.4 The school shall comply with the Diocesan Communication Media Policy and Faithful Citizenship Policy.

OLL.13.5 An enrollment coordinator position will be expanded to include public relations and marketing to ensure that communication occurs between the school and prospective families.

OLL.13.6 The school website and social media will be updated regularly in-house to better communicate with current and potential families in an environmentally-friendly manner.

OLL.13.7 An electronic database of alumni will be updated and maintained.

The Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Program Standards Addendum and Appendix

Standard 14 FCCAP

Addendum

Standard 14: An excellent Catholic school operates in compliance with all diocesan and applicable state, and local policies.

Benchmarks

14.1 The school shall develop a written plan for mandated diocesan, county, and state health procedures; provide a safe environment to prevent illness and accidents; deal with emergencies should they occur; and educate students concerning safe and healthy practices.

14.2 The school shall maintain health records that include immunization data, hearing and vision screening, scoliosis screening, and school-entry medical examinations.

14.3 The school shall be in compliance with diocesan and applicable state and county requirements regarding protection, health, sanitation, and safety.

14.4 The school shall develop and make available a written safety and security plan which shall include a section on emergency procedures to address such matters as natural disasters, environmental hazards, dangerous weather, violent incidents, and evidence of evacuation drills.

14.5 The school shall be in compliance with provincial and diocesan safe environment policies.

14.6 The school shall publish, implement, and display statements of nondiscrimination of students and personnel in accordance with federal law and regulations.

14.7 The school shall develop an academic calendar and supporting attendance policies that are sufficient to the operation of a quality instructional program with a minimum of 180 actual school days. The school year shall include a minimum of 540 net instructional hours for kindergarten, 720 net instructional hours for grades 1-3, and 900 net instructional hours for grades 4-8.

14.8 The age of the student is the primary appropriate entrance requirement. Entry dates shall be in accordance with the following schedule:

Pre-Kindergarten 3	3 years of age on or before September 1
Pre-Kindergarten 4	4 years of age on or before September 1
Kindergarten	5 years of age on or before September 1
First Grade	6 years of age on or before September 1 and successful completion of Kindergarten

14.9 The school shall maintain records for students containing information, procedures, and confidentiality as required by law and as necessary for the operation of a quality educational program. (Closed schools will follow diocesan procedure regarding these records.)

D.O. 14.10 The number of foreign students is limited to 15% of total student enrollment.

FCCAP Appendix:

Class Size and Staff Student Ratios

1. Class Size

GRADE LEVEL	CLASS SIZE LIMIT
Pre-Kindergarten – 3 years	20
Pre-Kindergarten – 4 years	25
Kindergarten	30
Grades 1-8	35

Any class size exception must be made with the approval of the Superintendent.

2. Staff/Student Ratios

GRADE LEVEL	STAFF/ STUDENT RATIO
Pre-Kindergarten 3 Yrs.	A part-time teacher assistant for 11-15 students.
	A full-time teacher assistant for 16-20 students.
Pre-Kindergarten 4 Yrs.	A part-time teacher assistant for 16-20 students.
	A full-time teacher assistant for 21-25 students.
Kindergarten	A part-time teacher assistant for 21-25 students.
	A full-time teacher assistant for 26-30 students.
Grade 1	A part-time teacher assistant for 21-25 students.
	A full-time teacher assistant for 26-35 students.
Grades 2-3	A part-time teacher assistant for 31-35 students.
Grades 4-8	At least one part-time teacher assistant(s) shared among these grades for 1-35 students.

Include in this section the school's 3-5 FCC accreditation goals--The school's action goals from the last accreditation visit as well as other school goals.

Monitoring of the Plan

The chair of the Strategic Planning Committee must review continual progress on the standards and benchmarks at least monthly. The Strategic Planning Committee and the School Board, through consultation, must review progress on each NSBCESS Standards (13) at least quarterly and document progress on a tracking report.

Formal monitoring of the plan will be a major part of Annual Report for Continued Accreditation (ARCA) for accreditation purposes.

APPENDIX B: MOST PROMINENT NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS

List of ten most prominent national educational associations acknowledged by The Council for Exceptional Children (1995) (as cited in Thousand and Villa, 2000) implementing inclusive schooling practices successfully:

1. National Association of State Directors of Special Education,
2. National Association of Elementary School Principals,
3. National Association of Secondary School Principals,
4. Council of Great City Inclusion Practices with Special Needs Students: Theory, Research, and Application Schools,
5. American Association of School Administrators,
6. National Association of State Boards of Education,
7. National State Boards Association,
8. Council for Exceptional Children,
9. National Education Association,
10. American Federation of Teachers

APPENDIX C: EIGHT FACTORS FOR ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION

Table 4: Eight Factors for Achieving Inclusive Education (Thousand & Villa, 2000)

Visionary Leadership

Collaboration

Refocused use of assessment

Support for staff and students

Effective parental involvement

Implementation of effective program models

Effective classroom practices

Funding

APPENDIX D: BEST PRACTICES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (BPIE)

SCHOOL BPIE INDICATORS

At-A-Glance

DOMAIN: Leadership and Decision-Making

1. The school leadership team analyzes data to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps that increase the number of students with low and high incidence disabilities, across all grades, in general education and natural contexts.
2. Short and long term efforts to implement and improve inclusive educational practices, as measured by the BPIE, are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).
3. The school has a key person who oversees, coordinates, and monitors the implementation of best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.
4. School administrators advocate for all SWDs to have the same school choice options as students without disabilities to ensure all SWDs receive educational services in their neighborhood school or school of choice.
5. School data reflect that all SWDs, regardless of the type or severity of disability, receive their education and related services in age and grade appropriate, heterogeneous, general education contexts 80% or more of the day.
6. School data reflect that all SWDs, ages 3–5, receive special education and related services in the regular early childhood (Pre-K) and kindergarten classes with peers without disabilities.
***schools with Pre-K programs only**
7. School administrators communicate expectations for all school personnel to share responsibility for all of the students in their building and consider all SWDs as general education students **first**.
8. School administrators facilitate the use of resources, by school personnel, to implement best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.
9. School administrators communicate expectations for all school personnel to use person first language in all written and verbal communications.
10. School administrators use job interview questions to appraise an applicant’s knowledge and beliefs pertaining to diversity and inclusive practices, as applicable to the position.
11. School administrators advocate for all SWDs to be transported to and from school and community-based activities with students without disabilities attending the same school, except for those who have an IEP indicating a shortened school day.
12. All SWDs have the same opportunities as students without disabilities to participate in all school sponsored, non-academic, age appropriate activities including electives, sports, dances, clubs, field trip, school plays, community service activities, and graduation activities.
13. All students, including SWDs, are given equal consideration for recognition through honors, awards and other designations offered by the school.
14. School administrators analyze data to identify professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) needed for school personnel to implement effective inclusive practices.

15. School leaders provide job-embedded **professional development** for all school-based personnel, as appropriate for their job role, on best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.
16. School leaders facilitate job-embedded, **technical assistance** for all school-based personnel, as appropriate for their job role, on best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.
17. School administrators ensure that collaborative planning time is used productively and reflected in general and special education staff schedules and instructional plans.

DOMAIN: Instruction and Student Achievement

18. Specials, electives, and career technical education (CTE) teachers have regularly scheduled opportunities to consult with special education teachers and related service providers to implement strategies that support the learning of all SWDs in their classes.
19. General and special education teachers use the Florida Standards as the foundation for instruction of all SWDs, including those with a significant cognitive disability.
20. A multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS) and problem-solving process is consistently used by school personnel to ensure progress in the general education curriculum, across all grades and settings, for all students with and without disabilities.
21. All instructional and related services personnel use formative assessment processes and tools to gather, analyze, and evaluate data about effective instruction and behavior interventions for all students with and without disabilities in general education and natural contexts.
22. Teachers of SWDs who spend less than 80% of their day in general education classes use formative assessment data to identify effective instructional and behavioral interventions that, when implemented in general education and natural contexts, allow SWDs to make progress toward meeting IEP and learning goals.
23. There is a school wide approach to facilitate positive, interdependent relationships and social responsibility among all students with and without disabilities across all general education and natural contexts.
24. There is a school wide approach for planning and implementing Universal Design for Learning across all instructional and non-instructional school contexts.
25. There are a variety of service delivery models in place, across all grade levels, to provide instruction and related services to SWDs in general education classes and natural contexts.
26. All paraprofessionals have received PD that includes clear descriptions of their work responsibilities and strategies for providing support to SWDs in general education classrooms and natural contexts.

DOMAIN: Communication and Collaboration

27. All special education teachers are full, collaborative members of a general education curriculum team.

28. General and special education teachers use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time to clarify their roles and responsibilities while planning effective instruction and assessment for all students.
29. Family members of SWDs are contributing members of school decision-making groups.
30. Learning opportunities and resources are provided to families of SWDs as a result of needs assessments and student data.
31. When communicating with families of SWDs, all personnel consider family members as a resource and obtain their input in planning and problem-solving.
32. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) and subsequent reports of progress toward implementing inclusive practices are disseminated to families, school district personnel, and community members annually.
33. The school uses a person-centered planning process for SWDs.
34. School uses a team decision-making process to ensure SWDs transition from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district to ensure placement in the least restrictive environment.

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Alicia Bell**

Date: **February 14, 2017**

Dear Researcher:

On 02/14/2017, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: Qualitative Inquiry Investigating the Inclusive Practices of Teachers within Catholic Schools
Investigator: Alicia Bell
IRB Number: SBE-17-12868
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Gillian Amy Mary Morien on 02/14/2017 11:17:35 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX F: APPROVAL FROM ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE
DIOCESE

July 15, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

I, _____, Associate Superintendent of the _____ Diocese of Catholic Schools, give Alicia Bell permission to conduct research using assessment data from the Catholic schools in the _____ Diocese for grades K through 8th grade for her doctoral research assignment at the University of Central Florida for the summer of 2016, fall 2016, and spring of 2017. I also give Alicia Bell permission to conduct a survey, interview, and focus group of administrators and faculty at the schools in the _____ Diocese. It is expected that the use of this data is solely for research purposes and meets all requirements established for the protection of privacy for students and schools in the Diocese of _____.

You may contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email XXXX@XXXXdiocese.org if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

Dr. _____

Assistant Superintendent at the Diocese of _____

APPENDIX G: SUMMARY OF EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Qualitative Inquiry Investigating the Inclusive Practices of Teachers within Catholic Schools

Principal Investigator: Alicia Bell

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Mary Little

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational solutions by educators to address the needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities within their classrooms in Catholic school settings. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate the lived experiences of educators in the Catholic schools that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. This investigation will explore two questions:

What are the lived experiences of elementary education teachers whose students with moderate to severe disabilities have demonstrated improved educational outcomes in private, Catholic elementary schools?

What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings?

Procedures and Duration of the Human Research

This study consists of surveys, observations, and interviews. You will first be contacted through an e-mail invitation to request your participation in the survey, as well as permission to observe you and your classroom, and request your participation in an interview, as well. The survey will be done through the web-based service called Qualtrics. The survey consists of approximately 20-25 questions and should take no longer than 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The observations will be conducted during the your instructional time and will be conducted in a way that would allow little to no interruption to your day/routine and would last for approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The interview consists of five categories of questions, each containing approximately five questions each and should take between 20 and 30 minutes to conduct. The interviews and observations will be held at the elementary school site with permission of the institution in your classroom. The interview will be conducted at a time when students and other personnel are not present, in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Please note, observations and interviews may be recorded using an audio recording device, however, if you prefer not to be recorded, you can still participate and handwritten notes will be used instead.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints contact Alicia Bell, doctoral student, College of Education and Human Performance (407-937-9843) or Dr. Mary Little, faculty supervisor, College of Education and Human Performance (mary.little@ucf.edu).

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX H: SURVEY

Qualitative Inquiry Investigating the Inclusive Practices of Teachers Within Catholic Schools

Q1 EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Qualitative Inquiry Investigating the Inclusive Practices of Teachers within Catholic Schools

Principal Investigator: Alicia Bell

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Mary Little

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational solutions by educators to address the needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities within their classrooms in Catholic school settings. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate the lived experiences of educators in the Catholic schools that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities. This investigation will explore two questions: What are the lived experiences of elementary education teachers whose students with moderate to severe disabilities have demonstrated improved educational outcomes in private, Catholic elementary schools? What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with teaching students with disabilities within these settings?

Procedures and Duration of the Human Research: This study consists of surveys, observations, and interviews. You will first be contacted through an e-mail invitation to request your participation in the survey, as well as permission to observe you and your classroom, and request your participation in an interview, as well. The survey will be done through the web-based service called Qualtrics. The survey consists of approximately 20-25 questions and should take no longer than 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The observations will be conducted during your instructional time and will be conducted in a way that would allow little to no interruption to your day/routine and would last for approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The interview consists of five categories of questions, each containing approximately five questions each and should take between 20 and 30 minutes to conduct. The interviews and observations will be held at the elementary school site with permission of the institution in your classroom. The interview will be conducted at a time when students and other personnel are not present, in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Please note, observations and interviews may be recorded using an audio recording device, however, if you prefer not to be recorded, you can still participate and hand written notes will be used instead.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints contact Alicia Bell, doctoral student, College of Education and Human

Performance (407-937-9843) or Dr. Mary Little, faculty supervisor, College of Education and Human Performance (mary.little@ucf.edu).

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

Selecting the “yes” option below indicates your consent and permission to take part in this research.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q2 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer not to answer (3)

Q3 What is your age range?

- < 36 years old (1)
- 36-45 years old (2)
- > 45 years old (3)

Q4 What is your race?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6)

Q5 What is your educational level?

- High School Diploma (1)
- Bachelor's Degree (2)
- Master's Degree (3)
- Doctorate Degree (4)

Q6 What certifications do you hold?

Q7 What training in inclusive education have you attended or completed? What this training required or by personal choice?

Q8 Please use the Likert scale to rate your attitude/belief of each of the following statements.

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
My diocese provides sufficient out-of-diocese training opportunities to appropriately teach students with disabilities. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My educational background has prepared me to teach students with disabilities. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My diocese provides sufficient inservice training through my school for teaching students with disabilities. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborative teaching of children with disabilities can be effective particularly when students with an IEP are placed in a regular classroom. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special education teachers should teach students who hold an IEP. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regular education teachers should not be responsible for teaching children with disabilities. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General education teachers should only be responsible for teaching students who	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

are not identified as having disabilities. (7)					
Both regular education teachers and special education teachers should teach students with an IEP. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers are provided with enough time, monetary support, and sufficient material at my school, in order to attend conferences/workshops in teaching students with disabilities. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administrators support teachers when faced with challenges presented by students with disabilities in my classroom. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All students who have an IEP for any reason need to receive their education in a special education classroom. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My colleagues are willing to help me with issues which may arise when I have students with disabilities in my classroom. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who are diagnosed as autistic need to be in special education classes. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All efforts should be made to educate students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who are diagnosed as mentally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

retarded should be in special education classrooms. (15)					
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Q9 Please use the Likert scale to rate your attitude/belief on each of the following statements.

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
In order to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps that increase the number of students with disabilities throughout the school, administration analyzes data. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Short and long term goals to implement and improve inclusive educational practices are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a lead person who oversees and monitors the implementation of best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All SWDs are advocated to have the same school choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>knowledge and beliefs pertaining to diversity and inclusive practices, as applicable to the position. (8)</p>					
<p>All SWDs have the same opportunities as students without disabilities to participate in all of our school sponsored activities. (9)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
<p>Equal consideration is given to all students, including SWDs for recognition through honors, awards and other awards offered by my school. (10)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
<p>Data at my school is analyzed to identify professional development and technical assistance needed for school personnel to implement effective inclusive practices. (11)</p>	○	○	○	○	○

Collaborative planning time is used productively at our school and is reflected in both general and special education staff schedules and instructional plans. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Q10 Click to write the question text

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
All special education teachers at my school fully collaborate with members of the general education curriculum team. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General and special education teachers at my school have and use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time to discuss their responsibilities while planning effective instruction and assessment for all students. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family members of	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>SWDs. (7) To ensure SWDs transition from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district with placement in the least restrictive environment, my school uses a team decision-making process. (8)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
---	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Q11 Click to write the question text

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly disagree (7)
<p>All teachers at my school have regularly scheduled opportunities to consult with special education teachers and related service providers to assist in implementing strategies to support the learning of all SWDs in their classes. (1)</p> <p>The Florida Standards are used as the foundation for instruction of all</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>SWDs, including those with a significant cognitive disability by general and special education teachers at my school. (2)</p>							
<p>A multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS) and a problem-solving process is used by school personnel at my school on a consistent basis to ensure progress in the general education curriculum, across all grades and settings, for all students with and without disabilities. (3)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>All instructional and related services personnel at my school use formative assessment processes and tools to gather, analyze, and evaluate data about effective instruction and behavior interventions for all students with and without disabilities in general education</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>classes. (4)</p> <p>Teachers of SWDs at my school, who spend less than 80% of their day in general education classes use formative assessment data to identify effective instructional and behavioral interventions that, when implemented in general education classes, allow SWDs to make progress toward meeting learning goals. (5)</p> <p>My school has a school wide approach to facilitate positive, interdependent relationships and social responsibility among all students with and without disabilities across all general education and natural contexts. (6)</p> <p>My school has a school wide approach for planning and implementing Universal Design for Learning</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 What grades have you taught? Check all that apply

- PreK (1)
- Kindergarten (2)
- First (3)
- Second (4)
- Third (5)
- Fourth (6)
- Fifth (7)
- Sixth (8)

Q16 Do you have any students who are identified with a disability?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Click to write the question text

Q17 How many students in your classroom are identified with a disability?

Q18 Select which disabilities your students in your classroom have been identified with.

- Autism (1)
- Deaf-blindness (2)
- Deafness (3)
- Developmental delay (4)
- Emotional disturbance (5)
- Hearing impairment (6)
- Intellectual disability (7)
- Multiple disabilities (8)
- Orthopedic impairment (9)
- Other health impairment (10)
- Specific learning disability (11)
- Speech or language impairment (12)
- Traumatic brain injury (13)
- Visual impairment, including blindness (14)
- Other (15) _____

Q19 Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Would you be interested and willing to participate in a follow-up interview and/or observation of your inclusive classroom? If yes or maybe, please provide your name and phone number for contact information.

- Yes (1) _____
- Maybe (2) _____
- No (4)

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR EDUCATORS AND
ADMINISTRATORS

Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers

Data Type	Interview Questions	Probing Questions
Participant's Professional Experiences, Training, & Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about yourself, your educational training, and teaching experiences. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your gender? Age? Ethnicity? 2. What is your highest level of education? 3. What special education courses have you taken? Were they required by your school or diocese or personal? 4. How many total years have you been teaching? 5. What is your current position/role?
Overarching Description of Teaching Roles and Responsibilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe your average work day. 2. Describe your classroom instructional strategies and accommodations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the daily expectations your supervisor has for you. 2. Describe your communication with other professionals regarding student needs and outcomes. 3. Describe your direct services for students with and without disabilities. 4. Describe student demographics of your classroom, classroom setting, expectations, etc.
Inclusive Service Delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe how you provide specialized instruction and intervention to students. 2. How do you decide the content of your instruction? Does this vary in different settings? Describe. 3. Discuss the implementation of inclusion at your school. 4. What changes have you seen with your roles and responsibilities as a special educator since you started 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you modify instruction or intervention to meet student needs? 2. Describe some of those changes. 3. Describe these changes on the services you provide to students both with and without disabilities. 4. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the support team at your school

teaching?

5. Is there a school wide approach for planning and implementing inclusive practices? Please describe.

6. Describe testing and assessment procedures.

Describe accommodations and/or modifications to course expectations.

(paraprofessionals, academic support personnel, specialists, etc.)

5. Are students' progress monitored on a regular basis? How often?

Communication and Collaboration

1. Describe your communication and collaboration practices at your school.

2. Describe parent communication involving SWDs.

3. Is your School Improvement Plan disseminated to faculty, staff, and parents?

4. Do you know the goals your school has regarding SWDs? What are they?

1. Are their regularly scheduled times to discuss instruction and interventions students are receiving?

2. Who are the involved members that meet to discuss student progress, particularly the SWDs?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else about your current roles and responsibilities that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

Interview Questions for Administrators

Interview Questions	Probing Questions
<p>Participant's Professional Background Information:</p> <p>1. Tell me about yourself, your educational training, and teaching experiences.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is your gender? Age? Ethnicity?2. What is your highest level of education?3. What special education courses have you taken? Were they required by your school or diocese or personal?4. What is your current position/role?5. How many total years did you teach? Been in administration?
<p>Description of Roles/Responsibilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Describe your average work day.3. Describe your school's/classroom's instructional strategies and accommodations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Describe the daily expectations you have for your teachers.2. Describe your communication with your faculty and staff regarding student needs and outcomes.3. Describe your direct services for students with and without disabilities.4. Describe student demographics of your school/classrooms.
<p>Inclusive Service Delivery:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Describe how specialized instruction and interventions are provided to students.5. How do you decide the content of your instruction? Does this vary in different settings? Describe.6. Discuss the implementation of inclusion at your school.7. What changes have been made to faculty and staff's roles and responsibilities since you became principal?8. Is there a school wide approach for planning and implementing inclusive practices? Please describe.9. Describe testing and assessment procedures.10. Describe accommodations and/or modifications to course expectations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you modify instruction or intervention to meet student needs?2. Describe some of those changes.3. Describe these changes on the services you provide to students both with and without disabilities.4. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the support team at your school (paraprofessionals, academic support personnel, specialists, etc.)5. Are students' progress monitored on a regular basis? How often?

Communication and Collaboration:

11. Describe your communication and collaboration practices at your school.
12. Describe parent communication involving SWDs.
13. Is your School Improvement Plan disseminated to faculty, staff, and parents? May I have a copy of your SIP.
14. What are the goals your school has regarding SWDs? Are teachers and staff aware of these goals?

1. Are there regularly scheduled times to discuss instruction and interventions students are receiving?
2. Who are the involved members that meet to discuss student progress, particularly the SWDs?

Funding:

15. Where do the necessary funds come from for implementing and sustaining your inclusive programs?

1. Do you receive McKay Scholarships?
2. Are there any students receiving funding through vouchers, tuition tax credits, or other government funded programs for SWDs.
3. Do parents have to pay for added services if their child has a disability? Are the extra costs included in tuition?

Conclusion:

16. Is there anything else about your current role and responsibilities that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?
-

APPENDIX J: EXAMPLE OF DATA AND THEME DEVELOPMENT FOR
INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

Data and Theme Development for Interviews and Observations

In this section, detailed descriptions of the responses are given from the educators who were willing to participate in the structured interviews. For confidentiality, the name of all participants has been changed in this report. Key statements have been highlighted in the color of its corresponding theme: Theme 1: Educators' belief to teach ALL (inclusion); Theme 2: Support for Inclusive Education; Theme 3: Planning for Inclusive Education; Theme 4: Differentiated Instruction; Theme 5: Consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education across grade levels and the entire school

Interviews

Patrick

Patrick is currently the Resource Teacher for fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and also facilitates the *Learning Lab* and Title I programs at the Elementary school. His typical responsibilities for the day include resource teacher in the mornings for fourth and fifth grade, then participates in the MTSS groupings and reviews meetings, then he does lunch duty, and in the afternoon he facilitates the Learning Lab for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Patrick also does homework help from 3:00PM to 4:00PM for students with an IEP or 504 Plan in grades third through eighth. His instructional strategies and accommodations include whatever is included on the students' IEP, SP, or 504 Plan, however he did express that the strategies and instructional practices are "more open" due to working in a Catholic school. He shared that the typical strategies or accommodations are discussed with the ESE specialist. In Learning Lab they consist of extra time, assistance on questions, explanations for directions, small group, discussion, and retesting. He also shared that he may participate in classroom observations, as

will other teachers, and then provide feedback, help, and support based on those observations. He helps wherever needed. He shared that the content of his instruction depends on what the County recommends and requests, otherwise it's based on his own choice and decisions, and teacher communication and feedback.

Patrick described the school and student demographics as very diverse and has a high number of ESE students. He went on to explain that a large percentage of the campus is Title I, sixty of which are in the elementary grades alone. Patrick shared that over the years, the middle school has had an increase in ESE students. He also shared with me that they have added a Sensory Room upon the implementation of the inclusion program at the school, as well as more admittance of students with serious needs. However, since he was hired after the implementation had started, he did not notice any shift in the roles or responsibilities for him. He informed me that the school wide approach for planning and implementing inclusive practices for SWDs consisted of training teachers and other faculty members working with students with disabilities on inclusive practices and instructional strategies, as well as talking with them if there are any issues that arise. He also shared that there is a purple binder system in place that contains the paperwork for all SWDs at the school and provides their accommodations and modifications, or behavior plans they may have. These can often be changed routinely based on the students' needs and reviews. The Student Service Team meets with the county personnel once a month to review students' IEPs and 504 Plans. He informed me that the testing and assessment procedures for standardized testing includes "all hands on deck", every room and every person helps. He shared that communication is done in many different ways, but email seems to be the most common. He is often copied on the classroom teachers' email to parents of a child that he may work with in Learning Lab or MTSS for an issue they are having. He also expressed that the

parents often notify and reach out to them about concerns, questions, or issues they may have. He was not sure about dissemination of the School Improvement Plan or specific goals the school had for SWDs, however he said he felt that the overall goal of the school was to just “do the best” so that the students can feel that they have achieved success.

Observations

Fourth Grade

Fourth grade was observed on March 28, 2017 between 1:20PM and 1:50PM. The class size was large and consisted of 25 students, but the classroom was rather small and it was very tight, not a lot of room to move around. There were two students in the class that had shadows with them. I had observed both these students in the Elementary Learning Lab earlier in the day. A few students in the room had chair bands and upon looking in the purple binder learned several students had ADHD. One student had a mouth piece and a stress relieving item he could shake. There were several behavior issues in the class that were apparent immediately upon walking into the room. The teacher had a good rapport with the students, but was stern and clear with her expectations and rules. There was also an assistant that helped in the classroom. She passed out papers, redirected students, answered questions about the assignment, and whatever else was needed. Students worked on a religion activity that had to do with Easter. They looked up bible verses to decorate the eggs in a way that illustrated the bible verse. They were grouped into small groups of three to work on the assignment and the teacher and assistant rotated around the room to assist. Assistant seemed to mainly work and alleviate the group that had the more extreme behavior issues.

Several students (13 out of 25) in the class had either an IEP, SP, 504 Plan, or reports from a Psychologist with accommodations. These disabilities varied from SLD, speech impairment, ASD, gifted, and ADD or ADHD. One of the students that had a shadow often barked or shouted aloud and the shadow had to calm him down and soothe and redirect him. She had a system that worked and it was obvious she knew and worked closely with him. When looking in the purple binder, I discovered he was diagnosed as having ASD, language impairment, physical and occupational therapy. His accommodations and modifications were one-on-one instruction, modified curriculum, reduced work, extra time, and picture tests. The second student with a shadow seemed to lose focus on tasks quite often and stare off at nothing in particular. The shadow had to redirect and engage him quite frequently. Upon looking at his document and plan in the purple binder, I learned that he also had ASD, language impairment, and occupational therapy. His accommodations were one-on-one instruction, use of a math grid, reduced work, and extra time. Another student in the class had ASD, language impairment, and occupational therapy, but did not have shadow. The assistant worked a great deal with him and the teacher planned her instruction accordingly, based on the needs of the classroom. She differentiated instruction a great deal for this particular class. She did a lot of group activities and center style teaching with frequent, ten minute rotations. She also used visual supports in her instruction, books on tape, often read tests aloud to students that needed it, reduced the workload if student's plan stated the need, and provided examples first. She was very flexible and accommodating to the students' needs. She also had a behavior plan which used clips and when the groups were on task or behaving in the way she expected, she would give them a "clip-up".

APPENDIX K: EXAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSES TABLE WITH FIVE THEMES

Table 5: Data Analyses Table with Five Key Themes

	Catholic educators' belief to educate all students	Support provided for inclusive education	Planning for inclusive education	Differentiated instruction	Consistency of vision and goals for inclusive education
Interviews:	<p>The principal, Wendy provided the following statement about her beliefs: all students should be “included and part of the Catholic school community”.</p> <p>Kimberly shared that there has been a lot of time and attention taken to make inclusion work at the Elementary school and help students get where they need to be. She said it really is a “top, down approach” and “the principal has been a huge asset”.</p>	<p>Stephanie said she “provides support for behavior and behavior plans throughout the school and additional resource support for students in grades K-2, which includes RTI/MTSS”.</p>	<p>Wendy shared that they plan students’ “transitioning from elementary to middle school grades, and then from middle school to high school” and they “work closely with the high school to learn what expectations they have in order to best prepare their middle school students for the transition”.</p>	<p>Kimberly said she “differentiates her instruction and assignments for students’ individual levels” and “uses formative and summative assessments to determine their level and needs”..</p>	<p>Wendy shared that “SWDs are progress monitored regularly based on their plans” and she ensures that students “receive every accommodation they need during testing or assessments”. The documents contained in the “purple binders for the SWDs are considered living documents, therefore they can change as accommodations or modifications are added or changed” for the student.</p>
Observations:	<p>In each classroom, I observed all students included and treated fairly and with respect.</p>	<p>I observed shadows and ESE certified teacher in the elementary <i>Learning Lab</i>, shadows in the fourth and fifth grade classrooms, support from administration through resources needed for the SWDs.</p>	<p>In almost every classroom, I observed the objectives posted and a behavior plan.</p>	<p>I observed students in the <i>Learning Lab</i> working on individualized plans with their shadows or in small groups.</p>	<p>Every classroom had the purple binders.</p>

APPENDIX L: FREQUENCIES OF TOTAL INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES
WITHIN EACH DOMAIN ON THE SURVEY

Table 6: Survey Results Set 1

Survey Questions based primarily on Kern’s 2006 <i>Survey of Teacher Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education Within an Urban School District</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My diocese provides sufficient out-of-diocese training opportunities to appropriately teach students with disabilities.	31.25%	12.50%	50.00%	6.25%	0.00%
My educational background has prepared me to teach students with disabilities.	18.75%	25.00%	12.50%	37.50%	6.25%
My diocese provides sufficient inservice training through my school for teaching students with disabilities.	25.00%	43.75%	18.75%	12.50%	0.00%
Collaborative teaching of children with disabilities can be effective particularly when students with an IEP are placed in a regular classroom.	43.75%	43.75%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Special education teachers should teach students who hold an IEP.	6.25%	31.25%	37.50%	6.25%	18.75%
Regular education teachers should not be responsible for teaching children with disabilities.	0.00%	6.25%	6.25%	37.50%	50.00%
General education teachers should only be responsible for teaching students who are not identified as having disabilities.	0.00%	6.25%	6.25%	43.75%	43.75%
Both regular education teachers and special education teachers should teach students with an IEP.	37.50%	50.00%	6.25%	6.25%	0.00%
Teachers are provided with enough time, monetary support, and sufficient material at my school, in order to attend conferences/workshops in teaching students with disabilities.	25.00%	37.50%	18.75%	12.50%	6.25%
Administrators support teachers when faced with challenges presented by students with disabilities in my classroom.	43.75%	43.75%	6.25%	6.25%	0.00%
All students who have an IEP for any reason need to receive their education in a special education classroom.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	37.50%	62.50%
My colleagues are willing to help me with issues which may arise when I have students with disabilities in my classroom.	62.50%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Students who are diagnosed as autistic need to be in special education classes.	0.00%	0.00%	18.75%	43.75%	37.50%
All efforts should be made to educate students with disabilities in the regular education classroom.	31.25%	56.25%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Students who are diagnosed as mentally retarded should be in special education classrooms.	0.00%	26.67%	33.33%	20.00%	20.00%

Table 7: Survey Results Set 2

Survey Questions based primarily on <i>BPIE: Leadership and Decision-Making</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
In order to identify barriers and initiate improvement steps that increase the number of students with disabilities throughout the school, administration analyzes data.	25.00%	50.00%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%
Short and long term goals to implement and improve inclusive educational practices are included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).	25.00%	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
There is a lead person who oversees and monitors the implementation of best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.	62.50%	31.25%	0.00%	6.25%	0.00%
All SWDs are advocated to have the same school choice options as students without disabilities at my school.	37.50%	37.50%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%
School data reflect that all SWDs receive their education and related services in age and grade appropriate, general education contexts at least 80% of the day.	37.50%	31.25%	25.00%	6.25%	0.00%
Expectations for all school personnel are communicated by the administrators at your school to share responsibility for all students, including SWDs as general education students first.	37.50%	43.75%	12.50%	0.00%	6.25%
We encourage the use of resources, by school personnel, to implement best practices for inclusive education for all SWDs.	43.75%	43.75%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Job interview questions appraise applicant's knowledge and beliefs pertaining to diversity and inclusive practices, as applicable to the position.	12.50%	25.00%	56.25%	6.25%	0.00%
All SWDs have the same opportunities as students without disabilities to participate in all of our school sponsored activities.	62.50%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Equal consideration is given to all students, including SWDs for recognition through honors, awards and other awards offered by my school.	56.25%	43.75%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Data at my school is analyzed to identify professional development and technical assistance needed for school personnel to implement effective inclusive practices.	50.00%	31.25%	12.50%	6.25%	0.00%
Collaborative planning time is used productively at our school and is reflected in both general and special education staff schedules and instructional plans.	56.25%	18.75%	18.75%	0.00%	6.25%

Table 8: Survey Results Set 3

Survey Question for <i>BPIE Communication and Collaboration</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
All special education teachers at my school fully collaborate with members of the general education curriculum team.	62.50%	31.25%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%

Survey Question for <i>BPIE Communication and Collaboration</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
General and special education teachers at my school have and use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time to discuss their responsibilities while planning effective instruction and assessment for all students.	25.00%	37.50%	31.25%	0.00%	6.25%
Family members of SWDs contribute to school decision-making groups.	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Learning opportunities and resources are given to families of SWDs based on needs assessments and student data.	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Family members of SWDs are considered a resource and all personnel obtain their input in planning and problem-solving.	31.25%	43.75%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%
Our School Improvement Plan (SIP) and other reports regarding progress in implementation of inclusive practices are disseminated to families, school district personnel, and community members annually.	18.75%	37.50%	43.75%	0.00%	0.00%
My school uses a person-centered planning process for SWDs.	18.75%	62.50%	18.75%	0.00%	0.00%
To ensure SWDs transition from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district with placement in the least restrictive environment, my school uses a team decision-making process.	25.00%	50.00%	18.75%	0.00%	6.25%

Table 9: Survey Results Set 4

Survey Questions based primarily on <i>BPIE: Instruction and Student Achievement</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
All teachers at my school have regularly scheduled opportunities to consult with special education teachers and related service providers to assist in implementing strategies to support the learning of all SWDs in their classes.	25.00%	25.00%	31.25%	0.00%	18.75%	0.00%
The Florida Standards are used as the foundation for instruction of all SWDs, including those with a significant cognitive disability by general and special education teachers at my school.	31.25%	37.50%	18.75%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
A multi-tiered system of student supports (MTSS) and a problem-solving process is used by school personnel at my school on a consistent basis to ensure progress in the general education curriculum, across all grades and settings, for all students with and without disabilities.	25.00%	31.25%	18.75%	18.75%	0.00%	6.25%

Survey Questions based primarily on <i>BPIE: Instruction and Student Achievement</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
All instructional and related services personnel at my school use formative assessment processes and tools to gather, analyze, and evaluate data about effective instruction and behavior interventions for all students with and without disabilities in general education classes.	37.50%	43.75%	6.25%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Teachers of SWDs at my school, who spend less than 80% of their day in general education classes use formative assessment data to identify effective instructional and behavioral interventions that, when implemented in general education classes, allow SWDs to make progress toward meeting learning goals.	31.25%	25.00%	6.25%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%
My school has a school wide approach to facilitate positive, interdependent relationships and social responsibility among all students with and without disabilities across all general education and natural contexts.	62.50%	25.00%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%	6.25%
My school has a school wide approach for planning and implementing Universal Design for Learning across all instructional and non-instructional school contexts.	25.00%	37.50%	25.00%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%
There are a variety of service delivery models in place at my school and across all grade levels to provide instruction and related services to SWDs in general education classes.	18.75%	56.25%	12.50%	6.25%	0.00%	6.25%
All paraprofessionals at my school have received PD, which includes clear descriptions of their work responsibilities and strategies for providing support to SWDs in general education classrooms.	6.67%	33.33%	20.00%	33.33%	6.67%	0.00%

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