1-2019

Implementation of Least Restrictive Environment and Cumulative Placement Rates

Sarah Eckhoff

Implementation of Least Restrictive Environment and Cumulative Placement Rates

by

Sarah R. Eckhoff

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Education in

Educational Administration and Leadership

May, 2019

Dissertation Committee:
Kay Worner, Chairperson
Janine Dahms-Walker
David Lund
John Eller

Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has mandated students with disabilities receive a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Research has unmasked a pattern of placement in more restrictive setting placements based on pre-existing programming. The study explores the effects the presence of self-contained programing has on the implementation of LRE and cumulative placement rates (CPR) in select Minnesota public elementary schools.

Key Words: Special Education Placement, Least Restrictive Environment, Educational Placement, Federal Setting, Placement Rates, Self-Contained Programs

Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents, husband and DOBBs this would not have happened without your love, guidance and support.

Acknowledgements

To my dissertation committee Dr. Kay Worner, Dr. Janine Dahms-Walker, Dr. David Lund and Dr. John Eller, my deepest gratitude for your encouragement, support, sharing your wisdom and endless hours of editing. This study would not have been possible without Dr. Kay Worner who selflessly offered her knowledge and time to inspire and motivate me to complete this work.

Thank you to Cohort VIII, your continuous support was essential to my completion of this journey. Jill, Marcia and Michelle, we have weathered so much together these last three years. May we continue to "do hard things"! Thank you for your sisterhood.

Finally, thank you to my family. You supported me through one of the biggest accomplishments of my life. I owe a lifetime of gratitude to my parents who instilled in me a value of education and cultivated my persistence. A special thank you to my husband, Andy, for his love, support and accepting my expensive hobby; my education.

Table of Contents

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

List of Tables

Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

The most recent national statistics indicated 6.6 million students ages 3-21 received special education services during the 2015-2016 school year, accounting for 13% of the public school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Students receiving special education are afforded certain rights by the United States Federal Government (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Since the Education for All Handicapped Act was passed in 1975, schools have been required to educate students in their Least Restrictive Environment (McCarty, 2006). Morningstar, Kurth, and Johnson explained, "Although the least restrictive environment in principle is universally accepted, there continue to be concerns regarding how it is interpreted and operationalized (2017, p. 3). A continuum of services is needed to meet the unique needs of each student with a disability (IDEA, 2004; McCarty, 2006; Taylor, 2004). The variety of services needed combined with the multitude of factors influencing availability of resources and placement decisions made by Individual Education Program (IEP) teams creates variation in the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment (Morningstar et al., 2017). IDEA, Circuit Court decisions, and peer reviewed literature maintain that the general education classroom should be the first educational setting considered (IDEA, 2004, Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Taylor, 2004).

Nationally, 13.7% of students received special education services in a separate setting indicating that they spend 40% or less of their day in the general education setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Self-contained classrooms or programs are one of the service delivery models used to meet the needs of these students. Morningstar et al. (2017) concluded that "IEP teams may be more likely to decide student placement based on existing

specialized programs." According to Daymond, Gilson, and Myran (2007), IEP teams may over rely on separate classrooms and schools due to a lack of understanding about the impact of placement decisions. Research is needed to understand the effect of pre-existing programs on IEP team placement decisions and the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Act; specifically, the requirement for students receiving special education to be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment (IDEA, 2004). IDEA requires that students receiving special education services be educated with students in the general education classroom and have access to general education curriculum to the "maximum extent appropriate" (IDEA, 2004). Additionally, students are only to be removed from the general education classroom to be educated in separate classrooms or schools when the student's disability is so severe that supplementary aids and services in the general education setting will not provide him or her with an appropriate education (IDEA, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was to analyze cumulative placement rates (CPR) of students receiving special education services in Minnesota public elementary schools in order to determine whether the presence of Federal Setting III, self-contained programs increased or decreased Least Restrictive Environment opportunities for students. Morningstar et al. (2017) and Daymond et al. (2007) identified a trend in placement decisions being made based on existing programs and an overreliance on self-contained programming. Findings from these two studies directly contradicted the expectation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act which required that schools maintain a continuum of placements and that each student be educated in

their Least Restrictive Environment (IDEA, 2004). There is limited research on the effects of having established elementary self-contained special education classrooms, on the implementation of least restrictive environment and educational setting cumulative placement rates. Results from the study may assist school leaders in determining special education service delivery models, influence placement decisions for students receiving special education services and improve implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in Minnesota elementary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine Minnesota elementary principals' rating of indicators of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in select public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact of self-contained programs on cumulative student placement rates in Federal Settings. The study examined the following aspects of Least Restrictive Environment and Federal Setting placement rates of students receiving special education services: the availability of a self-contained Federal Setting III program in a school and its impact on cumulative placement rates of special education students "in the general education classroom less than 40% of the day"; principal ratings on Least Restrictive Environment indicators in the areas of educational infrastructure; instructional capacity; school culture, climate, and leadership; and family and community engagement, in elementary schools that have self-contained Federal Setting III and those that do not; and cumulative placement rate data comparing schools with and without self-contained programs.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher acknowledges the following assumptions of the study:

- Principals have knowledge of the special education services provided in their elementary school in order to complete the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool.
- Principals objectively rated the implementation of LRE at their elementary schools.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are boundaries controlled by the research and applied to narrow the scope of the study (Roberts, 2010). Delimitations of the study include:

- The study focused on the review of literature and law pertaining to Least Restrictive Environment it does not include literature concerning inclusion. Inclusion is a multifaceted topic that is frequently intertwined with LRE. For the purpose of this study LRE was isolated to analyze the implementation as described in special education law.
- The researcher limited the population to public elementary schools in Minnesota.
- The study did not address the principals' role in leading/overseeing special education practices and the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in elementary schools.

Research Questions

1. How did select Minnesota elementary principals rate the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in elementary schools that offered self-contained Federal Setting III programs and those that did not?
2. How did select Minnesota principals' rating of implementation indicators of Least Restrictive Environment compare with cumulative placement rates of special education students in their schools?

3. What effect did the availability or lack of availability of a self-contained, Federal Setting III program in an elementary school have on the cumulative placement rates of special education students in the elementary schools participating in the study?

Definition of Terms

Cumulative Placement Rate: The number of students in an education setting per 100 students enrolled in the elementary school. The formula utilized in the study was adapted from the cumulative placement rate formula used to by Danielson and Bellamy in their 1989 study.

Child Count Data: The data collected by Minnesota Department of education reporting the number of students birth through age 21 who are eligible to receive special education and related services and have a current IEP signed by parents by December first of the year. Children are reported by their resident district regardless of where the student is served. Disability category and Federal Setting are also reported (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2018).

Federal Settings: the percentage of time a student spends in special education (MDE, 2018).

Federal Setting I: 0-21% in special education (MDE, 2018).

Federal Setting II: 21-60% in special education (MDE, 2018).

Federal Setting III: 60% or more in special education (MDE, 2018).

***Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*:** Public schools are required to provide an education that meets the individual needs of a student determined through evaluation and placement including modifications, aids and related services free of charge to students with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Individual Education Program: "a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised" (IDEA, 2004)

***Individual Education Program Team*:** "a group of individuals composed of—

i) the parents of a child with a disability

ii) not less than 1 regular education teacher of such child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);

iii) not less than 1 special education teacher, or where appropriate not less than one special education provider of such child;

iv) A representative of the local education agency who—

I. Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities

II. Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and

III. Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the local education agency;

v) An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in clauses(ii) through(vi)

vi) At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related service personnel as appropriate; and

vii) whenever appropriate, the child with a disability" (IDEA, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA): A law passed in 1975 under the title The Education for All Handicapped Children Act mandating a Free and Appropriate public education for all children, including children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is one that provides the appropriate supports and services while also the greatest amount of access to same age peers and grade level curriculum (Salvador & Pasiali, 2017). IDEA (2004) defines LRE, "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Least Restrictive Implementation: for the purpose of this study least restrictive environment implementation was based on the least restrictive environment indicators identified in the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool (Appendix E).

Least Restrictive Indicators: for the purpose of this study least restrictive indicators referred to areas rated using the Least Restrictive Rating Tool adapted from the District Level LRE Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Activities Tool in the areas educational infrastructure; instructional capacity; school culture, climate, and leadership; and family and community engagement (SPP-TAP, 2011, California Department of Education, 2005).

Self-contained program: a special education setting or classroom where a student with disabilities spends 60% or more of their school day (Kurth, 2015).

***Separate setting*:** Education of a student with a disability occurs in a separate school, residential setting, in home or in a hospital (Kurth, 2015).

Summary

Research is needed to understand the impact of established self-contained classrooms on IEP team placement decisions and the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment. A trend in placement decisions being made based on existing programs and an overreliance on self-contained programming (Daymond et al., 2007; Morningstar et al. 2017) directly contradict the expectations of the Individuals with Disabilities Act requiring that schools maintain a continuum of placements and that each student be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment (IDEA, 2004). There is limited research on the effects of having an established elementary self-contained, special education, classrooms on the implementation of least restrictive environment and educational setting cumulative placement rates. The problem of the study was to analyze whether the presence of Federal Setting III, self-contained programs increased or decreased Least Restrictive Environment opportunities for students. The purpose of the study was to determine Minnesota elementary principals' rating of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact of self-contained programs on cumulative student placement rates in Federal Settings.

The review of related literature in Chapter II provides an overview of disability and special education law, least restrictive environment, educational setting placements, case law, financial incentives for identification and placement in more restrictive setting, and self-contained programs.

Chapter III describes the quantitative study including methodology, participants, IRB approval, instruments for data collection and analysis, research design, procedures, and timeline.

Chapter IV presents a comprehensive analysis of the data compiled from the principal's LRE ratings and school cumulative placement rates.

Chapter V presents a summary of the findings, the researcher's conclusions based upon the collected data, recommendations for future research and recommendations for professional practice.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine principals' ratings of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in select public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact of self-contained programs on cumulative student placement rates in Federal Settings. Topics of this chapter include:

- Disability and Special Education Law
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Educational Setting Placements
- Case Law
- Financial Incentives for Identification and Placement in More Restrictive Setting.
- Self-Contained Programs
- Summary

Disability and Special Education Law

More than 60 years ago *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) set into motion the development of a national system for educating students with disabilities. "...In 1975, one in five students with identified disabilities attended school..." (Aron & Loprest, 2012, p. 100). Before the mid-1970s, school administrators were able to refuse to enroll any students they self-labeled as "uneducable" (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Changes in disability law and public policy over the last four decades regulate how American schools educate students with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The passage of the Act in 1973 was a fundamental turning point (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits any agency receiving federal monies from discriminating against people with disabilities. Title II of the Americans

with Disabilities Act extends this mandate to any State or local government activity, whether or not they receive Federal funding (ADA, 1990). All public schools in the United States receive government funding, obligating them to abide by this law and educate students with a range of disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012; McCann, 2014).

Schools were further impacted by the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act. "Building on the court decisions in the early special education and institutional cases, Congress implicitly endorsed the principle of the least restrictive environment in P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975…" (Taylor, 2004, p. 219). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was revised and renamed: The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990, required schools to provide students with disabilities a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Furthermore, "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—requires that students with disabilities be educated in the most integrated, least restrictive environment for those students" (Carson, 2015, p. 1399). Federal Law states:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities including children in public and private institutions or other care facilities are educated with children who are not disabled . . . or removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEA, 1997)

The idea of integration is predominant in both special education and United States disability law (Carson, 2015). Congress declared that 30 years of research and experience established the need for integration into the general education classroom including access to

general education curriculum and appropriate supports to effectively education students with disabilities [20 U.S.C. Secs. 1400(c)(5)(A) & (D)]. IEP teams are charged with the responsibility of providing a justification statement describing how the student's disability affects the student's participation and progress in the general education classroom and curriculum [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(d)(1)(A)(i); 34 C.F.R. Secs. 300.320(a)(1) & (2)]. Aron and Loprest summarized the amendments to IDEA in 1997, "focused on improving students' access to the general education classroom and curriculum, developing more accurate and appropriate assessment of academic achievement, implementing better discipline procedures and alternative placement options…" (2012, p. 100). These amendments were evidence of the United States government's' continued support for integration of students with disabilities into schools and classrooms with their non-disabled peers.

Over the last 40 years, the United States education system has made strides toward providing education to all (Duncan, 2010). The Americans with Disabilities Act and IDEA were fundamental in determining how the United States provides educational services for children with disabilities. Furthermore, IDEA guarantees the right for a student with a disability to receive a free and appropriate education in their least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment

The education of students with disabilities was originally separate from the education system for children without disabilities (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008). According to Richardson (1994) the 1800-1900s gave rise to three separate systems of education "the common, the delinquent, and the special" (1994, p. 715). Educational services for children with disabilities were initially created with the logic that specialized schools and classes would provide more individualized and specialized programming. Jackson et al. expounded,

educational services for students with extensive support needs were first developed based on the rationale that self-contained schools and classes could provide efficient and feasible services leading to optimal outcomes. Factors considered included the view that services in self-contained settings could focus on individualized curriculum needs that differed from those of general education students, that such services allowed for more instructional time because of a better adult-to-student ratio, and that such services permitted more specialized instruction by personnel with appropriate expertise (2008, p. 186).

The 1950s brought the deinstitutionalization movement (Lin, 2003). Parents played a central role in the process, refuting the idea that their children with disabilities were better off in residential programs or hospitals (Jackson et al., 2008). The philosophy of Least Restrictive Alternative (LRA) was born out the deinstitutionalization movement (Lin, 2003). Turnbull defined LRA as "A method of limiting government intrusion into peoples' lives and rights even when the government is acting in an area which is properly open to government action" (1981, p. 26). "The principle of the LRE can be traced to the 'separate is never equal' doctrine found in *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas" (Marx et al., 2014, p. 45) and the 1970s right-to-education cases (Crockett, 2014). The rulings from Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971) and the Mills v. Board of Education (1972) borrowed the LRA concept from the deinstitutionalization movement. Crockett (2014) clarified, "The concept of the least restrictive alternative (LRA) was familiar to lawyers, foreign to educators, and embraced by parents who wanted a better education for their children than institution of homebound services could provide" (p. 42). Ultimately, the term least restrictive environment replaced the language of least restrictive alternative, in education (Crockett, 2014).

The responsibility of United States schools to educate student in their Least Restrictive Environment can be found in IDEA as well as in the implementation regulations (Carson, 2015). The Least Restrictive Environment concept originates from both law and professional literature (Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Taylor, 2004). Peer reviewed publications in the field of special education have impacted the interpretation and practice of least restrictive environment by legislation and the court system (Taylor, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (1994) described LRE as: inclusion with nondisabled peers to the fullest extent possible. Through meta-analysis, Oh-Young and Filler found that 80 years of educational research supported the integration of students with disabilities in the general education setting with non-special education peers (2015). Taylor explained, "LRE is commonly associated with the most integrated or normalized setting possible" (2004, p. 219). Since 1976, The Council for Exceptional Children supported the mindset that children with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment (Taylor, 2004). The LRE principle is pivotal in determining how educational services are provided to individuals with disabilities (Taylor, 2004).

A variety of services are needed to meet the unique needs of each individual with a disability (Marx et al., 2014; Reynolds, 1962; Taylor, 2004). In 1962, Reynolds identified the "continuum" of programming services and supports needed to educate students with disabilities. Taylor explained," Since its earliest conceptualization, the LRE principle has been defined operationally in terms of a continuum, an ordered sequence of placements that vary according to the degree of restrictiveness" (2004, p. 220). IDEA (2004) required "Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services" [300.115 (A)]. This umbrella of educational services ranged in restrictiveness, or time spent the in the regular classroom. Marx et

al. (3014) argued, “It is important that schools have available a series of alternative placements that are hierarchical, with the preferred setting as the regular classroom to special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions, and that there be supplemental services available to maintain students’ placements in the LRE setting” (p. 45). The continuum allows schools to provide education services to a diverse population of unique learners (Martin et al., 1996). Carson (2015) articulated, “To meet the varying needs of students with a wide range of disabilities, special education services are offered on a continuum of placements, ranging from the least restrictive setting—a general education classroom—to the most restrictive placements in separate special education schools and institutions” (p. 1399). LRE is a continuum of services that range in restrictiveness based on a student's involvement in the regular education classroom and school (IDEA, 2004). Rozalski, Stewart, and Miller (2010) stressed, “...it is important to recognize the LRE is not a specific placement nor is there a single definition of what the least restrictive environment (LRE) is for each student” (p. 152).

Educational Settings Placements

A student's educational setting placement is measured by time spent in the general/ regular education classroom (IDEA, 2004). Taylor (2004) illustrated that each student receiving special education services can be placed somewhere on the continuum. The United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (2016) identified eight different setting placements:

1. Inside regular class 80% or more of day,
2. Inside regular class no more than 79% of day and no less than 40% of the day,
3. Inside regular class less than 40% of the day,
4. Separate School,

5. Residential Facility,
6. Homebound/Hospital,
7. Correctional Facilities,
8. Parentally-placed in Private Schools.

Education setting placement of a child receiving special education services is determined by the child's Individual Education Program (IEP) team (Anonymous, 2007; McCarty, 2006). Special education law requires that the team make a decision about education setting placement of a child based on the IEP, must be determined at least annually, and is as close to the students home as possible [IDEA, Section 300.116 (b) (1-3)]. Furthermore, IDEA (2004) instructed:

1. Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled;
2. In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs; and
3. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum. [Section 300.116 (c-e)]

States report education setting data annually to the United States Department of Education; this data is referred to as child count. Data analysis over the last 30 years has indicated an increase of students educated in the general education setting (Morningstar et al., 2017; Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). Data reported to the United States Department of Education indicated that during the 1989-1990 school year, 34% of students receiving special education services were in the general education setting for the majority of their school year (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). This percentage increased to 58% by the 2007-2008 school year (Hoppey &

McLeskey, 2013). Education setting placement rates provide a method to analyze the implementation of the LRE principle (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). Table 2.1 depicts the most recently reported United States and Minnesota placement rates for students receiving special education services in Federal Setting I, II, III.

Table 2.1

Federal Setting/Educational Setting Rates (U. S. Department of Education, 2017)

	Federal Setting I	Federal Setting II	Federal Setting III
	Inside regular class 80% or more of day	Inside regular class 79% of day to 40% of the day	Inside regular class less than 40% of the day
United States	62.7%	18.7%	13.5%
Minnesota	50.0%	22.8%	19.4%

The LRE and Federal Setting placement for a student is determined by the student's individual education team. Research identified numerous factors that may impact a team's placement decision (Ajuwon & Oyinlade, 2008; Banerjee, Sundeen, Hutchinson & Jackson, 2017; Morningstar et al., 2017). Banerjee et al. (2017) studied factors the influence placement decisions for students with multiple disabilities. Researchers concluded that socioeconomic status, parental involvement, parent expectations and parents' education level and English as a second language impact placement decisions made by IEP teams (Banerjee et al., 2017). Segall and Campbell (2014) discovered that students were placed in less restrictive settings when teachers felt competent and were surrounded by others who valued inclusion. Morningstar et al. (2017) identified social skills deficits, communication deficits, extensive behavior problems, teacher training, and availability of service providers as factors that influence IEP team's

placement decisions. Ajuwon and Oyinlade (2008) recognized classroom size and being able to attend the same school as their siblings as influences to parent placement decisions.

The age of the student receiving special education services also influenced the educational placement (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 1995). Students of elementary school age (6-11) are more likely to be served in the general education setting than secondary students, ages 12-21. This trend is attributed to the less complex environment and curriculums of elementary school (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 1995). The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs identified practices to increase the inclusion of students with significant disabilities in the general education setting: planning and implementing for students with disabilities with a team of professionals with diverse training and experience, a vision for inclusion and actions toward that vision, family involvement, continued professional development and support for general education and special education teachers (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 1995).

Beyond the principal's role in providing professional development, collaboration opportunities and a vision, O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015) conducted further research to understand principals' role in the implantation of LRE. The study revealed that "at a school level, presumably street-level implementation depends on the professional discretion and leadership of principals" (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015, p. 142), additionally, "principals abdicated their roles as street-level bureaucrats and spoke passively as policy tools, held to an external mandate they could not explain" (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015, p. 156). Principals often serve as the Local Education Agency (LEA) Representative on IEP teams (Moore, 2012). As the LEA representative, the school principal serves as the expert of the available resources within the

school (Moore, 2012). However, principals indicated that they deferred to the special education teachers for Least Restrictive Environment implementation (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). Moore (2009) suggested that knowledge of the educational setting placement process is necessary and that principals should consider implementing a systematic procedure for a team to determine Least Restrictive Environment. Studies in the field of special education have established a list of components that affect education placement settings for students receiving special education.

The Federal government has determined that the following may not be the sole reason for placement decisions made by the IEP team:

1. Category of disability,
2. Severity of disability,
3. Configuration of delivery systems,
4. Availability of educational or related services,
5. Availability of space,
6. Administrative convenience [71 Fed. Reg. 46540, 46588 (Aug 14, 2006)].

According to Federal policy it is not appropriate to place a student in a more restrictive educational setting for reasons other than student need (Disability Rights California, 2011). Lack of appropriate resources is not an adequate justification for placing a student in a more restrictive educational setting (IDEA, 2004).

In Article 8.2.3 of the 2004 IDEA congress stated, "Special education is not a 'place,' but rather a set of services delineated in the student's IEP [individualized education program]. Regardless of this statement, IEP teams continue to equate educational setting to supplementary aids and services" (Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). Crockett (2014) explained, "Currently, there is no

national framework to guide courts in making placement decisions, and to date the Supreme Court has denied hearing any LRE cases" (p. 45). With the absence of a description of LRE being provided by legislation and the Supreme Court, circuit courts were charged with the responsibility of interpreting and determining LRE to educational staff (Marx et al., 2014; McCarty,2006). This resulted in, "a student determined to be receiving FAPE in the LRE in one district may find his or her LRE different within another district" (Marx et al., 2014, p. 45). In other words, a student with similar individual characteristics may be placed in a different educational setting from one district to the next. Districts and individual schools inherently have a range of services and placements available to meet the needs of students with special needs enrolled in their institutions (Carson, 2015; Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). The continuum of environments available can be influenced by a number of variables including; population, funding, and mindsets of leadership (Palley, 2003; Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). The review of literature reveals that this natural occurrence of discrepant availability of services directly influences the practice of LRE.

Special Education Law required that students with disabilities be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment (Carson, 2015; IDEA, 2004). Congress and 80 years of data from research in the field of special education support the argument that students should be educated in their regular school and classroom (IDEA, 2004; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Taylor, 2004). Additionally, a continuum of services is needed to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners with a range of disabilities (Carson, 2015; IDEA, 2004; Marx et al., 2014). IEP teams are responsible for implementing the guidelines outlined by IDEA to determine the LRE for students receiving special education services [IDEA, Section 300.116]. Congress and the United States court system have stated that LRE is not a location, rather the services provided (IDEA, 2004,

Article 8.2.3). Interpretation of LRE has been given to IEP teams and the circuit court system (Marx et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2017).

Case Law

Education case law provides an opportunity to understand how the LRE principle was interpreted and governed by the court system (Rozalski et al., 2010). Disagreements between parent and school district regarding a student's LRE placement are first addressed by due process hearing officers, then district courts and finally the circuit court system (Rozalski et al., 2010). Rulings reached by circuit courts become case law for the ruling circuit (Rozalski et al., 2010).

Initial circuit court cases identified a pattern of support for placement in general education classes and regular schools whenever possible (Weintraub, Abeson, Ballard, & Favor, 1976). Federal courts upheld the right of students with disabilities to be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment with decisions made in Mills v. Board of Education (1972) and Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971) (Weintraub et al., 1976). Moreover, the settlement from the PARC case reinforced that the regular school and classroom are the most desirable placement for educating students with disabilities (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971, 1972). The PARC agreement stated, "...among the alternative programs of education and training required by statute to be available, placement in a regular public school class is preferable to placement in a special public school class and placement in a special public school class is preferable to placement in any other type of program of education and training" (334 F.Supp. 1257, p. 25). Early special education case law advised integration rather than alternative placements (Weintraub et al., 1976).

The court system initially supported the education of students with disabilities in their regular schools and classrooms (Weintraub et al., 1976). The decisions made since those initial cases, and with subsequent revisions to IDEA, another pattern of outcomes has emerged (Palley, 2003):

> The IDEA has been interpreted differently in each federal circuit court because, as noted earlier, these court decisions are based on the individual rights of the students for whom claims have been brought. Therefore, the extent to which IDEA can accomplish its goals of ensuring the education of students with disabilities in the LRE varies depending on the district in which a child resides. Also, the actual implementation of the law depends on who is making the ultimate decision regarding an inclusive or restrictive setting for each disabled child. Thus, even within school districts, different administrators may provide different placement options for similarly situated students with special needs. (Carson, 2015; Crockett, 2014; Palley, 2003)

Recent education case law outcomes reveal a pattern of prioritizing access to appropriate services over inclusion in the general education setting (Carson, 2015; Crockett, 2014). Crockett explained, “In deciding LRE case courts compare the student’s educational benefits with the statute’s overall preference for general class placement” (2014, p. 45). Circuit courts have determined that considerations such as minimal benefits of integration, cost and disruption, can outweigh the preference for inclusion in the general education setting (Crockett, 2014). Aligning with the 2004 statement from congress, that special education is a “set of services,” most recent case law prioritized appropriate educational services over inclusion in the general education setting (Carson, 2015; Crockett, 2014).

When assessing a student's needs and placement the school may make one of two decisions; to place the student in a currently operational classroom/program that most closely meets the student's needs or, design services and programing to meet the educational needs of the student (Carson, 2015). Carson articulated, "Put simply, the LRE requirement can be interpreted in two different ways: to mandate a special education student's placement in the least restrictive environment to meet the student's needs, or in the least restrictive environment available to meet the student's needs" (2015, p. 1399). Carson asserted that, "Historically, courts have favored the 'least restrictive environment available" (2015, p. 1400). The review of literature revealed that case law suggested that LRE for a student was greatly influenced by the resources currently available in the child's school or district.

Circuit court rulings have lacked consensus in their interpretation of Least Restrictive environment (Howard, 2004). Howard explained, "Lack of uniformity among the circuits means that a child with disabilities in one circuit may be placed in the general education classroom, while in another circuit, the same student could be placed in a separate private school" (2004, p. 168). Circuit courts have developed diverse tests and questions to guide IEP teams in determining LRE for individual students (Howard, 2004; Rozalski et al., 2010). Rozalski et al. published the following table in their 2010 article titled "How to Determine Least Restrictive Environment for students with Disabilities":

Table 2.2

Questions for the IEP Team to Consider When Making the LRE Decision (Rozalski et al., 2010, p. 160)

Court Case	Questions to Consider Based on Court Rulings
Roncker v. Walter (1983)	Roncker portability test: 1. If a segregated setting appears to be the preferable placement, could the services provided in the segregated setting be feasibly provided in a setting that is not segregated?
Daniel R. R. v. Board of Education (1989)	Daniel two-part test: 1. Can the education be achieved in the general education classroom with supplemental services? 2. If the student is placed in a restrictive setting, is the student integrated to the maximum extent possible?
Greer v. Rome City School District (1991)	1. Is a placement in the least restrictive environment (general education classroom) appropriate for the student's needs?
Sacramento City Unified School v. Holland (1992)	2. If so, will the student receive an appropriate education with supplemental aids and services?
Oberti v. Board of Education (1993)	
Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H. (1994)	Rachel H. four-factor test: 1. What are the educational benefits of the special vs. general education setting? 2. What are the social benefits of being educated with his or her peers? 3. What is the negative impact of the student with disabilities in the general education classroom? 4. What are the costs of the general education placement?
MR v. Lincolnwood Board of Education (1994)	1. How will the student's placement impact the learning of classmates without disabilities? 2. Is the student more likely to have a successful educational program in a self-contained classroom or a separate school with a structured program and supports?
Clyde K. v. Puyallup School District (1994)	1. Is the student making adequate progress and benefitting academically from a general education placement?
Flour Bluff School District v. Katherine M. (1996)	1. Is the student placed in the school and district that is closest to home?
Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills School District (1995)	2.Does the school closest to home have the supports/resources necessary for an appropriate education program for the student?
Poolaw v. Bishop (1995)	1. Will mainstreaming the student be the most educationally beneficial placement for him/her?
Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1997)	1. Is the student placed with nondisabled peers to the "maximum extent appropriate" under IDEA?

Howard argued, “the adoption of a single test would not only lead to greater uniformity, more importantly it would ensure that relevant factors are addressed by schools and by the courts, if and when needed” (2004, p. 168). The unclear definition of LRE provided by legislation assigned interpretation to Circuit courts and school staff (Marx et al., 2014). Special education, court cases originally favored the general education setting as the LRE (Weintraub et al., 1976). Under the current IDEA law and outcomes of more recent LRE complaints, courts have developed a pattern of favoring the “Least Restrictive Environment available” and appropriate services over integration into the neighborhood school; general education classroom (Carson, 2015).

Financial Incentives for Identification and Placement in More Restrictive Settings

The most recent United States census estimates that 30.5 billion dollars were provided by federal and states governments to fund special education programs (Education Commission of the United States, 2016). Services provided under the umbrella of special education are funded by local, state and federal government (Parrish & Chambers, 1996). Data from 1999-2000 school year indicated that state and local governments each contributed about 45% of special education costs and that the federal government covered approximately 9% (McCann, 2014).

Federal funding for special education, stemming from Part B of IDEA, was previously determined by the number for students receiving special education services (McCann, 2014; Parrish & Chambers, 1996). This model restricted the number of students that can be counted, up to 12% of the school age population (Parrish & Chambers, 1996). McCann declared, “The clear problem with that formula is that it rewards states that identify more special education students with more funding... rather than to help special education students return to mainstream

education" (2014, p. 7). In 1997, congress reformed its special education funding model. The federal government currently determines subsidy allocations using the individual state's public/non-public K-12 population (85%) and the number of students receiving free and reduced priced lunch (15%) living in that state. This change was made in response to concerns that students were being over identified for special education (McCann, 2014). The total federal monies provided for special education total approximately 11.5 billion each school year (McCann, 2014).

Each state employed a formula for determining funding (McCann, 2014; Millard & Aragon, 2015; Parrish & Chambers, 1996). These formulas account for the additional cost for educating students with disabilities. Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen explained, "Funding formulas can be categorized by how they allocate funding" (2016, p. 172). State formulas are comprised of methods including pupil weights, flat grants, census-based, resource-based, percentage reimbursement and variable block grants (McCann, 2014; Millard & Aragon, 2015; Parrish & Chambers, 1996). Congress has ordered, "A State must not use a funding mechanism by which the State distributes funds on the basis of the type of setting in which a child is served that will result in the failure to provide a child with a disability FAPE according to the unique needs of the child, as described in the child's IEP" [IDEA Sec. 300.114 (b) (1) (i)i].

Each states' special education funding formulas influence the methods for providing special education and fiscal benefit (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016). Despite federal direction, some state funding formulas unintentionally provide financial benefits for placing students in more restrictive settings. This occurs when funding is determined by the education placement setting in which special education services are provided (Martin et al., 1996; Parrish & Chambers, 1996) or when states allocate resources based on the number of students identified

needing special education services (McCann, 2014). Parish and Chambers disclosed, "these types of incentives appear to be artifacts of funding systems that were much more focused on other finance issues, such as the adequacy and equity of funding and the ability to track and audit federal funds" (1996, p. 128). The same trend was acknowledged at the federal level:

> Congress has recognized that a state's method of funding special education services can sometimes encourage districts to place students in specialized settings because of the potential to receive more money. Because of this danger, Congress requires states to develop policies and procedures to assure that their funding systems, if based on type of setting, do not violate the requirements of education in the least restrictive environment. [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412(a)(5)(B).]

Alternatively, some states used formulas that mimic the current federal funding formula. These states "institut[e] a base amount of funding per district and/or allocat[e] funds by the full population of student rather than the special education subset" (McCann, 2014, p. 13). Federal special education law "requires school systems to supplement and realign their resources to move beyond those systems, structures and practices which tend to result in unnecessary segregation of children with disabilities" [Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District, 789 F. Supp. 1322. (D.N.J. 1992)]. States with these funding models removed incentives for over identification and placement in more restrictive settings. Notably, these formulas, structured similarly to the federal funding formula, can cause districts with high special education and poverty populations to subsidize the added costs (McCann, 2014; Millard & Aragon, 2015). These census-based formulas assumed the number of students with disabilities were equal regardless of region. Calculations that do not account for disproportionate numbers of students receiving special education services can increase inequality in some district or schools

(Baker & Ramsey, 2010). Census based formulas removed financial benefits for districts that over identify students with disabilities, however, in areas with disproportionately high numbers of students with special education, districts must fiscally subsidize the special education system or provide diminished special education services (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016).

Minnesota made changes to the special education funding formula in 2016 (Minn. Stat. § 125A.76). Strom explained, in his 2017 report to the Minnesota House of Representatives, "Prior to the changes, Minnesota's special education formula was considered a partial cost reimbursement formula" (p. 57). In the fiscal year 2016, district special education funds provided by the state of Minnesota were determined by the following formula:

The sum of its special education-related transportation services, and the lesser of:

(1) 50% of the district's non-federal expenditures for the previous year;

(2) 62% of the district's special education revenue computed under the old formulas; or

(3) 56% of the sum of:

(a) the district's average daily membership times the sum of:

(i) $450;

(ii) $400 times the district's percent eligible for free and reduced-price meals; and

(iii) .008 times the district's average daily membership;

(b) $10,400 times the count of students with autism spectrum disorder, developmental delay, or severely multiply impaired;

(c) $18,000 times the count of students who are deaf/hard of hearing or have an emotional behavioral disorder; and

(d) $27,000 times the count of students who are developmentally cognitive mild-moderate, developmentally cognitive severe-profound, physically impaired, visually impaired, or deafblind. (Minn. Stat. § 125A.76)

In addition to the funding formula districts may be eligible for special education excess cost aid funds (Strom, 2017). Excess cost is determined by the following formula:

The greater of: (1) 56% of the difference between the district's unreimbursed special education expenditures and 7% of the district's general revenue; or (2) 62% of the difference between the district's unreimbursed special education revenue under the former formula and 2.6% of general revenue (Strom, 2017, p. 59).

Minnesota statute declared, "School districts receive state aid and some federal aid to pay for special education services. If these funds are insufficient to pay for the costs of the programs, districts must use other general fund revenue" (Minn. Stat. §§ 125A.75-125A.79). Local state and federal funds are allocated to provide special education services to children with disabilities. The formulas used to determine fiscal resources provided to districts and schools sometimes provide financial incentives for identifying more students and placing them in more restrictive settings (McCann, 2014; Parrish & Chambers, 1996). In contrast, funding formulas that remove the financial incentives for increased numbers of students in more restrictive settings can result in districts needing to compensate for the difference between cost and allocations from the government (McCann, 2014, Millard & Aragon, 2015). Furthermore, state funding formulas have been identified as one aspect "of a larger pattern that produced economic disincentives to integrate students with disabilities" (Weikart, 1998, p. 441).

Self-Contained Programs

Self-contained programs, schools, and classes have their root in the United States history of institutionalizing people with disabilities (Jackson et al., 2008). Kavale and Forness (2000) specify, "historically, special education within the public school system developed as a specialized program separate from general education and was embodied in the categorical 'special class'" (p. 280). Mirroring the ideology of institutionalization, self-contained programing was considered to have benefits including: specially trained teachers, smaller class sizes, individualized instruction and a focus on social and vocational outcomes (Johnson, 1962; Kavale & Forness, 2000). Students placed in self-contained programs spend at a minimum, 60% of their school day in the special education setting (Kurth, 2015). Students served in self-contained classrooms spend almost all of their time with special educators, therapists, and other service providers: these students may join their general education peers for some school activities or lessons (Dev & Haynes, 2015). IDEA stipulates that "special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.550).

Although IDEA (2004) restricts the use of separate special education classrooms and schools, it also requires that public agencies maintain these settings within their continuum of placement options. National data reveals that states vary in rates in which they utilize self-contained classrooms (Hasazi et al., 1994; Kleinert et al., 2015). Researchers have analyzed placement trends in self-contained programs (Daymond et al., 2007; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Morningstar et al., 2017). Hasazi et al. (1994) found six factors influencing the frequency

of placement in self-contained classrooms; “finance, organization, advocacy, implementers, knowledge and values and state/local context” (p. 504). Weikart stated, “Many students with disabilities have been placed in separate settings that do not represent the least restrictive environment” (1998, p. 432). Studies have indicated that existing specialized programs may incite team to consider placement in those restrictive settings (Daymond et al., 2007; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Morningstar et al., 2017). Daymond et al. (2007), believed IEP teams may over rely on separate classrooms and schools due to a lack of understanding about the impact of placement decisions. Kurth (2015) determined that once a student is placed in a self-contained program, he/she usually remains within that setting (White, Scahill, Klin, Koenig, & Volkmar, 2007). Setting placement research revealed trends in placement and withdrawal of students in self-contained programs.

Kurth, Born, and Love (2016) asserted, “Despite the right-basis of inclusive education established by IDEA and the benefits associated with inclusion, a dependence on self-contained setting persists for students with the most significant disabilities” (p. 228). Contrarily, others believe that self-contained programs, with a concentration of services, are a preferable setting for some students receiving special education services. Fisher and Meyer (2002) noted, “concerns continue to be raised that some children with special needs are better served in self-contained environments where special educators, therapists and other special education resource are concentrated” (pp. 263-264). Similarly, Dev and Haynes (2015) discovered that teachers believed “that students with severe social, emotional or physical disabilities were served best in self-contained rooms or separate schools” (p. 59). Researchers examining self-contained programs found that these programs are unsuccessful in providing the specialized instruction and individualized supports believed to be available in the setting (Kurth, 2015; Kurth et al., 2016).

There continues to be opposing views on the use and effectiveness of self-contained settings (Dev & Haynes, 2015; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Kurth, 2015). While IDEA indicated that the general education setting should be considered first, the law also identified a need for a continuum of services including self-contained programs (IDEA, 2004; Kleinert et al., 2015; Martin et al., 1996; Marx et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2017).

In addition to removing students from their general education peers, self-contained programming may further separate students by disability and location. Many self-contained programs are categorical, serving students with the same disability label (Algozzine, Morsink, & Algozzine, 1988). This separation by disability category is evidence that self-contained programs are based in the historical philosophy that separate classes provide learners with disabilities specialized and individualized instruction (Kurth, 2015). Self-contained programs may be located only within certain schools in a district. Sauer and Jorgensen (2016) explained that, "specialized services and programming are often concentrated in certain schools within a district, thus creating cluster-type programs which result in a disproportionate number of students with particular disabilities in one school." They continued, stating that parents are led to believe that in order for their student to receive needed services, they will be required to agree to a more restrictive placement for their student (Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). Students who are placed in self-contained programing may find themselves in a homogeneous classroom in school far from their neighborhood school (Kurth, 2015; Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016).

IDEA (2004) requires that schools maintain a continuum of services including self-contained programs. Requirements about when these programs can be considered by an IEP team are provided by IDEA and the LRE mandate (IDEA, 2004). Despite the data supporting integration into the general education classroom and curriculum, some states continue to utilize

self-contained programming at high rates, especially for students with significant disabilities (Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth, 2015). Alternatively, some believed that self-contained programs with concentrated, specialized services were a preferable setting to educating students with disabilities. Additional factors including the existence of specialized programs (Morningstar et al., 2017) and limited understanding of placement decision outcomes may increase the use of self-contained programs (Daymond et al., 2007).

Summary

In summary, United States disability and special education law has ensured the rights of students with disabilities. IDEA ensures that students receiving special education be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment (Carson, 2015). IDEA, congress and special education research concur that students should be educated in their home schools in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible. Statements made by the United States Congress and decisions made by circuit courts have recently indicated that appropriate services should be prioritized over inclusion in the general education setting (Carson, 2015; Crockett, 2014; IDEA, 2004). Individual Education Program (IEP) teams are responsible for determining the appropriate education placement setting to meet the unique needs of the students (Crockett, 2014). Research in the field of special education has identified a number of factors that may influence placement decisions made by IEP teams (Banerjee et al., 2017; Segall & Campbell, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 1995). Furthermore, the funding formulas used by each state may impact the implementation of LRE for students receiving special education services (McCann, 2014; Parrish & Chambers, 1996). Self-contained programs continue to be utilized in continuum of special education settings (Daymond et al., 2007; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Morningstar et al., 2017). Placement in these

programs varies between states and is most common for students with the most severe disabilities (Hasazi et al., 1994; Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth, 2015). There are conflicting views on the use and effectiveness of self-contained programs (Dev & Haynes, 2015; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Kurth, 2015). Chapter III provides methodology for the study examining the implementation of LRE and cumulative placement rates of student receiving special education services in select Minnesota public elementary schools with and without self-contained special education programs.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to examine principals' ratings of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in select public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact of self-contained programs on cumulative student placement rates in Federal Settings. The study was designed to assist school leaders in determining special education service delivery models, influence placement decisions for student receiving special education services and improve implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in Minnesota elementary schools. Topics of this chapter include:

- Research Questions
- Participants
- Human Subjects Approval- Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- Instruments of Data Collection and Analysis
- Research Design
- Treatment of Data
- Procedures and Timeline

Research Questions

1. How did select Minnesota elementary principals rate the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in elementary schools that offered self-contained Federal Setting III programs and those that did not?

2. How did select Minnesota principals' rating of implementation indicators of Least Restrictive Environment compare with cumulative placement rates of special education students in their schools?
3. What effect did the availability or lack of availability of a self-contained/Federal Setting III program in an elementary school have on the cumulative placement rates of special education students in the elementary schools participating in the study?

Participants

A convenience sample of forty-eight Minnesota public elementary schools from five Minnesota suburban school districts was invited to participate in the study. Study participants included select principals of the identified schools in Minnesota. The districts were chosen for their size, number of elementary schools and distribution of schools with and without self-contained programs. The researcher called districts' Special Education Directors to determine if they met the special education service delivery model criteria for the study. School districts and their elementary schools met the criteria if they were located in the suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul and had at least two elementary schools with and two elementary schools without Federal Setting III self-contained programs. The researcher sent requests to study in each district that met the special education service delivery model criteria. Superintendents from the five participating districts approved the study of their district. Principals' were informed of their superintendents' approval in the consent statement of the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool.

Human Subject Approval–Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The researcher completed the IRB training required by Saint Cloud State University through CITI Training Solution, submitted appropriate application materials, and received approval (Appendix E).

The research design of the study posed limited physical or psychological risk to participants. The only identifying information shared with the researcher were the names of the elementary school and district. District and school names were requested with the sole purpose of being able to match principals' Least Restrictive Environment Tool ratings with the cumulative placement rates provided by the Minnesota Department of Education. The researcher and St. Cloud State Statistical Center were the only individuals with access to the disclosed district and school names. Individual district or elementary school names were not used in description of the findings.

Principals who received the online Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool (Appendix E) were provided an introductory statement explaining the study and that participating in the online Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was their consent. Principals were informed that participation was voluntary and may be discontinued at any time and that refusal to participate at any time would involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which he or she was entitled. Furthermore, confidentiality was addressed specifying that individual schools or districts would not be identified in the study. Only the researcher and St. Cloud State University Statistical Center would have access to the collected identifying information, the elementary school name, for purposes of matching the data the principal provided with cumulative placement rates. Benefits of the study were included. Principals were informed that

the dissertation would be made public and added to the St. Cloud State University online repository.

Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis

The District Level Least Restrictive Environment Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Activities Tool (California Department of Education, 2005) was adapted to the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool (Appendix E) to measure students' access to their least restrictive environment under the areas of educational infrastructure; instructional capacity; school culture, climate, and leadership; and family and community engagement (SPP-TAP, 2011). The researcher edited the language in the rating tool to address school level implementation of Least Restrictive Environment. The word school was substituted for district without further revision whenever possible. Indicator descriptors that pertained only to the district level were removed.

The District Level Least Restrictive Environment Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Activities Tool was developed by the State Performance Plan Technical Assistance Project (SPP-TAP) and approved by the California Department of Education's Department to address disproportionality (SPP-TAP, 2011). The District Level LRE Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Activities Tool was developed using "research-validated activities that focus on practices found to improve learning for all students" (SPP-TAP, 2011). The California Department of Education utilized the tool in response to the indicators guiding the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part B provided by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2014).

Participating principals were asked to complete the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool for their elementary schools. The formula for cumulative placement rate (CPR) originally utilized by Danielson and Bellamy (1989) and then by McLeskey, Henry and Axelrod (1999), was employed to determine cumulative placement rates for each participating elementary school. The equation for CPR was adapted to assess the educational setting placement rates per 100 students enrolled in the elementary school. Existing child count data, reported annually to the state of Minnesota, retrieved from the Minnesota Department of Education was used to compute CPRs for each school. The number of students in each Federal Setting I, II and III was divided by the elementary school's total enrollment, and then multiplied by 100. The resulting data were a students per one hundred rate for each Federal Setting I, II and III. Minnesota Department of Education reported number of students educated in each Federal Setting I, II and III per 100 students enrolled in the elementary school to the researcher.

Research Design

Quantitative data were collected from elementary school principals from five select suburban Minnesota public school districts. The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was submitted to select Elementary Student Services Special Education Coordinators for review January 2018. The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Scale was field tested with a cohort of doctoral students to review the clarity and time to complete the tool. The feedback from the test was used to refine the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool to ensure reliability and validity of results. The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was then replicated into Survey Monkey for electronic distribution to elementary principals. Survey Monkey is a web-based survey tool capable of emailing participants the instrument for completion.

The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool included two parts. The first part required principals to provide numeric ratings for each indicator of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment at their elementary schools. Principals rated six LRE indicators including: Vision, expectations, leadership and climate; evidence of policies and procedures that promote LRE; An array of services and programs and classroom strategies, School accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students; Teachers, parents and students work together for better results for all students; Sufficient and available qualified staff support, and professional development related to LRE. Each indicator was comprised of three to seven descriptors. Principals were asked to utilize the clarifying, descriptors for each indicator and their knowledge of their schools and districts to determine their ratings. Principals rated each indicator using a five-point scale ranging from never to all of the time.

The second part of the Least Restrictive Environment Rating tool asked principals to identify whether their elementary schools housed a self-contained special education program. In an effort to provide clarity, self- contained program was defined as a special education setting or classroom where a student with disabilities spends 60% or more of their school day (Kurth, 2015).

In addition to the quantitative data collected though the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool, the researcher submitted a formal request for cumulative placement rate data, for each of the participating Minnesota public elementary schools to the Minnesota Department of Education on June 25, 2018. Data necessary to calculate cumulative placement rates were acquired on July 6, 2018 through the Minnesota Department of Education Data Reports and Analytics Department. Cumulative placement rates for each participating elementary school were calculated by the Minnesota Department of Education. The Minnesota Department of

Education had a policy that states they will not release data point less than ten for confidentiality purposes (K. Rewey, Quantitative Analyst, Minnesota Department of Education. personal communication, January 12, 2018). Due to the low number of students in Federal Setting III at some of the participating Minnesota public Elementary schools, cumulative placement rates, rather than raw numbers per Federal Setting, were reported to the researcher by the Minnesota Department of Education. The cumulative placement rates for each participating elementary were calculated by finding the number of students receiving services in each Federal Setting I, II and III. Each of the three numbers was then divided by the total number of students enrolled in the elementary and multiplied by 100. The result is the number of students educated in the Federal Setting per 100 students enrolled in the elementary school. Data for each school completing the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool were recorded in Microsoft Excel for correlation analysis.

Treatment of Data

Least Restrictive Environment ratings and cumulative placement rates were analyzed by the St. Cloud State Office of Statistical Analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results from the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool were separated into schools with and schools without self-contained programs. Data were averaged for each of the six indicators in the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool. T-tests were utilized to compare mean scores for schools with and without self-contained programs.

Least Restrictive Environment Ratings were averaged for each elementary school resulting in an overall average rating for implementation of Least Restrictive Environment. The overall average was used for correlation analysis. Pearson's correlation was used to identify the relationship between cumulative placement rates and principals' perceptions of the

implementation of Least Restrictive Environment. Pearson's correlation coefficient is "a mathematical expression of the direction and magnitude of the relationship between two measures that yield continuous scores" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 647). Principals' Least Restrictive Environment mean scores were sorted by the presence of self-contained programming. Correlations were analyzed for each Federal Setting I, II and III.

Cumulative placement rate data was separated in to two data sets; schools with and schools without self-contained programing. Cumulative placement rate data were analyzed by range and average for each Federal Setting I, II and III.

Procedures and Timeline

The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was replicated into Survey Monkey with the assistance of the Saint Cloud State University Statistical Center. After the research secured written permission to study the five school districts, 48 elementary school principals were emailed the rating form May 2018 (Appendix C). A follow-up email, identical to the initial email (Appendix C), was sent 2 weeks later to encourage principals who had not yet responded to complete the survey. The researcher attached the original email to an email addressed to each of the five Special Education Directors requesting their assistance in encouraging principals to complete the rating tool (Appendix D). A final email was sent to principals 1 week after the email addressed to Special Education Directors was sent. Results from the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool were automatically collected by the Survey Monkey site. After closing the survey June 2018, a list of schools who completed the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was compiled. The list of district and elementary school names was submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education with the data request form for CPRs June 2018. Minnesota Department of Education emailed a spreadsheet of CPRs to the researcher, July 2018. The

spreadsheet was submitted to the St. Cloud State University Statistical Center to complete the data set for analysis. Once data were analyzed, the results were reported in Chapter IV and conclusion in Chapter IV of the study. Final defense was scheduled in January 2019.

Summary

Chapter III described the methodology for this study including the purpose of the study, research questions, participants, human subject approval, data collection instruments, research design, procedures and timeline. The following chapters present a comprehensive analysis of the data, the findings, the researcher's conclusions and recommendations for future research and professional practice.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

Research is needed to understand the impact of the presence of self-contained special education elementary classrooms on Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team student placement decisions and on the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Student placement decisions based on available programs and an overreliance on self-contained programming (Daymond et al., 2007; Morningstar et al., 2017) directly contradict the expectations of the Individuals with Disabilities Act requiring that schools maintain a continuum of placement options and that each student should be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (IDEA, 2004).

The purpose of the study is to examine principals' ratings of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in select public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact of self-contained programs on cumulative student placement rates in Federal Settings. Forty-eight Minnesota public elementary schools from five Minnesota suburban school districts were invited to participate in the study. The school districts were chosen for their size, number of elementary schools, and distribution of schools with and without self-contained programs. Sixteen of the 48 elementary school principals completed the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool. There were two surveys discarded from the data; one was incomplete and the second did not identify the elementary school; which prevented the researcher from pairing the responses with cumulative placement rate data. Data include six schools (n = 6) without self-contained programs and ten schools (n = 10) with self- contained programs. Child count data reported to Minnesota Department of Education, for the 2017- 2018 school year, were utilized to compute cumulative placement rates for each participating school.

Findings in this chapter were organized by research question with detailed numerical and narrative results.

Research Question 1

How did select Minnesota elementary principals rate the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in elementary schools that offered self-contained Federal Setting III programs and those that did not?

The study utilized the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was designed to assess principals' perceptions of frequency of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) indicators in their elementary schools. To find statistically significant differences in LRE mean scores between principals of schools with and without self-contained programs, t-tests were computed. A t-test is "a parametric test of significance used to determine whether, at a selected probability level, a significant difference exists between the means of two independent variables" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, pp. 602-603). Jaccard and Becker (2010) explained that if a t stat value is 1.761 or higher at a p .05 level, then the difference is statistically significant. The p value is the probability of determining whether there is a significant difference between schools with and without self-contained programs, using the most common value of $p < .05$ or less than 1 in 20.

The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool included two parts. The first part required principals to provide numeric ratings of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment at their elementary schools. Principals rated six LRE indicators including:

1. Vision, expectations, leadership and climate;
2. Evidence of policies and procedures that promote LRE;
3. An array of services and programs and classroom strategies;

4. School accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students;
5. Teachers, parents and students work together for better results for all students;
6. Sufficient and available qualified staff support, and professional development related to LRE.

Each indicator was comprised of three to seven descriptors. Principals were asked to utilize the clarifying descriptors for each indicator and their knowledge of their schools and districts to determine their ratings. Principals rated each of the six indicators using a 5-point scale ranging from all of the time to never.

The second part of the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool asked principals to identify whether their elementary schools housed a self-contained special education program. In an effort to provide clarity, a self-contained program was defined as a special education setting or classroom where a student with disabilities spends 60% or more of their school day (Kurth, 2015). Table 4.1 contains the mean scores, t-values, f statistics, two tailed p values, and confidence intervals for each or the six LRE indicators.

Table 4.1

T-Test for Equality of Means: Least Restrictive Rating Tool

	Mean				
LRE Indicators	Elementary Schools with Self-Contained Programing n=10	Elementary Schools without Self-Contained Programming n=6	t- value	Sig.2 tailed	95% CIs
Section 1 Vision, expectations, leadership, and climate	4.27	4.44	.807	.433	[-.65, .29]
Section 2 Policies and procedures that promote LRE	4.40	4.78	2.75	.016	[-.67, -.08]
Section 3 An array of services and program and classroom strategies	4.55	4.53	.138	.892	[-.32,.37]
Section 4 School accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students	4.50	4.58	.406	.691	[-.52, .36]
Section 5 Teachers, parents, and students working together for better student results	3.83	3.83	.00	1.00	[-.44, .44]
Section 6 Sufficient numbers of qualified staff	3.77	4.17	1.26	.228	[-1.08, .28]

Table 4.1 data reveal that in section two: policies and procedures that promote LRE, there was a statistically significant difference in principals' mean scores (t = -2.75). This value indicates that principals in schools without self-contained programs perceived LRE implementation in the area of policy and procedures significantly higher (mean = 4.78) than elementary school principals in schools with self-contained programs (mean = 4.40). All other

differences in mean scores between principals with and without self-contained programs in their schools were not statistically significant.

Table 4.1 data also reveal that principals of schools without self-contained programming rated implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in section one, vision, expectations, leadership and climate with a mean score = 4.44; section two, policies and procedures that promote LRE with a mean score = 4.78; section four: accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students with a mean score = 4.58 and section six, sufficient numbers of qualified staff with a mean score = 4.17. These four sections mean scores were higher than principals' ratings in schools with self-contained programs. Principals in school with self-contained programs rated section one, with a mean score = 4.27, section two with a mean score = 4.4, section four with a mean score = 4.5 and section six with a mean score = 3.77.

Principals' ratings of LRE implementation in schools with and without self-contained programs for section three, an array of services and programs and classroom strategies, were similar with means scores of 4.55 and 4.53 respectively. Principals' in schools with and without self-contained programs had identical mean scores of 3.38 for section five, teachers, parents, and students working together for better student results. Data reveal that mean scores for principals in schools with self-contained programs rated the implementation of LRE indicators to be lower than or similar to schools without self-contained programs in all areas of the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool.

Research Question 2

How did select Minnesota principals' ratings of implementation indicators of Least Restrictive Environment compare with cumulative placement rates of special education students in their schools?

Principals total mean ratings provided through the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool were compared with their elementary schools' cumulative placement rates (CPR) for Federal Setting I, II and III. When discussing results from the study, cumulative placement rate refers to the number of students per 100 total elementary school population receiving special education services in the identified setting. Cumulative placement rates were provided by Minnesota Department of Education through existing child count data from the 2017-2018 school year. The Minnesota Department of Education provided the researcher with the Federal Setting I, II and III CPRs for each participating elementary school. The researcher, with the assistance of the St. Cloud State University Statistical Center, paired the mean ratings and CPRs for each school to compute correlations. Pearson r correlation was used to analyze the data. Pearson r is "a measure of correlation appropriate when both variables are expressed as continuous data; it takes into account each and every score and produces a coefficient between -1.00 and +1.00" (Gay et al., 2006). A correlation coefficient is a statistic used to understand the strength of relationship between two measures (Gay et al. 2006; Taylor, 1990). Taylor (1990) explained, "correlation coefficients which are less than 0.35 are generally considered to represent low or weak correlations, 0.36 to 0.67 modest correlations, and 0.68 to 1.0 strong or high correlations" (p. 37). Table 4.2 reports the correlation coefficients comparing principal's ratings on the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool with cumulative placement rates for their school.

Table 4.2

Pearson Correlations Comparing LRE Ratings and Cumulative Placement Rates

	Pearson Correlation	P-Value
Federal Setting I with self-contained program	0.6230526441	0.0543
Federal Setting II with self-contained program	0.24617863	0.4929
Federal Setting III with self-contained program	0.1105343709	0.7611
Federal Setting I without self-contained program	-0.5400690352	0.2687
Federal Setting II without self-contained program	0.08436349353	0.8738
Federal Setting III without self-contained program	0.3785281787	0.4593

Table 4.2 data indicate there was a significant correlation (P = 0.0543 at significance level = 0.1), between principals' ratings in schools with self-contained programs and CPRs for students receiving Federal Setting I services (r = 0.6230526441). These data demonstrate that the higher the mean score of LRE implementation as reported by principals in schools with self-contained programs, the higher the CPR for students in Federal Setting I.

Table 4.2 data also reveal the relationship between principals' ratings and CPRs for Federal Setting II (r = 0.24617863) and III (r = 0.110534371) for schools with self-contained programs are weak and not statistically significant (P = 0.4929-0.7611).

Pearson r correlations for schools without self-contained programs demonstrated a moderate, negative relationship (r = -.5400669035) between principal's rating of the implementation of LRE, and the CPRs for Federal Setting I, however, this correlation is not statistically significant (P = 0.2687). This result indicates that the higher a principal rated implementation of LRE, the lower the CPR of students in Federal Setting I. Table 4.2 demonstrates the relationship.

Conversely, data analysis suggests a weak relationship (r = 0.084363494) between elementary principals' ratings of LRE implementation in schools without self-contained programming and CPRs of students receiving Federal Setting II services who are served 79 to 41 percent of the day in the general education setting (P = 0.8738).

Correlation data demonstrated a moderate relationship (r = 0.378528179) between principals' ratings of LRE implementation in school without self-contained programming and CPRs of students receiving services in Federal Setting III who are served 40 percent or less of their day in the general education setting. This correlation is not statistically significant (P = 0.4593). The higher the mean score a principal reported the implementation of LRE the higher the CPR for students in Federal Setting III in his or her school.

Research Question 3

What effect did the availability or lack of availability of a self-contained/Federal Setting III program in an elementary school have on the cumulative placement rates of special education students in the elementary schools participating in the study?

Cumulative placement rates were provided by the Minnesota Department of Education using existing child count data from the 2017-2018 school year. The Minnesota Department of Education provided the researcher with the Federal Setting I, II and III CPRs for each participating elementary school. When discussing study findings, cumulative placement rate refers to the number of students per 100 total elementary school population receiving special education services in the identified Federal Setting. CPRs for schools without self-contained programs in each of the Federal Settings, are reported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Cumulative Placement Rates for Schools without Self-Contained Programs

	Cumulative Placement Rate		
School	Federal Setting I	Federal Setting II	Federal Setting III
School 11	6.3	4.4	0.8
School 12	11.1	0.9	0
School 13	6.5	3.5	0
School 14	5.8	0	0
School 15	10.7	0.3	0
School 16	6	1.8	0
Average:	7.73	1.82	0.13

Table 4.3 data reveal that cumulative placement rates for students receiving Federal Setting I services in elementary schools without self-contained programs ranged from 5.8 to 11.1 students per 100 school population, with an average of 7.73 students per 100 school population. Federal II CPRs ranged from 0 to 4.4 students per 100 school population with an average of 1.82 students per 100 school population. Cumulative placement rates for students in Federal Setting III ranged from 0-0.8 students per 100 school population with an average of 0.13 per 100 school population.

Cumulative placement rates for schools with self-contained programs in each of the Federal Settings are reported in Table 4.4

Table 4.4

Cumulative Placement Rates for Schools with Self-Contained Programs

	Cumulative Placement Rates		
Schools with Self-Contained	Federal Setting I	Federal Setting II	Federal Setting III
School 1	9	1.3	1.8
School 2	9.4	1.2	1.7
School 3	10.8	3	2.3
School 4	14.1	2.1	1.9
School 5	13.5	0.8	2.7
School 6	9.2	1.4	4
School 7	11.1	1.5	0.8
School 8	11.3	3.3	5.2
School 9	10.2	1.2	10
School 10	8.8	1.4	1.9
Average:	10.74	1.72	3.23

Table 4.4 data reveal that cumulative placement rates for students receiving Federal Setting I services in schools with self-contained programs ranged from 8.8 to 14.1 students per 100 school population, with an average CPR or 10.74 students per 100 school population. Federal Setting II numbers ranged from 0.8 to 3.3 students per 100 school population, with an average of 1.72 students per 100 school population. Cumulative placement rates for students receiving Federal Setting III services ranged from 0.8 to 10 students per 100 school population, with an average of 3.23 students per 100 school population.

Comparisons of CPR averages in schools with and without self-contained programs in each of the three Federal Settings are reported in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Average Cumulative Placement Rates for Schools with and without Self-Contained Programs

	Average Cumulative Placement Rates		
	Federal Setting I	Federal Setting II	Federal Setting III
Schools without self-contained	7.73	1.82	0.13
Schools with self-contained	10.74	1.72	3.23

Table 4.5 data reveal cumulative placement rates for Federal Setting I averaged of 3.01 students per 100 school population, indicating a higher placement of students in school with self-contained programs than in schools without self-contained programs. Averages for Federal Setting II data illustrate a .10 lower rate of student placement, per 100 total school population in schools with self-contained programs when compared to schools without self-contained programs. Cumulative placement rates of students in Federal Setting III for schools with self-contained programing were 3.1 students per 100 school population, higher than schools without self-contained programming.

Summary of Results

Results from the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool report that principals in schools without self-contained programs rated the implementation of LRE higher in most areas of measure than principals in schools with self-contained programs. Principals in schools without self-contained programs rated their implementation of LRE in the area of policies and procedures that support LRE significantly higher than principals in schools with self-contained programs. Correlation results reported a significant, positive relationship between principals' ratings of

Least Restrictive Environment and cumulative placement rates of students in Federal Setting I for schools with self-contained programs. There was a moderate negative, but not significant, relationship between principals' LRE ratings and CPRs for Federal Setting I in schools without self-contained programs. Correlation results revealed a weak relationship between Federal Setting II and III CPRs and principals' ratings for schools with and without self-contained programs. CPRs reported higher rates of placement of students in Federal Setting I and III for schools with self-contained programs. CPRs of students in Federal Setting II were similar for schools with and without self-contained programs.

Chapter IV includes discussion and conclusions based on the results. Recommendations for the field and future study are presented.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Introduction

United States disability law affords students receiving special education certain rights including the right to be educated in the students' least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004). A trend in student placement decisions based on available programs and an overreliance on self-contained programming (Daymond et al., 2007; Morningstar et al., 2017) directly contradict the expectations of the Individuals with Disabilities Act requiring that schools maintain a continuum of placements and that each student be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment (IDEA, 2004). Research is needed to understand the impact of the presence of self-contained special education classrooms in elementary schools on Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team placement decisions and the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment.

The purpose of the study was to determine Minnesota elementary principals' rating of indicators of the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in select public Minnesota elementary schools and the impact self-contained programs had on cumulative student placement rates in federal settings. The study examined the following aspects of Least Restrictive Environment and Federal Setting placement rates of students receiving special education services: the availability of a self-contained Federal Setting III program in a school and its impact on cumulative placement rates of special education students

Quantitative data were collected from 16 elementary school principals from five select suburban Minnesota public school districts using the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool (Appendix E). Cumulative placement rates were calculated by Minnesota Department of Education using child count data from the 2017-2018 school year. Least Restrictive Environment

Ratings were averaged for each elementary school resulting in an overall average rating for implementation of Least Restrictive Environment. Correlation tests were utilized to understand the relationship between Principals' LRE ratings and CPRs.

Research Questions

1. How did select Minnesota elementary principals rate the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment indicators in elementary schools that offered self-contained Federal Setting III programs and those that did not?
2. How did select Minnesota principals' rating of implementation indicators of Least Restrictive Environment compare with cumulative placement rates of special education students in their schools?
3. What effect did the availability or lack of availability of a self-contained, Federal Setting III program in an elementary school have on the cumulative placement rates of special education students in the elementary schools participating in the study?

Conclusions

Research question one. Study results revealed principals' rating of the implementation of LRE were higher in schools without self-contained programming. This finding is consistent with other research on LRE (Carson, 2015; Morningstar et. Al., 2017) identified a trend of students being placed based pre-existing programming. Additionally, Daymond et al. (2007) exerted that schools with self-contained programs may be over reliant on the programming without consideration of the impact of the placement. Principals in elementary schools with self-contained programs rated their policies and procedures that promote LRE significantly lower than principals in schools without self-contained programs ($t = -2.75$). Lower ratings of four of the six LRE indicators, in schools with self-contained programs, indicate that schools with self-

contained programs are less successful in the implementation of LRE in the areas of vision, expectations, leadership and climate (section one) policy and procedures that promote LRE (section two), school accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students (section four) and sufficient numbers of qualified staff (section six).

Research question two. Results from Pearson's correlation tests revealed that principals' ratings in schools with self-contained programs had a significant (P = 0.0543) relationship to cumulative placement rates when considering students receiving Federal Setting I services. The higher a principal rated the implementation of LRE in their elementary school with self-contained programing the higher the rate of placement in the Least Restrictive Educational setting. Correlations for more restrictive settings, Federal Setting II and III were weak and not statistically significant for schools with self-contained programs. Principals ratings of LRE in schools with self-contained programs were not predictive of actual placement rates in Federal Setting II and III.

Correlations for schools without self-contained programs were not statistically significant, however, principals' ratings were moderately predictive of CPRs for students receiving Federal Setting I and III services. The higher a principals' rating of LRE implementation, the lower the CPR for Federal Setting I, the least restrictive setting (r = -.05400690352). These data reveal that principals in schools without self-contained programs may have inaccurate perceptions of the implementation of LRE in their schools. Previous research found that principals often serve as the LEA representative on IEP teams at their school (Moore, 2012). In the role of LEA the principal is expert on the available resources within the school and district (Moore, 2012). O'Laughlin and Lindle explained, the implementation of LRE "...depends on the professional discretion and leadership of principals" (2015, p. 142). However,

research indicates that principals defer to special education staff for knowledge of resources and LRE implementation at the school level (Moore, 2009; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). This research provides one explanation for the incongruence between principals' ratings of LRE and CPRs.

The relationships between principals' ratings of LRE and CPRs for Federal Setting III, in schools without self-contained programming, further support the inaccuracy of principals' ratings ($r = 0.3785281787$). The higher the principals rated the implementation of LRE in their schools, the higher the CPR in the most restrictive setting, Federal Setting III. Correlations for Federal Setting II CPRs in schools without self-contained programs were weak and not significant ($r = 0.08426249353$).

Research question three. Cumulative placement rates for schools with self-contained programs averaged more than three students per 100 school population higher for Federal Setting III. These data supported Morningstar et al. (2017) and Daymond et al. (2007) research. Study results indicated students are 24.84 times more likely to be placed in the most restrictive setting if the elementary they attend has a self-contained program.

Cumulative placement rate averages for Federal Setting II were similar, 1.82 per 100 school population for schools without self-contained programs and 1.72 students per 100 for schools with self-contained programs. Results indicate that students are placed in Federal Setting II at consistent rates whether their school has self-contained programming or not.

Federal Setting I cumulative placement rates indicated that schools with self-contained programs placed students in the least restrictive setting at a higher rate than schools without self-contained programming. These data reveal a higher average rate of placement in Federal Setting I (10.74 per 100 school population) in schools with self-contained programs than in

schools without self-contained programs (7.73 per 100 school population). Results may be attributed to better implementation of LRE in schools with self-contained programming or a difference in identification rates. CPR data revealed an average of 9.68 students receiving special education per 100 school population for schools without self-contained programs. Schools with self-contained programs had an average per 100 school population 1.6 times higher than schools without self-contained programs (15.69 students per 100 school population). While the data only include placement averages for educational settings within the elementary school, it is indicative of higher special education identification rates in schools with self-contained programs.

Discussion

Overall, principals rated implementation of LRE in their elementary school high (Mean = 4.30 out of 5). Results comparing elementary principals' perceptions of the implementation of LRE with the actual cumulative placement rates for schools without self-contained programs revealed incompatibility. Principals' in schools without self-contained programs were more positive about how well their school implemented LRE than was indicated by their CPRs. Correlations indicated that the more positively a principal in a school without self-contained programming rated LRE in their school, the lower the CPR in the least restrictive setting environment and the higher the CPR in the most restrictive educational setting. Research would attribute principal's inaccurate perceptions to their passivity in the role or Local Education Agency (LEA) representative and trends to defer leadership to special education staff (Moore, 2009; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). Results support Moore's assertion that knowledge of the placement decision process is necessary for principals and that they should consider the adoption of a formal process for IEP teams to make placement decisions (2009).

The adoption of a formal process for IEP teams to follow was echoed by the court system (Howard, 2004; Moore, 2009;). Howard (2004) described the need for a single test or set of guiding questions to guide IEP teams through the educational setting placement process. Principals in schools with self-contained programs rate LRE implementation lower and may need to take steps to prevent placing students in more restrictive placements due to pre-existing programming. Data from the study supported Morningstar et al. (2017) and Daymond et al. (2007) findings; the presence of a self-contained program resulted in higher placement rates in the most restrictive setting (24.84 times higher than schools without self-contained programs). Furthermore, data indicated that schools with self-contained programs also identified students needing special education services at a higher rate.

Results from the study and research identify policy and procedures as a logical place to start disrupting this pattern (Daymond et al., 2007; Howard, 2004; Moore, 2009; Morningstar et al., 2017). Principals in schools without self-contained programing rated implementation in the area of policy and procedures that support LRE significantly lower than principals without self-contained programming ($t = 2.75$). Principals' rating of LRE and CPRs reinforce research exposing a pattern of placement decisions being made on pre-existing programs and services, rather than a student's individual needs, as law requires (Carson, 2015; Daymond et al., 2007; IDEA, 2004; Morningstar et al., 2017).

Limitations

The following are limitations for the study:

1. The sample size or number of survey participants who completed the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool totaled 16 of a possible 48. This small completion rate made it difficult to establish significant relationships within the

statistical data analysis. Additionally, larger districts with elementary schools that fit the research criteria were not open to survey studies, baring access to a significant portion of the population.

2. The timing of the distribution of the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was not identical for each district. The Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool was distributed to each district as permission from the superintendent was received by the researcher. Follow up emails were sent at the same intervals. The differentiated schedules may have influenced the completion rate from some districts due to the inconvenient end of school year timing.
3. The initial email was sent repetitively rather than an alternately worded follow up email. This created some confusion; two principals responded via email asking if they should complete the Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool again. The researcher responded to these emails and no duplicate responses were completed.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

1. State Departments of education could form a multidisciplinary committee including but not limited to judges, educational lawyers, State Department of Education staff, special education directors, principal, special education teachers, services providers and parents could be formed to draft a formal procedure for IEP teams to consider when determining LRE and educational placement for students. This would provide a more consistent interpretation and implementation of LRE at the school level.
2. Competencies for principal licensure could be expanded to include: understanding the role of Local Educational Agency (LEA) representative and implementing policy, procedures and professional development that support LRE. These competencies

could increase principals' effective participation in educational setting placement decisions.

3. Districts could request cumulative placement rate data from the Minnesota Department of Education for each of their schools to analyze for placement trends. The data analysis could be utilized by Special Education Directors and Principals to influence placement decisions at the school level.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. A federally sponsored study could be conducted to replicate the study on a larger scale, including secondary schools and across the United States, to further compare perceptions and placement rates beyond the scope of this study.
2. An expansion of the study could be undertaken to better understand the effect the presence of self-contained programming has on the overall rates of identification of students needing special education services.
3. A qualitative study could be conducted to understand the strengths and needs of LRE implementation at the elementary school level to provide direction for principals to improve LRE implementation at their school.
4. A study funded by the Minnesota Department of Education could be designed to understand why Minnesota's placement rates are lower than the national average for Federal Setting I and higher than the national average for Federal Settings II and III.

Concluding Remarks

The study sought to understand the effects of self-contained programs on the implementation of LRE and CPR in Minnesota elementary schools. Results were consistent with research indicating that the presence of a self-contained program decreased ratings on LRE

indicators and increased CPRs in the most restrictive settings. Current practice does not meet IDEA expectation that each student receives a Free and Appropriate Education in their LRE (IDEA, 2004). Changes in the policy and procedures are needed to support practices ensuring students have access to their LRE.

References

Ajuwon, P., & Oyinlade O. (2008). Educational placement of children who are blind or have low vision in residential and public schools: A national study of parents' perspectives. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 102*(6), 325-339.

Algozzine, B., Morsink, C., & Algozzine, K. (1988). What's happening in self-contained special education classrooms? *Exceptional Children, 55*(3), 259-265.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101-12213 (2013) (amended 2008).

Anonymous. (2007). *Getting the most out of the least restrictive environment: Integrating children with disabilities into the classroom*. Palaestra. Urbana: Sagamore Publishing, LLC.

Aron, L., & Loprest, P. (2012). Disability and the education system. *Future of Children*, *22*(1), 97-122.

Baker, B., & Ramsey, M. (2010). What we don't know can't hurt us: Equity consequences of financing special education on the untested assumption of uniform needs. *Journal of Education Finance, 35*(3) 245-275.

Banerjee, R., Sundeen, T., Hutchinson, S. R., & Jackson, L. (2017). Factors that explain placement decisions for students with multiple disabilities: Findings from national data. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 17*(2), 110-122.

California Department of Education, LRE Initiative. (2005). *District level LRE self-assessment and continuous improvement activities*. Retrieved January 6, 2018, from https://www.wested.org/online_pubs/dist.lre.tool.pdf.

Carson, C. (2015). Rethinking special education's "least restrictive environment" requirement. *Michigan Law Review, 113*(8), 1397-1426.

Crockett, J. (2014). Reflections on the concept of the least restrictive environment in special education. In B. G. Cook, M. Tankersley, & T. J. Landrum (Eds.), *Advances in the learning and behavioral disabilities: Special education past, present and future: Perspectives in the field* (pp. 39-61). United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing, Ltd.

Danielson, L., & Bellamy, G. (1989). State variation in placement of children with handicaps in segregated environments. *Exceptional Children, 55*(5), 448-455.

Daymond, S., Gilson, C., & Myran, S. (2007). Services for children with autism spectrum disorders: What needs to change? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 18*, 133-147.

Dev, P., & Haynes, L. (2015). Teacher perspectives on suitable learning environments for students with disabilities: What have we learned from inclusive, resource, and self-contained classrooms? *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences: Annual Review, 9*, 53-64.

Disability Rights California. (2011). *Special Education Rights and Responsibilities (SERR) manual.* Sacramento, CA: Author.

Duncan, A. (2010, April). Keeping the promise to all America's children. *Remarks made to the council for exceptional children, 21*.

Education Commission of the United States. (2016). *Do we spend too much on special education?* Retrieved January 15, 2018, from https://www.ecs.org/do-we-spend-too-much-on-special-education-in-this-country/.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act. (1975). PL 94-142.

Fisher, M., & Meyer, L. H. (2002). Development and social competence after two years for students enrolled in inclusive and self-contained educational programs. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 27*(3), 165-174.

Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction*. Longman Publishing.

Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2006). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. Columbus: Merrill Greenwood.

Hasazi, S. B., Johnston, A. P., Liggett, A. M., & Schattman, R. A. (1994). A qualitative policy study of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. *Exceptional Children, 60*(6), 491-507.

Hoppey, D., & McLeskey, J. (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *The Journal of Special Education, 46*(4), 245-256.

Howard, P. (2004). The least restrictive environment: How to tell. *Journal of Law & Education, 33*, 167.

(IDEA) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq. (1990) (amended 1997, 2004).

Jaccard, J., & Becker, M. (2010). *Statistics for the behavioral sciences* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Jackson, L., Ryndak, D., & Wehmeyer, M. (2008). The dynamic relationship between context, curriculum and student learning: A case for inclusive education s a research-based practice. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 34*(1), 174-195.

Johnson, G. (1962). Special education for the mentally handicapped: A paradox. *Exceptional Children, 29*(2), 62-69.

Kavale, K., & Forness, D. (2000). History, rhetoric, and reality. *Remedial & Special Education, 21*(5), 279.

Kleinert, H., Towles-Reeves, E., Quenemoen, R., Thurlow, M., Fluegge, L., Weseman, L., & Kerbel, A. (2015). Where students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are taught: Implications for general curriculum access. *Exceptional Children, 81*(3), 312-328.

Kurth, J. (2015). Educational placement of students with autism: The impact of state of residence. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 30*(4).

Kurth, J., Born, K., & Love, H. (2016). Ecobehavioral characteristics of self-contained high school classrooms for students with severe cognitive disability. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 41*(4), 227-243.

Kurth, J., & Mastergeorge, A. (2012). Impact of setting and instructional context for adolescents with autism. *Journal of Special Education, 46,* 36-48.

Lin, C. (2003). Ethical exploration of the least restrictive alternative. *Psychiatric Services (Washington, DC), 54*(6), 866-870.

Martin, E. W., Martin, R., & Terman, D. L. (1996). The legislative and litigation history of special education. *The Future of Children*, pp. 25-39.

Marx, T. A., Hart, J. L., Nelson, L., Love, J., Baxter, C. M., Gartin, B., & Schaefer Whitby, P. J. (2014). Guiding IEP teams on meeting the least restrictive environment mandate. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *50*(1), 45-50.

McCann, C. (2014). *Federal funding for students with disabilities: The evolution of federal special education finance in the United States*. New America: New America Education Policy Brief.

McCarty, K. (2006). *Full inclusion: The benefits and disadvantages of inclusive schooling: An overview*. Online submission.

McLeskey, J., Henry, D., & Axelrod, M. I. (1999). Inclusion of students with learning disabilities: An examination of data from reports to congress. *Exceptional Children*, *66*(1), 55-66.

Millard, M., & Aragon, S. (2015). State funding for students with disabilities. *ECS 50-State Review*.

Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C. 1972).

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). (2018). *Special education instructions on reporting child count*. Retrieved online December, 13 2018, from file:///C:/Users/sarah/Downloads/Child%20Count%20Reporting%20Instructions%209-10-18%20(1).pdf.

Moore, E. (2009). Decision making processes to promote inclusive environments for students with disabilities. *Catalyst for Change*, *36*(1), 13-22.

Moore, E. (2012). *A case study of rural elementary principals' conceptualization of the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities*. The Pennsylvania State University.

Morningstar, M. E., Kurth, J. A., & Johnson, P. E. (2017). Examining national trends in educational placements for students with significant disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *38*(1), 3-12.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *The condition of education–participation in education–elementary/secondary–children and youth with disabilities*. Retrieved January 15, 2018, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp.

Oberti v. Board of Education the Borough of Clementon School District, 789 F. Supp. 1322 (D.N.J. 1992).

Oh-Young, C., & Filler, J. (2015). A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 47,* 80-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2015.08.014.

Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2014). *Indicator 5: Least restrictive environment self-assessment instructions*. Retrieved January 15, 2018, from http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/Self-Assessment%20Instructions%20%28Form%29%20-%20Indicator%205%20LRE.pdf.

O'Laughlin, L., & Lindle, J. C. (2015). Principals as political agents in the implementation of IDEA's least restrictive environment mandate. *Educational Policy, 29*(1), 140-161.

Palley, E. (2003). The role of the courts in the development and implementation of the IDEA. *Social Service Review, 77*(4), 605-618.

PARC v. Pennsylvania, 334 F.Supp. 1257 (E.D. PA 1972).

Parrish, T. B., & Chambers, J. G. (1996). Financing special education. *The Future of Children*, pp. 121-138.

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971, 1972).

Pulkkinen, J., & Jahnukainen, M. (2016). Finnish reform of the funding and provision of special education: The views of principals and municipal education administrators. *Educational Review, 68*(2), 171-188.

Reynolds, M. C. (1962). A framework for considering some issues in special education. *Exceptional Children, 28*(7), 367-370.

Richardson, J. (1994). Common, delinquent, and special: On the formalization of common schooling in the American states. *American Educational Research Journal*, *31*(4), 695-723.

Roberts, C. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Rozalski, M., Stewart, A., & Miller, J. (2010). How to determine the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. *Exceptionality*, *18*(3), 151-163.

Salvador, K., & Pasiali, V. (2017). Intersections between music education and music therapy: Education reform, arts education, exceptionality, and policy at the local level. *Arts Education Policy Review*, *118*(2), 93-103.

Sauer, J., & Jorgensen, C. (2016). Still caught in the continuum: A critical analysis of least restrictive environment and its effect on placement of students with intellectual disability. *Inclusion*, *4*(2), 56-74.

Segall, M. J., & Campbell, J. M. (2014). Factors influencing the educational placement of students with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, *8*(1), 31-43.

State Performance Plan Technical Assistance Project (SPP-TAP) and California Department of Education. (2011). *Phase III: Plan for improvement*. Retrieved January 15, 2018, from https://spptap.org/phase-iii-plan-for-improvement/.

Strom, T. (2017). *Minnesota school finance a guide for legislators*. St. Paul, MN: Research Department for the House of Representatives.

Taylor, R. (1990). Interpretation of the correlation coefficient: A basic review. *Journal of Diagnostic Medical Sonography*, *6*(1), 35-39.

Taylor, S. (2004). Caught in the continuum: A critical analysis of the principle of the least restrictive environment. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities (RPSD), 29*(4), 218-230.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, (Pub.L. 93–112, 87 Stat. 355, enacted September 26,1973), 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.

Turnbull, R. (1981). Least restrictive alternatives: Principles and practices. In J. W. Ellis, E. M. Boggs, P. O. Brookes, & D. P. Biklen (Eds.), *Psychiatrics services*. Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Free appropriate public education (FAPE).* [Investigative Reports; Monitoring Reports]. Retrieved January 6, 2018, from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/issues/dis-issue03.html.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (1995). *Educational placements of students with disabilities.* Retrieved January 6, 2018, from https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/OSEP95AnlRpt/ch1c.html.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2016). *IDEA Part B. Child Count and Educational Environments for School Year 2015-2016.* Retrieved January 15, 2018 from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/collection-documentation/data-documentation-files/part-b/child-count-and-educational-environment/idea-partb-childcountandedenvironment-2015.docx.

Weikart, L. (1998). Segregated placement patterns of students with disabilities in three states. *Educational Policy, 12*(4), 432-448.

Weintraub, F., Abeson, A., Ballard, J., & Favor, J. (1976). *Public policy and the education of exceptional children*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

White, S. W., Scahill, L., Klin, A., Koenig, K., & Volkmar, F. R. (2007). Educational placements and service use patterns of individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *37*(8), 1403-1412.

Appendix A: Letter to Superintendents

Dear (Superintendent),

In an effort to better understand the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in elementary schools, I am seeking the participation of elementary school principals in your district for my doctoral research. My study will compare the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment of schools with and without self-contained programs. The research will compare cumulative student placement rates (students per 100 in each federal setting) with least restrictive environment measures for each participating elementary school. The objective is to determine what effect, if any, having a self-contained program in an elementary school has on Least Restrictive Environment and cumulative placement rates. Information gained through this research can be used to influence special education service delivery models and implementation of Least Restrictive Environment.

Would your district be willing to serve as participants for the study? The study would require the participation of your district elementary principals in completing an online survey. There are no anticipated discomforts or risks with this study. Participation is voluntary. All participants are free to withdraw her/his consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time. All data provided will be kept confidential. Only the investigator and St. Cloud State Statistical Center will be involved in the analysis of the data. The only identifying information the researcher is requesting is the name of the school and if the elementary school contains a self-contained program. The time required to complete the 22-item rating tool will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

If permission is granted, I have enclosed a standard form letter template, which can be retyped on district letterhead and returned to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Provided in the enclosures is a sample, Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool which the principals will be asked to complete online. The rating tool is scheduled to be sent out to participants by April 2nd, 2018. If there are any questions, concerns, or objections please call me, Sarah at (763) 670-0666 and/or e-mail ecsa0601@stcloudstate.edu

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Eckhoff
9947 Chisholm Trail
Corcoran, MN. 55340
Home- (763) 670-0666

Enclosures: (2) Form Letter Template
Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool

(Please print on letterhead)

Date:

To: St. Cloud State Institutional Review Board

From: Participating School District

Re: Permission to Conduct Study

This school organization has agreed to allow Sarah Eckhoff to collect data from elementary principals for her doctoral study on Least Restrictive Environment. Please consider this a letter of approval

Respectively,

Superintendent of Schools/ (or alternate title)

Appendix B: Letter to Special Education Directors

Good afternoon,

In an effort to better understand the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in elementary schools, I am seeking the participation of elementary school principals in your district for my doctoral research. My study will compare the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment of schools with and without self-contained programs. The research will compare cumulative student placement rates (students per 100 in each Federal Environmental Setting) with least restrictive environment measures for each participating elementary school. The objective is to determine what effect, if any, having a self-contained program in an elementary school has on Least Restrictive Environment and cumulative placement rates. Information gained through this research can be used to influence special education service delivery models and implementation of Least Restrictive Environment.

Would you be willing to encourage your superintendent to allow district participation in the study? The study would require the participation of your district elementary principals in completing an online survey. There are no anticipated discomforts or risks with this study. Participation is voluntary. All participants are free to withdraw her/his consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time. All data provided will be kept confidential. Only the investigator and St. Cloud State Statistical Center will be involved in the analysis of the data. The only identifying information the researcher is requesting is the name of the school and district. The time required to complete the 22-item rating tool will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

If permission is granted, I have attached a standard form letter template, which can be retyped on district letterhead and returned to me in United States post or electronically. Provided in the enclosures is a sample, Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool which the principals will be asked to complete online. The rating tool is scheduled to be sent out to participants by April 30th, 2018. If there are any questions, concerns, or objections please call me, Sarah at (763) 670-0666 and/or e-mail ecsa0601@stcloudstate.edu

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding participation in the study and your effort to persuade district leadership to participate.

Sincerely,

Sarah Eckhoff
Doctoral Candidate
St. Cloud State University
9947 Chisholm Trail
Corcoran, MN. 55340
Home- (763) 670-0666

Attachments: (2) Form Letter Template
Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool

Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participate and Follow Up Email

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral candidate in St. Cloud State University's Educational Administration and Leadership doctoral program. I am seeking the assistance of Minnesota elementary school principals in gather data on the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment in elementary schools with and without self-contained special education classrooms. Your Superintendent supports this research and has provided permission for the study to be conducted in your district.

Please consider taking 10-15 minutes to complete the survey by Friday, June 22nd to assist with this important study. Your participation is voluntary, anonymous, and very much appreciated. You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. The data from your responses will be invaluable. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please click here to take the survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RNVS7Z6

Sincerely,
Sarah Eckhoff
St. Cloud State University Doctoral Candidate
District Behavior Specialist, Osseo Area Schools
(763) 670-0666

Appendix D: Email to Special Education Directors

Good morning, I am writing to request your help. Below you will see the email and link that I have sent to the elementary principals in your district. The response rate for principals in your district is low. I know that it is a busy time of year and principals are trying to prioritize the abundant tasks they have been assigned. I am wondering if you would be willing to forward the message below to your elementary principals, with a brief personalized message asking them to complete the rating tool. Your time and support are appreciated.

Sincerely,
Sarah Eckhoff
St. Cloud State University Doctoral Candidate
District Behavior Specialist, Osseo Area Schools
(763) 670-0666

Appendix E: Least Restrictive Environment Rating Tool

Using your knowledge of programs, services, and initiatives supported by the district, please complete the following self-assessment protocol. Each indicator (ex 1.1) includes multiple descriptors to help you rate the item.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is one that provides the appropriate supports and services while also the greatest amount of access to same age peers and grade level curriculum (Salvador & Pasiali, 2017).

Rate each LRE indicator using the following rating scale: 5 = All of the Time 4 = Most of the Time 3 = Some of the Time 2 = Rarely 1 = Never

1. Vision, expectations, leadership, and climate

1.1 The school has a vision that values and celebrates student diversity. *There is evidence of guiding principles which encourage and support:* *All students educated together.* *High standards and expectations for all students.* *Access to the general education curriculum for all students.* *Participation of all students in district and State assessments with or without accommodations or through an alternate assessment as determined appropriate by the IEP team.* *Input from diverse groups of educators, parents, and the community.* *Staff communicates and demonstrates a philosophy that all students' abilities vs. disabilities are emphasized.*	1 2 3 4 5
1.2 Leadership is supportive of the LRE, and school initiatives and activities reflect the LRE. *School staff are committed to the implementation of LRE programs and supports for students.* *The school special education staff monitors implementation of LRE throughout the school on an ongoing basis, including access to the general education curriculum & access to extra-curricular activities for all school-age students.* *Personnel within the school are held accountable for implementing LRE.* *School staff directs resources to the training of staff regarding LRE requirements and appropriate opportunities and assessments.*	1 2 3 4 5
1.3 The school fosters a climate of collaboration between special and general education in order to promote school climate and culture in which there is a sense of community, where everyone belongs, is accepted, and is supported by peers and other members of the school community. *General and special education staff at the work collaboratively to plan and implement initiatives, activities, and supports that consistently communicate high expectations.* *The school monitors procedures and activities that foster and encourage social relationships between and among all students.* *The school is characterized by a climate or culture in which there is a sense of community where everyone belongs, is accepted and supported by peers and other members of the school community.*	1 2 3 4 5

2. Policies and procedures that promote LRE

2.1 School LRE policies and procedures reflect requirements of State and Federal law. *Students start and end the school day as well as recess and other activities at the same time as others in their school.* *All students have access to co-curricular and extracurricular activities.* *District policies and procedures regarding LRE, including transportation, are periodically reviewed with input from parents and staff.* *School committees include input from parents and parent groups representing special and general education children.* *The school is accessible and welcoming to all students.* *Personnel at the school are held accountable for providing support to the families for implementation of LRE, as determined within student IEPs.* *The school demonstrates ongoing responsibility and accountability for all students regardless of location of services or service provider.*	1 2 3 4 5
2.2 There are fiscal, organizational, and human supports provided for implementation of LRE *The school provides fiscal, human, and organizational resources for implementation of LRE (e.g., collaboration, planning time, IEP planning time, available substitutes, supports for participation at the IEP meeting for all required participants).* *Textbooks, instructional materials, and technology used throughout the school are available to all students.* *All curricular and extracurricular activities and opportunities are available to all students.* *Trained personnel are provided to implement LRE (teachers, related service staff, and paraprofessionals).* *School-sponsored standards and curriculum/ instruction/professional development activities are designed to infuse all student ability levels within the content presented.* *The school increases the knowledge base of its staff through strategies such as staff development and university partnerships for research and demonstration efforts*	1 2 3 4 5
2.3 Services for students are provided in schools they would attend if not disabled. *IEP determinations begin with consideration of how to appropriately support each student in the general education classroom/program.* *Families are informed that general education is the first consideration by the IEP team.* *The number of students with disabilities is within natural proportions.* *LRE placement patterns are regularly monitored by staff to ensure that decisions are being made based on the needs of the students.*	1 2 3 4 5

3. An array of services and program and classroom strategies

3.1 There are effective school strategies in the general education including early prevention/student support practices and coaching that promote successful learning. *The school provides support in the implementation of effective classroom instruction in general education, including early prevention, as the first premise on which to build successful services in the LRE.*	1 2 3 4 5
3.2 Research-and practice-based services and strategies are provided to meet students' unique needs to access the general curriculum. *The school provides information regarding research-based best practices to inform the school staff about the services and strategies that support implementation of the LRE.* *The school provides the necessary administrative support for the provision of services and strategies for any service written into the IEP.*	1 2 3 4 5
3.3 There are program organizational structures at the school that facilitate LRE. *The school provides administrative support for LRE including planning time across general and special education staff* *The district supports schools to utilize creative and innovative strategies to meet the LRE needs of students.*	1 2 3 4 5
3.4 There are classroom organizational structures at the school level that facilitate LRE. *The school has appropriate space, materials, and supplies to educate students with disabilities in order to provide access to the core curriculum.* *Effective classroom/program instruction in general education is supported by the school as the first premise on which to build successful services in the LRE.*	1 2 3 4 5
3.5 There is adequate access to assistive and instructional technology in order to support students in the LRE. *The school has developed and is effectively implementing a plan for the provision of necessary assistive and instructional technology to students and teachers* *The school facilitates effective use of technology for students.* *Training is provided in the use of assistive technology.*	1 2 3 4 5
3.6 The school ensures access classroom modifications, adaptations and accommodations. *IEP forms reflect the inclusion of necessary instructional and curriculum modifications, adaptations, and accommodations.* *The school provides ongoing support and assistance to school staff regarding the implementation of classroom modifications, adaptations, and accommodations for students.* *The school monitors IEPs for the identification and provision of supplementary aids and services (e.g., curriculum modifications, behavioral interventions, and assistive technology).*	1 2 3 4 5
3.7 The school ensures access to physical modifications and accommodations to support students in the LRE. *The district carries out a periodic assessment of the physical accessibility of the school (including playgrounds, classrooms, halls, cafeterias, and gyms) to ensure that all school is physically accessible and welcoming to all students.* *The district has a short and long-range plan for improving physical accessibility, modifications, and accommodations for all students, which is revised, as needed.*	1 2 3 4 5

4. School accountability systems that reflect high expectations for all students

4.1 Assessment facilitates LRE (e.g., qualified staff, strength-based vs. deficit-based strategies, documentation of progress within the general curriculum, and culturally appropriate assessment). *The school ensures that assessment practices facilitate the implementation of LRE as identified in IDEA through:* *Hiring and maintaining qualified staff* *The effective use of functional, strengths-based assessments which integrate information from the family and the entire transdisciplinary team* *The effective use of ongoing documentation of progress within the general curriculum* *Assessment procedures that include information related to enabling the child to be involved in and progress within the general curriculum* *Assessment and IEP development practices value and include information provided by the parents.* *The school uses culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments.* *The school staff (psychologists and special education teachers) effectively use:* *Functional behavior assessment for the purpose of developing behavioral support plans* *Data-based student progress monitoring* *Alternate assessment methods such as portfolios, interviews and other qualitative methods of evaluation.* *The school maintains ongoing responsibility and accountability for all students.*	1 2 3 4 5
4.2 Students are included within state and district assessments and other forms of accountability that assess what the student is being taught and that measure ongoing student progress toward identified educational goals. *Staff oversee the inclusion of students with disabilities in district and state assessments, including accommodations and alternate assessments, including: Staff training, and ongoing monitoring of the types of assessments provided, types of accommodations, and the numbers and kinds of students receiving an alternate assessment.* *The school monitors suspension, retention, attendance rates, graduation rates, and dropout rates for all students.* *The school ensures that training and support are provided regarding allowable accommodations to district and state assessments for students with disabilities, as well as support for alternate assessments.*	1 2 3 4 5

5. Teachers, parents, and students working together for better student results

5.1 There is coordination and cooperation with personnel working together and supporting each other (e.g., through team teaching, co-teaching, teacher and student assistance teams, and other collaborative arrangements). *Special and general education staff work together to support collaboration and coordination between special and general education teachers and other staff within the school.* *Sufficient time is provided on a regular basis throughout the year for personnel to talk and work together regarding student needs.*	1 2 3 4 5
5.2 Parents are embraced as equal partners and fully involved in their child's educational program. *The school encourages and implements outreach efforts for all parents to facilitate effective service delivery including LRE supports for their children. Parental input regarding effective adaptations and accommodations are solicited.* *Parents are included in all components of the IEP process.* *The school implements strategies for fully involving parents and embracing them as equal partners in the educational process for their child.* *The school provides ongoing training, information and support for parents that considers and is respectful of cultural and language diversity.*	1 2 3 4 5
5.3 Students are involved in their IEP/LRE discussions. *The school implements strategies for effectively involving students in the educational process, including their IEP meetings.*	1 2 3 4 5

6. Sufficient numbers of qualified staff

6.1 Ongoing training readily available for IEP teams. *School staff have received information and training regarding LRE legal requirements and best practices.* *Staff development is provided for school principals related to LRE legal requirements and effective practices.* *The school provides ongoing staff development activities for special and general education teachers regarding LRE legal requirements and effective practices, including ways to make the general curriculum accessible for all students.* *The school implements strategies that provide positive behavior supports to students, including modeling and coaching.* *The school implements aggressive training, retaining, recruitment, and retention strategies with the goal of providing qualified personnel.*	1 2 3 4 5
6.2 Supports are provided to teachers and other school staff in meeting the LRE needs of students with disabilities. *Personnel is available to provide training and ongoing direct support for curriculum modifications and other student supports to assure appropriate education in general education settings.* *Training, mentoring, and coaching are available for general and special education teachers/staff.* *The school provides training and ongoing support for IEP team members regarding physical adaptations, accommodations and assistance.* *The school provides support, training, and ongoing assistance for implementation of strategies that provide positive supports to students (i.e., natural support networks and strategies such as peer tutoring, buddy systems, circle of friends, systemic supports, cooperative learning and other ways of connecting students in natural, ongoing, and supportive relationships).* *The school provides information, training, and assistance to staff on the implementation of strengths-based, integrated, and functional behavior assessment, student progress monitoring, and culturally appropriate assessments.*	1 2 3 4 5
6.3 Paraprofessionals provide support for special and general education teachers in the implementation of LRE. *The school has a training program for paraprofessionals to facilitate their support of students in the LRE.* *School staff monitor the effectiveness of services provided by paraprofessionals and the guidance and supervision provided for paraprofessionals by the general and special education teachers.*	1 2 3 4 5

Self-Contained Program

Does your elementary school have a self-contained classroom? *Self-contained program: a special education setting or classroom where a student with disabilities spends 60% or more of their school day (Kurth, 2015).*	YES NO

Appendix F: IRB Approval Letters

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION:

Name: Sarah Eckhoff

Email: ecsa0601@stcloudstate.edu

After review of your existing data application, the IRB was able to determine that because the identity of individual subjects may not be readily ascertained or associated with the information that will be provided to you, the research does not qualify as research with human subjects under policy [45 CFR 46.102(f)(2)]. You may proceed with your project.

Project Title: Implementation of Least Restrictive Environment and Cumulative Placement Rates - Existing Data

Advisor Kay Worner

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Sarah Eckhoff

Email: ecsa0601@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Exempt Review

Project Title: Implementation of Least Restrictive Environment and Cumulative Placement Rates

Advisor Kay Womer

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology,Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1809 - 2309	**Type:** Exempt Review	**Today's Date:** 4/17/2018
1st Year Approval Date: 4/9/2018	**2nd Year Approval Date:**	**3rd Year Approval Date:**
1st Year Expiration Date:	**2nd Year Expiration Date:**	**3rd Year Expiration Date:**