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## ABSTRACT

Teachers, administrators, and counselors throughout South Carolina were randomly surveyed to evaluate attitudes toward inclusion. One hundred administrators, 125 counselors, and 342 teachers responded. Philosophically, over half of counselors and teachers believed that students with special needs have a basic right to be taught in the general education classroom, but only 43 percent of administrators felt that way. The three groups agreed that students with special needs would benefit from inclusion, but one third or less believed that students would increase their academic skills in inclusive settings. Regarding feasibility, 72 percent of teachers, 60 percent of administrators, and 44 percent of counselors believed that inclusion was a good idea but would meet with much resistance from general educators. Most general educators preferred to send special needs students to special education classes. Many responses indicated that general educators received little assistance from special educators. The three groups believed that general and special educators should collaborate, yet responses revealed that general educators are marginally comfortable in coteaching with special educators. Over half of teachers, administrators, and counselors felt that more finances are needed to successfully implement inclusion. Perceptions of special needs students were mixed, but all three groups perceived them as needing more attention. Results indicate a need for teacher preparation programs and faculty development, lower student-teacher ratios in the inclusion class, financial commitment for inclusionary service delivery models, and mission statements that reflect community values and beliefs. Three tables include survey responses. Contains 21 references. (TD)

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## RURAL TEACHERS', ADMINISTRATORS', AND COUNSELORS' ATTITUDES ABOUT INCLUSION

*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990) formerly, the *Education of the Handicapped Act* (1975), mandated that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The least restrictive environment may be a general education classroom or it may be a more restrictive setting such as self-contained classroom. The *Oberti v. Clementon* case (1992) established a federal court precedent in support of inclusion. School districts must justify any decision to exclude a child from the regular class. Often this exclusion process is conducted by regarding the student's daily educational schedule on a class by class basis. Each segment of the day must be discussed and documented in terms of inclusion or exclusion.

Inclusion has its roots in the regular education initiative (REI). Madeline Will (1985) first proposed the regular education initiative as a curricular methodology to educate students with mild disabilities within the mainstreamed classroom. Advocacy efforts ensued and by the end of the 1980's, the concept took on an inclusionary perspective which translated in some educational circles as educating all students in the mainstream, including those students with severe and profound involvement (Rogan & Davern, 1992). Mainstreaming and inclusion are terms that have been used in the literature to describe service delivery models that provide instruction for students with disabilities in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers. While both terms appear to have the same meaning, inclusion is used in the school reform literature as well as in the special education literature and denotes a concept of full participation with necessary accommodations in a classroom where all students are equal members. Inclusion refers to every child's right to be taught to his highest level of understanding (Kansas State Department of Education, 1992). The Massachusetts Task Force on Education (Feldman, 1991) considers inclusion to be more than mere physical proximity of students with and without disabilities. It is multi-leveled instruction which is sensitive to ability ranges and learning styles, focuses on reciprocal relationships between students, and generalizes knowledge across the continuum. Students in an inclusive setting work in flexible learning environments with the implementation of teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, peer mediated learning, and collaborative and team teaching (Schragg & Burnette, 1993; Villa et al., 1996; Fuchs et al., 1990; NEA, 1992).

The National Association of School Boards of Education (NASBE, 1992) Special Education Study Group developed a list of assumptions that included the following: (1) an integrated education system is best, (2) with support, many student needs can be met by regular teachers, (3) all students have differences and instruction should reflect the individual needs of all students, (4) a situation where there are no choices for separate programming is unacceptable. Critics have noted that these principles are based on the assumption that with proper training, good teachers will be willing and able to teach students with special needs; yet teachers judged as most competent based on effective school research may not have the most positive attitude toward students with special needs (Roach, 1991). Concerns from several professional groups in the field of education are noted. Teachers expressed concerns about the adequacy of their

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preparation (Peck et al., 1989). Administrators had concerns about liability, increased parental expectations (Peck et al., 1989), and philosophical differences between teachers (Littrell et al., 1994). Counselors expressed concerns about the the social and emotional well being of the students involved in inclusion settings (Stainback et al., 1992).

The Massachusetts Task Force presents five areas critical to successful inclusion. They are training, staffing, class size, curriculum, and phasing in the plan (Feldman, 1991). Preparation in the form of information dissemination must be systematic and timely, beginning prior to implementation and continuing throughout the process. It should be comprehensive and inclusive, and presented as professional development rather than obligatory training. It should give professionals the skills, knowledge, and resources to deliver effective educational services to students with disabilities (Gillung & DeFrances, 1992). This comprehensive personnel development will require significant effort on the part of professional organizations, state and local educational agencies, colleges and universities, the federal government, and the private sector (Gillung & DeFrances, 1992). Most importantly, successful inclusion requires increased communication among school personnel and between school personnel and families (Feldman, 1991).

A major factor in the success of inclusion is in the hands of higher education teacher preparation programs. Many teachers do not feel confident in their knowledge and skills of students with disabilities (Schumm & Vaughn, 1992). Collaboration must be modeled among professors (both regular and special education) and discussed and practiced in coursework and field experiences. More preparation in content areas for special educators and more preparation in diverse learners' needs and service delivery models for regular educators must be implemented as a first step toward modeling collaboration at the higher education level. All students should be required to complete field experience in an inclusion classroom.

The present study was designed to evaluate the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and counselors in South Carolina toward inclusion. The intent of the study was to identify areas of need for teacher inservice as well as graduate and undergraduate coursework pertaining to inclusive education. School districts as they address restructuring school reform and higher education as it addresses restructuring will need to plan effective programs based on data collected from public perceptions.

### **Method**

Surveys were randomly distributed to teachers, administrators and counselors throughout South Carolina. The surveys included twenty-five statements rated by using a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The major areas addressed included: the general education teacher's role, attitude and knowledge of collaboration and disabilities, the role of special educators in inclusion, and the impact of special education students in inclusive settings. Three hundred forty-two teacher surveys were returned, one hundred twenty-five counselor surveys were returned, and one hundred administrators surveys were returned.

### **Results**

The results of the survey are reported in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The results of the questionnaire were broken down into six themes: (1) basic philosophical beliefs (questions 10, 13, 17, 18, 25, 12), (2) feasibility of inclusion (questions 1, 6, 8, 9, 4), (3) collaboration (questions 3, 5, 7), (4) finances (questions 11, 24), (5) giftedness (question 16), and (6) perceptions of students with special needs (questions 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23).

Philosophical beliefs were for the most part pro inclusion. Counselors (58%) and teachers (59%) believed that students with special needs have a basic right to be taught in the general education classroom. Only 43% of the administrators felt the same way. Teachers (62%) and administrators (65%) felt that students with special needs would benefit from inclusive settings and would not effect the regular education class negatively (teachers, 62%;

administrators, 60%; counselors, 44%). However, only forty-five percent of the counselors agreed that students with special needs would benefit from inclusion. While the three groups agreed that students with special needs would indeed benefit from inclusion, only 23% of the teachers, 30% of the administrators, and 24% of the counselors believed that students would increase their academic skills in inclusive settings. With regard to who was responsible for the education of students with special needs in the general education class, teachers (51%) and administrators (60%) felt that the primary responsibility for the education of students with special needs belonged to the general educator. Forty percent of the counselors agreed.

The feasibility issue was less promising. Regarding resistance from general education teachers, the survey found that teachers (72%), administrators (60%), and counselors (44%) believed that although inclusion was a good idea, it would meet with much resistance from general educators and that most general educators prefer to send students with special needs to the special education classes for service delivery (teachers, 67%; administrators, 65%; and counselors, 61%). Many responses indicated that general educators received little assistance from special educators (teachers, 35%; administrators, 22%; and counselors, 36%). Only a slightly higher percentage of responses believed that special education teachers provide support for all students (teachers, 57%; administrators, 58%; and counselors, 58%) rather than for students with special needs only (teachers, 33%; administrators, 29%; and counselors, 40%).

Collaboration received positive responses. Teachers (84%), administrators (70%), and counselors (72%) believed that general and special educators should collaborate. The three response groups saw no problem with the issue of who would be in charge of the inclusive classroom (teachers, 63%; administrators, 50%; and counselors, 59%); yet the groups' responses revealed that general educators are marginally comfortable in co-teaching with special educators (teachers, 33%; administrators, 40%; and counselors, 29%).

Finances were perceived as not reducing the load of the general classroom teacher (teachers, 21%; administrators, 20%; and counselors, 22%) and that more finances are needed to successfully implement inclusion (teachers, 57%; administrators, 50%; and counselors, 58%).

Approximately one-third of each group saw inclusion as a threat to the education of gifted students in inclusive classrooms (teachers, 34%; administrators, 34%; and counselors, 33%).

Perceptions of students with special needs was a mixed bag. While the groups believed that students with special needs would improve their social skills in inclusive settings (teachers, 66%; administrators, 68%; and counselors, 48%), there was still the issue of problem behaviors among students with special needs (teachers, 45%; administrators, 26%; and counselors, 46%) and the ability to adjust to the regular classroom (teachers, 34%; administrators, 19%; and counselors, 30%). Peer acceptance was high (teachers, 42%; administrators, 55%; and counselors, 48%); however, students with special needs continued to be stigmatized (teachers, 57%; administrators, 46%; and counselors, 40%). Students with special needs were perceived as needing more attention (teachers, 60%; administrators, 71%; and counselors, 55%) and as having lower study skills (teachers, 44%; administrators, 37%; and counselors, 48%).

## Discussion

The results of this survey are similar to the results of other research on attitudes towards inclusion. The study points out some areas of need for general education and special education, for public schools and higher education, and for counselors and administrators. When general education teachers were asked if they received help with instructional modifications from special educators, the responses indicated that the direct support was limited. While general educators viewed special educators as being supportive, direct assistance with modification tasks may be limited. This may indicate a need for teacher preparation programs and faculty development to teach all educators how to make curricular modifications to meet the needs of all students. The preferences of general educators in sending students with special needs to the special education teacher while recognizing their responsibility to students with special needs may indicate a lack of confidence in their knowledge and skills. Again, teacher preparation programs and faculty



development could address these issues. The responses indicated that general education teachers, although willing, were marginally comfortable in co-teaching an inclusion class. Again, higher education and faculty development could easily address this problem. The survey also indicated a need for lower student teacher ratios in the inclusion class as well as the need for a financial commitment for inclusionary service delivery models.

Many issues need to be addressed for successful inclusion to occur. Toward the implementation of successful inclusion, each school district will need a well defined mission statement which reflects the community's values and beliefs. This mission statement should also be well planned, well communicated, and gradually and methodically implemented. "Rules, regulations, funding patterns, and interagency agreements... are necessary to support the vision of public education." (Gillung and DeFrances, 1992, p. 15)

Change is more likely to be accepted if faculty have the opportunity to understand why the change is needed. They may even embrace the change if given a voice in its development. Reform embraces the past, present, and the future. It is continuous and reflects society's view of what is important for that period of time. This makes reform an open-ended social issue (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Solutions will be difficult to find; however, resolutions have the potential to reflect professional, political, and public sentiments (Kaufman et al., 1990). It is important for a cross section of professionals from the education field discuss inclusion and come to a consensus. No one person has enough knowledge or can be solely responsible for change (York et al., 1989). Many people must be involved to create and sustain the momentum of change. This can be accomplished through taking small, well thought out steps and achieving success, finding natural support, using a participation approach, coming to consensus, employing group problem solving, and communicating effectively with everyone involved (York et al., 1989).

The school reform movement with its focus on inclusive education and the public's demand for accountability require educators to work collaboratively to assure an educated populace. Higher education will need to structure integrated teacher preparation programs that model and focus on collaborative teaching. School districts will be expected to provide individual programming for all students in inclusive environments.

**Table I**  
**Responses To Survey On Attitudes Of Teachers Toward Inclusion**

	A Strongly Agree	B Agree	C Neutral	D Disagree	E Strongly Disagree
1. Although inclusion of students with special needs is a good idea, one reason it will not succeed is too much resistance from regular education teachers.	15%	57%	22%	3%	3%
2. Regular education teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to teach students with special needs.	3%	9%	13%	45%	30%
3. Special education and regular education teachers should demonstrate collaboration with all students with special needs in the regular education classroom.	51%	33%	11%	5%	0%
4. The regular education teacher receives little assistance from special education teachers in modifying instruction for students with special needs.	9%	26%	29%	31%	5%
5. Bringing special education teachers into regular education classrooms can cause serious difficulties in determining "who is in charge".	5%	14%	18%	51%	12%
6. Regular education teachers prefer sending students with special needs to special education classrooms than have special education teachers deliver services in their classroom.	22%	45%	23%	6%	4%
7. Regular education teachers are comfortable co-teaching content areas with special education teachers.	3%	30%	33%	30%	4%
8. Special education teachers provide educational support for all students.	14%	43%	24%	18%	1%
9. The special education teacher only provides assistance to those students with special needs.	7%	26%	18%	27%	22%
10. Regular education teachers have the primary responsibility for the education of students with special needs in their classroom.	12%	39%	12%	25%	12%
11. The redistribution of special education resources into the regular education classroom decreases the instructional load of the regular education teacher.	4%	17%	28%	31%	20%
12. The inclusion of students with special needs negatively affects the performance of regular education students.	6%	12%	20%	42%	20%
13. Students with special needs have a basic right to receive their education in the regular classroom.	18%	41%	23%	15%	3%
14. Students with special needs improve their social skills when placed in a regular class.	21%	47%	17%	11%	4%
15. Students with special needs lose the label of being "stupid", "strange", or "failures" when placed in the regular education classroom.	14%	19%	10%	38%	19%
16. Gifted students are neglected in inclusive classrooms	18%	16%	21%	34%	11%
17. Students with special needs benefit from inclusion in the regular education classroom.	15%	47%	24%	13%	1%
18. Special needs students do better academically in inclusive classrooms.	8%	15%	45%	27%	5%
19. Students with special needs require more attention and assistance than the regular education teacher can provide.	28%	43%	17%	7%	5%
20. Students with special needs demonstrate more behavior problems than regular education students.	8%	18%	38%	33%	3%
21. Students with special needs adjust well when placed in regular education classrooms.	1%	18%	39%	48%	7%
22. Peers are not accepting of students with special needs in the regular classroom.	4%	10%	31%	48%	7%
23. The study skills of students with special needs are inadequate for success in the the regular education classroom.	6%	31%	32%	27%	4%
24. Although inclusion of students with special needs is important, the necessary resources are not available for it to succeed.	17%	40%	21%	18%	4%
25. Families are supportive of inclusive classrooms.	7%	27%	38%	21%	7%

**Table II**  
**Responses To Survey On Attitudes Of Administrators Toward Inclusion**

	A Strongly Agree	B Agree	C Neutral	D Disagree	E Strongly Disagree
1. Although inclusion of students with special needs is a good idea, one reason it will not succeed is too much resistance from regular education teachers.	25%	35%	20%	10%	10%
2. Regular education teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to teach students with special needs.	15%	15%	15%	35%	20%
3. Special education and regular education teachers should demonstrate collaboration with all students with special needs in the regular education classroom.	50%	20%	10%	20%	0%
4. The regular education teacher receives little assistance from special education teachers in modifying instruction for students with special needs.	12%	20%	23%	25%	20%
5. Bringing special education teachers into regular education classrooms can cause serious difficulties in determining "who is in charge".	18%	14%	18%	40%	10%
6. Regular education teachers prefer sending students with special needs to special education classrooms than have special education teachers deliver services in their classroom.	20%	45%	20%	10%	5%
7. Regular education teachers are comfortable co-teaching content areas with special education teachers.	15%	25%	35%	20%	10%
8. Special education teachers provide educational support for all students.	17%	41%	22%	15%	5%
9. The special education teacher only provides assistance to those students with special needs.	9%	20%	15%	34%	22%
10. Regular education teachers have the primary responsibility for the education of students with special needs in their classroom.	20%	40%	10%	17%	13%
11. The redistribution of special education resources into the regular education classroom decreases the instructional load of the regular education teacher.	7%	13%	28%	30%	22%
12. The inclusion of students with special needs negatively affects the performance of regular education students.	13%	12%	15%	40%	20%
13. Students with special needs have a basic right to receive their education in the regular classroom.	23%	20%	25%	20%	12%
14. Students with special needs improve their social skills when placed in a regular class.	25%	41%	19%	11%	4%
15. Students with special needs lose the label of being "stupid", "strange", or "failures" when placed in the regular education classroom.	17%	23%	20%	30%	10%
16. Gifted students are neglected in inclusive classrooms	20%	14%	18%	35%	13%
17. Students with special needs benefit from inclusion in the regular education classroom.	25%	40%	18%	7%	10%
18. Special needs students do better academically in inclusive classrooms.	10%	20%	35%	11%	24%
19. Students with special needs require more attention and assistance than the regular education teacher can provide.	20%	40%	18%	7%	10%
20. Students with special needs demonstrate more behavior problems than regular education students.	27%	18%	30%	10%	15%
21. Students with special needs adjust well when placed in regular education classrooms.	7%	27%	28%	30%	8%
22. Peers are not accepting of students with special needs in the regular classroom.	8%	20%	30%	34%	8%
23. The study skills of students with special needs are inadequate for success in the the regular education classroom.	14%	30%	25%	26%	5%
24. Although inclusion of students with special needs is important, the necessary resources are not available for it to succeed.	15%	35%	24%	20%	6%
25. Families are supportive of inclusive classrooms.	6%	20%	40%	24%	10%

**Table III**  
**Responses To Survey On Attitudes Of Counselors Toward Inclusion**

	A Strongly Agree	B Agree	C Neutral	D Disagree	E Strongly Disagree
1. Although inclusion of students with special needs is a good idea, one reason it will not succeed is too much resistance from regular education teachers.	20%	24%	20%	16%	20%
2. Regular education teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to teach students with special needs.	24%	16%	20%	8%	32%
3. Special education and regular education teachers should demonstrate collaboration with all students with special needs in the regular education classroom.	52%	20%	12%	12%	3%
4. The regular education teacher receives little assistance from special education teachers in modifying instruction for students with special needs.	12%	24%	36%	16%	12%
5. Bringing special education teachers into regular education classrooms can cause serious difficulties in determining "who is in charge".	4%	16%	16%	36%	23%
6. Regular education teachers prefer sending students with special needs to special education classrooms than have special education teachers deliver services in their classroom.	23%	38%	20%	12%	7%
7. Regular education teachers are comfortable co-teaching content areas with special education teachers.	6%	23%	26%	37%	8%
8. Special education teachers provide educational support for all students.	18%	40%	22%	16%	4%
9. The special education teacher only provides assistance to those students with special needs.	12%	28%	21%	19%	20%
10. Regular education teachers have the primary responsibility for the education of students with special needs in their classroom.	8%	32%	24%	24%	12%
11. The redistribution of special education resources into the regular education classroom decreases the instructional load of the regular education teacher.	8%	14%	24%	32%	23%
12. The inclusion of students with special needs negatively affects the performance of regular education students.	16%	10%	32%	20%	22%
13. Students with special needs have a basic right to receive their education in the regular classroom.	20%	38%	16%	16%	10%
14. Students with special needs improve their social skills when placed in a regular class.	18%	30%	19%	24%	9%
15. Students with special needs lose the label of being "stupid", "strange", or "failures" when placed in the regular education classroom.	11%	12%	35%	26%	16%
16. Gifted students are neglected in inclusive classrooms	13%	20%	24%	32%	11%
17. Students with special needs benefit from inclusion in the regular education classroom.	10%	35%	25%	16%	14%
18. Special needs students do better academically in inclusive classrooms.	8%	16%	40%	20%	16%
19. Students with special needs require more attention and assistance than the regular education teacher can provide.	20%	35%	20%	14%	11%
20. Students with special needs demonstrate more behavior problems than regular education students.	22%	24%	26%	20%	8%
21. Students with special needs adjust well when placed in regular education classrooms.	16%	14%	30%	20%	12%
22. Peers are not accepting of students with special needs in the regular classroom.	12%	16%	24%	35%	13%
23. The study skills of students with special needs are inadequate for success in the the regular education classroom.	16%	32%	28%	16%	8%
24. Although inclusion of students with special needs is important, the necessary resources are not available for it to succeed.	14%	44%	16%	14%	12%
25. Families are supportive of inclusive classrooms.	12%	28%	32%	20%	8%



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