DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS: A LOOK AT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) require that students with disabilities have equal access to general education curricula and contexts. Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP) is designed to support educators in meeting IDEA and NCLB requirements. The authors reviewed 35 School Improvement Plans (SIP) from the seven largest districts across the state to find evidence of schools participating in the DAP for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The findings suggest that although a level of consistency was evidenced in certain districts, a great deal of variety remains across the seven districts sampled regarding potentially effective professional development and continuous improvement strategies promoting inclusive practices. The article describes and analyzes localized responses to accountability policy approaches that are reflected globally in trends towards state supported systems that utilize high-stakes measurement metrics and supports to spur more efficient and competitive reforms for all students, including students with disabilities.

Service delivery is a central concern for educators of students with disabilities throughout the world. In the United States, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA) of 2004 and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB) require that students with disabilities have equal access to general education curricula and contexts (US Department of Education, 2002; 2004). The state of Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP) is designed to support educators in meeting IDEA and NCLB requirements (US Department of Education, 2008b). Specifically, the DAP, which is a federal incentive policy designed to afford states flexibility in aligning improvement efforts with individual schools' specific needs according to each school's AYP status, requires schools in needs improvement status (SINI) to develop action plans with professional development and curriculum and instruction among targeted components. Schools subsequently incorporate the action plan into individual Differentiated Accountability School Improvement Plans (SIP) (Florida Department of Education, 2008a).

This article is written within the context of the professional and academic domain of the United States and does not reflect the international variability in the broad special education policy targets, nor incredibly wide disparities reflected in the experience of students with disabilities throughout the globe (Clements & Read, 2008). Nevertheless, Florida's special education policy efforts provide an example of the design and implementation of accountability policy managerial technologies reflected in globalizing trends towards state supported systems that utilize high-stakes measurement metrics and supports to spur more efficient and competitive reforms through a system that ranks schools (Bernahu, 2010; Fullan, 2010; Itkonnen & Jahnukainen, 2007). Within recent history, the state of Florida's accountability reform efforts have been viewed as one of the most comprehensive within the United States and held up as an example of effective accountability reform by several policy institutes in Washington, D.C. Since 1999, the state has vigorously pursued charter school and other school choice initiatives, performance-based pay, grading of schools, targeted remedial instruction, and other reforms designed to both provide tight oversight of schools, particularly poorly performing schools that still recognizes the local variability and comparative looseness of historically decentralized educational systems in the United States (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Dorn, 2007; Ladner & Burke, 2010). Critics have pointed to narrowing of curriculum and educational goals, a dispirited and oppressed teaching force, and symbolic forms of performativity that seek to obfuscate stagnant student achievement gains (Dorn, 2007).

What we describe in this paper provides insight into what Fuhrman, Goertz, & Weinbaum (2010) describe as the push towards *greater homogenization of intergovernmental arrangements* (p.57) in the United States in order to better coordinate disparate programs, as well as global phenomena of *ever increasing number of diverse demands for improvement in challenging contexts* (Rayner, 2007, p. 148). In contrast with approaches in a country like Finland, which creates policies and distributes resources

under the assumption that achievement is a collective responsibility, the educational policy process described in this paper emanates from a policy ecology that seeks to provide equal individual access and opportunities through grant in aid programs like the Title I and the Differentiated Accountability Program (Itkonnen & Jahnukainen, 2007). Similarly, Deluca and Stillings (2008) report that different European countries have developed models in order to differentiate and target additional funding to either schools with students with special needs or the individuals themselves and linking benchmarking performance indicators to those schools and students.

This study contributes to inquiry into distinct school-based professional development and continuous improvement efforts regarding students with disabilities as they relate to policies implemented in a particular policy contexts. The authors present findings from a content analysis of School Improvement Plans for 35 selected elementary schools designated in need of improvement. The text of the School Improvement Plans is analyzed to increase understanding of schools' conceptionalization of the types of teacher development and school improvement efforts needed to educate students with disabilities. Working from a hypothesis that integration of inclusive practices in SIPs reflects schools' intent to support principles of equal access to general education curricula for students with disabilities, the authors examine whether objectives and strategies in reading appear to promote inclusive practices through professional development and an articulated continuous improvement model (CIM). The research questions addressed in the study are: Does the language used in SIPs provide evidence that schools target students with disabilities through differentiated and supported instruction? Furthermore, does the language used in SIPs provide evidence that targeted instruction is supported by providing professional development to special education and/or general education teachers responsible for teaching students with disabilities?

The article first introduces Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program and profiles its significance. Then literature on professional development for inclusive education is reviewed before an ensuing discussion on methods and analysis of districts' and schools' chosen strategies of targeting students with disabilities' reading achievement through professional development guided by the CIM process. A discussion of findings in response to the research questions, implications of the findings and recommendations for future research conclude the article.

Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program
Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP) is designed to focus efforts to reduce achievement gaps between students in accountability subgroups through more distinctive forms of intervention that consider individual schools' and/or districts' needs. The DAP seeks to offer states and local school districts opportunities to contextualize improvements using more *global and transformative intervention(s)* (US Department of Education, 2008a, p.4). In the United States, the logic of standards based has more attention on lower performing schools as *schools are now steered by the identification and regulation of learning outcomes* as a means to more efficiently coordinate state policy actions and target the allocation of limited resources (Cohen, 2007, p. 358)

When DAP was adopted in 2008, Florida was seen as an attractive pilot site because of the state's history of accountability reform, diversity, and performance of its identified subgroups (Borman & Dorn, 2007). For example, students with disabilities, Black students, and English Language Learners (ELL) did not meet AYP in reading or math for five consecutive school years prior to implementation of DAP in 2008 (Florida Department of Education, 2009). Outcome trends for aggregate student groups such as students with disabilities suggest a need for innovation in targeted intervention strategies as facilitated through the DAP process.

Florida's approved DAP consolidates Title I schools into categories based on the number of years classified as SINI, school grade (schools and districts are graded on a scale of A to F by the state of Florida), and the percent of adequate yearly progress (AYP) achieved (see Appendix A). The result is a five-celled matrix that differentiates schools and that encourages a locally customized system of intervention and support (US Department of Education, 2008a). Florida's DAP requires districts to submit a *Comprehensive Intervention and Support Plan* (CISP) to the Florida Department of Education for schools in each of the five SINI categories (SINI Prevent I, SINI Correct I, SINI Prevent II, SINI Correct II, SINI Intervene). The plan underscores the role of the state, district, and school in planning leadership strategies and interventions for each SINI group in nine areas including Professional Development and the CIM. SINIs subsequently integrate components from the districts' CISPs into the current year's *Florida Differentiated Accountability Program School Improvement Plan* (Florida

Department of Education, 2008a).

DAP and Professional Development
Florida's professional development model is patterned after research concluding that effective professional development should be intensive and sustained over time in order to have a positive impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Florida House, 2008). Schools and districts must base professional development activities on the *Florida Protocol System* (Florida Department of Education, 2010), developed around 66 state standards, which are based on state and federal requirements and the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) standards. The NSDC standards are organized into *context* (teachers' learning environment), *process* (teachers' learning strategies), and *content* standards (knowledge and skills needed to improve achievement) geared to planning and organizing professional development activities (Florida House, 2008).

The DAP involves redirection of funds from the Basic Title I grant and the IDEA grant to support improvement in the nine target areas (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Expenditures of redirected funds are aligned with guidelines for professional development and the continuous improvement model (CIM), which provides a framework for curriculum and instruction design based on ongoing progress monitoring (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Reading is a focus area within the state's plan. School Improvement Plans for each SINI must incorporate the guidelines for professional development for teachers and administrators as well as the CIM reflected in the process component of the NSDC standards. The process standards within the NSDC address use of multiple sources of student data and other relevant information to guide improvement efforts. Additionally, these standards include provisions for teachers to learn to use research-based instructional practices integrating appropriate learning strategies and to collaborate effectively with colleagues (Florida House, 2008). Examples of funded professional development include establishing and supporting professional learning communities (PLCs), direct professional development in non-AYP areas, data analysis, comprehensive reading programs, research-based reading materials and strategies, and teaching advanced academics courses based on school needs. The DAP outlines the trajectory that professional development and the CIM should follow based on SINI status (see Appendix B). Included among the consequences for failing to comply with DAP guidelines are withholding state and/or federal funds and moving the school to a more restricted SINI category; in this case, to SINI Correct II status (Florida Department of Education, 2008a).

Professional Development for Inclusive Education
Professional development research suggests that macro and micro contextual factors influence its effectiveness on student achievement (Borko, 2004; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). These factors are particularly impactful when it comes to inclusive education. On one hand, accountability requirements provide a macro perspective advanced by NCLB and IDEA; while on the other hand, micro contextual concerns shape the fidelity with which inclusive practices are learned and implemented in classrooms and schools (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Little & Houston, 2003; McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002). In the United States, policies compelling educators to provide students with disabilities equal access to general education curricula and instruction and to ensure that all students meet state academic standards generally represent a shift in traditional ideology and practices related to students with disabilities (Brown, 2006; Bryant, Linan-Thompson, Ugel, Hamff, & Hougen, 2001; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002). Even with guiding federal legislation local practices vary across states and communities in Florida. DeLuca and Stillings (2008) discuss the role of national special education policy on local inclusive practices in various countries in Europe, yet still report that features of schools and curricular approaches, flexibility to use funding streams, as well as local training of teachers may facilitate or constrain inclusive practices. Consideration of who is responsible for teaching students with disabilities is central to discussions about professional development for inclusive education (Black & Burrello, 2010; Cole, 1999; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002). A broader issue is that general education teachers often have to first experience inclusive teaching in order to acknowledge and identify areas where they need professional development (McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002). Thus, professional development for inclusive education must begin with providing teachers with opportunities to gain new knowledge, practice learned skills, and receive feedback from trainers and colleagues over extended periods (Little & Houston, 2003; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008).

Attention to individual school cultural factors is necessary to effecting fundamental changes in teachers'

beliefs about inclusive education. McLeskey & Waldron (2002) suggest that professional development for inclusive education include a structured set of learning opportunities that a) are tailored to each school, b) initially engage teacher and administrator beliefs, understandings, and attitudes towards inclusion, and c) address the needs of all learners. Teachers obtain knowledge and skills in multiple contexts in addition to teacher education courses (Coombs-Richardson & Mead, 2001). Therefore, designers of professional development must consider teachers' individual learning styles as well as the varying contexts in which learning occurs, in order to develop effective professional development (Borko, 2004; Florida House, 2008). The unique characteristics of individual teachers and school contexts factor strongly into designing professional development for faculty engaged in inclusive schooling practices (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Van Hover, 2006; McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002).

For instance, teachers typically have to differentiate instructional material and methods to meet the diverse needs of all students including students with disabilities (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). When teachers receive needed support and resources to include students with disabilities in general education settings, their sense of efficacy and willingness to continue working with students with disabilities tends to increase (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002). Conversely, teachers' implementation and maintenance of learned knowledge and practices depend on the degree of divergence between teachers' preconceptions and new knowledge and skills (Brownell et al. 2009; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Gaps between prior knowledge and skills and those provided through professional development pose challenges for sustained implementation by teachers (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). Some teachers engage in experimentation with prospective instructional strategies, while others request supports such as in-class modeling to supplement in-service training as a means of helping bridge gaps between old and new knowledge and skills (Bryant et al. 2001).

Although research literature illuminates generally agreed upon features of effective professional development, data is inconclusive regarding the elements that lead to increased student achievement (Wayne et al. 2008). However, there is evidence that professional development should be ongoing and should a) incorporate training in multiple contexts, b) opportunities to implement knowledge, strategies and skills, and c) provide teachers with a feedback loop to produce change in teachers' beliefs and practices, that will help facilitate academic success for students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Brownell et al. 2006; Bryant et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009; Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Sukyoon, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Kazemi, & Hubbard, 2008; McLeskey, & Waldron, 2002; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008). Professional development that is sustained over time provides intensive study of content, and which offers opportunities for collegial collaboration between general and special education teachers is associated with improved student achievement (Borko, 2004; Brownell et al. 2006; Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, Scheer, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Desimone et al. 2002). However, professional development of this nature has yet to become prototypical of what most teachers experience (Borko, 2004; Brownell et al. 2006; Buell et al. 1999; Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Desimone et al. 2002).

In fact, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) concluded that although content-focused professional development and use of mentoring/coaching support for teachers is prevalent today, overall the professional development lacked intensity in terms of clock hours of professional development provided over the course of the school year. The professional development experiences lacked opportunities for collaborative work, which Garet et al. (2001) found promote active learning and coherence resulting in increased knowledge and skills by teachers. The benefits of collegial collaboration appear to have even greater impact when teachers teach at the same school, content-areas, and/or grade levels (Garet et al., 2001). While 59% of teachers found professional development in content areas to be useful, less than 50% of teachers found other professional development to be useful to them (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). Smith and Desimone (2003) found similar results regarding teachers' evaluation of usefulness, wherein teachers reported content-related professional development as most useful. Moreover, 15% of teachers expressed a need for additional professional development in special education, indicating perceived inadequacy of the fewer than 8 hours of professional development in special education over 3 years in which 66% of teachers reported participating (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009).

General educators point to specific needs for professional development in curriculum and instruction modifications as well as progress monitoring (Buell et al. 1999). Both require teachers to obtain procedural knowledge as well as knowledge of ways to differentiate instruction according to the range of

learning needs among diverse students such as students with disabilities (Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Klinger, 1998). Furthermore, although teachers may receive high quality professional development, they vary in levels of confidence and proficiency in adopting and adapting learned knowledge and practices (Brownell et al. 2006; Buell et al. 1999; Vaughn et al., 1998). High adapters and adopters would seem to be particularly suited for inclusive education.

> High adopters had the most (a) knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, (b) knowledge and student friendly beliefs about managing student behavior, (c) student-focused views of instruction, and (d) ability to carefully reflect on students' learning. High adopters also were able to adapt strategies to meet students' needs, which in all likelihood derived from the other four qualities. (Brownell et al. 2006, pg. 177)

Moreover, teachers are more likely to adopt and adapt strategies they believe are helpful for standardized test preparation or other school reform initiatives (Desimone et al. 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Vaughn et al., 1998). Because transfer of practices across contexts rarely occurs, teachers are more likely to adopt instructional practices when they have received professional development focused on specific instructional practices (Desimone et al. 2002). Increased job-embedded professional development is seen as a mechanism for improving transfer from training to the classroom (Florida House, 2008).

Professional development that helps teachers to address diverse student needs is required to implement inclusive education. Valeo (2008) notes that there is a global movement towards the delivery of services in classes with typically developing youth. However, her study of inclusion efforts in a school setting in Canada revealed many of the challenges associated with such movements, including limited administrative knowledge of special education and no clear accounting of various teacher roles and the amount of time needed to integrate educational supports into an inclusive classroom settings (Valeo, 2008). Although data that directly connects professional development to student achievement is limited, evidence suggests that professional development must be sustained, content-focused, and provide opportunities for collaboration to be effective. Additionally, contextual factors such as leadership, teacher, school, and student characteristics figure prominently in the types of professional development needed. Before general education teachers adopt inclusive practices, they must believe that all students can benefit from instruction and have confidence in their abilities to provide effective instruction. They can then move to learning specific strategies and making modifications and accommodations to meet the needs of all students (Desimone & Hochberg, 2010). The extent to which the Florida Differentiated Accountability Program supports such efforts is a focus of this study.

The following section includes a description of the method used to collect and analyze data from School Improvement Plans of 35 SINIs in the seven largest school districts in Florida, all of which are racially, economically, and need diverse. The purpose of the analysis is to determine whether schools in the sample appear to promote inclusive practices in reading through a schema that infuses professional development and a CIM.

Methods
Florida requires every public K-12 school to complete uniformly formatted School   Improvement Plans (SIP) annually documenting efforts to meet state accountability requirements for making Adequate Yearly Progress (Florida Department of Education, 2008b). Schools are required to complete sections of the SIP consistent with strategies and interventions established under the Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP) in each category of Title I schools in need of improvement (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). After receiving IRB review and approval, the authors searched the 2008-2009 School Improvement Plans (SIP) for 35 Florida elementary schools classified as SINI according to accountability guidelines under *No Child Left Behind* and the Florida Differentiated Accountability Program to identify common themes regarding instructional strategies and professional development practices promoting inclusive practices in reading relative to students with disabilities.
School Sampling Procedures
The 35 schools form a purposive sample with the following characteristics in order of consideration. First, the schools were elementary schools classified as SINI Correct I within the DAP framework. SINI Correct I schools have been classified as needing improvement for at least four years and met 80% of AYP criteria in Spring 2008. SINI Correct I remain under local monitoring, in contrast to Prevent I schools that maintain autonomy in improvement efforts as well as the remaining SINI categories; i.e., Prevent II, Correct II, and Intervene, which require close supervision by both local (LEA) and state education agencies (SEA). Therefore, schools in Correct I status were sampled, as the authors believed that they were more likely to reflect variation in planned professional development and improvement

models for students with disabilities.

Second, the study draws from the seven districts with highest student enrollment located in multiple areas in the state. Florida Department of Education oversees 67 public county school districts. Public schools in Miami-Dade (Miami), Broward (Ft. Lauderdale), Hillsborough (Tampa), Orange (Orlando), Palm Beach (Palm Beach), Duval (Jacksonville), and Pinellas (St. Petersburg) counties serve 52% of the total K-12 student population (Florida Department of Education, 2009). These districts rank within the top 100 largest school districts nationwide (US Department of Education, 2010a). The diverse composition of students and communities in the districts made the existence of variable approaches to professional development and improvement processes more probable. Moreover, the large size of the districts increased the likelihood that each would have an adequate sample of SINI Correct I schools serving students with disabilities.

The third criterion for inclusion in the study was students with disabilities as a counted subgroup in determination of AYP. As all who work in the schools know, AYP calculations are not easily transparent. All Florida public schools must include students in the following subgroups in AYP calculations if the school meets an enrollment criterion of at least 30 students per subgroup that represent at least 15% of the school's population. The subgroups include White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient (LEP), and Students with Disabilities. Calculations for AYP include considerations regarding *participation* rates (at least 95% of students take the FCAT) and proficiency rates in *reading*, *mathematics*, and *writing*. For 2008-2009, 65% of all students must be performing at or above grade level in reading or mathematics; and 65% must improve by 1% in writing. Finally, AYP calculations include the *graduation* rate (schools must improve by 1%), as well as *school grade* requirements (Florida Department of Education school grade is not *D* or *F*). Additionally, schools that meet all requirements except reading and/or mathematics proficiency may make AYP according to a provision that is designed to provide some relief to schools and districts that have students represented in multiple subgroups: Safe Harbor. By invoking the Safe Harbor provision, a school (or district) may meet AYP criteria for an identified low performing subgroup if the percentage of non-proficient students increased by 10% from the prior year in the subject being evaluated and/or the students are *on track to be proficient* according to the state formula). Only students present in the same school or district for a full academic year, according to October and February student membership audits count towards AYP determination.

The final consideration in selecting schools to be included in the analysis was that students with disabilities failed to make AYP in 2007-2008. Each SINI was required to focus their efforts to improve the achievement of students in each targeted subgroup. Schools in which students with disabilities did not make AYP were required to articulate the ways the school planned to address these students' needs. Once schools met all four criteria, in order to make the data more manageable, five schools from each of the seven representative school districts (n=35) were randomly selected to include in the analysis.

Specifically, the FDOE's database of schools not making AYP was accessed to create a table of Correct I SINIs in the seven districts. The table contained 168 schools. The next step was to determine which of the 168 schools served students with disabilities as a counted subgroup for determining AYP. The School Accountability Reports were reviewed to determine which of the 168 schools served students with disabilities as a counted subgroup. Seventy-nine of the 168 schools provide AYP data for students with disabilities. Those schools making AYP under either Safe Harbor or the Growth Model were retained in the 79 SINI. From these 79, five schools from each district were included in data analysis (see Appendix C for a list of all schools).

Analysis of School Improvement Plans
State-approved SIPs for the 35 individual schools, each averaging 30 pages, were downloaded from each district's website. For 2009 (tests are administered in the spring of each school year), the annual target was 65% of students earning a proficient score in reading. Hence, in the objective section, schools cite objectives for reaching the reading goal and the remaining goals required to make AYP. Schools can make AYP by the percent of students scoring at or above proficient on assessments for the year, Safe Harbor, and/or the Growth Model. Depending on the status of student subgroups, schools' objectives may reflect any combination of these three ways of making AYP and the objectives can be analyzed for content.

The search and analysis was conducted primarily in the *strategies* and *professional development* sections in the 2008-2009 SIPs for the 35 SINIs in the study for reading because the state places particular emphasis on reading outcomes for all student subgroups (Florida Department of Education, 2010b). First, the authors created a spreadsheet that captured specific language pertaining to students with disabilities. The authors then established categories for the overall reading objective, the strategy section, and the professional development (PD) sections according to the research questions. School strategies and professional development were placed in the Differentiated Accountability Program categories. In the *Targeted Direct (DI)* category, the reading objective and the majority of strategies and PD specifically target students with disabilities. In the *Targeted Indirect (TI)* category, the reading objective specifically targets students with disabilities. Strategies and/or PD are identical or mostly similar to strategies/PD for general education students. In the *Nontargeted Direct (ND)* category, the reading objective targets general education students, while some strategies/PD specifically target students with disabilities. Lastly, in the *Nontargeted Indirect (NI)* category, the reading objective targets general education students, and students with disabilities not specifically targeted in strategy/PD.

Utilizing these categories, the authors were able to identify instructional strategies and professional development that were prevalent and determine the extent of their planned use with students with disabilities. The data were then analyzed to answer the research questions. The discussion of findings is organized around themes related to inclusive practices concerning curriculum and instruction within a professional development and CIM context that targets students with disabilities.

Limitations
Although School Improvement Plans (SIPs) provide a formal account of schools' intentions for professional development and continuous improvement, there are limitations to using a single document for this purpose. Some view SIPs as a mechanism to demonstrate schools' compliance with SEA and LEA accountability requirements (Anfara Jr., Patterson, Buehler, & Gearity, 2007). School improvement plans have audiences external to the local school community and they may reflect some messages targeted toward district and state level audiences that may not reflect the capacity and will to implement fully the professional development and CIM processes analyzed and described in this article (Fullan, 2010). Institutional theory reminds us of the tendency toward isomorphism and the lack of variability in approaches reflected in documents and other texts, symbols, and actions as schools attempt to meet compliance guidelines and preserve political and institutional legitimacy with external constituents (Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Descriptive analysis allows deeper scrutiny of the data contained in written SIPs whereas simple quantification of key words and terms may limit understanding of schools' intentions for inclusive educational practices. Additionally, systematic review of each of the SIPs at least two times over a period of several weeks increased the reliability of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although the entirety of each of the plans was examined, analysis of inclusive practice was limited to two primary areas of the SIPS; i.e., the *Strategies* and *Professional Development* sections. Evidence suggesting inclusive practices might be found in any of the other seven categories required under the Florida DAP program. The study was designed to provide a wide look into schools' efforts. Yet, these efforts are limited as representations of intentions as presented in an official planning document. Collection of additional data and documentation and more in-depth and direct observation of schools' implementation of SIPs would be a logical next step to consider.
Moreover, although the seven districts represent 52% of the total student population in Florida, the sample was limited to elementary schools in order to limit variability. The study is also limited to one (Correct I) of the five SINI categories (Prevent I & II, Correct I & II, and Intervene). The sample includes slightly fewer than half (n=35) of the SINI Correct I schools where students with disabilities were a counted accountability subgroup (n=79). This approach provided substantial information regarding Correct I schools, but confines interpretation of the findings to the 35 schools included in the study.

Findings
School Improvement Plans (SIP) from 5 elementary schools in each of the seven largest districts in Florida were examined for indications of inclusive practices and professional development (PD). Public schools in Miami-Dade (Miami), Broward (Ft. Lauderdale), Hillsborough (Tampa), Orange (Orlando), Palm Beach (Palm Beach), Duval (Jacksonville), and Pinellas (St. Petersburg) counties serve the following student enrollments: Miami-Dade (348,116), Broward (258,746), Hillsborough (193,062), Orange (174,033), Palm Beach (170,977), Duval (124,741), and Pinellas (107,882), totaling 1,377,557

students and representing 52% of the total K-12 student population (Florida Department of Education, 2009). This section includes an overview of each district, in order of largest to smallest. Particular emphasis is placed on schools that include a targeted reading objective and the instructional strategies and PD that address the reading objective. The analysis revealed a range of service delivery options for students with disabilities and the authors discuss how the language of SIP revealed efforts at inclusive practice.

District Profiles
Miami-Dade County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Feinberg-Fisher, Peskoe, Dupuis, Lenora Smith, and Silver Bluff Elementary Schools were reviewed. Dupuis Elementary School (2008) specifically included a reading objective targeting students with disabilities. This school included PD in addition to those in the general objective. The remaining SIPs in Miami-Dade indicate some level of inclusive practices. However, the extent of access to the general education curriculum, which is contained in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, remains unclear. Moreover, these schools included PD for the general reading objective only. Key terms and phrases that suggest inclusive education and/or targeting students with disabilities include FCAT Levels 1 & 2, differentiated instruction, flexible small groups, and include student with disabilities w/support/inclusion model.

Case example
Dupuis Elementary School (2008) includes a separate objective for reading for students with disabilities in addition to a general reading objective that also includes targeted strategies for these students. The reading objective that targets students with disabilities reads: *Given instruction using the Sunshine State Standards, Special Education (SPED) students will improve their reading skills as evidenced by 65 percent of students achieving Level 3 or above on the 2009 administration of the FCAT Reading Test* (Dupuis Elementary School, 2008). Strategies listed for accomplishing this objective appear more focused on targeted instruction based on individual student needs. These strategies incorporate the *Continuous Improvement Model* (CIM), which uses assessment and monitoring to guide instructional decisions, along with implementation of the district's *Comprehension Reading Plan* (CRP) and *Title I Extended Day* tutorials to provide reading instruction to students with disabilities. Additionally, ongoing PD in reading is indicated as a means of ensuring that students with disabilities make achievement gains in Reading. Strategies unique to the targeted reading objective include parenting workshops focusing on the *...social, emotional, and academic growth of SPED children and to assist them in improving their child's reading comprehension skills* (Dupuis Elementary School, 2008) and the use of packaged curriculum programs such as the Voyager *Passport Series* and the *Lexia Program.*

One of the first strategies listed for achieving the general reading objective refers to implementing ... *the Inclusion Model and small group individualized instruction to assist Special Education (SPED) students, English Language Learners (ELL) and Advanced Academic students in making adequate learning gains* (Dupuis Elementary School, 2008). Additionally, strategies in this section refer to the CIM, collaborative PD, and Title I Extended Day tutorials similarly to the Reading Objective for students with disabilities.

The reading objective and strategies contained in the Dupuis Elementary School (2008) SIP suggest that service delivery for students with disabilities is based on the continuum of services according to unique students needs as required under IDEA. The SIP indicates that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, as students are included in general education settings with support. Additionally, strategies state that their teachers will be provided with PD and support in the *use of effective reading strategies to improve students' reading skills as reflected in the Sunshine State Standards* (Dupuis Elementary School, 2008). It is unclear whether students who are not fully included in general education receives reading instruction based on the CRP, if these students are taught reading primarily through a diagnostic/prescriptive approach using packaged programs, or a combination of the two. Both packaged programs are listed in the PD section for each objective.

Broward County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Croissant, Davie, Lloyd Estates, Oakridge, and Pompano Beach Elementary Schools were reviewed. Each of the five schools sampled included a reading objective targeting students with disabilities. Croissant Elementary School (2008), Davie Elementary School (2008), Lloyd Estates Elementary School (2008), and Oakridge Elementary School (2008) included numerous strategies targeting students with disabilities. These four schools referred to placement of students with disabilities in classrooms with dually certified teachers. Additionally, dual certification was

a stated focus of PD. Key terms and phrases suggestive of inclusive education and/or targeting students with disabilities include Safe Harbor/Growth Model, dual certification (Elementary Ed. & ESE), PD in inclusive strategies, push-in model, Individualized Education Program (IEP), differentiated instruction, PD in intervention programs, targeted instruction, and second dose/extended learning.

Case example
One example of a targeted Reading Objective comes from the SIP of Davie Elementary School (2008). This objective combines the school's reading goal for students with disabilities with ELL students, bottom quartile students, and the remaining students participating in the FCAT. Reading objectives in the remaining Broward County schools' SIPs incorporated all student subgroups similarly. The SIP lists strategies for all students in the same section:

> By June 2009, 39% of Students with Disabilities will score a Level 3 or above on the reading portion of the FCAT, satisfying the Safe Harbor method of achieving AYP. By June 2009, 50% of English Language Learners will score a Level 3 or above on the reading portion of the FCAT, satisfying the Safe Harbor method of achieving AYP. By June 2009, 82% of all students meeting the criteria of DOE rule 6A-1.09981 will score Level 3 or above on the reading portion of the FCAT. By June 2009, 72% of bottom quartile students will demonstrate learning gains on the 2008 FCAT Reading Assessment and show improved performance in tested strands. (Davie Elementary School, 2008)

Although the SIP lists all student subgroups in the reading objective, certain strategies refer specifically to students with disabilities. These strategies refer to placing students with disabilities in classrooms with dually certified teachers, implementing a push-in model where the special education teacher works with students in the general education classroom as needed, and identifying and implementing packaged programs that target students with disabilities. Additionally, these strategies state that, *Teachers will use strategies/provisions outlined in students Individual Educational Plan (IEP)* (Davie Elementary School, 2008), suggesting that accommodations and modifications to curricula, materials, and/or methods will be implemented on these student's behalf. The Davie professional development plan indicates that teachers are encouraged to become dually certified and that teachers will receive training in intervention reading strategies (Davie Elementary School, 2008).

Hillsborough County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Bing, Lanier, J.S Robinson, Witter, and Edison Elementary Schools were reviewed. Each of the five schools sampled included a reading objective targeting students with disabilities. Additionally, there was a great deal of overlap among the strategies for the Hillsborough schools. Bing Elementary School (2008), Lanier Elementary School (2008), and J.S. Robinson Elementary School (2008) referred to a form of inclusion of students with disabilities for Reading instruction framed as a co-teaching or collaborative teaching model. Bing Elementary School (2008), Edison Elementary School (2008), and Witter Elementary School (2008) implemented individual student conferences with students with disabilities to discuss progress towards goals in reading; i.e., by *examining progress towards benchmark goals*. Moreover, these three schools discussed Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) globally as the primary PD model. Key terms and phrases referencing inclusive practices and/or students with disabilities include individual student conferences/ discussions, differentiated instruction, extended learning, Professional Learning Community (PLC), collaborative/co-teaching model, standard curriculum students, instructional accommodations (Bing Elementary School, 2008; Edison Elementary School, 2008; & Witter Elementary School, 2008).

Case example
The Bing Elementary School SIP (2008) states, *The percentage of AYP All Curriculum students in the students with disabilities subgroup scoring at or above a Level 3 in FCAT Reading will increase from 35% in 2007-2008 to 62% or decrease the percentage of non-proficient students by 10% in 2009. Target = 42%.* Note that the last section regarding a 10% decrease refers to the Safe Harbor provision under State statute. A supporting strategy for this objective states, *The use of a collaborative teaching model of instruction with ESE, ELL and classroom teachers will be implemented to enhance Reading instruction for all students* (Bing Elementary School, 2008). This suggests that general and special education teachers will engage in some form of collaboration, such as planning and delivery of instruction, for students with disabilities. Additionally, the word *model* implies that instruction will take place in a general education setting.

Orange County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Fern, Orla Vista, Azalea, Lake Weston, and Hiawassee Elementary

Schools were reviewed. Hiawassee Elementary School (2008) and Lake Weston Elementary School (2008) included a targeted objective in reading for students with disabilities. The remaining three schools' SIPs reference students in the lowest 25%, without reference to students with disabilities in the reading objective or the supporting strategies. These schools referred to learning gains (Growth Model) as the benchmark for meeting the reading objective. Key terms related to inclusive practices and/or students with disabilities include learning gains, reading intervention, Level 1 & 2/lowest 25%, and NCLB groups.

Case example
The reading objective for Hiawassee Elementary School (2008) states, *By July 2009, 51% of all students with disabilities at Hiawassee Elementary School will score at level 3 or above on FCAT Reading*. The schools' SIP contained numerous strategies that differ from strategies for the general reading objective. These strategies explicitly state that the school is implementing an inclusion model; i.e., *Continue the Instructional Support Model for ESE Inclusion students* (Hiawassee Elementary School, 2008). One assumption that may be made from this statement is that these students have access to the *Next Generation SSS*. Push-in is defined in this SIP as a method to provide grade level reading instruction to *self contained ESE students for 30 minutes daily* (Hiawassee Elementary School, 2008). It is unclear whether this push-in effort will occur by providing instruction in the *Next Generation SSS* in the general education classroom or in a separate setting. Additional strategies indicated for targeted students with disabilities include use of research-based instructional packages such as *Reading Mastery* and PD in research based strategies such as Reading First strategies. Hence, the picture of inclusive service delivery for students with disabilities in this district appears mixed.

Palm Beach County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Belle Glade, Berkshire, Lake Park, Pioneer Park, and Starlight Cove Elementary Schools were reviewed. Belle Glade Elementary School (2008), Berkshire Elementary School (2008), and Lake Park Elementary School (2008) included reading objectives targeting students with disabilities. Each of the 3 schools referred to a form of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education during reading. Each of the five schools referred to learning gains (Growth Model) as the benchmark for meeting the reading objective. Three schools included students with disabilities in PD. Key terms referring to students with disabilities or inclusive practices include Safe Harbor/Growth Model/learning gains, inclusion/full inclusion, targeted instruction, extended learning, looping, and differentiated instruction (Berkshire Elementary School, 2008; Lake Park Elementary School, 2008; Pioneer Elementary School, 2008).

Case example
The Lake Park Elementary School SIP (2008) states its reading objective in terms of students in each subgroup, which includes students with disabilities. The SIP for Lake Park contains general strategies along with a subsection of strategies targeting students with disabilities. The strategies include provisions for students with disabilities to *…access to the general education curriculum where differentiated instruction is utilized* (Lake Park Elementary School, 2008), as well as research-based instructional and technological strategies and programs such as *SRA Corrective Reading*, *Reading Mastery*, and *Read, Write, Gold – texthelp*. The SIP states that these strategies would be implemented in either the *regular* or general education program. The SIP describes ongoing PD in multiple intelligences/cooperative learning, differentiated instructional strategies, and *training on IEP development and the nature and learning styles of students with disabilities to improve their instructional delivery to a diverse population in the general curriculum* (Lake Park Elementary School, 2008). SIP strategies suggest that students with disabilities receive instruction primarily in inclusive settings.

Duval County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Hyde Park, Pinedale, Cedar Hills, Reynolds Lane, and Robinson Elementary were reviewed. Neither of the schools sampled in Duval County Schools included a targeted objective in reading for students with disabilities. The closest references to students with disabilities in these reading objectives are goals for students in the bottom quartile, struggling students (lower quartile), and subgroup. However, three of the schools included strategies targeting students with disabilities. Cedar Hills Elementary School (2008), Pinedale Elementary School (2008), and Reynolds Lane Elementary School (2008) refer to a form of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education during reading. Schools address students with disabilities through accommodations and modifications (Cedar Hills Elementary School, 2008), differentiated instruction (Hyde Park Elementary School, 2008), as well as targeted interventions (Pinedale Elementary School, 2008). Pinedale Elementary School

(2008) included PD targeting students with disabilities. Key terms addressing students with disabilities or indicating inclusive practices include differentiated instruction, collaborative planning, inclusion, differentiated PD, and student subgroups.

Case example
The Reynolds Lane Elementary School SIP (2008) reading objective states, *By June of 2008, 65% or higher of all 3rd – 5th grade students, in individual subgroups will score a 3 or higher on the SSS component of the FCAT*. The SIP includes strategies stating that the school will implement inclusion for all students with disabilities, with the exception of EBD students. A strategy stating that *All self contained students will be exposed to grade level curriculum and FCAT strategies* (Reynolds Lake Elementary, 2008), denotes a level of inclusive practices in terms of access to the standard curriculum albeit not in the general education setting.

Pinellas County Schools
School Improvement Plans for Fairmont, North Shore, Ponce de Leon, Skyview, and Westgate were reviewed. Fairmont Elementary School (2008), North Shore Elementary School (2008), Ponce de Leon Elementary School (2008), and Westgate Elementary School (2008) included a targeted reading objective for students with disabilities. Fairmont Elementary School (2008) and North Shore Elementary School (2008) referred to a form of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education during reading. Although North Shore, Ponce de Leon, and Westgate included a targeted reading objective, supporting strategies and PD were identical to other subgroups. Because four of five schools examined in this district stated explicit reading goals for students with disabilities, but duplicated strategies for other subgroups, it is difficult to determine the extent of targeted service delivery and the extent of access to *Next Generation SSS* for students with disabilities. PD varied widely among the five schools; however, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) is included in each school's SIP as a PD strategy. Key terms referring to students with disabilities and/or inclusive practices include differentiated instruction, Professional Learning Community (PLCs), inclusion, collaborative planning, and the Classroom Instructional Support Model (CISM).

Case example
The Fairmont Elementary School (2008) targeted reading objective states, *Fairmount Park will increase the percentage of Students with Disabilities scoring at grade level or above in reading from 25% to the required 65% for the '08-'09 school year*. Targeted strategies include inclusion in third grade, 1-1 and/or small group instruction, and Title I Extended Day tutorials. Targeted PD at Fairmont is similar to the remaining four schools; however, *IEP updates by the special education team* is included in the PD section of the SIP (Fairmont Elementary School, 2008). It is unclear whether these updates occur as part of the CIM where general and special education teachers engage in collegial collaboration to revise instructional strategies according to achievement data or as part of IDEA requirements for annual reviews of IEP goals and objectives.

Discussion
Policy guidelines delineated in IDEA and NCLB prescribe increased access to the standard/general education curricula and instruction for students with disabilities. Access to the standard curricula must coalesce with specialized instruction in order to provide a service delivery model that provides students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as required by IDEA (US Department of Education, 2006). Historically, these components of the law were accomplished through a continuum of services. Currently, the requirements under IDEA and NCLB call for broadened access to general education curricula and instruction. School Improvement Plans of 35 schools in SINI Correct I status were reviewed so as to examine implementation of access to the standard curricula and instruction for students with disabilities according to IDEA and NCLB. For this analysis, inclusion/inclusive practices are examined through SIP text that indicates that students identified with a disability are provided access to the standard curriculum comprised in Florida's *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (SSS)* in reading through a CIM and professional development.

These areas were of particular interest because Florida embarked on an innovative pilot program in 2008, the Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP), which is designed to allow the State increased flexibility in designing instruction and professional development, in addition to other areas, to meet the needs of schools in improvement status (SINI). This program guided state (SEA) and local education agencies (LEA) to expand opportunities to address diverse student needs. The DAP was explicit in requiring the State to focus on target student groups experiencing persistent achievement gaps. Students

with disabilities form such a group in Florida, as these students as an aggregate have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) since the first year of reporting in 2003-2004 (Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Student Education, 2010). The following discussion will address the research questions posed by the study.

Does the language used in SIPs provide evidence that schools target students with disabilities through differentiated and supported instruction?
The organizational schema used to analyze the texts of SIPs allowed quantification of schools that include a targeted reading objective for students with disabilities and their teachers. This schema was chosen because of the assumption that if the SIP incorporated a targeted reading objective, the supporting strategies would also differentially target the needs of students with disabilities. In the following section, this assumption is discussed. The analysis revealed a number of themes related to either the setting and/or the responsible personnel for providing instruction to students with disabilities. Common themes for instruction in SIPs with targeted direct (TD) reading objectives include implementing differentiated instruction, inclusion/inclusive strategies, push-in model, small group instruction, tutoring, and collaborative teaching/planning as instructional strategies. Inclusion/inclusive strategies were mentioned most among the differentiated instructional models, suggesting that these students would have access to the *Next Generation SSS.*

Duplication of strategies
The assumption regarding compatibility between targeted reading objectives and supporting instructional strategies for students with disabilities was dispelled in some cases as evidenced by duplication of the strategies for other targeted groups of students. Twenty (57.1%) of the 35 schools included in the study incorporated targeted reading objectives in the SIP. Of the 20 schools, 12 (60%) schools incorporated Targeted Direct (TD) instructional strategies for students with disabilities. There is some evidence of centralization of SIPs in certain districts. For example, additional strategies that were uniquely consistent across the five schools in Hillsborough County Schools included conferences/discussions and targeted instruction in Broward and Palm Beach county school districts. Overall, instructional strategies across schools took a number of different forms with various levels of support for students with disabilities.

Differentiated instruction
Although a number of schools referred to *differentiated instruction* as a strategy to support the reading objective, few defined the nature of differentiation or specialization to accommodate students' with disabilities learning needs. Two exceptions to the lack of specificity found in the majority of SIPs provide evidence of more focused conceptualizations of differentiated instruction in inclusive settings (Lake Park Elementary School, 2008; Witter Elementary School, 2008). In the first example, Witter Elementary School (2008) explicates the types of accommodations/modifications that teachers will implement with students with disabilities.

> Construct a master schedule providing appropriate classroom teachers the opportunity to teach (co-teach, support facilitate) with ESE and ELL teachers. Objective 4 ESE - Clarify directions and assist with assignments, write assignments and page numbers on the board, or provide a syllabus, write instructions and problems using shorter and less complex sentence structure.

In the second example, Lake Park Elementary School (2008) references differentiated instruction using research-based reading strategies for students with disabilities.

> 1) Have access to the general education curriculum where differentiated instruction is utilized;
> 2) Have access to successfully proven reading strategies offered through the regular or special education program (examples: Wilson Reading; Orton-Gillingham; SRA Corrective Reading; SRA Reading Mastery).

In this case, the reading strategy refers to implementation in either the special or general education classroom, suggesting that a continuum of services model of LRE is in use. Additionally, North Shore Elementary School (2008) comes close to delineating specific instructional strategies for students with disabilities when stating, *Teachers will use instructional strategies based on multiple intelligences research* within the inclusion classroom. This suggests an attempt to match instructional methods, materials, and delivery to the needs of students with disabilities.

Inclusion/inclusive practices
School Improvement Plans (SIPs) included various arrangements of *inclusion/inclusive practices* as supporting strategies for TD reading objectives. These include placement of students with disabilities in

general education settings, push-in services, and collegial collaborations. In some cases, strategies for inclusion simply refer to placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. For example, *Provide Students with Disabilities (SWD), an inclusion model with additional assistance from SPED teachers within the general classroom setting, as well as after school tutoring* (Lenora Smith Elementary School, 2008). This suggests that special education teachers will assist students in the general education setting as needed. In other cases, inclusion strategies reference special education teachers implementing a push-in model for students in the general education classroom. Oakridge Elementary School (2008) presents such an example,

> Identified intermediate ESE students who demonstrate a need for additional small group instruction as indicated on their IEP will be taught using a push-in model of instruction utilizing the following intervention programs: *Wilson Reading Systems, Great Leaps, Quick Reads, QAR,* and/or *Direct Instruction*. Primary ESE students will be taught a second dose of reading utilizing a pullout model.

The push-in model involves the special education teacher providing individualized or small group instruction in specific subject-area content for designated instructional segments in the general education setting. This may reflect differentiation of content, methodology, and delivery to address students' unique needs. However, the level of inclusivity involved in the push-in model has been questioned (Capper & Fratturra, 2009; Furney, Hasazi, & Clarke-Keefe, 2005).

Another model for inclusion in SIPs refers to collaborative arrangements between general education and special education teachers. Cedar Hills Elementary School (2008) includes such strategies: *Resource teacher support for students with disabilities...Accommodations and modifications will be made in classes for students with disabilities*. The assumption here is that the accommodations and/or modifications of content, methodology, or delivery in the general education classroom would correspond to each student's IEP. Hence, students with disabilities will have access to the Next Generation SSS with adjustments to curricula and instruction as needed.

These instructional models of inclusion/inclusive practices focus on various ways that students with disabilities may receive instruction in general education settings as well as give some indication as to the roles of general and special education teachers. None of the plans revealed language of full inclusion for all categories of disability.

Does the language used in SIPs provide evidence that targeted instruction was supported by providing professional development to special education and/or general education teachers responsible for teaching students with disabilities?

Professional development for special and general education teachers was often streamlined in a similar fashion as instructional strategies. Thus, although schools may have included a targeted reading objective for students with disabilities, duplication of PD in the reading objective for other targeted groups is indicative of a lack of differentiation. Of the twenty (57.1%) schools that incorporated targeted reading objectives in the SIP, 7 (35%) incorporated Targeted Direct (TD) PD. Schools implemented a variety of PD. However, certain districts appear to have streamlined PD as evidenced by common language across SIPs. These districts include Broward, which indicated that teachers would be encouraged to become dually certified and included PD in PLCs and in inclusive strategies. In Broward's case, inclusive strategies are described with generic language. Additionally, Hillsborough and Pinellas school districts also consistently included broader and non-specific frameworks of PLCs as PD for teachers working with students with disabilities. Professional development was framed in ways such as naming specific commercial programs for which training would be provided, focusing on monthly PD topics, establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and PD for inclusive practices.

Commercial programs

The planned use of commercial programs is extensive across the state. As a typical example, John G. Dupuis Elementary School (2008) lists K-3 Student Center Activities and 4-5 Student Center Activities training (which is part Florida's *Reading First* initiative), Houghton-Mifflin, Empowering, Words Their Way, and Quick Reads as additional PD for teachers of students with disabilities. Schools indicate the use of research-based technology programs and packaged reading curricula such as *Reading Mastery* (Hiawassee Elementary School, 2008; Lake Park Elementary School, 2008; & Silver Bluff Elementary School, 2008). Commercial programs are those on the approved list for use in SINI schools (Florida Department of Education, 2008a) and offer school-based administrators concrete options for professional development that are easily represented in School Improvement Plans.

Focus calendar
Many plans designate foci for professional development through a scripted calendar schedule. Lenora Smith Elementary School (2008) and Silver Bluff Elementary School (2008) designate a monthly PD focus. Lenora Smith Elementary School (2008) integrates the monthly focus with training in commercial programs, test preparation, and continuous improvement efforts as denoted by use of *Houghton Mifflin Reading*, *Using Reading Data to Drive Instruction*, and focusing on use of *FCAT Item Specifications and FCAT Task Cards*. Moreover, the PD drive ends in November. Although the reading objective is NTI (non-target indirect), inclusion is mentioned as a supporting strategy (Lenora Smith, 2008). The implication is that teachers of students with disabilities participate in the focus PD activities even as they are not.

Professional learning communities (PLC)
Schools presented professional learning communities (PLC) in SIPs in a variety of formats and for various purposes. At Edison Elementary School (2008), PLCs were used to *analyze student data, trends, and patterns of performance, and collaborate to improve teaching methods, impacting student achievement at their grade level*. Conversely, PLCs were simply listed without explication as in the case of Fairmont Elementary School (2008). Finally, some schools provided teachers with a menu of PD from which to choose, as in the case of Pioneer Elementary School (2008), wherein teachers *receive embedded staff development within weekly Learning Team meetings by grade level on self-selected topics*. Among the self-selected topics was *ELL/ESE strategies*. Here PLCs serve as a means for implementing the CIM or for provided PD in selected topics (Pioneer Elementary School, 2008).

Inclusion model and/or inclusive strategies
Of the 35 schools, Pinedale Elementary School (2008) provided the single instance in which PD included training in the *Inclusion Model*; i.e.,

> The Inclusion Team will meet monthly with the Coaching Team to celebrate successes, identify areas of need, and develop an action plan. ESE and regular education teachers will be trained and collaborate on the implementation of an ESE Inclusion Model with school and district follow up support.

Schools such as Oakridge Elementary School (2008), Pinedale Elementary School (2008), and Pioneer Elementary School (2008) list mostly undefined inclusive/ESE strategies for PD provided to teachers of students with disabilities. For example,

> Teachers with ESE students in grades K-5 will participate in a variety of reading and ESE workshops offered by the district or school-based. This includes, but is not limited to, training in the High Yield Strategies…Teachers will be trained in strategies that address the effective instructional inclusion of ESE students into the basic classroom setting. (Oakridge Elementary School, 2008)

The diversity of PD provided across schools suggests that there is little consensus on the training needs of teachers of students with disabilities.

Implications
This study examines the text of school improvement plans (SIP) in order to increase understandings regarding ways in which schools implement service delivery for students with disabilities. The variety of ways that schools frame their responses to federal policies and regulations in IDEA and NCLB indicate that there is a gap in agreement among educators regarding effective strategies and professional development targeting students with disabilities. As the guiding force for schools in needs improvement status (SINI) in Florida, the DAP requires schools to use a continuous improvement model (CIM) to steer curriculum and instruction. Moreover, the DAP includes provisions for professional development to prepare teachers and administrators to work effectively with students with disabilities and other targeted student groups. Implications from the findings and implications for further research follow.

Implications for Practice
The findings from this study suggest that schools needs to identify inclusive practices that provide increased access to general education curricula and instruction to students with disabilities, provide sustained intensive PD in identified effective inclusive practices, monitor academic outcomes for individual students with disabilities in response to inclusive practices, and adjust curricula, instruction, and professional development in accordance with outcome data.

Identify inclusive practices that provide increased access to general education curricula and instruction to students with disabilities

Schools with targeted direct reading objectives referred to inclusive practices in generic terms. This suggests that teachers either used a toolbox of accepted strategies for students with disabilities or they implemented strategies with all students, in some instances in inclusive settings. SIPs where accommodations and modifications were referenced suggest the latter. Interestingly, in some instances where schools did not state a targeted reading objective, strategies for reading referenced differentiating instruction according to student needs. For example, the SIP for Skyway Elementary School (2008) is non-targeted indirect, meaning that neither the reading objective nor related strategies mention students with disabilities. The strategies for Skyway Elementary School (2008) state,

> Teachers will differentiate student instruction based on diagnosed student need and reading levels. Differentiation will occur through the use of varied materials, instructional strategies, small group instruction and technology. Assessment teams will administer the DAR to struggling students and teacher will individualize iii instruction for students based on these results. Will progress monitor all struggling students per PIAP/PCAS guidelines and make instructional decisions based on the results. Use professional learning communities (PLCs) to provide grade level and school level discussions of data results, planning where to we go from here, asking the 3 big questions (what are the students going to learn, how will we know that they learned it, what will we do for the students that didn't learn it). Provide substitutes for ESE Assistants in IVE classrooms as needed.

These strategies incorporate many of the components for curricula and instruction suggested in the literature. The strategies refer to specialized instruction in its reference to adjusting materials, methods, and delivery as stipulated in IDEA (US Department of Education, 2006). Clements and Read (2008) that international human rights approaches can inform a practices that recognize that categories for supports must be fluid so that, for example, opportunities for teachers to implement a CIM should be designed to review multiple forms of student data and adjust curriculum and instruction accordingly. Overall, these findings suggest that teachers need more information regarding effective curricula and instructional methods, including differentiating curricula and instruction.

Provide sustained intensive PD in identified effective inclusive practices

The review of literature on professional development points to a need to consider teacher, student, and school characteristics when planning professional development, as well as to allow teachers to help plan professional development whenever possible. Attending to stakeholder characteristics and the interplay between these and the school culture is essential for inclusive education because changing beliefs about students with disabilities can be and often is a major challenge for general educators. Once decisions regarding professional development are made, activities should be job-embedded, context-specific, content-focused, intensive, and sustained over time. Additionally, literature on professional development for inclusive education, suggests that general education teachers respond more positively when knowledge and skills can be applied to all students.

A number of the schools included in the study appear to be using recommended practices for professional development generally. However, the degree to which these practices apprehend the needs of students with disabilities and their teachers is less encouraging. One example is that PLCs were referenced in a number of schools in various forms as either a strategy or as professional development; i.e., CIM, book study, etc. This suggests that PLCs are being designed according to identified needs of the staff. For instance, when used in a CIM process, PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to review student data, discuss student issues, and address concerns as appropriate. Conversely, when used as a mechanism for professional book study, PLCs can serve as professional development, particularly when led by experts such as reading coaches. In this case, PLCs become a means to address site-specific professional development needs as suggested in the literature. The literature also recommends that professional development incorporate opportunities for collegial collaboration and job-embeddedness. PLCs provide a mechanism for both to occur. Similarly, although Pioneer Elementary school (2008) is not referring to PLCs, the SIP states that teachers, *Receive embedded staff development within weekly Learning Team meetings by grade level on self-selected topics*. This strategy not only provides for embedded professional development, but also provides teacher-selection of topics based on need; another recommendation presented in the literature.

Schools that use professional development calendars with designated monthly topics are unlikely to

receive the needed doses of professional development to impact practice. These are typically one-shot workshops with one day of the month dedicated to the topic. This situation occurred in a few of the schools in the study, with at least one school focusing on students with disabilities during one of the months. This suggests that students with disabilities and their teachers were not the target of the professional development in the other months.

Valeo (2008) argues that concerns around administrators providing sufficient resources and supports to promote inclusive practices among teachers who identify as general education teachers is a global concern. The findings suggest that schools should specify in SIPs exactly how professional development addresses all teachers of students with disabilities. Moreover, schools should attend to other recommended practices such as duration and intensity to ensure that when needed professional development is identified, teachers receive sufficient training and feedback to create change in practice. An example of questionable duration and intensity is in the case of Lloyd Estates Elementary School (2008),

> Professional development in differentiated instruction to meet individual learning needs, Eighteen teachers attended nine days of instruction of meeting the needs of ELLs and SWDs students by using programs such as Differentiated Instruction and A+Rise.

The professional development cited in this example demonstrates that only a portion of the faculty would receive limited professional development in differentiated instruction. The wording suggests that teachers would learn to adjust materials, methods, and delivery. Left unanswered are whether the eighteen teachers teach in inclusive settings, whether they are special education or general education teachers, and whether these teachers will share what they learn with the remaining faculty.

Schools in Broward County included in SIPs that teachers were encouraged to obtain dual certification. This strategy addresses what the literature refers to as teachers' diverse learning styles and different contexts in which learning occurs. It stands to reason that dual certification would go far to prepare teachers to work with students with disabilities by providing teachers with accredited training as well as with opportunities to implement knowledge and practices in their classrooms, thus providing a feedback loop for teachers.

Fluidly adjust curricula, instruction, and professional development in accordance with outcome data
The DAP requires that teachers implement a CIM in which teachers use data to monitor students' progress and to adjust instruction accordingly. Furthermore, DAP requires that districts provide schools with professional development on assessing student progress. All schools in Florida, regardless of improvement status, are required to incorporate a CIM in SIPs. The State Education Agency and School District provide certain aspects of the CIM such as Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) and Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) to aid in progress monitoring (Florida Department of Education, 2010a; 2010b). These instruments accommodate progress monitoring for all students by culling and presenting student data to teachers in useful forms.

Rayner (2007) notes that in various national contexts benchmarking and progress monitoring is *now well established in school development planning-the [challenge] is to avoid being dominated by performativity or infected by sterility associated with completing an endless accounting exercise* (p.148) and rather to manage continued organizational learning around authentic educational practices. Mandates that schools implement a CIM for all students may cloud understandings regarding the level to which this process is applied to students with disabilities. IDEA requires that students' IEPs delineate goals for students to participate in and progress in general education settings. Although schools are required to review IEPs annually, another aspect of this provision requires reviews whenever changes to students' programs occur. Thus, CIM for students with disabilities would imply that in theory, IEPs might be reviewed numerous times throughout the school year. However, when referenced in SIPs, IEPs appear to be rigidly enforced within special education settings (Davie Elementary School 2008; Lloyd Estates Elementary School, 2008; Oakridge Elementary School, 2008; & Pinedale Elementary School, 2008). Rather than advancing a notion that all teachers are responsible for students with disabilities, these plans seem to reflect and reproduce commonly held linear notions of organizational responsibility: special education teachers working in special (and separate) settings are responsible for the goals listed in an IEP (Black & Burrello, 2010; Capper & Fraturra, 2009; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). These plans may also reflect Olson & Sexton's (2009) study of teacher and school response to external accountability mandates in which teachers and administrators narrow their concerns and scope of responsibility.

Exceptions to this trend is in case of Pinedale Elementary School SIP (2008), which states, *Regular education and ESE teachers will collaborate on IEP targets for the SWD sub group and develop best practices within the workshop model*. This statement intimates rigidity in implementation, but flexibility in terms of seeking strategies to address students' learning goals. The workshop model has limitations, such as lack of intensity, duration, and subsequently, transfers to various contexts that are acknowledged in the literature. In another case, the Fairmont Elementary School SIP (2008) states that, *Staffing Coordinator and Team will meet to monitor IEP updates*. It is unclear whether these are the mandated annual updates, or if updates occur more frequently in response to progress monitoring.

Lake Park Elementary School (2008) provides the single instance of professional development targeting students IEPs, *Access training on IEP development and the nature and learning styles of students with disabilities to improve their instructional delivery to a diverse population in the general curriculum*. This strategy includes recommendations from the literature that professional development include familiarizing teachers with the unique learning characteristics that students with disabilities may bring to the classroom and providing targeted training to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to differentiate instruction.

The findings suggest that schools should ensure that students with disabilities benefit from progress monitoring by applying flexibility to IEP implementation and monitoring (Furney et al. 2005). This will require additional time and possibly personnel; however, it will provide teachers with current information that can inform curricula and instruction for students with disabilities.

This descriptive study reveals a number of areas requiring further attention. Based on the analysis more effort needs to be dedicated by researchers to find a way to compete with commercial programs and more directly bridge the research to practice gap between inclusive strategies and effective teaching for students with disabilities. The application of New Public Management theoretical frameworks to school-based performance accountability responses suggests that the use of commercial programs may represent efforts to demonstrate increasing specification on targets that serve to legitimize local school response vis-à-vis the state mandates (Hood & Peters, 2004; Maxcy, 2009) rather than more authentic attempts to provide comprehensive networks of supports for students with disabilities (Rayner, 2007). Clearly, leadership matters and if only one of the 35 schools expressly embraced a fully inclusive stance, there is a need to develop and support individuals who promote inclusive leadership that builds capacity for all teachers to have dispositions that allow them to accept responsibility for all students. As Rayner (2007) points out in the context of practice in the United Kingdom, *education, special education, and inclusion entail uncertainty and complexity, as context, contest, and circumstances present dilemmas and contradiction* (p.3) and coordination and tightening from state policies are almost inevitably going to be held in tension with the profusion of local practices that contain such contradictions. In addition, while it is important to recognize that in many respects the United States led the world in the passage of federal legislation in 1975 that established free and appropriate public education as a right for individuals with disabilities, a consequence was the early creation of separate special and general education systems that continue to influence federal and state policy, as well as school based improvement processes (Itkonnen & Jahnukainen, 2007).

Nevertheless, there continue to be legal requirements under IDEA in the United States and provisions in other countries that are relatively complex and require that teachers and other school personnel be trained in those areas. Given the temptations to expend huge amounts of time and effort in monitoring student progress and other acts of performativity in an era of high-stakes accountability, explicit attention needs to be placed on professional development that entails training in authentic practices that can include commercial programs and/or be inquiry and locally based (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Intention needs to be aligned with action in program planning efforts for students with disabilities. Despite the need to clearly accommodate local practices and individual school and community needs and voices, the formulation of common language across state, district, and school level educators continues to be a useful endeavor that can provide clarity on what instructional strategies and professional development initiatives entail. The SIPS reflected little in terms of a language of common interest or fates. As globalizing trends towards devolution and market solutions, as well as standards-based reforms continue and are reflected in policies such as the Differentiated Accountability Program, further attention to localized language and practice of common interest and membership may need to be articulated by local leaders in school planning processes (Berhanu, 2010; Black & Burrello, 2010).

Implications for Further Research

Since the implementation of the DAP in Florida began in 2008, more states have adopted the policy framework. This study has provided one glimpse into how districts have planned for its implementation. While more inclusionary professional development and continuous improvement efforts were identified in the 35 schools across the seven large urban districts, more in depth analysis is warranted. Further examination of outcome data, particularly for students with disabilities could be useful in beginning to examine if any relationships exist between the emphases in the plans and patterns in outcome data. Perhaps more revealing would be in depth case studies of several of the schools that are purposively sampled in order to capture the dynamics of different approaches. The extent to which inclusive practices occurred varied and coming to understand how and why those variations occurred would be very useful. In particular, are there any additional intersections betweens types of disability, race, compliance, and effective inclusionary practices? As Cohen (2007) argues, *Since most of the knowledge problems remain unsolved, outcome-oriented policies are in no position to rationally reorder the preexisting stock of education policies. They coexist with earlier policies and programs, rather than reordering them* (p. 353). Tracking shifts over time in the SIPs can help illuminate the impact of the Florida DAP on planning over time and can provide more questions for investigation around how various policies for students with disabilities interact.

Within the United States, the landscape of education policy has been fundamentally altered, as many more interest groups and reformers are actively involved in constructing accountability policy instruments, such as the Differentiated Accountability Program (Debray-Pelot & McGuin, 2009). Whereas the SIPs in this study reflected a partial focus on students with disabilities, critics nationally and internationally could argue that the plans provided an appearance of equal treatment without providing any more funding resources, resulting in continued unequal distribution of resources and lack of attention to contexts outside of special education such as employment, health, and welfare policies (Itkonnen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Maxcy, 2009: Turnbull, 2009). However, arguments in support of efficient efforts to provide targeted support to the schools and students will continue to be supported by arguments of moral persuasion and future economic productivity and policies such as the ones developed throughout Europe and the rest of the world that aim at utilizing indicators and benchmarks to monitor progress for students with disabilities (Deluca & Stillings, 2008). Studying how policies are received, articulated, and implemented, particularly with groups of students that have not traditionally done as well in school by various measures, will continue to be a rich area for inquiry across multiple contexts.

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Appendix A: Florida K-12 Schools in Need of Improvement and Schools Placement Within Each Differentiated Accountability Program Category (2007-2008)

2007-2008 SINIs	Category I: (A's, B's, C's, and Ungraded Schools with at Least 80% AYP Criteria Met)	Category II: (Schools with Less than 80% AYP Criteria Met, and All D's and F's)
SINI-Prevent (SINIs 1, 2, & 3)	416 Schools Focus planning on missed elements of AYP.	85 Schools Implement comprehensive school improvement planning.
SINI-Correct (SINIs at Year 4 and Up)	248 Schools Focus reorganization on missed elements of AYP.	181 Schools Reorganize the school.
SINI-Intervene (MOST CRITICAL)	7 Schools Restructure/Close the school.	

Source: Florida Department of Education. (2008). *Florida's Differentiated Accountability Model: Guidance for Implementation 2008-09 School Year*. Retrieved from www.fldoe.org

Appendix B: Florida Differentiated Accountability Program Guidelines for Professional Development and Continuous Improvement

Professional Development

Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) are aligned with the needs of subgroups not making AYP, reform efforts, and state protocol requirements. The master schedule provides time for both common planning and job-embedded professional development (PD) for Prevent II, Correct II, and Intervene schools.

- School ensures IPDPs for teachers of targeted subgroups includes PD targeting the needs of subgroups not making AYP and include mentoring or coaching by a highly effective teacher.
- School ensures that Individual Leadership Development Plans (ILPDs) include PD targeting the subgroups not making AYP.
- School PD Plan aligns with state professional development protocol standards.
- School ensures equitable access to technology resources, integration, and professional development.
- District provides technical assistance in identifying professional development, ensures that school professional development plans meet protocol standards and align with school reform efforts and that sufficient human resources are provided to deliver, follow-up, and evaluate professional development.
- District PD Plan meets state PD protocol standards and ensures that school PD plan meets protocol standards.

Continuous Improvement

Ongoing formal and informal assessments are administered to monitor student progress, redesign instruction as needed, and provide remediation, acceleration, and enrichment.

- School administers diagnostics and provides remediation, acceleration, and enrichment.
- School develops and implements a curriculum calendar.
- District provides progress monitoring tools and analyzes data to determine effectiveness of instruction and to allocate resources based on need.
- School implements a Response to Intervention model.
- School ensures real-time access to student achievement data.
- District provides technical assistance on formative and summative assessments.
- District monitors and analyzes progress monitoring three times per year for students requiring reading intervention.
- District monitors and analyzes progress monitoring on tested core-content areas twice per year.
- District ensures that schools demonstrating the greatest need, based on data analysis, receive the highest percentage of resources.

Source: Adapted from Florida Department of Education (2008). *Florida's Differentiated Accountability Model, Guidance for Implementation 2008-09 School Year.*

**Appendix C: Sample Schools and Percentage of Students At or Above Grade Level in Reading
(2007-2008)**

Miami-Dade	Reading	Broward	Reading
Fienberg-Fisher	33/SH	Croissant	31
Peskoe	29	Davie	32
John G. Dupuis	21	Lloyd Estates	38
Lenora Smith	34/SH	Oakridge	25
Silver Bluff	31/SH	Pompano Beach	36
Hillsborough	Reading	Orange	Reading
Bing	35	Fern	34
Lanier	51/SH	Orla Vista	23
J.S. Robinson	49/GM	Azalea	34
Witter	18	Lake Weston	16
Edison	34	Hiawassee	45
Palm Beach	Reading	Duval	Reading
Belle Glade	16	Hyde Park	43
Berkshire	38	Pinedale	21
Lake Park	38	Cedar Hills	49/SH
Pioneer Park	33	Reynolds Lane	29
Starlight Cove	40/SH	Robinson	19
Pinellas	Reading		
Fairmont	25		
North Shore	41		
Ponce de Leon	44		
Skyview	34		
Westgate	34		

For 2008-09, the state objective is to have at least 65% of all students and each subgroup reading at or above grade level.
SH – Safe Harbor (see Notes for description)
GM – Growth Model (see Notes for description)

Source: Florida Department of Education. (2008). *School Accountability Reports.* Retrieved from
http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/default.asp?report=AYP