THE STANDARDIZATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NCLB AND IDEA IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

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University of Pittsburgh, 2014

Over the years, federal special education and accountability policies have aligned more closely to require that students with disabilities receive individualized instruction in general education classrooms. Thus, for an increasing percentage of students with disabilities, these policies now mandate that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are written at annual IEP meetings and then implemented in general education classrooms. The practice of providing services and instruction to students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as inclusion. Inclusion theoretically requires collaboration between general and special education teachers to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate services and supports in general education classrooms. Numerous studies examining the practices of inclusion have led scholars to critique how inclusion is being implemented and whether it is really supporting student learning. This said, little work has empirically examined the influence that NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) have on general and special education teachers' practices in inclusive settings, and ultimately the effect this has on students' access to an appropriate education. My dissertation research is comprised of separate studies that explore the implementation of two key policy mandates within inclusive settings: (1) creation, implementation, and progress monitoring of IEPs, and (2) standards-based instruction by highly qualified teachers. Specifically, in my first study I explore the role of the IEP process in the

education of students with specific learning disabilities receiving instruction in inclusive classrooms. In my second study, I examine the types and quality of writing instruction that students with disabilities receive in 8th grade inclusive English classrooms, along with the policy and organizational factors that influence this instruction.

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PREFACE

My dissertation represents a milestone of nearly six years of work with my academic family in the Learning Sciences and Policy Program (LSAP) at the University of Pittsburgh. My experiences in LSAP represent an amazing chapter in my life that was filled with intense learning and great people. I have thoroughly enjoyed the journey. Since my first day as an LSAPer, I have been provided with wonderful opportunities to work with incredible scholars on meaningful research projects. These experiences have enabled me to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to effect change in my future work. I would like to acknowledge the remarkable people who have supported me throughout this journey.

First and foremost I wish to thank my advisor, Jennifer Lin Russell. She has been a source of inspiration since the first day I met her while interviewing for LSAP. I remember meeting her and being awed by her passion for her work and belief that we could make things better through high quality research. After nearly six years of working together, I am still in admiration of her and the work she has done. Jenn has given me a tremendous amount of time, support, and resources during this journey. She has always encouraged me to pursue my research interests and passion for improving the learning opportunities of students with disabilities. I feel blessed and honored to be her first advisee.

Thank you to my dissertation committee: Lindsay Clare Matsumura, Christopher Lemons, Naomi Zigmond, and Elizabeth McGhee-Hassrick. Lindsay, thank you for gently

pushing me to be a better writer and scholar. I will always think of you when developing and refining my research questions. Chris, thank you for being such a pivotal role model in my work. Your passion, drive, and ability to bring out the best in others is something I will continue to strive to do in my work. Naomi, your research has had a huge influence on my work. One day, I hope to have as meaningful an impact as you in improving the lives of students with disabilities. I feel privileged to have worked with you. Elizabeth, thank you for your feedback. It has been instrumental in pushing my work forward.

I would also like to thank the entire LSAP faculty who have guided me through all these years. In particular, I would like to thank Mary Kay Stein for being a dynamic leader not only in the LSAP program, but in the field of education. I am continuously inspired by your ability to break down boundaries and the status quo in your work as a scholar, administrator, and professor.

To my fellow LSAPers, thank you for being you! I feel so grateful to have been surrounded by you over the past six years. You are my academic sisters and brothers, and like all healthy sibling relationships we know how to push each other's buttons, but also how to bring out the best in one another. You have been an essential piece in my development as a scholar and person - from being a shoulder to cry on, a sounding board to talk through problems, and a gentle push to not give-up, thank you… Miray, Jolene, Mary Ann, Elaine, Lisa, Kaleen, Lauren, Tara, Anita, Zahid, Peter, JC, Sam, and Jimmy. I also want to thank Alicia Mrachko for being a constant source of support, guidance, and advice during this journey. I look forward to continuing to work with each of you on future projects to improve instruction and learning for all students.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my family. I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional love and support. They have always believed in me and have instilled in me the belief that I can do anything if I work hard enough. I would also like to thank my sisters, Becky and Jaime, for unknowingly teaching me some of the most important lessons in life and also being my best friends. I would like to thank my daughters, Elizabeth and Catherine. They are the light of my life, and constant source of inspiration to make this world a better place. Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Scott. His love and support have made this all possible. To my entire family, I love you and thank you!

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Two broad and historic federal education laws emerged from the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. The first was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which primarily focused on general education. The ESEA ensured that the federal government would provide financial aid to states to assist in the education of students living below the poverty line. The second was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA, now referred to as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA), which dramatically increased the role of the federal government in special education. EAHCA protected the rights of students with disabilities and their parents by guaranteeing that students with disabilities would receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Over the years, ESEA and EAHCA maintained fairly distinct mandates that provided increasing oversight of both general and special education. However, after subsequent reauthorizations of ESEA and EAHCA, there has been an increased blending of the two policies. This trend is captured in the following quote from Zigmond and Kloo (2011):

> Both general education and special education in the United States have long and distinguished histories that, until the latter quarter of the 20th century, ran parallel, non-intersecting courses. Then came the passage of Public Law 94-142 (1975), The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and its subsequent reauthorizations, the normalization movement and calls for more inclusive public

> schools, and the wholesale adoption of full inclusion as the preferred model of service delivery for all students with disabilities. With these developments came increasing calls for a single system of education (e.g., Arnold & Dodge, 1994; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992; National Education Association, 1992) and for a deliberate blurring of the identities of special and general education. (p. 160)

While this blending of special and general education had been long underway, it was advanced by the standards-based reform effort defined by the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2001, referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Thurlow & Quenemoen; 2011; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it further aligned the wording and requirements of these two policies. In earlier authorizations, IDEA was primarily focused on procedural compliance (Zigmond & Kloo, 2009). The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA represented a shift in focus from procedural compliance towards an emphasis on academic standards and educational results. This shift was propelled by the mandate that students with disabilities had to be included in state and district-wide assessments. Moreover, both NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) required schools to report the state assessment results for students with disabilities in both the total student population and as a disaggregated subgroup. IDEA (2004) also reiterated that students with disabilities must be included on state and district assessments (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011).

IDEA (2004) therefore placed a renewed focus on ensuring that students with disabilities are learning (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2006). It further emphasized that instruction should be provided by a highly qualified teacher (defined in NCLB as a teacher who has a bachelor's

degree, full state certification and demonstrated knowledge of each subject they teach) and guided by a standards-based general education curriculum (IDEA, 2004). As a result of IDEA's increased focus on academic outcomes and access to the general curriculum, there has been greater pressure for accountability in the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Russell & Bray, 2013). While special education teachers historically worked with students with disabilities in more restrictive self-contained settings using adapted curriculums, IDEA now requires general education teachers to play a greater role in the instruction of students with disabilities' in general education classrooms using a standards-based general education curriculum.

While the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms had long been underway, the fact that NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) both now hold schools accountable for students with disabilities' performance on tests aligned with a standards-based general education curriculum accelerated this trend (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006; Russell & Bray, 2013). The practice of instructing students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as inclusion. While there is not a single definition of inclusion, several researchers and advocacy groups agree that inclusion refers to the placement, education, and rendering of supports and services to students with disabilities within the general education classroom (Idol, 1997; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997).

Research indicates that inclusion has significantly altered how, what, and where students with disabilities learn; and who teaches them (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). Historically, it was the responsibility of special education teachers to write, implement, and monitor IEPs in more restrictive special education settings. Inclusion now requires that general and special education teachers work together to ensure that IEPs are written,

implemented, and monitored in general education classrooms. In addition, inclusion assumes that general education teachers will have a greater understanding of the IEP and involvement in the IEP meeting. Even though special education policy and the educational placement of students with disabilities have changed to align more closely with general education policy and practice, the IEP and IEP meeting still remain a fundamental part of special education policy and practice.

Numerous studies examining the practices of inclusion have led scholars to critique how inclusion is being implemented and whether it is really supporting student learning (see Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). This said, little work has closely examined the influence that NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) have on general and special education teachers' practices in inclusive settings, and ultimately the effect on students' access to an appropriate education. This lack of research may be due to the "siloing" or compartmentalization of special education and general education policy analysis and research. As Ramanathan (2008) notes, "Reform movements in special and general education have often mimicked the 'parallel play' of young children, using identical means to achieve similar goals while rarely communicating" (p. 280). However, the blending of IDEA and NCLB now requires the interaction and collaboration of general and special education teachers to ensure that students with disabilities have appropriate access to the general education curriculum.

My dissertation research explores the implementation of NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) in inclusive settings, particularly the extent to which they influence students' access to an appropriate education in the LRE. As highlighted by Weatherly and Lipsky (1977), teachers serve as street level bureaucrats implementing state and federal policies and making key policy decisions. What teachers do in schools and classrooms constitutes the policy as implemented,

despite legislative intent or regulatory requirements. In the following two studies, I closely examine the practices and interactions of general and special education teachers, as well as their ultimate implementation of NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) in inclusive settings. In separate studies, I explore two key policy mandates in inclusive settings: (1) the creation, implementation, and progress monitoring of IEPs, and (2) standards-based instruction by highly qualified general education teachers. In my first study, I examine the role of the IEP process in the education of five high school students identified with specific learning disabilities receiving instruction in general education classrooms. In my second study, I examine the types and quality of writing instruction that students with disabilities receive in 8th grade inclusive English classrooms, along with the policy and organizational factors that influence this instruction.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

My dissertation research contributes to the limited body of literature that has examined the blending of general and special education policies and practices in inclusive classrooms. Historically, special and general education were not only governed by distinct policies (ESEA vs. EAHCA), but instruction occurred in separate settings (general education classrooms vs. self-contained special education classrooms and resource rooms). Additionally, the types of instruction students received varied (whole-group/standardized instruction versus individualized/specialized instruction), and the knowledge and pedagogy of the teachers who instructed students was also different (general versus special education teachers). Therefore, the increased alignment between NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) has resulted in institutional demands for a blending of these very distinct educational traditions (Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

Research examining special education teachers' practices in inclusive settings highlights the challenges of providing students with disabilities access to an appropriate education in inclusion classrooms. Several studies indicate that special education teachers often take passive roles in inclusive classrooms, and that students with disabilities receive little individualized or specialized instruction from special education teachers in inclusive settings (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Walther- Thomas, 1997; Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, & Hughes, 1998; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Research also indicates that the most common type of inclusion model is the one teach-one assist model, or rather the general education teacher leads instruction while the special education teacher assists and monitors students on work (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002; Scruggs, Mastopieri, & McDuffie, 2007). As such, students with disabilities in inclusive settings are receiving the majority of their instruction from general education teachers.

Little work has examined general education teachers' roles in providing students with disabilities access to a standards-based curriculum in inclusive settings. However, a substantial body of literature has examined general education teachers' perceptions of the instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (see Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). This work has consistently exposed that general education teachers report that they require additional support in attending to the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. These additional supports include additional time (e.g., for planning and instruction), training (e.g., ongoing professional development), personnel resources (e.g., access to special education teachers and paraprofessionals in the classroom), and material resources (e.g., appropriate curriculum and equipment). Research also suggests that elementary and secondary general education teachers differ in their views towards inclusion (Chalmers, 1991; Rogers, 1987), with elementary school teachers having more positive views of inclusion than secondary school

teachers (Savage & Wienke, 1989). However, much of this research was done prior to the more aggressive movement toward inclusion. Given the statute changes now emphasizing more inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms, additional research is necessary to gain a more current assessment of whether general education teachers' perceptions have changed as well.

A key component to ensuring that a student with a disability has appropriate access to the general education curriculum is through the implementation of her/his IEP. IDEA mandates that an IEP meeting be held yearly, during which a student's educational progress and needs are evaluated and assessed, and the IEP is drafted. Since 1975, several studies have examined parents, teachers, and students' interactions during IEP meetings (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Lynch & Stein 1987; Salembier & Furney, 1997; Lovitt & Cushing, 1999), however little work has explored general teachers' involvement in the IEP meetings for students receiving instruction in inclusive settings. This is interesting, given the increased role that general education teachers have in the education of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Although limited, research on general education teachers' perceptions of IEP meetings indicates that they report lower levels of satisfaction with the IEP development than other IEP meeting participants (Nadler & Shore, 1980; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978; Menlove, Hudson, & Suter, 2001). Elementary teachers also reported the highest level of satisfaction with the IEP process, while high school teachers reported the lowest levels of satisfaction. Teachers indicated the following five broad reasons for their dissatisfaction: lack of team connection or not feeling a part of the IEP team; lack of time to participate in meetings; lack of preparation for the meeting; lack of training, knowledge, and skills to engage in the

meeting; and lack of relevance between the IEP and student learning/ instruction (Menlove, Hudson, & Suter, 2001).

Research examining special education teachers' roles in inclusive settings, general education teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, and general education teachers' perceptions of engagement during IEP meetings suggests that the policies and practices of general and special education are far from being blended, but rather still remain extremely siloed. In many ways, general and special education teachers appear to be working in parallel worlds, which are still very much governed by distinct policies and practices. This is supported by a recent study conducted by Russell and Bray (2013) which found that teachers perceived conflicts and expressed concerns about the requirements of NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004), specifically the mandate for students with disabilities to meet age-based content standards. Special education teachers reported engaging in actions that conflicted with their professional judgments about providing an appropriate education for students with disabilities. This work also suggests that NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) may influence teachers' practice. In my dissertation research, I build upon this research to explore the extent to which NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) informs teachers' practices, and ultimately influences students' access to an appropriate education in the LRE.

2.0 STUDY 1: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE IEP PROCESS IN SECONDARY INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (EAHCA, Public Law 94-142, now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004), the Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been the cornerstone of special education policy and instruction. However, over the past thirty years special education policy and practices have changed dramatically to more closely align with general education policy and practices (Karger, 2004; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). The alignment between special and general education was advanced by the historic re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) in 2001, now referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011). As highlighted by several scholars, this alignment between IDEA and NCLB is resulting in a "blurring" of special and general education policy and practice (see Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

For instance, while the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms was long underway, the alignment between IDEA and NCLB accelerated this trend (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006; Russell & Bray, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2011). This trend is illustrated by the fact that students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their school day in general education classrooms rose from 34% in 1990-1991 to 58% in

2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Nearly two-thirds of students receiving special education services are students identified with specific learning disabilities (Levine & Wagner 2003). Research indicates that the majority of students with specific learning disabilities spend a significant percentage of their school day in general education classrooms (Newman, Marder, & Wagner, 2003).

The practice of instructing students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as inclusion. Research indicates that inclusion has significantly altered where, how, and what students with disabilities learn, and by whom they are taught (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). For instance, general educators now play a larger role in the education of students with disabilities. Likewise, students with disabilities are primarily taught the general education curriculum with the use of differentiated instructional practices. These changes are particularly evident in secondary inclusive education, which research indicates pose unique organizational and instructional challenges (Boudah, Schumacher, & Deshler, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Weiss & Lloyd; 2002). For example, students move from classroom to classroom throughout the school day and receive instruction from multiple content specific general educators.

Although the education of students with disabilities has changed in inclusive settings, the IEP process remains a central feature of special education policy and practice (IDEA, 2004). The IEP process mandates how IEPs should be written, implemented, and monitored (see Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001). While numerous studies have separately examined IEPs and IEP meetings (see Etscheidt & Curran, 2010; Karger, 2004; Tennant, 2007), little of this work has studied the IEPs and IEP meetings of students receiving instruction in inclusive settings. Furthermore, the current literature-base is void of studies that have examined the entire IEP

process for students with disabilities (i.e., the creation, implementation, and monitoring of IEPs). Research on the IEP process in secondary inclusive settings is necessary given the changes in educational policy that places greater emphasis on the instruction of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, as well as research which has highlighted the unique organizational challenges of attending to students' learning needs in secondary inclusive settings.

In this qualitative comparative case study, we begin to attend to this gap in the literature by examining the role that the IEP process has in the instruction of students with disabilities in secondary inclusive settings, and ultimately to explore what this alignment of IDEA and NCLB means for students with disabilities receiving instruction in inclusive settings. To do this, we examined the IEP process for five high school students identified with specific learning disabilities. Three of the students were from a full inclusion high school with limited co-teaching, while two of the students were from a full inclusion high school with a routine co-teaching and resource support. To explore the role that the IEP process had in the students' education, we analyzed audio recordings and transcripts of the students' IEP meetings; interviews regarding the IEP meetings, IEPs, and classroom instruction; pertinent documents (i.e., IEPs, progress monitoring reports, and behavior plans, etc.); and field notes from days shadowing special educators. Our findings indicate that, although the schools enacted full inclusion very differently, the IEP process at both schools was very similar. Ultimately, at both schools students received a standardized rather than an individualized education in inclusive settings.

2.1 CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING

From the time that EAHCA was enacted in 1975, the IEP has remained the primary mechanism for ensuring that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), while still addressing their individual learning needs (Sec. 616(a)(3)(A)). According to Senator Robert Stafford (1978), one of the writers of the EAHCA, the IEP was "the central part of this Act as we wrote it and intended it to be carried out" (p. 72). However, the increased alignment between NCLB and IDEA has resulted in a complex mandate to provide a student with an individualized education in general education classrooms. In the following sections, we illuminate the policy demands of creating, implementing, and monitoring IEPs in inclusive settings by outlining: (1) how changes in policies have resulted in an increased alignment between NCLB and IDEA, and (2) how this alignment is changing the premise of individualization in the IEP process.

2.1.1 Evolution of special and general education policies

Emerging from the Civil Rights Movement were two broad and historic federal education laws. First, the ESEA was enacted in 1965 and was primarily focused on general education. The ESEA ensured that the federal government would provide financial aid to states to assist in the education of students living below the poverty line. The EAHCA was enacted in 1975, thereby increasing the role of the federal government in special education. EAHCA protected the rights of students with disabilities and their parents. It also guaranteed that students with disabilities would receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Over the years, ESEA and EAHCA maintained fairly distinct policies that provided oversight of general and special education, respectively. However, after subsequent reauthorizations of EAHCA and ESEA, there has been an increasing overlap between the two policies. This trend is captured in the following quote from Zigmond and Kloo (2011):

> Both general education and special education in the United States have long and distinguished histories that, until the latter quarter of the 20th century, ran parallel, non-intersecting courses. Then came the passage of Public Law 94-142 (1975), The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and its subsequent reauthorizations, the normalization movement and calls for more inclusive public schools, and the wholesale adoption of full inclusion as the preferred model of service delivery for all students with disabilities. With these developments came increasing calls for a single system of education (e.g., Arnold & Dodge, 1994; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992; National Education Association, 1992) and for a deliberate blurring of the identities of special and general education. (p. 160)

While this blurring of special and general education was long underway, it was further advanced by the standards-based reform effort defined by the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2001, referred to as NCLB (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Thurlow & Quenemoen; 2011; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011).

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized to align more closely with NCLB. Both NCLB and IDEA provide incentives for schools to expose students with disabilities to instruction in general education classrooms. In earlier authorizations, IDEA was primarily focused on procedural compliance (Zigmond & Kloo, 2009). The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA represented a shift in

focus from procedural compliance towards an emphasis on academic standards and educational results. This shift was propelled by the mandate that students with disabilities had to be included on state and district-wide assessments. Both NCLB and IDEA require schools to report the state assessment results for students with disabilities in both the total student population and as a disaggregated subgroup. IDEA (2004) reiterates that students with disabilities must be included on state and district assessments (Thurlow & Quenemoen; 2011).

As such, IDEA 2004 placed a renewed emphasis on ensuring that students with disabilities are instructed using the general education curriculum and held to grade-level content standards (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2006). As a result of IDEA's increased focus on academic outcomes and access to the general curriculum and standards, there has been greater pressure for accountability in the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. However, IDEA still mandates that educators attend to the individual learning needs of students with disabilities while holding them to grade-level content standards.

2.1.2 The premise of individualization in the IEP process

As mandated, the IEP is intended to guide a student's education by identifying and attending to her/his individual learning needs. Historically, a majority of students with disabilities received instruction by special education teachers who were trained in providing systematic, intense, direct instruction and interventions to students in self-contained special education classrooms. Therefore, special educators were expected to tailor the curriculum and instruction to attend to the individual learning needs of their students. To accomplish this mandate, individual learning goals were determined that specifically aligned to the learning needs of the student. These learning goals were monitored using assessments to track the students' progress towards

reaching their goals. In addition, specially designed instruction (SDI) was outlined to attend the individual learning needs of the student (see Zigmond & Kloo, 2009). The definition of SDI in IDEA is as follows:

> SDI means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. [§300.39(b)(3)]

Examples of SDIs include: chunking, modeling, written prompts, paraphrasing, mnemonic strategies, visual prompts, rehearsal/use of scripts, role playing, self monitoring techniques, tactile stimulation, and direct teaching.

This original concept of individualization in IEPs is still being enacted for a small percentage of students with disabilities who are receiving instruction in more restrictive settings (such as autistic support classrooms). However, the majority of students with disabilities are now receiving their instruction in a general education or inclusive classroom environment. Thus, the whole notion of individualization in IEPs and the IEP process is changing. IDEA (2004) indicates that, for a majority of students with disabilities, their IEPs should align more closely with the general education curriculum and grade-level content standards (Thurlow & Quenemoen; 2011). As such, student's learning goals are now expected to address not only the specific educational needs of students with disabilities, but also be aligned with the general education curriculum and grade-level content standards. Furthermore, the students' SDIs are intended to outline the special education, related services, supplementary services, modifications,

and accommodations needed to achieve in the general education curriculum and grade-level content standards (Thurlow & Quenemoen; 2011).

Research indicates that there is confusion among educators and administrators on how to write and implement IEPs that attend to both the individualized learning needs of students and also align with grade-level content standards (Ahearn, 2006; Russell & Bray, 2013). Drawing from interviews with representatives from 18 states, Ahearn (2006) found that participants were confused regarding the relationship between standards and the IEP process. Furthermore, based upon interviews with educators and administrators (as well as document analysis of NCLB and IDEA), Russell and Bray (2013) found that special educators were very likely going to view IDEA and NCLB as conflicting mandates. They specifically that they were conflicted over whether they should attend to individual learning needs of students as outlined in their IEPs, or to have the students focus on achieving the standardized grade-level content. Educators also discussed the logistical challenges of attending to the individual learning needs and goals of students with disabilities in classrooms full with 30 or so students.

As previously indicated, IDEA and NCLB are becoming more closely aligned. This "blurring of special education" is resulting in a fundamental shift in what is meant by an individualized education. Our study explores how schools and educators are responding to the complex demands of creating, implementing, and monitoring IEPs for students identified with specific learning disabilities in secondary inclusive settings. It also examines how this blurring of special and general education policy has impacted how schools are actually providing students with learning disabilities an individualized education in inclusive settings.

2.2 METHODS

This study was a part of a broader project that sought to explore the roles, tools, and practices of secondary inclusive education. The broader project utilized qualitative comparative case study design to explore the distinctive attributes of secondary inclusive education (see Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Purposeful sampling was employed to strategically select schools to: (1) position ourselves in situations that would provide us with rich opportunities to observe the multi-faceted and nuanced nature of this phenomenon, and (2) to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 1996; Yin, 2008). For the broader study, we selected two schools that were identified by the state education agency and other local informants as having programs that included effective inclusionary practices. Furthermore, we selected schools in which administrators and teachers would be willing, and even excited to share their practices with us.

2.2.1 Setting

Willow HS was located in a suburban environment in Pennsylvania, and had approximately 1,500 students. About 50% of the students were economically disadvantaged, 57% were Caucasian, and 41% were African American. It had a well-established inclusion program that provided inclusion for nearly 95% of its students who required special education supports and services. The inclusion program had recently been recognized as providing high-quality inclusive education to students. The remaining 5% of students with disabilities were provided with instruction in self-contained "life skills" classes.

There were eight special educators working at the high school. Five of these teachers were "inclusion teachers" and three of the teachers were "life skills teachers." The inclusion teachers had an IEP caseload of approximately 30 students. These caseloads were organized by grade level. For instance, one special educator case managed all of the students in 9th grade students. Furthermore, each of the inclusion teachers had a content specialty, which was based upon several factors including the educator's seniority, interests, and familiarity with the subject. The special educators were expected to support students in the general education classrooms based upon their identified content specialty. The support typically included: consulting the general education teachers on the learning needs of students and pulling students out of the classroom for accommodations on assessments. There were also instructional assistants at the school, who were assigned to general educators at the beginning of the year based upon the number of special education students enrolled in each class.

Elm HS was also located in a suburban area in Pennsylvania, and had 555 students. Approximately 41% of the students were economically disadvantaged, 86% were Caucasian, and 13% were African American. The school had a fairly new inclusion program for all of its students who required special education supports and services. A majority of these students also attended at least one class period a day of special education resource support. The inclusion program had recently been identified by the state as not providing enough students with access to the least restrictive environment. This was due to the fact that the district placed students with more severe disabilities in specialized private schools. However, university-based consultants with experience in many schools in the region identified the school as having strong inclusionary practices.

There were four special education "learning support teachers" working at the high school. The inclusion teachers' IEP caseloads varied, ranging from approximately 10 to 24 students. Similar to Willow HS, these caseloads were based upon grade levels. In addition, the special educators co-taught with the general educators based upon grade level, not subject mater. For instance, the 9th grade case manager would also co-teach with designated 9th grade English, science, and math teachers during specified periods during the school day. In addition, each of the special educators had at least one support study hall a day during which they supported students on their caseloads. There were no instructional assistants at the school.

2.2.2 Focal students

To gain greater insights into the tools and practices of secondary inclusive education, we identified five focal students to bound and focus our data collection, including multiple points during the IEP process (i.e., IEP meeting, IEP, implementation, and monitoring of the IEP). The rationale for selecting focal students was to provide teachers with specific students for whom they could discuss and describe their practices. It also enabled us to examine the entire IEP process, from the creation to the implementation and monitoring of the IEP for each of the five selected students. To ensure that the teachers would feel comfortable with us collecting data associated with particular students, we asked for their help in identifying the students. The sampling criteria we had for the students were: (1) 10th or 11th grade students, (2) identified with a specific learning disability, and (3) requiring modifications and accommodations in her/his inclusion classrooms. The demographics on the five focal students selected for the study are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Focal Students

Focal Student	School	Sex	Grade Level	Disability Label	Impacted by Disability	Ethnicity
Andrew	Willow	Male	11th	Specific Learning Disability	Reading and Math	Caucasian
Breann	Willow	Female	10th	Specific Learning Disability	Math	Hispanic
Cara	Willow	Female	9th/10th	Intellectual Disability switched to Specific Learning Disability	Reading, Math, and Behavior	African American
Danielle	Elm	Female	10th	Specific Learning Disability	Reading and Math	Caucasian
Erik	Elm	Male	10th	Specific Learning Disability (Autistic Tendencies)	Reading, Math and Social Skills	Caucasian

2.2.3 IEP teams

Each of the focal students' IEP teams were comprised of at least one special educator, parent, student, and general educator. In the table below we highlight the demographics of the special education caseload managers (subsequently referred to as special educators) for each of the students, as well as the general educators involved in the IEP meetings.

Table 2.2: Educators Present at IEP Meetings

General Educator(s)	Special Educator	Student
English Teacher	Miss Smith	Andrew
Math and Allied Health Teachers	Miss Miller	Breann
Math Teacher	Miss Miller	Cara
English Teacher	Miss Keys	Danielle
Math Teacher	Miss Keys	Erik

All of the special educators were veteran teachers with each having with over twenty years of teaching experience. By accounting for the diverse qualities of the inclusion programs, focal students, and IEP teams, we believe this study provides a more nuanced, yet reliable understanding of the patterns we observed in our data analysis.

2.2.4 Data collection

Our approach to data collection was ethnographic in nature as we attempted to capture and understand the nature of inclusion from the perspective of the participants. This approach led us to spend a considerable amount of time in the field examining how the school supported students with disabilities in inclusive settings. We took field notes and pictures while visiting the schools. We also conducted formal and informal interviews, as well as collected documents (both used and created by participants). We allowed the collected data to influence research decisions, including our selection of future interview questions and observation settings. This process enabled us to further examine and question counter hypotheses. We triangulated data sources by

interviewing multiple stakeholders and collecting different data sources around an event (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

2.2.5 Overarching research question and subset of data

The overarching research question that guided this work was: how are schools and educators responding to the complex demands of creating, implementing, and monitoring IEPs for students with specific learning disabilities in secondary inclusive settings? For the purpose of this examination, we decided to focus on a specific subset of data that would enable us to closely examine the roles and interactions of participants during the IEP process. Therefore, we drew from the following data sources (1) audio recordings and transcripts of the focal students' IEP meetings, (2) IEPs for the focal students, (3) interviews with the focal students' special and general educators, and (4) field notes from at least two days spent observing each of focal students' special educators.

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Our strategy for analyzing data took a semi-structured approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The students' IEP meetings and semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, allowing us to read through them several times while developing codes. The process of analyzing data was iterative, as we would consult literature for further understanding of emergent patterns we discovered in the data. Furthermore, throughout our analysis, we triangulated data

sources and also considered counter hypotheses to explain the patterns we observed in the data. We will highlight this process below.

We began our data analysis by reviewing the focal students' IEPs and listening to the audio recordings of each of the focal students' IEP meetings. As we listened to the IEP meetings, we took notes on the general flow and topics discussed. We then read through the transcripts of each of the students' IEP meetings and further developed notes on the general flow of the meetings, topics discussed, and interesting moments and themes. Next, we created summary sheets of each of the students' IEP meetings, using the notes we took from listening to the audio and reading the transcripts of the IEP meetings. We then compared the different summary sheets and drafted several memos about emerging patterns. Lastly, we coded each of the IEP meetings for descriptive information such as how many words each participant spoke. We subsequently drafted memos examining emergent patterns within and between IEP meetings.

Drawing from our IEP summary sheets, descriptive data on the IEP meetings, and relevant memos, we began to code the transcripts of the IEP meetings for participants' interactions during the IEP meeting. We coded each participant turn as one of the following types of interaction: acknowledging, facilitating, informing, explaining, agreeing/confirming, disagreeing/countering, questioning, and miscellaneous. Drawing from our summary sheets and memos, we then coded the different sections of the IEP meetings based upon the sections of the IEP. We also coded when participants were reading/summarizing the IEP verses talking and discussing topics pertaining to the IEP. We next began to identify instances when learning was discussed during the IEP meetings for each of the students. We closely examined these instances by identifying who initiated the discussion, what they discussed regarding learning, and the outcome of the discussion.

While examining the focal students' IEP meetings, we simultaneously analyzed their IEPs. We created matrices examining similarities and differences in the content of the IEPs, paying particular attention to the following sections that focused on learning, instruction, and assessment: present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, participation in state and local assessments, goals and objectives, and program modifications and specially designed instruction. We also compared what was discussed at the IEP meetings with what was written in the IEPs.

We then read through our observations of our days shadowing the special educators, as well as interviews with the special and general educators to explore how special educators were progress monitoring and implementing the students' IEPs. As we did this, we took notes and wrote memos. We then coded the observations based upon what the special educators were doing: case managing, pulling students out, co-teaching, or resource support. Next, we calculated how much time special educators spent engaging in each of the activities based upon school periods. Afterward, we began to code when the special and general educators discussed case managing, pulling students out, co-teaching, and resource support. We then examined these codes with matrices and created child nodes to further identify patterns within the data. Then we compared the interview and observation data to provide additional insights into how special educators were progress monitoring and implementing IEPs. Finally, we examined these patterns aligned with what was written in the students' IEPs, as well as what was discussed during the students' IEP meetings.

We then examined the interviews with the students' general educators to explore their perceptions of IEPs. We began by reading through the interviews and noting patterns between the students. Next, we coded when general educators discussed IEPs. We then created child

nodes and further coded the interviews based upon how they used or discussed the IEPs (i.e., useful vs. not useful to instruction, not individualized, etc.). We also created matrices to explore patterns between general educators at both schools. Lastly, we compared these patterns to what was written in the students' IEPs, what was discussed during students' IEP meetings, and observations of the special educators.

2.4 FINDINGS

Our findings show that the IEP process played a relatively minor role in the students' instruction because the students' IEPs indicated that students would receive a general education with very little identification or discussion of instructional strategies or interventions to attend to their learning needs. We begin by providing the results of our analysis of the students' IEPs, which indicated that they were aligned with the general education curriculum but did not provide any specially designed instructions to attend to student learning in the general education classrooms. Next, our analysis of transcripts of the focal students' IEP meetings expose that the majority of time was spent reading and explaining the IEP. When discussion regarding the student veered from this typical pattern, it did not result in discussion focused on identifying or discussing specific instructional strategies or interventions to help the focal students learn the general education curriculum. We then present our analysis of interviews with educators and from observations of the special educators to expose that the school's inclusion model influenced how the students' IEPs were progress monitored and implemented (and not the other way around). We conclude by presenting data from our interviews with general educators that reveal they did

not find the IEPs useful to instruction because the IEPs provided no guidance on how to attend to the students' learning needs.

2.4.1 *Standardized* Education Programs

At both schools, the students' IEPs were aligned with the general education curriculum. All of the students' IEPs drew from general education curriculum-based assessments, measures, and observations to identify, discuss, and monitor students' present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, participation in state and local assessments, goals and objectives, and program modifications and specially designed instruction. Consistent with the focus on alignment with the standardized general education curriculum, students' IEPs did not outline any specific instructional interventions or strategies to attend to the students' individualized learning needs. The majority of the modifications and specially designed instruction listed were accommodations that were very similar (from one IEP to the next) and merely attended to surface-level features of student learning. As such, the students' IEPs were more like *Standardized* Education Programs, in that they indicated that students would receive a standardized general education, similar to that of their non-disabled peers, with minor accommodations that tinkered around the margins of their learning.

To illustrate this finding, which was largely consistent across the five focal students' IEPs, we provide examples from Andrew's IEP. However, throughout our findings, we also show the similarities and/or differences between the other focal students' IEPs, as well as provide appendixes to illuminate these patterns. In the subsequent sections, we highlight how the following segments of Andrew's IEP aligned with the general education curriculum: present

levels of academic achievement and functional performance, participation in state and local assessments, goals and objectives, and program modifications and specially designed instruction.

2.4.1.1 IEPs used general education based measures to describe student

Andrew's statement of present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (subsequently referred to as present levels) relied on the following data sources: IQ scores from the Weschler Intelligence Scale (taken from a previous re-evaluation report), Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, curriculum-based assessments taken from his linguistics class, 4Sight assessment, observations from his general educators, and grades. All of the focal students' present levels contained similar data sources (see Appendix G). Andrew's present levels began by identifying his disability and academic areas of weakness through the use of norm referenced and diagnostic assessments (i.e., Weschler Intelligence Scale, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test).

> Results from the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children: Third Edition (2003) indicated Andrew attained a Verbal IQ of 65; a Performance IQ of 87; and a Full Scale Score of 74. This score placed Andrew within the Borderline range of intellectual ability. According to the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test given in April, 2009, Andrew answered 22 out of 54 questions correctly which falls in the 3.1 level for comprehension.

In each of the focal students' present levels, norm referenced and diagnostic assessments were used to expose deficits in learning.

Andrew's present levels also included indicators of his performance in his general education classrooms. These measures included: criterion-referenced and interim/benchmark assessments administered to all general education students, as well as general educators' observations and grades in courses. This was similar to the data used in all of the focal students'

present levels. In addition, comments from several of Andrew's current general educators were included in his present levels (linguistics, choir, computer, chemistry, and English). These comments were often subjective observations about the students' personality, behavior, and participation in the classroom. The following excerpt from Andrew's present levels highlights what these comments from general educators looked like.

> Andrew's Understanding Literature teacher states that that he is a good speaker. He sometimes gets excited and off track from the topic, but a teacher prompt will put him back on task. He comes prepared to class, he participates and follows classroom rules. He gets along well with peers but would rather work alone than with partners.

One of the other focal student's present levels included specific comments from each of her general educators, while the other three focal students had broad summary statements that were based upon feedback from the students' general educators. Andrew's grades were then listed for the second grading period: English 11-70, Government-75, Plane Geometry- 85, Applied Chemistry-83, Music Appreciation-93, Digital Multimedia-85, and Cappella Choir-100. All of the other focal students' present levels also contained their grades.

2.4.1.2 Students held accountable using general education assessments

Andrew's section on participation in state and local assessments indicated that he would participate in the state's assessment of reading, writing, science, and math without accommodations. In other words, he would take the same assessment as his nondisabled peers. Two of the other focal students were identified as taking the state's assessment, although with accommodations (e.g., extended time, take in a separate room, etc.) (see Appendix H). Cara was identified as taking the state assessment in reading, writing, and science with accommodations,

but a modified state assessment in math. The modified state assessment was intended for 2% of special education students who were not able to reach grade-level standards even with the best instruction (see Zigmond & Kloo, 2009). Danielle's participation in the state assessment indicated that she was not taking the state's assessment during the duration of her IEP. All of the students were identified as participating in local assessments. However, the three focal students from Willow HS were to take the local assessments without accommodations, while the focal students at Elm HS were to take the local assessments with accommodations, which were the same for both students (e.g., extended time, use of calculator where permitted, etc.).

2.4.1.3 Goals and measures of progress aligned with general education standards and curriculum

Andrew's academic goals and objectives (subsequently referred to as goals) were based on state standards that are the same as the learning standards for general education students. Standards are commonly defined as what students should know and be able to do in a particular grade. Andrew had two academic goals, one in math and the other in writing. This was similar to the other focal students, as two had 2 academic goals, and two had 3 academic goals. The following is Andrew's mathematics goal (see Appendix I).

> Given 15 problems containing different kinds and forms of rational numbers including positive and negative integers, decimals, fractions, proper and improper fractions, and percents, Andrew will correctly solve them using a calculator with a yearly average of 85% accuracy. (State Standard, 2.8)

All of the focal students' academic goals indicated either a standard or use of the general education curriculum in the actual goal, besides one of Erik's math goals.

Andrew's academic goals included his progress being monitored using curriculum-based assessments. All of the focal students' goals from Willow HS drew from curriculum-based assessments, or classroom work and assignments to measure progress, or rather directly from the general education curriculum or classroom work. Meanwhile, the focal students' goals from Elm HS identified multiple methods of progress monitoring the goals. Still, each included measures that came directly from the general education classroom (e.g., curriculum-based measures, grades, and test scores).

2.4.1.4 Surface-level and similar adaptations

Andrew's modifications and specially designed instructions (now referred to as SDIs) were: extended time on assessments, adapted assessments, take assessments in resource room, use of a calculator, permission to come to the resource room if a substitute teacher was in the class, adapted research papers, and preferential seating. Interestingly, none of these were actually SDIs, but they were rather all accommodations. As highlighted previously, a SDI is an adaptation to the "content, methodology, or delivery of instruction." On the other hand, an accommodation is a change that helps students overcome (or work around) their disability. For instance, preferential seating allows a student to have improved access to instruction should they have challenges paying attention, seeing, and/or hearing.

Consistent with the findings for Andrew, nearly all of the other focal students' included SDIs were really accommodations. While accommodations can be extremely beneficial to providing students access to the general education curriculum, they do not actually change instruction. As such, the "SDIs" provided to the focal students were primarily focused on tinkering around the edges of actual instruction or addressing surface features of their participation in general education classrooms. The exceptions to this were in Danielle and Erik's

IEPs. Danielle and Erik's IEPs specified that they would receive instruction using a co-teaching model, and Erik was also to receive instruction in the "support study hall" (a study hall provided by special educators). However, these specifications are also not SDIs, but rather broad models or settings for delivering instruction to students. Or rather, co-teaching and support study hall (or often referred to as a resource support) exist as a means for providing SDIs to students to ensure that they have access to general curriculum.

The content listed as SDIs were highly similar across focal students (see Appendix J). For instance, all five of the focal students were provided with extended time and adapted assessments, and four of the focal students were provided with the use of a calculator and assessments in the resource room. These similar SDI patterns were also very high within the schools. For example, seven of Danielle and Erik's SDIs were exactly the same. These patterns between the focal students suggest that the majority of the SDIs were not particularly specialized or individualized, but were rather a standardized "one-size-fits-all" approach of providing students with accommodations.

2.4.2 Following the script of the IEP meetings

We now expose that virtually none of the discussion at the students' IEP meetings focused on identifying or discussing specific instructional strategies or interventions to help the focal students learn the general education curriculum. We observed that the majority of time in each student's IEP meeting was spent simply reading and explaining the IEP. Next, we reveal that, while limited, there were some instances when the IEP meetings veered from the typical reading and explaining of the IEP to include discussions of student learning. These discussions of student learning primarily focused on challenges that the students had learning in the general

education classrooms, and questions regarding students' work and assessment scores. Lastly, we expose that, in some instances, these discussions resulted in changes to the students' IEPs. However, there was only one instance of a discussion regarding an instructional strategy to attend to a student's learning needs in the general education classroom.

2.4.2.1 IEP meeting followed the script of the IEP

Andrew's special educator brought a completed rough draft of his IEP to the meeting. This was a similar practice across all of the focal students' IEP meetings. As indicated in past research (see Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011), the discussion in Andrew's IEP meeting followed the script of his IEP. This approach was also fairly consistent with that taken in all of the focal students' IEP meetings. Furthermore, as highlighted in past research (Salembier & Furney, 1997; Lovitt & Cushing, 1999), the special educator spoke a large percentage of the words spoken at the meeting (43%), which was focused on reading and explaining the IEP. This pattern of the special educator reading and explaining the IEP was similar to the other focal students' IEP meetings (see Appendices E, F, and G). Across all five IEP meetings, significant amounts of words spoken were spent discussing the students' present level of academic achievement, functional performance level, and transition services (see Appendix N). In addition, during all five IEP meetings little time was spent discussing the students' IEP goals and what available special education related services might be helpful in achieving them (i.e., focal students' modifications and SDIs were discussed). This is surprising given that these sections indicate how the school will attend to the learning challenges outlined in the student's present levels section, or rather what makes the student's education "individualized" or for that matter a "special" education.

Since the special educator primarily read and explained the IEP, the way she discussed Andrew's learning needs was very similar to how it was outlined in his IEP. This was especially

true during her explanation of his present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, participation in state and local assessments, goals and objectives, and program modifications and specially designed instruction. In the following excerpt, we place the wording from Andrew's present levels next to an excerpt from his IEP meeting to highlight this phenomenon. This same approach was generally used across all of the focal students' IEP meetings.

IEP

> Andrew is a sixteen year-old junior at Willow HS High School in the XX School District. He receives learning support services while fully included in the general education curriculum in the general education setting. Andrew has been receiving special education services since the 5th grade. There are no known reports of any medical conditions that may be impacting his education performance. His overall medical history appears to be unremarkable. At this time, there are no concerns with his vision or his hearing. There are no indications of any social or cultural background information that may be impeding Andrew's ability to learn within the educational setting.

IEP Meeting

> Basically, I said Andrew is a sixteen year-old junior in the Willow HS High School in the XX School District. He receives learning support services while fully included in a general education curriculum in a general education setting. Andrew has been receiving special education services since the fifth grade. There are no known reports of any medical conditions that may be impacting his

> educational performance. His overall medical history reports and any medical conditions that may be impacting his educational program….Wait. I'm sorry. His overall medical history appears to be unremarkable. At this time, there are no concerns with his vision or his hearing. There are no indications of any social or cultural background information that may be impeding Andrew's ability to learn within the educational setting.

Therefore, as mentioned in the previous section on the content of the IEPs, when the IEP sections were read and explained during the meetings, the content of the meeting was highly aligned with the general education curriculum.

The general educator invited to Andrew's IEP meeting was his English teacher, even though his primary disability was identified in math. With this said, results from assessments also indicated that Andrew struggled with reading. In all of the other students' IEP meetings, the general educator present at the meeting taught the subject area in which the student was identified as having a disability (there were two general educators in Breann's IEP meeting, one aligned with her math disability and the other aligned with her allied health postsecondary transition goal). In Andrew's IEP meeting, the general educator was present for 86% of the words spoken at the meeting but only spoke about 5% of the recorded words. While there was variation across the meetings in the percent of words the general educators were present for and words they spoke (see Appendices E and F), overall the general educators spoke significantly less than the special educators. When the general educators spoke at the meetings, they often spoke about the student's present levels. The following excerpt from Andrew's IEP meeting highlights the way general educators tended to participate in the IEP meetings, which was to provide a description of the students' performance in their classroom.

> One of my favorite things about Andrew is that he's so willing to seek outside resources to gain assistance when he struggles. He's really great in place. He participates. He doesn't struggle with group work in my class, really, but I think you have a couple of friends in the class. […] Right, but even when I assign groups, because I will do that, I've never had an issue with you doing the group work.

However, there was variation in how much information the general educators actually disclosed. While most of the general educators provided brief student performance descriptions, one of the general educators present in Breann's IEP meeting provided a more in depth account of the student's progress. This difference in the general educators' description of the students explains most of the variation in the words spoken between the general educators.

2.4.2.2 Going off script to discuss learning

We identified 38 instances when discussion departed from the typical reading and explaining of the IEP to a discussion of learning. Close analysis of these instances, or rather disruptions to the normal flow or script of the IEP meeting most frequently focused on learning challenges (e.g., issues completing reading assignments), assessments questions (e.g., what was meant by the state assessment scores) and student work (e.g., when a project for a class was due) (see Appendix P). The following example from Andrew's IEP meeting highlights a discussion about learning challenges he had in his chemistry class. Note that the special educator was reading from the student's present levels when this disruption occurred.

> Special educator: Okay, on the next part, we're now going to look and think –
>
> […] Hang on. Andrew needs to ask for help when he doesn't understand or

needs clarification on directions or concepts. Now, Andrew, I said that mainly because of science.

Andrew: Right.

Special educator: Because remember what happens in there? If you're frustrated, you'll just sit there.

Student: Yeah, because we're doing this thing with math. I know how to do the lineup and the problems, but when it comes to her and she said it's like 2.035 times 10 to the 23rd, I totally lose it. I'm like, "Okay, why?" I tried it on my calculator and she wasn't there. I had no idea what I was doing.

Special Educator: Okay, so what are the two things that I told you, you could do, though?

Student: I could ask.

Special Educator: Yeah. Who are the two other people in that room that you can get help from?

Student: Mr. Ladd [science special education inclusion teacher] and Mrs. Apples [instructional assistant].

Special Educator: Right. If a day goes bad, if you're totally lost that period – say it was today, you're totally lost, then you just leave a note and say – you can go to 144 and say, leave a note on Mr. Ladd's desk and say, "I'm confused with what happened in class today," [cut off]

Student: Well, I'm not saying I'm lost.

Special Educator: Or ask Mrs. Apples

Student: Yeah. I asked Mrs. Apples, but she didn't know how to do it at all.

Special Educator: Okay, but that's good because you're asking her, so if she can't do it and then Mrs. Myers [chemistry teacher] not there, then Mr. Ladd and Mrs. Apples can [cut off]

Student: Yeah, but then she just said, "Oh, okay. Just turn it in," because I did five.

Special Educator: Oh, that's good.

Similar to this example, the special educator often recommended something that the student and/or parent could do to address the students' challenges learning (5 instances). For instance, in Danielle's IEP meeting the special educator suggested that the parent should work with her daughter on how to use an analogue clock. However, none of these disruptions resulted in the identification of instructional strategies or interventions that the general or special educators could do to address the challenges that the students had learning the curriculum.

2.4.2.3 Disruptions that led to changes in the students' IEPs

A few of these disruptions around learning actually resulted in changes to the students' IEPs (9 out of 38 instances). The parent or special educator most commonly initiated the disruption that resulted in changes to the students' IEPs (see Appendix P). These changes occurred to the focal students' present levels (7 instances), SDIs (1 instance), and transition (1 instance). The interactions around learning during Andrew's IEP meeting resulted in five changes to his IEP, while Erik had two changes, Julia and Danielle had one change, and Breann had no changes. We believe that the greater instance of changes to Andrew's IEP was due, in part, to the active involvement of Andrew and his parent.

In the following excerpt from Andrew's IEP meeting, the special educator reads the present levels in his IEP and states that the chemistry teacher explained that he gets frustrated

and confused in her class. The special educator states that Andrew can get help from the science inclusion teacher and the instructional assistant in the class. Andrew's parent then interrupts and states that the issue is that he needs to sit closer to the board because he cannot see it. The parent goes on to explain that she emailed this suggestion to the chemistry teacher, but the teacher did not respond. The special educator then explains that the chemistry teacher has a method for changing seats every marking period, but indicates she will specify this modification in the SDI section.

> Special educator: Right. Andrew comes to class prepared. He will pout if he does not get his own way. As the year progresses Andrew is finding the work more challenging, so he is getting frustrated. At this point, Andrew will not ask for help and will only receive help if the teacher checks on his work, so Andrew, just like with the special education supervisor was chiming in with, that's when you have to be – you're a self-advocate for everything else, so instead of sitting there and not knowing how to do it – and then that's when Mr. Ladd, Mrs. Apples– that's when you can use those – now, Mr. Ladd, he's another inclusion teacher, but he works with the science teachers, and Mrs. Apples is an instructional assistant that's actually in the classroom that period every day.
>
> Parent: I think his problem is he asked to sit up front, closer to the board, and [cut off].
>
> Andrew: And she still doesn't let me.
>
> Parent: And I emailed her and she still wouldn't allow him.

Special educator: And she came and talked to me, and I am fixing this. We'll get to that.

Later in the meeting, the special educator states that she added preferential seating as a SDI in his IEP so that the chemistry teacher would change his seat.

Special educator: […] Okay, this is the part you have to listen to. Hi, Mrs. Brent. Preferential seating – Andrew should have a seat in front row in close proximity to the teacher and chalkboard or Promethium board. Is that specific enough, Andrew?

Andrew: Mm hmm.

Special educator: Parent, is that okay with you? Do you want to see that? Okay, parent, right beside you is Mrs. Brent. She's our transition coordinator. I was expecting that you just – I mean I went through the information that you had. I didn't mention that thing and maybe you can go do that thing in May. I didn't. I forget what it is, but it was something.

Parent: Oh, I tried. Go ahead.

Special educator: No, go ahead. No, you can keep going. Is there any other ones we should add here?

Special education supervisor: Preferential seating? Did you put that?

Special educator: Yeah. I'll read it again.

Special education supervisor: Okay, because that's what needs to go there […]

Special educator: Preferential seating – Andrew should have a seat in front row, in close proximity to the teacher and chalkboard or Promethium board.

Special education supervisor: Okay.

Similar to this discussion, during Danielle and Erik's IEP meetings, issues were raised regarding the student's learning during the reading of the present levels section. However, these issues were resolved by changing the students' course schedules for the following year to place them into remedial general education classes, as well as into a support study hall.

2.4.2.4 Limited discussion of instruction

We coded only one instance of a discussion regarding an instructional strategy used to attend to the learning needs of a focal student in the general education classroom. This occurred during Andrew's IEP meeting, the general education teacher briefly discussed using a jigsaw strategy to support the student's successful completion of assigned work.

> I think when we read the stories – I think initially because I'll give him something here and there, independent reading, and it doesn't make sense, but then once we have a discussion or we'll jigsaw and break into groups and they'll – we'll translate and then his interest level you can clearly see increases because he'll understand it, and then we did – we translated the Gettysburg address […].

Based upon this interaction, the special educator added to Andrew's IEP that he enjoyed reading, but surprisingly did not mention the strategies the general educator used to improve his reading comprehension and which also helped him to enjoy reading more.

Most time in IEP meetings was spent reading the IEP document. When discussion broke this pattern, a member of the team (typically parents) raised a concern or learning challenge faced by the student. These instances sometimes resulted in a change to the IEP document. However, the unavoidable "elephant" in the meeting was that very few of these disruptions

focused on discussing actual classroom instruction or identifying instructional strategies to improve student learning in the general education classroom.

2.4.3 "Pulling out" and "pushing in" to case manage and implement IEPs

The ways that special educators implemented students' IEPs revealed very different enactment of full inclusion in the two schools. At Willow HS, the special educators spent the majority of their school day identifying struggling students and pulling them out of the general education classroom to provide them with accommodations on assessments. In sharp contrast, the special educator at Elm HS spent the majority of her day going into the general education classrooms to support students, as well as instructing and assessing students during study support classes[1]. We then illuminate that the special educators' methods of attending to the learning needs of students aligned with the surface-level and generic accommodations outlined in their IEPs. Lastly, we posit that Willow HS's method of triaging and pulling students out of the general education classroom resulted in a focus on learning outcomes (i.e., assessment, projects, and grades). In contrast, Elm HS's method of pushing into the general education classroom, as well as having a support class resulted in a focus on both the learning process and outcomes.

2.4.3.1 Triaging and pulling out students

At Willow HS, the majority of the special educators' time was spent case managing students' IEPs (see Appendix Q). When special educators were engaged in activities pertaining to case

[1] The different enactment of inclusion represented by the focal students' special education teachers was consistent with our observations of the other special education teachers in the school.

management, they were working on IEPs, attending IEP meetings, collecting data for progress monitoring, and addressing questions and concerns of parents, students, general educators, and administrators. For instance, the following excerpt from our field notes taken from observing Miss Miller highlights what this type of activity looked like:

> Miss Miller is at her cubicle and she is checking her email. She spends approximately 20 minutes reading through her emails and responding to a few. One of the emails she responds to is from the special educator supervisor regarding an emergency meeting that they are having for a student. As Miss Miller is writing the email, she stops to go through filing cabinets and pulls a folder out. She uses information within the folder to help her write the email about the student's levels, and also documentation that she's taken about the student's behavior throughout the school year. She tells me that she finds it very important to stay on top of documentation for all the students, because oftentimes when these types of meetings happen, she likes to be informed enough and have all the information available so they can make the best decisions regarding interventions, but also placement for the child.

While case managing students, the special educators drew from progress monitoring forms and grades to help them identify students who were struggling in general education classrooms. This is indicated in the following quote from Miss Smith:

> Well I mean again, everybody does theirs [progress monitoring] different. But the email for me, that works well and it's great because they hate to fill out forms, and they don't understand documents, like why we need the documents. […] Right, because when anything occurs, like say – and then again, and this is really good

> because like on that _____ I have probably on my grade books from whenever I had my own class. But if there is like a high maintenance student but we have done all this on – well now it can't be anymore, but before they could have up to seven years to sue – so then you have your little paper trail. So basically it's good to have a paper trail.

Both of the special educators we observed indicated that they frequently used the information from the data collected by the general educators to identify struggling students.

> Miss Miller stressed the importance of gathering as much information on students as possible. She explained she's constantly trying to gather as much information as possible, and will go back to the office to document it. She explains that she needs all this information as a student's caseload manager in case something comes up: a change of behavior or slipping grades.

This makes sense given that the special educator had little contact with the students on their caseload. They were not routinely present in the general education classrooms, but rather pulled students out to receive support. As such, the special educators at Willow HS indicated that they used the data that they gathered from the general educators to triage support to students who were struggling in general education classrooms. In the following quote, Miss Smith describes this process of triaging support.

> You'll look at the kids who have the lower grades. Like this girl (points to a paper), I would look at her and say, "Oh you have a 47%. We need to do this test." So you'll look at that pile of papers and periodically say this kid has a low grade. How about we work on these assignments. So you see my folder is getting

> pretty thick. It's towards the end of the grading period so we're going to try to get some grades up because all those assignments need to be brought up.

This process of triaging support to students was confirmed by our observations of the special educators. These observations established that they frequently pulled struggling students out of the general education classroom to provide assistance on tests and assignments. At one point during our observations of Miss Smith, an English teacher states that she thinks a student needed to take an assessment with the special educator. She responded, "Well, if the student fails, then we'll always retest them, and they can come back, and they can take the test with me and with Betty [the instructional assistant]."

Miss Miller indicated that the downside to this approach was that it focused on only the clearly "high maintenance" students. There were other students who "fell through the cracks." These marginal students were passing their courses, but could be performing much better if they received more assistance. The following quote captures this concern.

> The main reason I'm here is for the kids. (…) I have like 30 on my IEP list or 35 on my IEP list, and working with the high maintenance kids. Well what about the one that's not making waves. Like I'm not paying enough attention to this kid. He's passing everything, but what if I just go to him a little bit more, his grades would come up. That's my total frustration a lot.

Interviews with the general educators also indicated that the special educators were more likely to pull students out of the general education classrooms to receive support if they were receiving poor grades on tests and assignments. Breann's social studies teacher indicates this in the following quote.

> […] I think, once their grades show that they're failing, and their IEP teacher says, "Oh my goodness, I have a lot of IEP students that are failing. I have to get in touch with that regular ed teacher. I'm going to start pulling such and such out." So, it's almost like they start to get pulled out, maybe, when failure has already become apparent, as opposed to prior to it.

A few of the general educators at Willow HS voiced frustration with the special educators' focus on students' grades because when a student was failing they would feel pressure to pass the student. For instance, Breann's math teacher explained this frustration in the following quote.

> But as far as when I send the grades to them, not really unless they're failing, and then all of a sudden it's like, "Well, why are they failing and why didn't you tell me?" Well, they haven't done anything. I mean, honestly I don't think that I have any kids failing this year who bust their butts. I'm pretty sure that all of my kids who've been trying have been passing. So all of the failures are kids that it's on them. It's not because I didn't give them enough time. It's not because I didn't blow it up so they could read it. It's not because I didn't make an extra copy. It's not because I didn't send them to the resource room. It's because they haven't done anything. So I hate when it's like, "Well, why are they failing?" Why don't you ask them? Why don't you even ask them who their teacher is this year, 'cause they might not know.

Thus, because of the school's inclusion model, the special educators were not routinely in the general education classrooms with students on their caseloads and did not have scheduled times during the day to work with students. Therefore, they had developed a system to triage and pull students out of the general education classroom only after they were performing poorly

in classes. Ultimately, this resulted in a process primarily focused on learning outcomes and, more specifically, on course grades. This process aligned with the focal students' IEPs in that the SDIs provided to Andrew, Breann, and Cara were accommodations to assessments. They contained no specific focus on instructional strategies or supports to help attend to the learning process in the general education classroom.

2.4.3.2 Co-teaching and support study hall

Meanwhile at Elm HS, the majority of the special educator's time was spent pushing into general education classrooms to co-teach with the general educators, and in study support, as opposed to case managing the students' IEPs (see Appendix Q). In both days we observed Miss Keys, she spent certain periods during the school day co-teaching in the general education classrooms. She co-taught in two English classes, as well as in one math and science class. In the classrooms, she frequently circulated around the room and worked with individual students on assignments:

> Miss Keys walks around and asks the students if they need help on their math problems. The general educator then asks a student to go to the board and solve one of the math problems they are completing on the board. The general educator then goes around the classroom and works with individual students, while special educator is taking notes in a notebook. The special educator then finishes writing and begins to circulate around the room again.

Interviews with the general educators indicated that the special educator routinely push into their classrooms to co-teach unless there was an important issue she needed to attend to or that she was on a fieldtrip with students on her caseload to support their transition goals.

> I see her every day unless there's a field trip. She's in charge of field trips. So she's gone with that. […] I know that she won't be there. She'll warn me.

When discussing her role in the general education classrooms, Miss Keys explained what she thinks would happen if she did not push into the classes.

> I think the students would be more overwhelmed. I think the modification and the adaptations would not be done nearly maybe as efficiently or as often as they need to be done, because you know, there'd be one person in there concentrating on 30 kids or 25 – you know, 25 regular – you know, students and Special Ed students combine. I think it just – it's also very beneficial to the regular ed teachers because it gives them that additional support and then they're able to make sure that that IEP is being carried out.

Furthermore, the special educator had two special education support study halls a day to work with students on her caseload. In the following quote, Miss Keys explained the work that students did in her support study hall.

> Basically what we do is as soon as they walk in the door I say the same thing to them every single day, you know, what do you have, and I go through – I say, English, science, world cultures, and I go through all the subjects with them. And then they have something they start working on that particular subject. If I know that they had – if they don't have anything that's due, then I try to look ahead, like for example, if they're sentences are due, and then we'd get those done, even if it's three weeks ahead of time. If there is nothing to do then they check the red basket to see if they owe anything that has to be done. And then if they don't have anything and everything is totally done, then we might work on some skills that they are weak in, for example, multiplication, telling time, counting money, you know. Or we'll go back to the IEP goals and I pull up the IEP and I say we have

> to work on looking up three careers, you know, if it's on their IEP, and you know, what they – maybe we need to look up three colleges. So that's basically what we do during the learning support.

We also observed Miss Keys assess students, work individually with students on problems, re-teach course material to groups of students, work on remedial skills with students, and case manage.

Therefore, unlike the special educators' at Willow HS, the special educator at Elm HS did not need to spend as much time progress monitoring students because she was in the general education classroom. As such, she was able to collect her own data or she asked the general educators for information on the students while she was in the classrooms. She also had two periods a day during which she could instruct and support the students on her caseload. As such, these structural differences enabled the special educator at Elm HS to support the focal students during both the learning process and outcomes. This process aligned with the focal students' IEPs in that the SDIs provided to Danielle and Erik were accommodations to assessments, as well as support study hall and co-teaching. While including support study hall and co-teaching as SDIs in the students' IEP did not indicate any specific instructional strategies, it did allow for the special educator to have routine access to the focal students, the general educators, and the material that the students were working on in the general education classroom.

2.4.4 General educators' perceptions of IEPs

Since the focal students' IEPs aligned with the general education curriculum, it was a surprise to hear the general educators, at both schools, frequently mention during our interviews that the IEPs were not useful to their instruction of students. Our analysis of the interviews suggests that

the Standardized nature of the IEPs and school's model of inclusion both influenced the general educators' perceptions of IEPs.

2.4.4.1 IEPs were not individualized or useful to instruction at Willow HS

During our interview with the general educators, they reported reading and being familiar with the IEPs, yet they did not find the information very useful in guiding instruction.

> I mean, there's nothing written anywhere that tells you how you should do things do be honest with you. It's like from experience, the more you're dealing with them, the more you deal with any kid, the better you get at it. So maybe I might know something about a particular student and approach it one way and it's not working, so I turn the clock and do it a different way right then and there. I won't have time to look it up in the book [IEP].

The fact that the general educators did not find the information in IEPs useful was not particularly surprising, given our analysis of the focal students' IEPs indicated that there were no specially designed instructions in them (i.e., instructional strategies or interventions) to attend to the learning needs of students in the general education classrooms. Rather, the SDIs were surface-level accommodations that tinkered around the margins of the focal students' instruction, or, more frequently, the assessment of learning.

Several of the general educators at Willow HS also indicated that all of the IEPs were extremely similar.

> Yeah, the IEPs – when I first got my first round of IEPs, I thought, "Oh, this is great." And then, year after year, "Oh my gosh, it's the exact same thing for every kid." So, I wonder how an individualized education plan can be the same

> for every special ed. student. […] And, no, they're not all the same, but they're pretty much the same.

In the following quote, the general educator explained how all of the students' SDIs were similar to one another.

> No, actually her IEP looks almost like all the other ones, and the fact that some of the kids have to sit up front because of distractions or whatever; she has to sit up front because of hearing. I have to give the directions the same way written and oral and redo them, so it's interesting in the fact that a lot of them are the same.

Another general educator echoed this sentiment in the following quote.

> Simply because they all say the same thing. There's so many kids. It's extended time. It's small classroom. Honestly, I could show you the whole stack and it's the same in every single one.

Our analysis of the focal students' SDIs confirms what the general educators had noticed. The SDIs were, in fact, very similar among all the focal students in our study. As such, in the following quote from a general educator, she explains it made more sense to provide all of the students in her classroom with the same accommodations.

> When I look at the IEP's, they tend to be generally the same and just change the name. The behavior — even like the behavior things, they tell you to go through this step, this step, this step. It's so hard to follow those because they don't really help. A lot of — not _____ help at all. But especially in a class that's all special ed, if you just do it for everybody, then they're fine.

Ultimately, the general educators did not find the IEPs useful to their instruction in the general education classrooms due to their similarity from one to another and their lack of specificity.

But, as the following quote points out, the mere presence of an IEP meant that the general educator had to be more careful as to how they assessed the learning progress and their grading of students with disabilities.

> No, I don't use it [the IEP] to plan for his instruction. I use my knowledge, I use – to be totally honest with you at the beginning of the year you get this folder of all these IEPs and you're like I don't know these students, I don't even know what they look like. So I hate to say it's an exercise in futility in a way to even read over them at that point. But to me it is. I put them – I notice the names and in my grade book I highlight the students with an IEP.

Our analysis of the focal students' IEPs and how the special educators progress monitored and implemented the students' IEPs, supports the general educators' poor perceptions of the IEPs. They indicated that the IEPs were particularly useful to their instruction, they were very similar from one to another, and that they were mainly focused on ensuring that students received accommodations on assessments.

2.4.4.2 General educators at Elm HS rely on the special educators rather than IEPs

Similar to Willow HS, interviews with the general educators at Elm HS indicated that the general educators did not find the IEPs useful to their instruction. The main complaint among the general educators was that the IEPs were too long.

> So that's – the IEP in general – I see the paperwork with them _____ do. I think it's too long, too many pages. When you have an IEP sitting there with 30 pages, that's way too much – I mean they can shorten that up. I mean paperwork is just ridiculous. Yes, there has to be one, but why does it need to be 30 pages. That doesn't make any sense.

However, because the IEPs were so long, the general educators frequently said that they relied more on the special educators for information on the focal students than on the IEPs.

> Yeah, I think so, because they're so, because they're so long and sometimes it's in that jargon, and you know, you sit in those meetings and you flip through 45 pages and you only really need to know stuff on like one page. So it's just easier to ask [the special educator].

This makes sense, and aligns with our analysis of the special educator's role in progress monitoring and implementing the IEPs. The special educator at Elm HS commonly pushed into the general education classrooms with the focal students. Therefore, the general educators at Elm HS did not feel the need to rely on the IEPs as much as the general educators did at Willow HS because they felt they could refer to the special educators for support. With this said, they too noticed that the SDIs were fairly similar from one IEP to another, as indicated in the following quote.

> I get a copy [of the IEP]. I always get a copy at the beginning. I always know what my kids IEPs say, but I have to say I mostly rely on the special educator. Miss Keys knows everything, and some of the kids most of the time they end up getting the same – they could be pulled out of class. Their adaptations are usually the same. So it's not a big deal.

This was supported by our analysis of the focal students' IEPs at Willow HS, which indicated that the SDIs listed in the students IEPs were very similar. The students' SDIs were primarily accommodations regarding how the students would be assessed. The main difference between the focal students SDIs attending Willow HS and Elm HS was the inclusion of co-teaching and a

support study hall at Elm HS. These two SDIs appeared to be the most significant difference in how the two schools addressed the learning needs of students.

2.4.5 Summary

In this article, we exposed the complexity and nuance of the IEP process in secondary inclusive settings. On the one hand, the IEPs and IEP meetings were aligned with the general education curriculum. So much so, in fact, that based solely on the IEP process, focal students were basically receiving a general education with similar surface-level accommodations that tinkered on the margins of the students' learning. On the other hand, the entire IEP process lacked specificity about the actual instruction of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Essentially, even when the IEP process at Elm HS was more focused on learning, due to the model of inclusion offered at the school, it still provided virtually no guidance or oversight over the actual instruction of students in the co-taught general education classrooms and support study hall. As such, at both schools, the if, what, how, where, and who of a student's actual instruction was left to the complete discretion of the general and special educators (i.e., instructional strategies and interventions were not listed in student's IEP or discussed during IEP meetings).

2.5 DISCUSSION

As indicated in IDEA, the IEP is the cornerstone of special education because it is intended to drive the educational process for students with disabilities (see Bateman, 2011). It was originally

devised to ensure that a student with a disability receives a more intense and *individualized* education in the least restrictive environment. For a growing majority of students with disabilities (particularly students identified with specific learning disabilities), this means receiving a significant percentage of their instruction in general education classrooms (Newman, Marder, & Wagner, 2003). Regardless of their placement in general education classrooms, students' IEPs are still supposed to outline what, how, who, and when they will receive special education services and supports to attend to their learning needs (Etscheidt, 2012). As such, the IEP process must not only align with the general education curriculum, but also outline specific instructional strategies and interventions to attend to the students' learning needs in the general education classroom.

Researchers have argued this has resulted in a deliberate blurring of special and general education (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). In this study, we examined how are schools and educators responding to the complex demands of creating, implementing, and monitoring IEPs for students with specific learning disabilities in secondary inclusive settings. We found that students were receiving basically the same general education instruction as their nondisabled peers: they were primarily receiving instruction from general educators, in general education classrooms, and on the same curriculum and standards with only minor surface-level accommodations to assessments. This aligns with prior research that has examined the instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive settings, which exposed that students received little to any individualized instruction (Bray, Mrachko, & Lemons, 2014; Zigmond & Baker, 1996).

Although, unlike the findings of Espin, Deno and Albayrak-Kaymak (1998), which found that IEPs were more individualized for students receiving instruction in resource support and

more aligned with the general education curriculum for those receiving support in inclusive classrooms, our findings indicate that the IEPs for students at both schools were very similar regardless of the educational models used to instruct students. Yet, the actual implementation and progress monitoring of the IEPs was very different between the two schools. In the school with resource support and co-teaching, there was a greater focus on both the learning process and outcomes, while the school without resource support or co-teaching was just focused on learning outcomes. It could be that the discrepancy in our findings with Espin and colleagues (1998) was due to differences between the elementary and high school settings, although we believe it could be that pressure to align IEPs to the general education curriculum could be resulting in a standardization of all IEPs. In other words, the policy pressure to align students' IEPs with grade-level content standards and the general education curriculum is taking precedence over attending to the individual learning needs of students.

There are some who may argue that this is a step in the right direction because at least students with disabilities have access to a general education curriculum. We question this line of reasoning. We do believe the mainstreaming of students with disabilities into general education classrooms is appropriate when discussed and agreed upon by their IEP team. However, the findings from our study indicate that a student's educational placement, particularly at Willow HS, was largely determined by the school's model of inclusion rather than by the actual determination of the individual learning needs of students. When students with disabilities were merely placed into the general education classroom, their learning needs were only addressed when a student was failing a course. Additionally, the types of supports provided to the students were accommodations that enabled them to perform better on assessments, but did little to promote student learning or understanding of content. These students were identified as having a

disability in the first place because of challenges they had learning the general education curriculum. As such, they likely require specialized instruction and support in order to have an opportunity to learn the general education curriculum.

School districts are currently under little pressure to ensure that students are receiving anything more than a general education. If anything, most of the policy messages are pushing schools to provide students with disabilities instruction in general education classrooms (Russell & Bray, 2013). As such, it is easy for schools to justify the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms with little to any additional learning support. School districts are under tremendous pressure to be more efficient, reduce expenses, and cut budgets. Therefore, as they place more students with disabilities into their general education classrooms, they can also reduce spending on special educators, adapted curriculums, adaptive technologies, and additional special education supports and services (i.e., speech therapy, reading specialists, etc.).

Based upon the findings of our study, some may argue that the IEP process is a waste of time and should be done away with. However, if this were to happen, school districts would be even less accountable to parents in ensuring that the learning needs of students with disabilities are really being addressed. Rather, we assert that the IEP process needs to be radically overhauled to be more transparent, meaningful, and aligned with actual instruction and measures of student learning. So how can the IEP process be made more meaningful for the education of students with special needs? We outline below our recommendations for school administrators and policymakers.

2.5.1 Recommendations for school administrators

Findings from our study suggest that school administrators must value special education and make it a priority in their schools. As was the case at Elm HS, special educators need to be viewed and treated principally as instructors and invention specialists and not as generalists who deal with all the issues pertaining to students' education (i.e., social workers, guidance counselors, vice principals, librarians, disciplinarians, etc.). At Willow HS, where the special educators were primarily engaged as case managers, students with disabilities received virtually no additional learning support.

School administrators should intentionally plan how they will organize inclusion at their schools to maximize the special educator's role as an instructor and intervention specialist. This model of inclusion is likely more similar to Elm HS's inclusion program in that it would not be a one-size-fits-all approach, but should rather allow for a continuum of placement opportunities to attend to the varying needs of the students with disabilities, including: mainstreaming; co-teaching; resource support; remedial courses; intense and specific intervention courses in math, reading, writing, and technology; apprenticeship model career internships; and vocational training. Lastly, administrators should identify other ways at their schools that students with disabilities learning needs can be better addressed, such as with instructional interventions using technology, specialized curriculum, and/or instructional assistants.

2.5.2 Recommendations for policymakers

In order to make the IEP process more relevant, transparent, and aligned to instruction and measures of learning progress, we assert that policymakers must radically change the nature and

purpose of the IEP process. As our findings suggest, IEPs must be designed to be more accessible and meaningful to the IEP team, especially the general educators. To do this, IEPs should take on the semblance of an action plan that uses matrixes, checklists, and summary sheets to identify and align learning needs, goals, and instructional strategies. These action plans could have similar characteristics to the types of checklists and support plans that are being designed to coordinate the ongoing care of patients receiving treatment from multiple medical specialists (see Engestrom, Engestrom, & Kerosuo, 2003). In addition, these action plans should clearly identify who is specifically responsible for the deliverance of recommended supports, including specific checklists and outlines for the general educators to follow. As demonstrated in research on health care provider checklists, these action plans should identify and task the general educators with specific, effective, and meaningful actions to be taken in their classrooms to attend to the specific learning needs of students (see Gawande, 2009). These action plans should be designed so that they are more accessible to educators (both special and general), other service providers, student (if appropriate), and the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student.

We also recommend the creation of a new "electronic" IEP and system that allows all the involved participants to have access to it on their personal computers, using appropriate sign-in protocols and passwords to ensure privacy. In this electronic version, the IEP team participants could create and modify the IEP before and after the actual IEP meeting. Therefore, unlike the findings in our study, this would allow all participants to have an active role in drafting the IEP before the actual IEP meeting. After the "official" IEP meeting, the agreed upon IEP version would be loaded into the secure IEP system and would then be implemented, progress monitored, and through which specific service supports could be delivered. Interaction would be encouraged, not only among the educators, but also with the students and their parents.

Additionally, this electronic format would become a "live" action system where supports could be delivered, monitored, and modified. Thus, the IEP itself would be transformed from a "legalistic" rigid document that appears to be irrelevant to many general educators into a "live" action orientated program that encourages communication, change, and innovation amongst the participants (including from the general educators).

This type of electronic IEP system would also attend to the challenges that our study found with regard to the time spent monitoring IEPs for progress, making the process more efficient by reducing paperwork, encouraging direct communication, and permitting the automatic uploading of grades and progress reports. Likewise, by changing the design and accessibility of the IEP to be a live action plan, we contend that it could have implications for how participants engage in the IEP meetings and how learning and instruction are discussed. As highlighted by our findings, as well as past research (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011), the IEP meetings primary followed the template of the IEP. If all of the IEP team participants were encouraged to interact around a student's learning before and after the IEP meeting using more interactive and meaningful forms with clearly assigned responsibilities, we contend it could result in more effective and meaningful discussion at the IEP meetings focused on instruction and learning.

By converting to a live online IEP system, we assert that the result would have positive outcomes for both parents and educators. This new IEP process will make schools more efficient and effective at providing students with disabilities appropriate services and supports to better address their learning needs. An online IEP and process would also be a more useful, vibrant, and meaningful tool for educators as it would enable them to better design supports, encourage better communication, and more specifically address the learning needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Lastly, the state education departments (with the support of research universities, the federal government, and private foundations) could design and build IEP systems that would then be shared with individual school districts. This would spread the cost of designing, building, and updating this system over the entire state and not become the sole burden of an individual school district. By making the results of such a system accessible to collaborating research universities, researchers would have access to large amounts of data from the participating schools. This kind of aggregate data could then be studied to learn what services and supports are actually working and what are not. This ability to collect data across a large sample could accelerate the rate of innovation in special education and greatly enhance further progress in identifying successful supports and strategies.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

We will now highlight the limitations of this study. First, the study was a comparative case study of five students' IEP processes at two high schools, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The schools' organizational structures greatly influenced the IEP process. As such, while the findings are specific to these schools, they may provide insights into schools with similar organizational characteristics.

Another limitation of this study was that we only examined the IEP process. As such, instruction in the classroom could have been tailored to the learning needs of the students even though it was not indicated in the student's IEP or discussed during the student's IEP meetings. While outside the scope of this study, interviews and observations with general educators suggest this was not the case, but rather, students primarily received a general education with little

instructional differentiation. In addition, this is supported by numerous studies that have examined instruction in inclusive settings (Bray, Mrachko, & Lemons, 2014; Zigmond & Baker, 1996).

Due to the boundaries of this study, we only examined the role of the IEP process in the instruction of students with disabilities. As such, we did not closely examine the students' transition plans. While transition planning is an extremely important part of a high school students' education, it was not in the scope of this study. Future research should explore the role of transition planning for students' at full inclusion high schools.

2.7 CONTRIBUTION

The findings of this study question what role the IEP process currently plays in the instruction of students with disabilities in secondary inclusive settings. At both schools, the students were primarily receiving a general education with little to any individualized instructional supports or interventions. Ultimately, we must ask students and their parents if this is what they really want? However, many students and parents may not be aware that there are other options available and may not feel comfortable advocating for something different. Many parents also probably do not realize that their child is actually receiving a general education with little to any additional support besides assessments. A parent could easily miss what is really going on with their child. At a quick glance, especially to someone outside of education, the IEPs and IEP meetings have the appearance that the school is doing something different and special for these students. The standardized IEPs and ensuing process have a superficial appearance that looks like an approach

that is systematic, meaningful, and takes into consideration the learning needs of the students. However, this was not the reality in the two schools in our study.

As previously asserted in our discussion section, policymakers need to overhaul the IEP process so that it not only aligns with grade-level content standards and the general curriculum, but also becomes a strategic, online, and live action plan. Disability advocacy groups must strengthen their lobbying efforts to ensure that special education remains "special" and to ensure that students with disabilities receive more tailored educational supports that are not found in a general education. Ultimately, we believe that the path to ensuring this is through reclaiming the "I" in IEPs, not to just mean individualized but to also indicate instructional.

3.0 STUDY 3: STANDARDIZED WRITING OPPORTUNITIES: A CASE OF WRITING INSTRUCTION IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS[2]

Research indicates that writing is one of the most cognitively demanding skills students learn in the primary grades (Graham & Harris, 2002). For a majority of students with disabilities, writing is a particularly challenging skill to master (Graham & Harris, 2003). According to data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, nearly 94% of eighth-grade students with disabilities scored below the "proficient" level in writing thereby indicating a lack of grade-level writing skills (Salahu-Din, Perskey, & Miller, 2008). There are several factors that make writing a difficult skill for students with disabilities to learn, including possible deficits in self-regulation, attention, language, and memory (Graham & Harris, 2011). A deficiency in one or more of these skills makes planning for and completing writing tasks an arduous process (Graham & Harris, 1996; Graham, Harris, & Olinghouse, 2007). The key to improving the writing skills of students with disabilities is to provide them with high-quality, evidence-based, and responsive writing instruction (see Palinscar, Cutter, & Magnusson, 2004).

For an increasing percentage of students with disabilities, writing instruction is taking place in general education classrooms. The percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their school day in general education classrooms rose from 34% in 1990-1991 to

[2] Bray, L. E., Mrachko, A., & Lemons, C. (2014). Standardized writing opportunities: A case study of writing instruction in inclusive classrooms. *Teachers College Record*, *116*(7).

58% in 2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms has been underway for several decades, but recent policies that hold schools accountable for students with disabilities' performance on tests aligned with the general education curriculum have accelerated this trend (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006). The practice of instructing students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as inclusion. Inclusion requires general education teachers to simultaneously instruct students with and without disabilities. For elementary and middle school English teachers, inclusion requires that they teach students with varying instructional needs how to write.

While numerous studies have examined writing instruction and interventions for students with disabilities (see MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006), little research has closely examined the phenomenon and implications of providing writing instruction in inclusive classrooms. It seems particularly timely to explore the writing opportunities provided in these settings given (a) the increasing number of students with disabilities receiving writing instruction within inclusive English classrooms and (b) the lack of previous research focused on this topic. This case study's purpose is to begin to address this gap in the literature. Using a qualitative case study approach, we examined the writing opportunities provided to eighth-grade students at a full-inclusion middle school that had been identified by the state as providing "exemplary inclusionary practices." The research questions that guided this work were:

RQ1. What are the quality and types of writing tasks assigned to students in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ2. What are the types of written feedback provided to students in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ3. What types of instructional practices and supports do students receive on writing tasks in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ4. Are writing tasks, written feedback, instructional practices, and grading criteria differentiated for students in the eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ5. What types of accommodations and modifications do students with disabilities receive on writing tasks in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ6. What were the factors that influenced the teachers' choice of writing tasks, types of written feedback provided to students, and types of instructional approaches employed?

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Instruction in inclusive classrooms is governed by two broad and historically distinct federal policies: one that primarily pertains to general education (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965; now referred to as No Child Left Behind, NCLB, 2001) and the other to special education (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; now referred to as Individuals with Disabilities Act, IDEA, 2004). NCLB requires the vast majority of students to learn and master grade-level state standards, while IDEA mandates that students with disabilities meet individually determined goals (see Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). IDEA also mandates that students with disabilities receive individualized instructional supports, resources, accommodations, and modifications as outlined in an Individualized Education Program or IEP. These policy messages place complex instructional demands upon teachers of inclusive classrooms as the

teachers are expected to provide high-quality and rigorous instruction to all students, while also delivering individualized and direct instruction to students with disabilities.

Attending to the various learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms is often described as differentiated instruction or differentiation. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction is the process of "ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning" (p. 30). Differentiated instruction presumably allows all students to have access to the general education curriculum and standards, while also tailoring instruction to attend to the individual needs of students. To differentiate instruction, teachers can provide students with multiple entry points, learning tasks, and learning outcomes (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003).

Effective differentiated writing instruction is responsive to students' needs (Palinscar, Cutter, & Magnusson, 2004). There are some, albeit limited, survey-based studies that have examined whether teachers' writing instruction is responsive to the writing needs of weaker writers. Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) found that a majority of high school teachers reported that they used evidence-based writing practices, as well as provided adaptations to struggling writers. Yet, the teachers also reported they did not frequently use these practices. Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, and MacArthur (2003) examined primary grade teachers' use of instructional adaptations for weaker writers and found that while a majority reported they were sensitive to the needs of struggling writers, nearly 42% of the teachers made few or no adaptations for students. While these studies begin to shed light on the writing instruction provided to struggling writers in general education classrooms, little research has closely

examined the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students with and without disabilities in inclusive classrooms and the factors that influence these opportunities.

3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.2.1 Research on writing tasks

Although classroom writing tasks or assignments are an integral part of writing instruction, their usage and impact on students have not been examined until recently. In 2002, Matsumura, Garnier, Pascal, and Valdes piloted measures to gauge the quality of language arts writing assignments. Writing assignments as well as samples of student work from 181 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District were examined. After controlling for student background and prior achievement, the researchers discovered that high school students who received higher quality tasks produced higher quality work. In another study, Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) found that in 29 third grade classrooms the quality of writing assignments accounted for a significant amount of variance in the quality of students' final drafts. While research examining writing tasks is still fairly novel, recent work highlights that writing tasks can provide considerable insights into the instructional opportunities provided to students who are engaged in rigorous and high-quality work.

3.2.2 Research on written feedback

Research confirms the importance of providing written feedback to students during the writing process (Beach, 1979; Hillocks, 1982; Hillocks, 1986; Van Gelderen, 1997). Several researchers have found that when teachers provide written feedback to students about their work, the quality of the writing improves more than when no written feedback occurs (e.g., Sternglass, 1997; Hillocks, 1982). For instance, Beach (1979) found that high school students who received written feedback from teachers on their writing showed greater improvements on drafts as compared to students who received no written feedback or evaluated their own writing. Likewise, Hillocks (1982) found that students' writing on subsequent drafts improved through positive and focused written teacher feedback. Hillocks concluded that in order for feedback to improve the quality of students' writing, it should be focused on particular skills and goals.

Several additional studies have also suggested that teachers' written feedback on students' writing plays a pivotal role in students' motivation and direction for future revisions (Graves, 1983). Matsumura, Pattey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) found that teachers' written feedback primarily focused on superficial aspects of students' writing (e.g., grammar, mechanics, and word choice) instead of responding to the ideas, argument, and flow of the paper. Research indicates that attention to superficial features of writing early on in the writing process leads to minor improvements in students' writing (Ferris, 2001). Studies examining written feedback provided to college-level students indicate that instructors often provide feedback that is confusing to students (Butler, 1980), overly judgmental, and harsh (Grant-Davie & Shapiro, 1987), attached to a grade and/or used as an assessment (Hausner, 1975), and focused on grammatical errors (Searle & Dillon, 1980; Sommers, 1982).

3.2.3 Research on the writing process for students with disabilities

Numerous studies have highlighted the need to provide students with disabilities explicit scaffolding throughout the writing process and direct instruction and feedback on their writing (Campbell, Brady, & Linehan, 1991; Dowis & Schloss, 1992; Harris & Graham, 1985). Several of these studies have indicated that an effective approach in improving students' writing is providing intense direct instruction of strategies for planning, revising, and editing writing (Campbell, Brady, & Linehan, 1991; Dowis & Schloss, 1992; Harris & Graham, 1999). Research also indicates that having students work with peers to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions improves students' writing in subsequent drafts (MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). Other research highlights that explicitly teaching students with disabilities strategies for producing a written summary of reading material makes it easier for them to write about it (Placke, 1987; Nelson, Smith, & Dodd, 1992). Additional evidence-based practices include setting clear goals (see Graham, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1995), using direct instruction to teach grammar (Dowis & Schloss, 1992), teaching students text transcription (Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000), using a word processer (Morphy & Graham, 2012), teaching writing and reading together (Mason, Snyder, Sukhram, & Kedem, 2006), encouraging students to monitor their writing (Shimabukuro, Prater, Jenkings, & Edelen-Smith, 1999), and reinforcing positive aspects of students' writing (Hopman & Glynn, 1989).

3.3 METHOD

3.3.1 Sampling

The teachers selected for this study had already been selected to participate in a broader project focused on developing an opportunity-to-learn screening measure to assist IEP teams in determining which children should qualify for a modified assessment (Elliott, Kettler, Zigmond, Kloo, Lemons, & Lupp, 2009). While collecting data for the broader project, we used critical case sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify a school that would allow us to investigate the phenomenon of writing instruction in inclusive classrooms. Sampling criteria included identifying a school that had a successful model of inclusion as perceived by the state, with school and district leaders who strongly supported inclusive education. After interacting with teachers from several schools, we selected Wilson Middle School (WMS). WMS had a full inclusion program that had received sustained attention and support from state and district leaders, including ongoing professional development and monthly planning time for collaboration between general and special education teachers.

Eighth-grade was selected based upon the parameters of the broader project. With this beginning said, eighth-grade is a grade in which federally mandated assessments are taken. It is also the last year of a student's education before entering high school. As such, it provides an optimal time to assess a student's learning before entering the secondary grades. By the end of eighth grade, students are generally expected to write multi-paragraph informational and persuasive pieces, use appropriate conventions of writing (i.e., spelling, grammar and punctuation), and edit and revise their own work.

3.3.2 Setting

Miller School District (MSD) was located in the suburbs of Pennsylvania. There were about six hundred students in the school, with nearly three hundred in the eighth-grade. Approximately 48% of the students were African-American and nearly 70% qualified for free and reduced price lunches. The mission of the district was to "create a community that works together to provide an excellent education for all students."

A hallmark of the district's academic philosophy was its full inclusion program. Nearly 95% of students who received special education supports and services were educated in inclusive settings. Students in the inclusion program received all of their instruction within general education classrooms, with pullout permitted for specific special education services (e.g., speech therapy), testing, or instructional support. The remaining 5% of students with disabilities received instruction in self-contained classes. These classes included an autistic support classroom and a life skills classroom. MSD's inclusion program was the recipient of an award from the state for using effective instructional practices that resulted in the successful inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms.

At the time of the study, however, MSD was under tremendous pressure to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by NCLB and determined by student scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). After not making AYP for four consecutive years in the same subject areas, MSD was placed into "Corrective Action 1." It was also identified by the state as a "persistently low achieving school." To assist MSD in improving PSSA scores, the state awarded the district with a School Improvement Grant to develop a teacher evaluation system and provide teachers with incentive pay for student performance. The

following year, after intense state oversight, MSD was placed into "Making Progress in Corrective Action 1."

Meanwhile, WMS was placed into "School Improvement 2" after three consecutive years of not making AYP in a subject area. Administrators and teachers were under immense pressure to improve students' performance on the PSSA. WMS had restructured its school day to provide students with additional instructional time in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Teachers from the school were receiving training from the state on using active learning techniques and state standards to drive instruction.

3.3.3 Participants

Four eighth-grade English teachers from WMS were recruited to participate in this study. All four of the teachers were female, Caucasian, held a Master's degree and had been teaching for three to seven years. All were certified in general education, and one teacher also had a special education certification. Two of the teachers taught language arts, while the other two taught reading. The language arts curriculum was centered on exposing students to the writing process through pre-writing, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing work. The reading curriculum was focused on exposing students to a variety of literary genres. However, the reading curriculum also emphasized the use of writing to critically reflect and respond to literature. Although all students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms, the students were tracked into classes based upon reading fluency scores, PSSA scores, and grades. In an attempt to capture potential differences in writing instruction, we selected both a low and average tracked language arts class and a low and average tracked reading class.

The number of consented students in each of the focal classrooms ranged from 5-10 students (average number of students per class was 7.25) for a total of 29 students (see Table 3.1). For each of these students, information was collected on demographics, disability status, and category and PSSA achievement. The number of consented students identified with a disability in each classroom ranged from two to six. Out of the 29 students, 13 were identified with a disability (11 Specific Learning Disability, 1 Intellectual Disability, and 1 Speech and Language Disorder).

Table 3.1: Characteristics of Students by Classroom Teacher

	Number of Students						
Classroom Teacher	Students	Free and Reduced Lunch	African American	Disability	Learning Disability	Intellectual Disability	Speech and Language
A	5	5	2	2	1	1	0
B	9	8	7	2	2	0	0
C	5	4	5	3	3	0	0
D	10	10	5	6	5	0	1
Total	**29**	**27**	**19**	**13**	**11**	**1**	**1**

3.3.4 Procedures

At the beginning of the 2010 school year, the four English teachers were contacted to participate in the study. Teachers were mailed packets that contained information on the study. They were instructed to submit information on two typical writing tasks, including lesson plans, pre-writing activities, and grading requirements. Teachers also completed a writing task information sheet that included questions regarding the learning goals of the tasks, and modifications and

accommodations provided to students during the writing process. In addition, teachers were asked to submit student work (rough and final drafts, along with any written feedback provided to students) from children who were participating in the larger study. Three out of four of the teachers also participated in interviews (ranging from 45 to 60 minutes) with the first author about their writing practices. A transcription services company transcribed the interviews. Teachers were provided with a payment of $200 for completing the study.

3.3.5 Measures

3.3.5.1 Quality of writing tasks

To assess the quality of the writing tasks, we used the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) Middle School Language Arts Assignment Rubric (Matsumura, Pascal, Steinberg, & Valdes, 2002). The rubric consists of the following six dimensions: cognitive challenge, clarity of the goals for student learning, clarity of the grading criteria, alignment of learning goals and task, alignment of learning goals and grading criteria, and overall quality of the assignment. Table 3.2 provides a description of these dimensions. Each dimension was scored using a four-point scale (1= poor quality and 4 =excellent quality). The first author blindly coded each task on each of the six dimensions. To examine inter-coder reliability, a second trained coder (second author) blindly coded two randomly selected tasks (20%) on the six dimensions. The overall agreement between the two coders was 90%.

Table 3.2: Dimensions of Rubric to Assess Quality of Writing Tasks

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Cognitive Challenge	Measures the level of higher level thinking that a task requires of students to complete.
Clarity of the Goals for Student Learning	Measures how clearly a teacher states the skills, practices, and concepts that students will learn through completing the task.
Clarity of the Grading Criteria	Measures the clarity teacher's grading criteria and if the criteria provide guidance on how students could improve their writing.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Task	Measures the alignment of learning goals to the actual writing task.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Grading Criteria	Measures the alignment of the learning goals to the actual grading criteria.
Overall Quality of the Assignment	Measures the overall quality of the writing task with a focus on the cognitive challenge of the writing task.

Note: Description of the dimensions derives from the CRESST Writing Rubric.

3.3.5.2 Types of written feedback

The types of written feedback provided on students' drafts were rated using the dimensions on the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. The Pennsylvania Writing Rubric consists of the following five dimensions: focus, content, organization, style, and conventions. Table 3.3 provides a description of these dimensions. When reviewing the feedback, every instance of feedback was coded using a dimension of the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. The first author blindly coded the

feedback provided on students' drafts using the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author blindly recoded randomly selected feedback on student drafts (20%) on the five dimensions. The overall agreement between the codes was 95%.

Table 3.3: Dimensions of Rubric to Assess the Quality of Students' Writing

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Focus	The single controlling point made with an awareness of task (mode) about a specific topic
Content	The presence of ideas developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons, and/or explanations
Organization	The order developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using transitional devices and including introduction and conclusion
Style	The choice, use and arrangement of words and sentence structure that create tone and voice
Conventions	The use of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.

Note: Description of dimensions derives from the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric

3.3.5.3 Evidence-based instructional practices

A rubric was created to identify evidence-based practices that teachers implemented to support students with disabilities during the writing process based upon the work of Graham & Harris (2011). Table 3.4 provides a description of the ten dimensions of the rubric. The teachers'

writing tasks, grading requirements, pre-writing activities, lesson plans, feedback on students' work, and writing task information sheets were blindly coded by the first author for instances of evidence-based practices using the ten dimensions on the rubric. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author blindly recoded randomly selected artifacts (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 85%.

Table 3.4: Dimensions of Rubric to Assess Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Revising	Teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions
Peer Work	Having students work together to plan, draft, revise and edit their compositions
Summary	Teaching strategies for producing a written summary of material read
Goals	Setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish in their writing
Direct Instruction	Using direct instruction to teach grammar and usage skills
Transcription	Teaching students text transcription skills (handwriting, spelling and typing)
Word Processing	Using word processing and related software as a tool for writing; teaching writing and reading together
Reading	Teaching writing and reading together
Monitoring	Encouraging students to monitor one or more aspects of their writing performance
Positive	Reinforcing positive aspects of students' writing

3.3.5.4 Types of differentiated instructional opportunities

The writing tasks, written feedback, lesson plans, and writing task information sheets were examined to identify instances of differentiated instructional practices on four dimensions: writing tasks, writing feedback, instructional strategies, and assessment/grades. The first author

coded the data for instances of differentiated instruction. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author recoded randomly selected artifacts (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 90%.

3.3.5.5 Types of modifications and accommodations

The types of modifications and accommodations provided to students on writing tasks were identified from teachers' responses on their writing task information sheets. On the writing task information sheet, teachers were asked to identify any modifications and accommodations provided to students during the writing process. It also asked them to describe any instructional supports students received during the writing process. The first author coded the writing tasks information sheets for instances of modifications and accommodations. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author recoded randomly selected writing task information sheets (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 95%.

3.3.6 Data analysis

The analysis of data was an iterative process in which we systematically measured and examined the different sources of data to capture the writing opportunities provided in each classroom (see Miles and Huberman, 1994). We first coded and examined the writing tasks, written feedback, evidence-based writing practices, differentiated instructional opportunities, and accommodations

and modifications. Summary sheets were then drafted for each of the writing tasks which included information of the type and quality of task, types of written feedback provided to students, instructional practices and goals of the tasks, how much time was spent on the task and how the tasks were assessed. We then examined the summary sheets for patterns in the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students in each of the classrooms. Matrices were then developed to display the data for each teacher and for all of the teachers as a group. These matrices allowed us to examine and identify emergent patterns.

We then identified factors that were influencing the teachers' instructional practices, by examining data from the following sources: interviews, lessons plans, writing task information sheets, the writing tasks and the written feedback provided to students. The interviews were first coded to identify any factors that teachers cited as influencing their instructional practices and choice of writing tasks. The coding categories were emergent. The overarching coding categories were: lack of support and training, inclusion and tracking of students, teaching the standards, PSSA guides instruction, and PSSA pressure. These factors were then further categorized into organizational features and accountability policy pressures that influenced the teachers' instructional practices. We then blindly coded the artifacts for evidence tending to support or contradict the existence of the identified factors. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of our analysis, we triangulated data using multiple sources and considered counter hypotheses to understand and explain the emergent themes (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005).

3.4 FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in the following categories, which align with our research questions: quality and types of tasks, types of written feedback, evidence-based instructional practices, differentiated instruction, accommodations and modifications, and factors that influenced instruction.

3.4.1 Types and quality of tasks

To examine the types, quality, and variation of writing tasks provided to students in inclusive settings, we first identified and described the writing tasks and then rated them using the CRESST rubric. Out of the eight typical writing tasks submitted, two were poems, one was a diary entry, one was an informational essay, three were persuasive letters, and one was a biographical essay. The reading teachers had students draft poems about novels they were reading in class. One of the poems was historical and the other was a cinquain poem. One of the reading teachers submitted a diary entry which she had students draft on a novel they were reading. The two language arts teachers and one of the reading teachers submitted persuasive letter tasks. The biographical and informational essays were both submitted by language arts teachers. There was no variation in the type of task provided to students within the same classroom.

The overall quality of the tasks based upon the CRESST rubric ranged from 1 to 2 points (out of a possible 4 points). Based upon the CRESST rubric, a 1 equates to a poor quality and a 2 equates to a limited quality in terms of the "level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria." The average overall quality of the tasks was 1.6. Based

upon the six dimensions of the CRESST rubric (i.e., cognitive challenge, clarity of the goals for student learning, clarity of the grading criteria, alignment of learning goals and task, alignment of learning goals and grading criteria, and overall quality of the assignment), the total points tasks scored using the CRESST rubric ranged from 11 to 16 (out of a possible 24 points). The average total score was 13.1.

3.4.2 Types of feedback

To examine the types and variation of written feedback provided by teachers to students on their rough drafts, we coded the written feedback using the PSSA writing rubric. Very little feedback was provided on content, organization, and style. Three out of the four teachers did not provide any written feedback on students' rough drafts in the areas of content and organization. In addition, two of the teachers did not provide any written feedback on style. Teachers provided limited feedback on focus. Out of the 44 student rough drafts submitted by teachers, only seven received feedback on focus. However, all four teachers provided the majority of their students with written feedback on conventions. Out of the 44 student rough drafts submitted, 35 had written feedback on conventions. There was little variation in the types of written feedback provided to students in a classroom.

3.4.3 Evidence-based instructional practices

The writing tasks, written feedback, grading requirements, writing task information sheets, and lesson plans were coded using a rubric to identify if teachers were using instructional practices that have been proven effective for improving the writing skills of students with disabilities. The

average number of displayed evidence-based practices for the eight tasks was 3.6 (out of a possible 10 instructional practices). The range of evidence-based instructional practices present in a task was 1 to 5 practices. Six of the eight tasks submitted displayed evidence of teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions; having students work together to plan, draft, revise and edit their compositions; and, setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish in their writing. The writing tasks from the two reading teachers each displayed evidence of teaching writing and reading together. Only three of the tasks displayed evidence of allowing students to use word processing and related software as a tool for writing. Two tasks displayed evidence of teaching students text transcription skills (handwriting, spelling and typing). One task displayed evidence of teaching strategies for producing a written summary of material read (this was for a reading teacher's task) and only one task displayed evidence of reinforcing positive aspects of students' writing. None of the tasks displayed evidence of using direct instruction to teach grammar and usage skills or encouraging students to monitor one or more aspects of their writing performance.

3.4.4 Differentiated instruction

To examine whether teachers provided differentiated instruction, we analyzed the writing tasks, writing task information sheet, written feedback, grading requirements and lesson plans for instances of variation or use of differentiated instructional strategies. There was no variation in the four writing tasks provided to students. In other words, there was no variation in the writing prompt on the eight writing tasks (e.g., no variation in the directions, materials, and/or response requirements). Within classrooms, there was little variation in the types of written feedback provided to students. As previously noted, the majority of feedback provided was on

conventions. Three of the teachers had students peer conference on the writing tasks. In addition, seven of the eight tasks included a pre-writing exercise. However, only two out of eight tasks had evidence of teacher conferencing. There was no evidence of tiered writing activities, tiered writing assignments, compacting writing instruction, use of learning centers, flexible grouping of students, use of learning contracts, or use of writing portfolios. There was no specific mention of differentiated instructional practices on any of the writing task information sheets. In regards to grading criteria, two of the teachers stated that they graded each child differently based upon their past performance and abilities. This said, there was no evidence of variation in the grading rubrics or criteria used on the eight writing tasks.

3.4.5 Accommodations and modifications

To examine the types of accommodations and modifications provided to students with disabilities on the writing tasks, we analyzed the writing task information sheet on which teachers were asked to identify any accommodations and modifications provided to students. Based upon our analysis, very few accommodations were provided to students. The language arts teacher with the dual certification in general and special education provided the most accommodations. She wrote on her writing information sheet "accommodations were provided on an individual basis. If students needed help developing content, they were given material to copy. Time extensions were also given to finish. Grading is also very different for each kid. I know their abilities, and grade accordingly." Regarding modifications provided to students, she wrote "All adaptations and modifications were mostly given orally in regard to paragraph structure and sentence development." On four of the writing tasks, teachers provided no accommodations. One teacher provided a student with extra time to finish an assignment and

another allowed a student to use a computer to type her paper due to a broken arm. None of the teachers provided modifications on the tasks or mentioned the IEP document on the writing task information sheet.

3.4.6 Factors that influenced instruction

To understand the factors that influenced the teachers' instructional practices, we examined interviews, lesson plans, writing task information sheets, and writing tasks. We identified organizational features (lack of support and training, and inclusion and tracking of students) and accountability policy pressures (teaching the standards, PSSA preparation, PSSA pressure) that influenced the teachers' writing instruction.

3.4.6.1 Organizational features

Lack of support and training. Two of the teachers expressed concern over the amount of support provided to students with disabilities in their classrooms. One of the teachers, who was dual certified in special and general education, stated that she tried to provide students with direct instruction, but struggled due to the large number of struggling students in her classroom. She explained:

> In the resource room, I did have an instructional aide … Having an aide is really nice when you're dealing with special ed. kids because they can do types of formative assessments, fluency indicators, comprehension indicators, you know, means of tracking progress. They can do that once a day for you. You can still maintain a classroom while you've got testing going on, you've got progress monitoring going on. And then I lost that. So it was just very, very difficult.

Another language arts teacher stated, "I don't think that WMS does the best job because they're just fully included." She went on to explain:

> There's definitely areas where it would be nice to have someone to be like a crutch where I could take these students on, but then a lot of times that's where I just pick another student to kind of help and then move that one on. It's like a performance every day.

She also stated, "When I have that class with five children with IEP or disabilities, having that ability to have that person come in and help I think would be really helpful." However, on one of the teachers' writing task information sheets she indicated, "The special ed. facilitator was in my room during the project. She walked around helping all of the students complete the task." Conversely, on the other teachers' writing task information sheets they indicated that they did not receive support from instructional aids and/or special education teachers.

One of the teachers explained that she was confused by the fact that general education teachers, with no training in special education, were expected to teach students with disabilities.

> The interesting thing here is with inclusion now in our target class I think we have two kids that are not identified, seven that are. I do have a special ed. background. However, the two other teachers that teach the same exact thing that I teach here, they don't have a special ed. background. So you're working with probably 80 percent special ed.; one or two kids that don't have it, but you're with a regular ed. teacher, something I think that causes issues in the setting.

This teacher went on explain how she used her special education training to provide direct instruction to students with disabilities in her classroom, but believed special education

students in her colleagues' classrooms did not receive direct instruction because of their lack of training. She stated:

> So they do get that a little bit from me [direct instruction], but that's because I'm Special Ed. Now the other two teachers, they never had direct instruction class. So once again, it would be nice if there was something uniform across the board because, right now, each kid in special ed. can be getting something different because we're not all certified in the same thing. Our specialties aren't in the same thing. So you know we're doing our best but, at the same time, our system here is a little bit odd for having such a large population of special ed. kids.

A general education teacher, with no special education training, noted that this was her most challenging year because of special education students. She stated:

> I literally used to come home like I am not doing my job. Like I said, my roommate's a Special Ed. teacher so she helped me a lot. But I used to come home like in tears. "They're not learning anything. This is terrible. I can't do this. What do I do?"

This teacher went on to state that she was unable to provide students with the individual attention they needed. She explained:

> And it's hard because if you're sitting over here waiting too long for my time, then you're getting snappy and I'm like, "Hold on, I'm coming, I'm coming." That was really hard. "You don't care about me." And I'm like, "Oh God, please let me find a way to help you!"

Inclusion and tracking of students. All three of the teachers indicated that students were tracked into their classrooms based upon fluency scores, previous PSSA scores, and grades.

Thus, the teachers' indicated that most of the students in a classroom had similar learning abilities and instructional needs. This practice of tracking also resulted in the majority of students with disabilities being taught in the same classes. The lower track language arts teacher stated, "Now I don't consider myself to be a regular ed. teacher when I have a 90 percent special education." She went on to explain, "Initially I was hired as a special education teacher. But my role did change, even though my setting here really hasn't changed much." One of the teachers explained that because all the students have the same needs in her classroom that it is not difficult to differentiate – "with that in place the past two years [tracking], differentiating instruction for these kids is not all that difficult." Another teacher indicated that:

> It's probably like a month and a half before I actually even know which students are special ed.– by the time they get all their paperwork out and all that stuff. So basically I play it as though – I start everyone the same here. I can tell who is excelling faster and so I just differentiate everything. So, across the board.

3.4.6.2 Accountability policy pressures

Teaching the standards. All of the teachers interviewed stated that they aligned their instruction to the PA standards. The teachers' lesson plans and writing task information sheets on which they listed the PA standards supported this. One teacher explained that the standards that she was expected to cover were provided to her, "We're given a curriculum of everything we have to cover story wise, and with the different stories, there are specific skills and standards that we have to cover." When another teacher was asked about the learning goals of her lesson she stated, "As far as the goals that I wanted them to complete, they were in accordance with the standards." This teacher also stated that, "Even here [at WMS], even some of our lesson plans,

they don't really get looked at very much. So you don't have to be very specific with standards and anchors, and that's just the nature of the beast."

PSSA guides instruction. Two of the teachers interviewed stated that previous PSSA assessments and PSSA preparation materials influenced their instruction. A reading teacher explained:

> Our kids aren't used to taking tests in this format [PSSA format]. We are actually in the process of going through our curriculum and rewriting all the tests and assignments trying to put them in a PSSA format, so the kids aren't freaking out in this sort of format. We've learned even with practice tests, if it's in that format, they're doing worse because they're not used to reading the two columns of this and the way the questions are worded. So, we've caught ourselves rewording questions a lot with our instruction to go on the PSSA level, which is not necessarily the everyday use of how you would ask the questions.

When this teacher was asked about how the PSSA influenced her instruction, she stated:

> We actually do a lot of PSSA prep packets where I take the released items off of the website and we actually read them together and go over them in class. That's a day or two of instruction because a lot of times, we'll take the open-ended and we'll get the responses others have given and grade them ourselves as a different way to have them look at it.

Another teacher explained that, "Everything you do is data driven here. So PSSA, we study literally the whole entire year. So I do break down a lot of grammar and we start right at the beginning." She went on to state:

> You're just – I mean you're just – it's like you're just strictly focused on it [the PSSA]. I mean that's what everything revolves around. You're using your anchor terms always. You're just repeating, like we have words that we're supposed to use in the classroom, so everyone's on the same page.

The only teacher who did not explicitly discuss how the PSSA influenced her instruction during the interview indicated that her use of Venn diagrams was influenced by the PSSA.

> That was a big push this year [the use of Venn diagrams], especially with PSSA, teaching kids to compare and contrast, similarities, differences. I almost try to do a Venn diagram with every story. For these kids, when they see this on a test, they need to know what it is.

This teacher indicated on her writing task information sheet that she did not provide students with disabilities modifications or accommodations on writing tasks because students would not receive extra help on the PSSA. She wrote, "No students were given different outlines, templates, or essay formats simply because this assignment is to prepare them for the PSSA, which they will receive no writing help." On her other writing task information sheet she wrote, "As in the previous task, all students are/were expected to complete a three paragraph letter, due to practice for the PSSA." Based upon our review of the previous years' PSSA writing prompts and reading questions, four of the writing tasks were similar to previous PSSA writing prompts (i.e., an informational essay and three persuasive letters) and two of the writing tasks had students analyze and write poems that were similar to poems on the reading section of previous PSSAs. In an interesting digression from the PSSA, one of the language arts teachers had her students write biographical essays for a school writing contest for African American History Month.

PSSA pressure. All three of the teachers indicated that they were under tremendous pressure to improve PSSA scores and that this pressure had an impact on their instruction. One teacher stated:

> I've been here the longest and, almost every year – almost every year – we don't make it because of the IEP category. You know, you've got all this staff; we all look at the information together. We go over the high school and they pull the whole district together to look at this stuff and it's like they made it, they didn't. I know that my colleagues don't look at me and expect me to do this because a lot of them have those kids in science and social studies; they're behavior problems. They know that that they're not going to achieve. But you still feel pressure because that's your – that's you. You're their teacher.

She went on to explain:

> So there's pressure because there are people that just tell you right out that you're not going to make it. Then there's people that are very understanding, that kind of cushion you and you know you're going to take that fall. You don't want to face it, but they're not going to be like it's your fault. So yeah, there's a lot of pressure. There's a ton.

Teachers at the school were receiving ongoing professional development on improving PSSA scores. In addition, the teachers were using PSSA supplemental booklets with the students in both English and math.

3.5 DISCUSSION

Concern over the quality of writing instruction students receive is nothing new (see Graves, 1983). However, over the past few years there has been a renewed interest in improving writing instruction, particularly for struggling writers. While not every student with a disability struggles with writing, a majority do (Graham & Harris, 2003). Increasingly, students with disabilities are receiving writing instruction in inclusive settings (see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Although a few studies have examined the writing instruction provided to struggling writers in general education classrooms (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009; Graham et al., 2003), little work has examined the types and quality of writing instruction provided to students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This exploratory study examined the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students in four eighth-grade inclusive classrooms. Our findings indicate a need for increased concern over the quality of writing instruction provided in inclusive classrooms. Our findings also raise several questions regarding the unintended consequences of organizational features and accountability pressures that promoted the instructional practice of standardization.

3.5.1 Quality of writing instruction

The data paint a fairly bleak picture of the writing opportunities provided to students in these four inclusive classrooms. In general, students were provided with a writing prompt on which they received minimal feedback on grammatical and spelling errors. Although the teachers' instruction was not observed, their writing task information sheets and lesson plans indicated that little time was spent on direct instruction of writing skills, conferencing with peers and/or the

teacher, and editing subsequent drafts. Unfortunately, these findings are not particularly surprising. A 2006 report based upon NAEP data indicated that while there had been an increased emphasis on writing, there has been little increase in the time spent on writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

3.5.2 Differentiation, accommodations, and modifications

Our findings also highlight that there was nearly no differentiation of writing opportunities occurring in these classrooms, and students with disabilities rarely received modifications or accommodations on their work. We found that teachers provided little if any differentiation on the instructional tasks, feedback, approaches, and/or assessment. This lack of differentiated writing instruction was unexpected, in part, because WMS had been selected for its exemplary inclusion program. However, these findings align with those of Graham et al. (2003), which found that nearly 42% of primary grade teachers made few or no adaptations for struggling writers.

3.5.3 Factors that influenced standardization

Several organizational features and policy pressures were influencing the teachers' instruction. Taken together, these factors promoted and resulted in the standardization of writing opportunities.

3.5.3.1 Organizational features

Although the school was a full inclusion middle school, students were tracked into classrooms based upon fluency scores, previous PSSA scores, and grades. The school's educational model of full inclusion and tracking ultimately resulted in classrooms of students with similar instructional needs. It also resulted in high numbers of students with disabilities in the same classrooms. This lack of instructional diversity resulted in little need to differentiate instruction or provide adaptations. In other words, what may be differentiation, accommodation or modification in a classroom of diverse learners became standardized practice for all (in a homogenously grouped classroom).

In addition, the teachers noted that they did not have support (i.e., manpower) or training to attend to the needs of students in their classrooms. In many ways, the school's method of inclusion was similar to more restrictive educational settings, such as a self-contained special education classroom, in that all of the students with disabilities were predominately instructed in the same classroom. However, unlike a self-contained special education classroom, a general education teacher was the primary instructor, and there was a higher student to teacher ratio with no instructional aids or specialized curriculum and resources. With such high numbers of students with instructional need, along with a lack of support, resources, and/or training, teachers focused on teaching the general education curriculum and grade-level academic standards with little differentiation or adaptation made to instruction.

3.5.3.2 Accountability policy pressures

The types and quality of writing instruction provided within these classrooms were strongly influenced by accountability policy pressures. Teacher interviews, writing task information sheets, and lesson plans indicate that the teachers were extremely aware of the state standards

and accountability assessments, and used them to plan for and guide their instruction. For instance, state standards were listed on each of the teachers' lesson plans. Likewise, the teachers provided students with writing tasks that were actual PSSA writing prompts or strongly influenced by them. The teachers would provide the students with the writing prompt similar to how it was administered on the PSSA. There was little instruction provided, but rather the task alone was intended to serve as practice for the PSSA. As such, students did not receive much instruction on writing, but rather practice taking a test. This practice of test preparation or teaching to the test has been exposed in schools under similar accountability pressures (see McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

Another unexpected and troubling phenomenon discovered was that one of the teachers was not providing students with disabilities differentiated writing opportunities in order to prepare them for the PSSA. In other words, she was standardizing instruction as a means to have students achieve the standards and obtain proficiency on the PSSA. This teacher indicated that since students with disabilities would not receive additional help or support on the PSSA that it was counterproductive to provide it to them in the classroom. Additionally, the teacher indicated that they did not differentiate the writing tasks or grading requirements because all students would receive the same PSSA writing prompt and would be assessed using the same PSSA rubric. As such, it appears that one of the teachers may not have provided different writing tasks or grading requirements in order to prepare students for the PSSA.

3.5.4 Inclusion and standardization

Inclusion is a broad term used to describe the instruction of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Over the past three decades, students with disabilities have increasingly

spent a greater percentage of their school day in general education classrooms (see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This has trend has been influenced by both IDEA's mandate to instruct students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and NCLB's requirement to hold a majority of students to grade-level academic standards. However, how schools organize to support inclusion and the types and quality of instruction provided to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms has generally not been supervised.

Our findings indicate that the teachers responded to the organizational and accountability policy demands of inclusion by standardizing instruction. Standardization of instruction resulted in students with disabilities receiving nearly identical writing opportunities, resources, and supports as their non-disabled peers. This practice of standardization is extremely troubling in light of research that highlights the challenges that students with disabilities commonly encounter during the writing process (see Graham & Harris, 2003). While research supports that good instruction is often good instruction for all students, it also indicates that good instruction for students with disabilities is more intense and direct, and may require different instructional approaches, interventions, curriculums, therapies, and techniques.

3.6 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations of this study. First, the study was a case study of four teachers writing instruction within one school, which limits the general scope of the findings. The school's organizational structure, history, and state oversight greatly influenced the teachers' instructional practices. As such, our findings are specific to this school, although they may

provide insights into schools with similar organizational features operating under comparable accountability pressures.

Another limitation of this study was that we only examined writing instruction. Both the language arts and reading teachers spent a considerable amount of their time and energy on reading instruction. The teachers' focus on reading instruction is not particularly surprising. WMS was under tremendous pressure to make AYP, and although writing was assessed on the PSSA it did not count towards the calculation of AYP. This begs the question: if we had examined reading instruction, would we have found higher quality and more differentiated instruction? We may have, but our findings indicate that the teachers' writing instruction was strongly influenced by the state standards and the accountability assessment. The teachers also expressed concern and a desire for their students to do well on the writing assessment. As such, we hypothesize that although the teachers placed greater emphasis on reading instruction, their practice of standardizing instruction more than likely remained the same. Ultimately, we believe that the teachers viewed standardization as what they were expected to do (i.e., hold all students to the same standards). However, in doing so, they lost sight of the fact that providing standardized learning opportunities was not a means to this goal.

In addition, we did not have access to the IEPs of students included in the study. Access to the students' IEPs may have provided us with greater insights into their present academic and performance levels, as well as specific modifications and accommodations. However, we did have access to the students' PSSA scores, disability categories, and written work. All of the students with disabilities included in this study scored below proficient on the PSSA reading section. The students' writing drafts also indicate that most were struggling writers. This aligns with research indicating that the majority of students with disabilities struggle with writing

(Graham & Harris, 2003). Teachers were also asked to indicate all accommodations and modifications provided to students on the writing task information sheets. While we were unable to compare the modifications and accommodations indicated on the students' IEPs with the teachers' actual instruction, we were able to capture the overall frequency and types of modifications and accommodations provided to students on the writing tasks.

Lastly, the teachers' actual instruction of the writing tasks was never observed. If we had observed instruction we may have noted practices that were not accounted for in the writing task information sheets, lesson plans, student work, teacher feedback, writing tasks, grading criteria and interviews. Notwithstanding observation, we triangulated multiple data sources in an attempt to capture the actual practices occurring within the classroom. We believe that the artifacts we collected, as well as the interviews, provide a fairly accurate picture of the practices occurring in the classrooms.

3.7 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The findings of this study emphasize that including students with disabilities into a general education classroom does not necessarily lead to high quality learning opportunities for those students. While this may seem intuitive, discussions and policies surrounding special education often focus on the least restrictive environment, with little consideration or mention of the quality of the learning opportunities provided within an educational setting. Some may argue that current accountability policy focuses on improving the quality of instruction provided to students with disabilities within inclusive settings but our findings suggest otherwise. Accountability policy emphasizes the standardization of learning goals and outcomes with little

focus on the actual types and quality of instruction provided to students. For students with disabilities, focusing solely on teaching grade-level learning standards and improving high-stakes accountability assessments is not the solution for improving instructional opportunities and outcomes. Students with disabilities frequently need more direct, individualized, and intense instructional interventions and supports than their non-disabled peers.

Our findings also highlight several organizational and instructional challenges that the teachers encountered when instructing students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Ultimately, the teachers were conflicted by their desire to attend to the unique learning needs of their students, while also holding them to grade-level standards and preparing them for high-stakes accountability assessments. Future research should explore teachers' frustrations with the demands of instructing students with disabilities in high-stakes inclusive settings. This work would provide greater understanding of the current context of inclusive education in an era of high-stakes accountability.

Finally, our findings also expose that under certain conditions, standardization of instruction is a potential unintended consequence of inclusive education. Standardization was promoted by the school's organizational features and accountability policy pressures that resulted in inclusive learning environments in which teachers did not have the training or resources to attend to the unique learning needs of students, and instruction was squarely focused on preparing for and improving high-stakes assessment scores. Standardization of instruction coupled within an inclusive setting essentially equates to students receiving a general education-nothing more or less. For students with disabilities, who are already at risk of academic failure, the practice of standardizing instruction may result in increased frustration and risk of dropping

out of school. Future work should continue to examine the prevalence of the practice of standardizing instruction in other inclusive settings and subject areas.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Over the years, federal special education and accountability policies have aligned more closely to require that students with disabilities receive individualized instruction in general education classrooms (Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). Thus, for an increasing percentage of students with disabilities, these policies now mandate that IEPs be written at annual IEP meetings and then implemented in general education classrooms (see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In my dissertation studies, I sought to examine the influence that NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) have on general and special education teachers' practices in inclusive settings, and ultimately the effect this has on students' access to an appropriate education. Findings from these studies expose that educators were grappling with the tension of attending to the individual learning needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings while also holding them to grade-level content standards. As illuminated in the findings of my studies, this tension has the potential to result in both the standardization of instruction and the implementation of *Standardized* Education Programs. Below, I highlight and discuss these unintended consequences and how they are ultimately resulting in the standardization of special education.

4.1.1 Takeaways from Study 1: Implementation of Standardized Education Programs

Findings from my first study demonstrate that the IEP process was aligned with the general education curriculum, so much so, that students were essentially receiving a general education with minimal accommodations. The students' IEPs pretty much outlined that they would receive a general education with minor generic surface-level accommodations provided on assessments. As such, the IEPs were more similar to *Standardized* Education Programs because they outlined that a student would basically receive a general education.

In addition, throughout the IEP process, there was little to any focus on the actual instructional strategies and interventions used to support student learning. While research focusing on school accountability has discussed the challenges of examining and changing the technical core or "black box" of education, or rather instruction (see Black & Wiliam, 1998), little to any work has highlighted the challenges of changing the instruction of students with disabilities to attend to their individual learning needs. My first study exposes that the IEP process gave the appearance that the school was doing something different and special for students. The standardized IEPs and ensuing process look like an approach that is systematic, meaningful, and takes into consideration the learning needs of the students. However, they provided virtually no guidance or oversight about the actual instruction of students. As such, the if, what, how, where, and who of a student's actual instruction was left to the complete discretion of the general and special educators.

These findings also illuminate the significant differences in how the schools enacted "full inclusion" and the influence this had on the IEP process. In one school, special education teachers had limited contact with general education instruction and intervened primarily when students were in risk of failing courses. In sharp contrast, the special education teacher at the

second school engaged directly with instruction in co-taught classrooms and in the resource room. Ultimately, the IEP process was neither individualized or focused on instruction at either school, but rather was standardized to provide students with superficial and minor accommodations.

4.1.2 Takeaways from Study 2: Standardization of instruction

The findings from my second study highlight that including students with disabilities into general education classrooms does not necessarily lead to high quality learning opportunities for students. Rather, all of students (i.e., students with and without disabilities) in the four inclusive settings were provided with fairly low-quality writing tasks, and minor and surface-level feedback on their writing (i.e., grammatical and spelling errors). In addition, the instructional strategies used to teach students were similar or rather standardized between the students. Therefore, students with disabilities were not receiving differentiated instruction to attend to their learning needs, but were rather being provided with low quality and standardized instructional opportunities.

Moreover, findings from my second study expose how the accountability pressures from NCLB resulted in an emphasis on the standardization of learning goals and outcomes for students with disabilities while providing little to any oversight over the actual types and quality of instruction provided to them. Under certain policy and organizational conditions, findings indicate that educators were actually standardizing instructional opportunities to prepare students for state assessments. In other words, instead of just standardizing the learning goals and outcomes of students, teachers were providing students with standardized learning opportunities. While past research has highlighted the lack of differentiation that often occurs in inclusive

settings (see Zigmond & Baker, 1996), this study exposes that teachers were purposefully providing standardized instruction due to the policy messages to hold all students to the same standards.

4.1.3 Findings from Study 1 and Study 2: Standardization of special education

The findings of these two studies not only provide insights into the challenges that educators encounter when attending to the individual learning needs of students included in general education classrooms, but also offer insights into the implementation of two broad policies with historically distinct theories of action (Russell & Bray, 2013). As such, these studies contribute to a limited but growing research base that has examined how actors respond to multiple, and at times, divergent policy messages (Russell & Bray, 2013; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Essentially, the findings of these studies suggest that the policy messages of NCLB are trumping those of IDEA, contributing to the standardization of special education. Research on accountability policy exposes the far-reaching and often unintended consequences of holding schools accountable for students' progress on high stakes assessments (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Fusarelli, 2004). I contend that my studies provide insights into the indirect policy pressures of NCLB on IDEA and how these policy pressures are fundamentally altering the premise of special education from ensuring that students are provided with a FAPE in the LRE to providing all students with a general education.

While research indicates that well supported inclusive settings can provide students with effective and meaningful learning opportunities (Waldron, Cole, & Majd, 2001), findings from my studies reveal the variability in the types and quality of supports that are provided to students. This variability raises concerns over how schools are organizing to support student learning in

inclusive settings, and what is basically meant by the term "inclusion." School districts are currently under pressure to ensure that students have access to the general education curriculum and instruction in general education classrooms (Russell & Bray, 2013). As such, it is easy for schools to justify the "inclusion" of students with disabilities into general education classrooms with little to any additional learning support. Findings expose that at some schools, the practice of "inclusion" is more similar to that of mainstreaming as the students essentially receive a general education with little to any special education.

4.1.4 Recommendations for policymakers

Based upon the findings of this work, I recommend that policymakers proceed cautiously as they move forward with future reauthorizations of IDEA and NCLB. Historically, IDEA has ensured that the individual and varied needs of students with disabilities are addressed. The current direction in which special education is headed strips away the individualization of special education and replacing it with a standardized general education. While some of the changes to IDEA have resulted in positive outcomes, such as promoting high expectations of all students and exposure to general education curriculum, we need to have a serious and honest conversation about how to best provide and support the learning of students with disabilities. Research has shown that students with disabilities often need specific, intense, and direct instructional interventions and strategies to have the best learning outcomes. Therefore, policymakers should consider the following recommendations: (1) focus on the types, quality, and intensity of instructional supports provided to students with disabilities, linked to educational outcomes, (2) redesign the IEP process to be more relevant, transparent, and aligned to instruction, and (3)

increase oversight over the practices employed by school districts that purport to provide an inclusive education for students with special needs.

4.1.4.1 Focus on the types and quality of instructional supports provided to students with disabilities

The findings from my second study emphasize that including students with disabilities into a general education classroom does not necessarily lead to high quality learning opportunities for those students. While this may seem intuitive, discussions and policies about special education often focus on the least restrictive environment, with little consideration or mention of the quality of the learning opportunities provided within an educational setting. Accountability policy emphasizes the standardization of learning goals and outcomes with little focus on the actual types and quality of instruction provided to students. For students with disabilities, focusing solely on teaching grade-level learning standards and improving high-stakes accountability assessments is not the solution for improving instructional opportunities and outcomes. Students with disabilities frequently need more direct, individualized, and intense instructional interventions and supports than their non-disabled peers (e.g., Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, Francis, Schatschneider, 2005). As such, policymakers should develop measures and ways to better explore the types and quality of instruction provided to students. This could be done by our next recommendation which is to redesign the IEP process to make it more relevant, transparent, and aligned with instruction.

4.1.4.2 Redesign the IEP process to be more relevant, transparent, and aligned to instruction

The findings from my first study highlight that the IEP process has little to do with the actual instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. As such, the IEP process must be radically overhauled to be more relevant, transparent, and aligned to actual instruction and measures of learning progress. Ultimately, if the IEP process was redesigned to be more closely coupled with instruction (i.e., interventions and strategies to attend to the learning needs of students and authentic measures of student learning), it may result in increased transparency and accountability regarding how schools are actually attending to the learning needs of students in inclusive settings. In addition, this may also lead to better learning opportunities and, hopefully, better outcomes for students with disabilities.

4.1.4.3 Increase oversight over what school districts mean by inclusive education

Findings from both studies expose variation in the types and quality of instruction provided in inclusive settings. As an increasing percentage of students with disabilities spend a greater amount of their school day in general education classrooms (see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), policymakers must hold schools accountable for the instructional supports and services provided to students in inclusive settings. This can be done through amending IDEA to include a definition of inclusion, which should underscore that it means students will receive systematic, effective, and meaningful interventions to attend to their learning needs in the general education classroom. It should also emphasize that inclusive education is different than general education. Likewise, states should be required to conduct periodic audits of schools' inclusion programs to ensure that schools are actually attending to the learning needs of students with disabilities.

4.1.5 Recommendations for future research

Based upon the findings of these studies, I will now outline the following research agenda: (1) examine resource room support, (2) design work around the IEP process drawing from sociocultural and organizational theory, and (3) design specific instructional interventions and strategies that align with the Common Core.

4.1.5.1 Examine resource room support

Findings from my first study suggest that the resource room or support study hall may play an important role in ensuring the needs of students with disabilities are addressed in inclusive settings. Currently, little research has explored the role of resource room support in the instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Findings from my first study also indicate that having the special educator in the general education classrooms with the students can make the instructional supports and interventions provided in the resource room more meaningful and relevant. As such, future research should explore what the role of the resource room should be in delivering learning supports. Additional research should also be done to determine what the role of the special educator in resource room support should optimally look like, as well as what best practices and ways to utilize the time to support the learning needs of students should be.

4.1.5.2 Design-based research on the IEP process

Findings from my first study suggest that the IEP process needs to be redesigned to be more meaningful, relevant, and better aligned to actual instruction. To do this, federal and state governments, universities, and private foundations should explore how to overhaul the current

design and practices of the IEP process. Future design research should draw from sociocultural and organizational theories on how to make the IEP process more collaborative and vibrant (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Scott & Davis; 2006). New tools, practices, and routines need to be created that are designed to encourage more authentic, direct, and transparent communication between the different stakeholders involved in the process.

4.1.5.3 Design-specific instructional interventions and strategies that align with Common Core State Standards

In addition, findings from my second study suggest that an increased focus needs to be placed on the process of learning and not just learning outcomes. One way to do this is through the development of specific instructional interventions and strategies that are aligned with Common Core State Standards. This would clarify to educators that although they are expected to hold students to the same learning goals that they should draw from multiple instructional approaches to assist students in reaching these goals. Or rather, that although educators are expected to standardize learning outcomes they should not be standardizing instruction. These newly created instructional interventions and strategies should clearly identify the specific students they were designed for and how they should be implemented and monitored. As they are developed, they could be placed onto a website with their supporting materials, videos, and implementation advice.

4.1.6 Final reflections

The findings from these studies suggest that the dynamic interplay between NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) has resulted in a standardization of special education. This movement towards the

standardization of special education has resulted in some good outcomes, such as providing students with disabilities increased access to the general education curriculum as well as creating higher expectations for students with disabilities. But, it has also resulted in several negative consequences such as promoting the standardized instruction of all students, as well as providing students with few, if any, learning supports in general education classrooms. Special education is currently at a crossroads. If nothing is done, the founding principle of special education – that certain students need and deserve instruction that is different, more intense, and more specific than a general education curriculum offers – may be lost. In other words, students with disabilities need something special: a special education. Moving forward, parents, students, researchers, lobbying groups, and policymakers must continue to seek innovative and better ways to ensure that students with disabilities receive a high quality and meaningful special education.

APPENDIX A

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL OF WRITING PRACTICES

Background Knowledge:

1. Can you briefly describe your background and teaching experience?
    - How long have you been teaching?
    - How long have you been teaching at this school?
    - What subject areas do you teach?
    - What grade level(s) do you teach?

Inclusion Program*:*

2. Can you tell me a little about the school's inclusion program?
    - How are students supported in inclusive classrooms?
    - How are students placed into inclusive classrooms?
3. In general, can you tell me about the range of students' writing abilities in your inclusion classes?
    - Does this impact your instruction? If so, how and why?

4. Can you tell me about the benefits and challenges of teaching writing in inclusive settings?

Writing Practices:

5. Can you tell me about the writing skills and concepts that students are expected to learn in 8th grade English?
6. Can you describe for me the types of writing tasks you normally provide to students? How do you select these writing tasks? Do you vary the types of writing tasks or requirements of writing tasks for students within in your classes? If so, how?
7. Do you or someone else provide writing modifications or accommodations to students? If so, can you tell me about these modifications and accommodations?
8. What are your goals for teaching writing to your students? Do these goals vary for students in your classroom? If so, how?

Standards and PSSA:

9. Can you tell me a little about the writing standards?
    - Do they influence your instruction? Why, why not?
    - Do they influence your planning? Why, why not?
10. Does the PSSA have an impact on what and how you teach? If so, how?

Reflection and Wrap Up:

Is there anything I haven't asked you related to the writing instruction in inclusive English classes that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS ON WRITING TASK INFORMATION SHEET

1. What were the learning goals of the writing assignment?
2. How did you support students during the writing process? When did you introduce the task? When did you collect the task? How many days in class were spent on the task?
3. Did anyone else support the students on the writing assignment (e.g., peers, special education teacher, instructional assistant)? If so, who and how? In addition, which students received this support?
4. Did you provide any students with accommodations on the writing assignment? If so, please describe the types of accommodations provided, and whom you provided them to?
5. Did you provide any students with modifications on the writing assignment? If so, please describe the types of modifications provided, and whom you provided them to? If you provided any students with modified assignments or assessment criteria, please attach a copy of these documents.
6. Did any students struggle in completing the writing assignment? If so, who struggled and what were they struggling to do? For the students who were struggling, how did you attend to their learning needs?

7. Can you describe how you assessed the students' work? Did you assess any of the students' work differently? If so, which students' work did you assess differently, how was it assessed differently and why?
8. Out of the student work submitted, which paper do you feel represents:
    a. The most improved from the first to final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?
    b. The best final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?
    c. The worst final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?
    d. The average/typical final drafts produced by students in the classroom (please provided the student's project code)? Why?

APPENDIX C

OVERVIEW OF CODING PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

Step 1: Labeled data sources with project codes

Step 2: Coded data using measures

	Data Source(s)	Measure	Coding Process
Quality of Writing Tasks	Writing Tasks	CRESST Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Second Author Blindly Coded Randomly Selected Tasks (20%) • 90% Overall Agreement
Types of Written Feedback	Student Work	PA Writing Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Randomly Selected Student Drafts (20%) • 95% Overall Agreement

Evidence-Based Instructional Practices	Writing Tasks, Grading Requirements, Pre-writing Activities, Lesson Plans, Feedback on Student Work, and Writing Task Information Sheet	Evidence-Base Practices Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Randomly Artifacts (20%) • 85% Overall Agreement
Types of Differentiated Instructional Opportunities	Writing Tasks, Grading Requirements, Lesson Plans, Feedback on Student Work, and Writing Task Information Sheet	Differentiated Instructional Practices Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Randomly Artifacts (20%) • 90% Overall Agreement
Types of Modifications and Accommodations	Writing Task Information Sheet	Modifications and Accommodations Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Randomly Artifacts (20%) • 95% Overall Agreement

Step 3: Created summary sheets for each writing task

Step 4: Created matrices to display data

Step 5: Coded data for factors that influenced instruction

	Data Sources	Coding Process	Emergent Codes	Broad Categories
Factors that Influenced Instruction	Interviews, Lesson Plans, Writing Task Information Sheets, Writing Tasks, and Feedback on Student Work	• Read Transcribed Interviews • Identified Emergent Codes through an Iterative Process of Memoing and Discussing Codes with Colleagues • Coded Interviews for Emergent Codes • Coded Artifacts for Evidence to Support or Contradict Identified Codes • Triangulated Data • Considered Counter Hypotheses	• Lack of Support and Training • Inclusion and Tracking of Students • Teaching the Standards • PSSA guides Instruction • PSSA Pressure	• Organizational Features • Policy Pressures

APPENDIX D

EXAMPLES OF MATRICES USED TO DISPLAY DATA BETWEEN TEACHERS

Example 1: Matrix Overview of Data Between Teachers on Tasks

Teacher	Task	Quality of Task		Types of Feedback					Evidence of Differentiation				Evidence-Based Practices									
		Quality Score	*Total Points*	*Focus*	*Content*	*Organization*	*Style*	*Conventions*	*Tasks*	*Instruction*	*Feedback*	*Grading*	*Revising*	*Peer Work*	*Summary*	*Goals*	*Direct Instruction*	*Transcription*	*Word Processing*	*Reading*	*Monitoring*	*Positive*
A	1	2	16	1/5	0/5	0/5	3/5	2/5	No	Min.	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	2	2	15	1/5	0/5	0/5	0/5	5/5	No	Min.	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
B	1	2	13	0/3	0/3	0/3	0/3	2/3	No	Min.	No	No*	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
	2	1	11	1/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	4/7	No	Min.	No	No*	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
C	1	1	11	1/4	0/4	0/4	0/4	2/4	No	Min.	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	2	2	15	0/4	0/4	0/4	0/4	4/4	No	Min.	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
D	1	1	11	3/8	7/8	0/8	2/8	8/8	No	Min.	No	No*	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
	2	2	13	0/8	5/8	8/8	0/8	8/8	No	Min.	No	No *	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

* Teacher stated they graded differently on writing task information sheet, but no evidence in actual grading and/or grading rubric

Min. refers to minimal evidence of possible differentiation (i.e., prewriting activity, student peer conference, and/or teacher conferencing), no specific strategies for differentiation or mention of differentiation in lesson plans or writing task information sheets.

Example 2: Matrix of Modifications and Accommodations Between Teachers on Writing Task Information Sheets

Teacher	Task	Accommodation(s)	Modification(s)
A	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	Use of computer	No modifications
B	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	No accommodations	No modifications
C	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	Extended time	No modifications
D	1	Additional resources and extended time	No modifications
	2	Additional support and feedback	No modifications

APPENDIX E

TRIANGULATION OF DATA WITHIN TEACHERS BY USING MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES

Sample from Teacher A: PSSA Guides Instruction

Source 1: Excerpts from Interview

"We're given a curriculum of everything we have to cover story wise, and with the different stories, there are specific skills and standards that we have to cover. There are different skills and standards we have to cover, and for Anne Frank, it's actually just learning about drama, acts, and scenes. That was newly added to the PSSA's this year from what our reading coaches told us, so we actually reviewed it really quickly. The skill that went with it is the acts and scenes with drama. Well, we had to cover it before PSSA's, in this story specifically because of the interest level put for after PSSA's. So, I had already taught those skills using weekly reader magazines. I just pulled these very short plays and we'd act it out a day or two to make sure they had the skills for the test. So my focus I chose was characterization just because I thought there were a lot of characterization things you could pull from the story. So I chose the

characterization and we've spent so much time, especially in my lower classes, just discussing characterization and how can you tell this sort of character, until I finally feel like they have it."

"Some of it is probably good pressure. Some of it is stress pressure. On the good pressure end of it, it's an accountability system. You are making sure did I teach this skill, and it's making sure the students have what they need as far as skill wise. As far as stress pressure, the standardize tests stress our kids out a lot. They are not used to taking tests in that format. We are actually in the process of going through our curriculum and rewriting all the tests and assignments trying to put them in a PSSA format, so the kids aren't freaking out in this sort of format. We've learned even with practice tests, if it's in that format, they're doing worse because they're not used to reading the two columns of this and the way the questions are worded. So, we've caught ourselves rewording questions a lot with our instruction to go on the PSSA level, which is not necessarily the everyday use of how you would ask the questions."

"We actually do a lot of PSSA prep packets where I take the released items off of the website and we actually read them together and go over them in class. That's a day or two of instruction because a lot of times, we'll take the open-ended and we'll get the responses others have given and grade them ourselves as a different way to have them look at it. What score would you give this? Okay, now remember, somebody is doing that to your work, so make sure you're writing so you would give yourself these points and it makes them look at it a different way. There's that, the coach books."

"There are also PSSA coach books- one for reading and math. They provide a lesson set-up for a skill and then test practice. Reading and language teachers use these to assess students' reading scores."

"It's kind of a scripted lesson [the coach book]. It's set up specifically on a skill though. Like today's skill will be characterization. Today's skill is – here like vocabulary and word recognition. Lesson one is roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Lesson two is synonyms and antonyms. After they learn lesson one and lesson two, there's a test practice. It was kind of left for each team to pick up a little bit of how they wanted to do it, but the way we chose to do it is it's on the reading and the language teacher to do the test practice for reading. Now, there are two weeks of lesson. On the first Wednesday, our history teacher will teach lesson one, roots, prefixes, and suffixes, going specifically out of the book. There's a lesson provided, which is the worksheet he would go off of. And then the next Wednesday, he would teach synonyms and antonyms. Fridays is when we do our work.

Source 2: Writing Tasks

Task 1: Historical Poem

The pre-writing activity was taken from PSSA coach book. Students read a poem and are taught strategies for analyzing rhyme and rhyme scheme. Task 1 asks students to write a poem.

Task 2: Diary Entry

Pre-writing activity includes having students read a poem and locate historical content.

Source 3: Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan Task 1

Standards listed on lesson plan

Learning Goal: "students were to analyze the historic content in a piece of literature. Student will follow the rhyme scheme from a given poem and write and original poem following the same format"

Lesson Plan Task 2

Standards listed on lesson plan

Goals: "using the author's purpose to determine content, writing from an alternate point of view, writing with empathy"

Reflection of Triangulation:

Teacher A indicates during the interview that she uses the PSSA prep packets and coach books to guide her instruction. She provides concrete examples of how the PSSA resources influence her instructional practices (i.e., the skills and materials she covers). She also indicates that she provides students with instruction on and practice taking the PSSA. Writing task 1 had students complete a pre-writing activity taken from the PSSA coach book. In addition, similar to questions on previous PSSA reading assessments, writing task 1 had students practice analyzing poems. Furthermore, writing task 2 had students write a diary entry on a novel that was recommended in preparation for the PSSA. Students also had to analyze a poem as part of the pre-writing assignment. Teacher A's lesson plans provided no direct support or contradiction that the PSSA was influencing her instruction. However, the learning goals listed on the lesson plans reiterate her focus on standards and skills that would be assessed on the PSSA. Overall, the data indicates that Teacher A's instruction was influenced by the PSSA.

APPENDIX F

EXPLORING COUNTER HYPOTHESES WITHIN TEACHER DATA

Sample from Teacher B: PSSA Guides Instruction

Hypothesis*:* Teacher B's instruction is guided by the PSSA.

Counter Hypothesis: Teacher B feels pressure from the PSSA, but it does not guide her instruction.

Summary Matrix of Data:

Data Sources	Summary of Data	
Interview	"Everything you do is data driven here. So PSSA, we study literally the whole entire year. So I do break down a lot of grammar and we start right at the beginning." "You're just – I mean you're just – it's like you're just strictly focused on it [the PSSA]. I mean that's what everything revolves around. You're using your anchor terms always. You're just repeating, like we have words that we're supposed to use in the classroom, so everyone's on the same page."	
Writing Task	Task 1	Biographical Essay
	Task 2	Persuasive Letter
Grading Rubric	Task 1	Similar to PSSA writing rubric
	Task 2	Similar to PSSA writing rubric
Lesson Plan	Task 1	Standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
	Task 2	Standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
Writing Task Information Sheet	Task 1	No standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
	Task 2	No standards listed, no mention of the PSSA

Reflection: During the interview, Teacher B stated that everything is data driven and that they study the PSSA the whole year. She then indicated how studying the PSSA informs her instruction (i.e., focusing on grammar and using anchor terms). However, Teacher B's task 1 was not similar to the previous year's PSSA writing prompt or specific skills tested on the PSSA. Although, task 2 was very similar to the previous year's PSSA writing prompt. In addition, she used a grading rubric similar to the PSSA writing rubric to assess students. Teacher B did not mention the PSSA on her lesson plans or writing task information sheets. Based upon the evidence, it appears that Teacher B's instruction was influenced by the PSSA.

APPENDIX G

DATA USED IN STUDENTS' PRESENT LEVELS

Focal Student	Data Used in Present Levels
Andrew	Weschler Intelligence Scale, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, *curriculum-based assessments taken from his linguistics class, 4Sight assessment, observations from his general education teachers, and grades*
Breann	Weschler Individual Achievement Test, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, *4Sight assessment, State Assessment Scores, broad statement of performance in general education classrooms, and grades*
Cara	Weschler Intelligence Scale, Weschler Individual Achievement Test, Adaptive Behavior Assessment, *State Assessment scores, observations from his general education teachers, and grades*
Danielle	Weschler Individual Achievement Test, *4Sight assessment, Star Reading and Math, broad statement of performance in general education classrooms, and grades*
Erik	Weschler Individual Achievement Test, *4Sight assessment, Star Reading and Math, broad statement of performance in general education classrooms, and grades*

Note: Italics indicates that the measure aligns with the general education classroom

APPENDIX H

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN STATE AND LOCAL ASSESSMENTS

Focal Student	Participation in State Assessments	Participation in Local Assessments
Andrew	Reading, Writing, Science, and Math *No accommodations*	Local Assessments *No accommodations*
Breann	Reading, Writing, Science, and Math *Extended time*	Local Assessments *No accommodations*
Cara	Reading, Writing, Science *Extended time* Modified Math *Extended time, orally read upon student request*	Local Assessments *No accommodations*
Danielle	Will not participate in during the duration of the IEP	Local Assessments *Extended time, test administered in designated area, preferential seating, redirection, prompts, directions read orally where permitted, calculator where permitted*
Erik	Reading, Writing, Science, and Math *Extended time, test administered in designated area, preferential seating, redirection, prompts, directions read orally where permitted, calculator where permitted*	Local Assessments *Extended time, test administered in designated area, preferential seating, redirection, prompts, directions read orally where permitted, calculator where permitted*

APPENDIX I

STUDENTS' GOALS

Focal Student	Goal	Monitored Using	Frequency
Andrew	Writing- Standard Identified	District's writing rubric	Every 9 weeks
	Math- Standard Identified	Curriculum-based assessments	Every 9 weeks
Breann	Writing- Curriculum Identified	Curriculum-based assessments	Reported 4 times a year
	Math- Standard Identified	Curriculum-based assessments	Reported 4 times a year
Cara	Reading- Standard Identified	Curriculum-based assessments	Reported 4 times a year
	Writing- Curriculum Identified	Writing samples	Reported 4 times a year
	Math- Curriculum Identified	Assignments and assessments	Reported 4 times a year
Danielle	Reading- Standard Identified	Achievement testing (WIAT), Star reading assessments, English tests, quizzes, and classwork	Quarterly
	Math- Standard Identified	Work samples, anecdotal teacher recordings, homework, assignments, quizzes, tests, and grades, as well achievement testing (WIAT), and Star math assessments	Quarterly
Erik	Reading- Standard Identified	Achievement testing (WIAT), Star reading assessments, English tests, quizzes, and classwork	Quarterly

	Math- Standard Identified	Work samples, anecdotal teacher recordings, homework, assignments, quizzes, tests, and grades, as well achievement testing (WIAT), and Star math assessments	Quarterly
	Math- No Standard or Curriculum Identified	Work samples, anecdotal teacher recordings, homework, assignments, quizzes, tests, and grades, as well achievement testing (WIAT), and Star math assessments	Quarterly

APPENDIX J

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

SDI	Andrew	Breann	Cara	Danielle	Erik
Extended Time	X	X	X	X	X
Adapted Assessments	X	X	X	X	X
Use of Calculator	X	X		X	X
Preferential Seating	X		X		
Adapted Assignments	X				
Assessments in Resource Room	X	X		X	X
Attend Resource Room if Substitute	X				
Orally Read Directions			X	X	X
Check Progress on Lengthy Projects			X		

Redirect in a calm manner			X		
Copy of Class Notes				X	
Explanation of Directions				X	X
Support Study Hall				X	
Co-teaching Model				X	X
Peer Tutoring if Requested					X

APPENDIX K

WORDS SPOKEN AT IEP MEETING

	Special Educator	General Educator(s)	Parent(s)	Student	Principal	Vice Principal	Counselor	Psychologist	Sped Supervisor	Transition Coordinator
Andrew	43%	5%	13%	16%	NA	NA	2%	NA	16%	5%
Breann	74%	17% 4%	2%	3%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cara	45%	1%	5%*	1%	NA	NA	NA	44%	4%	NA
Danielle	70%	5%	16%	5%	3%	NA	1%	NA	NA	NA
Erik	73%	2%	23%	0%**	NA	0%**	2%	NA	NA	NA

* Dad 4%, Mom 1%

** Less than 1%

APPENDIX L

PRESENT AT MEETING

	Special Educator	General Educator	Parent(s)	Student	Principal	Vice Principal	Counselor	Psychologist	Sped Supervisor	Transition Coordinator
Andrew	100%	86%	100%	100%	NA	NA	100%	NA	99%	17%
Breann	100%	22% 10%	100%	100%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cara	100%	57%	100%*	56%	NA	NA	NA	100%	42%	NA
Danielle	100%	41%	100%	100%	100%	NA	100%	NA	NA	NA
Erik	100%	17%	100%	100%	NA	100%	100%	NA	NA	NA

* Dad and Mom 100%

APPENDIX M

READING AND EXPLAINING VS. DIALOGUE

	Andrew	Breann	Cara	Danielle	Erik
Reading & Explaining	29%	37%	40%	34%	54%
Dialogue	71%	63%	60%	66%	46%

APPENDIX N

WORDS SPOKEN DURING IEP SECTIONS

	Andrew	Breann	Cara	Danielle	Erik
Educational Placement	2%	6%	2%	4%	4%
Goals and Objectives	6%	10%	3%	3%	2%
Other	12%	12%	69%	16%	46%
Assessment	4%	0%	4%	1%	1%
Present Levels	42%	48%	9%	34%	35%
Procedural Safeguards	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%
Special Considerations	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Sped/Related Services	7%	10%	7%	4%	2%
Transition Services	25%	12%	4%	27%	8%
Summary Sheet	NA	NA	NA	6%	0%

APPENDIX O

MATRIX OF DISCUSSION REGARDING LEARNING

Initiator	Topic	Outcome	IEP
Andrew			
GenEd	Learning improvement	Agreement	N
GenEd	Instructional strategy	New understanding	N
Student	Q: assessment	New understanding	N
GenEd	Assessment challenge	New understanding, agreement	N
Parent	Q: assessment	Dismissed	N
GenEd	Learning strength	Agreement, new understanding	Present Levels
GenEd	Q: student work	New understanding	N
SpEd	Q: student work	Agreement, new understanding	Present Levels
Parent	Learning challenge	New understanding	Present Levels
Parent	Learning challenge	New understanding	SDI
Student	Q: assessment	New understanding,	N
Student	Learning challenge	New understanding,	N
Student	Q: SDI	New understanding	N
Student	Learning challenge	New understanding	N
Student	Learning strength	New understanding	Present Levels
GenEd	SDI	New understanding, agreement	N
Breann			
SpEd	Q: learning challenge	New understanding	N
Student	Q: assessment	New understanding	N
SpEd	Q: student work	New understanding	N
GenEd	Learning challenge	New understanding, agreement	N
GenEd	Learning improvement	Agreement	N
SpEd	SDI	Agreement	N
SpEd	Learning challenge	Agreement	N

Cara			
SpEd	Q: assessment	Agreement, clarification	N
Parent	Q: course placement	New understanding.	Transition
Parent	Q: present level	New understanding	N
Parent	Q: student work	Dismissed	N
Danielle			
Parent	Learning challenge	New understanding	N
Parent	Q: student work	New understanding	N
GenEd	Learning challenge	Agreement	N
SpEd	Learning challenge	New understanding	Present Levels
Student	Q: assessment	New understanding	N
Parent	Q: learning challenge	Dismissed	N
Student	Q: present level	Counter information	N
Erik			
SpEd	Learning challenge	New understanding	Present Levels
SpEd	Learning challenge	New understanding	Present Levels
Parent	Q: present level	Dismissed	N
Parent	Learning challenge	New understanding	N

APPENDIX P

INSTANCES OF DISCUSSION REGARDING LEARNING

	Andrew				Breann					Cara					Danielle				Erik			
	Sped	Gen	Std	Pt	Sped	Gen1	Gen2	Std	Pt	Sped	Gen	Std	Pt1	Pt2	Sped	Gen	Std	Pt	Sped	Gen	Std	Pt
Indicates Challenges Learning (13)		1	2	2	1	1									1	1		1	2			1
Indicates Challenges on Assessment (1)		1																				
Indicates Improvement in Learning (1)							1															
Indicates Learning Strength (2)		1	1																			
Indicates Instructional Strategies (1)		1																				
Indicates SDI (1)																			1			

Question re: Student Work (5)	1	1			1								1					1				
Question re: Challenges Learning (2)					1													1				
Question re: Present Levels (3)													1				1					1
Question re: Assessment (6)			2	1				1		1							1					
Question re: SDI (1)			1																			
Discussion re: SDI (2)		1			1																	
Question re: course placement (1)														1								
	1	6	6	3	4	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	3	0	0	2

APPENDIX Q

WORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS

Special Educators	Pull Out	Push In	Case Manage	Study Support
Miss Smith	31%	11%	58%	NA
Miss Miller	0%	6%	94%	NA
Miss Keys	12%	50%	13%	25%

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