

Principal Perception Survey of Special Education Legal Knowledge

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### **Abstract**

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Principal Perception Survey of Special Education Legal Knowledge

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A principal has many responsibilities; high on this list includes the need to be educated in current special education requirements to serve students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore the amount of special education legal knowledge that secondary principals in Ohio possess. Demographic information, perceived special education legal knowledge, and potential professional learning needs data were collected through an online, researcher-developed survey. Via an initial email followed by reminder emails and phone calls to respondents, 1,587 secondary principals in rural, suburban, and urban school settings in Ohio were invited to respond to the survey. Two hundred forty-five principals participated in the study.

Respondent data provided evidence that the area of special education legal knowledge of highest confidence for principals is in Individualized Education Program (IEP) document compliance. Specifically, respondents had the highest levels of legal knowledge in the following sections of the IEP document: nonacademic and extracurricular activities, meeting participants, specially designed instruction (specific to the differences between and accommodation and a modification), least restrictive environment, and the student profile. The area of lowest special education legal knowledge included principal knowledge of how to work within the dispute resolution process. Specific areas in this process include: impartial due process hearing, working

with an IEP facilitator, the mediation process, preparing for an administrative review, and understanding how to use the Ohio Operating Standards for Children with Disabilities. There were statistically significant differences in the way male and female respondents viewed their own special education legal knowledge ( $p = .004$ ). Females viewed themselves as more knowledgeable. There were statistically significant differences in the way urban respondents viewed their own special education legal knowledge in comparison to their rural and suburban peers. Urban respondents viewed themselves as less knowledgeable. Respondents noted they value continued professional learning around special education legal knowledge.

## Dedication

*This dissertation is dedicated to the staff and students of Alum Crest High School and to the staff and students at The Ohio State School for the Blind. These two groups of people have changed my expectations for what it means to live in service. Your dedication to learning makes me want to work hard. Thank you for helping me grow.*

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter describes a research study that examines the special education legal knowledge needs of secondary principals in the state of Ohio. The beginning of the chapter presents background information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) and how regulations around this law have impacted the school experience for students with disabilities and the principals who serve them. Next, the significance of the study is presented to establish the need for this study. The rationale and research questions are shared with a focus on special education legal knowledge needs of principals and are followed by the problem statement. In the next section, specifics of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are discussed, including services provided, the impact of the team process on IEP development, and legal knowledge principals must have for ensuring service delivery through an IEP for students. The chapter concludes with the delimitations and key definitions relevant to the study.

### **Background**

In the current education climate, students with disabilities are served in a variety of classrooms in schools across the United States. There are specific laws that guide the educational requirements for students with disabilities. The expectation that both teachers and principals are knowledgeable about these laws exists to ensure that an education program which allows access to the general education curriculum and provides educational benefit is provided for each student.

Current expectations have been strongly shaped by history. The special education movement and the opportunities it sought to provide for students has its ethos in ideology

born from the civil rights movement (Keogh, 2007; Shaver, 2015; Skiba et al., 2008). The case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* is of particular importance in setting the political stage for creating a requirement to serve marginalized students. This case motivated school districts nationwide to consider the level of services being provided to the students they served. Levels of service were now perceived as a legal issue, and limited or no educational service became a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution (Shaver, 2015). When considering the social contexts of the era that helped turn the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, PL 94-142) into action, it is important to understand the steps that came before (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). Change and focus occurred first for students served in the general education setting; then the needs of students with disabilities were considered and responded to.

The first major federal efforts in the modern era to improve public elementary and secondary schools came in 1958 with the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). The expectations set from this act created funding with the intention of providing academic access designed to result in student progress. The NDEA allocated funds for the purpose of increasing academic rigor and quality critical thinking in the teaching of math and science (Martin et al., 1996). This action was set in place to improve the learning experiences of students in the general education setting.

While classrooms nationwide were providing an improved experience to students in general education, students with disabilities continued to be left behind, or worse yet,



left out completely. Historically, there were two categories of exclusion experienced by students with disabilities. One category was exclusion from the classroom. The other category was schooling where students with disabilities received traditional schooling, but no individual programming to meet their specific needs. The problem with standard schooling, (i.e., education based on the needs of a traditionally performing neuro-typical general education student), was that it was not necessarily “appropriate to the needs” of students with disabilities (Yell, Katsiyannis, & Hazelkorn, 2007, p. 2). Prior to EAHCA, no provisions for the education of students with specialized needs were expected or provided (Shaver, 2015). Political and social expectations during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States included expectations of inclusion for multiple groups. There was a focus on social consciousness and equality, which was gaining political support and would eventually impact classrooms nationwide. The civil rights movement in the 1960s was centered on inclusion of each individual, regardless of ethnic, racial, or religious identity (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). In the 1970s, the momentum of inclusion continued and provided needed attention on the incorporation of those who may have physical or mental disabilities into society in a meaningful way. A hallmark of this time was the 1973 passage of the Rehabilitation Act (subsequently referred to as Section 504, Anti-Defamation League, 2005). The social and political focus of inclusion during the 1960s and 1970s continued with the passage of EAHCA as the first attempt at inclusion for those previously marginalized into the classroom. This historical context of leveraging laws to create additional layers of social justice helped set the stage to invite students with disabilities into the classrooms. Engel (1991) describes the impact of

leveraging laws to create social change, describing how laws that evolve from social and cultural demands impact the political environment, and can affect society as a whole. Because of these changes, education, a vital service offered through state and local governments, was now being offered to all (Phillips, 2008). When classroom doors opened, plans needed to be made for all students to engage in academic content, for teaching and learning to occur. Congress renamed the EAHCA in 1990 to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 2004, IDEA was renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and referred to with the acronym (IDEIA). However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act is sometimes still referred to as IDEA (IDEA; Phillips, 2008).

**IDEA.** Taylor (2011) outlines the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as an access point with a stated goal to ensure students with disabilities have “maximum access to the educational benefits of the public-school system” (p. 28). Muller and Carranza (2011) define the spirit of IDEA as a chance for meaningful groupthink, and an opportunity for parents/guardians and school districts to work together to create a formalized plan providing the student with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). IDEA is the framework designed to set up systems of academic and social supports to help students be successful in the general education setting (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). There are several components to consider in an educational regulation as large as IDEA. It has become the framework used to build the educational plan for millions of students with disabilities nationwide. Part of this framework is access to content allowing for equal participation in the educational setting for each student.

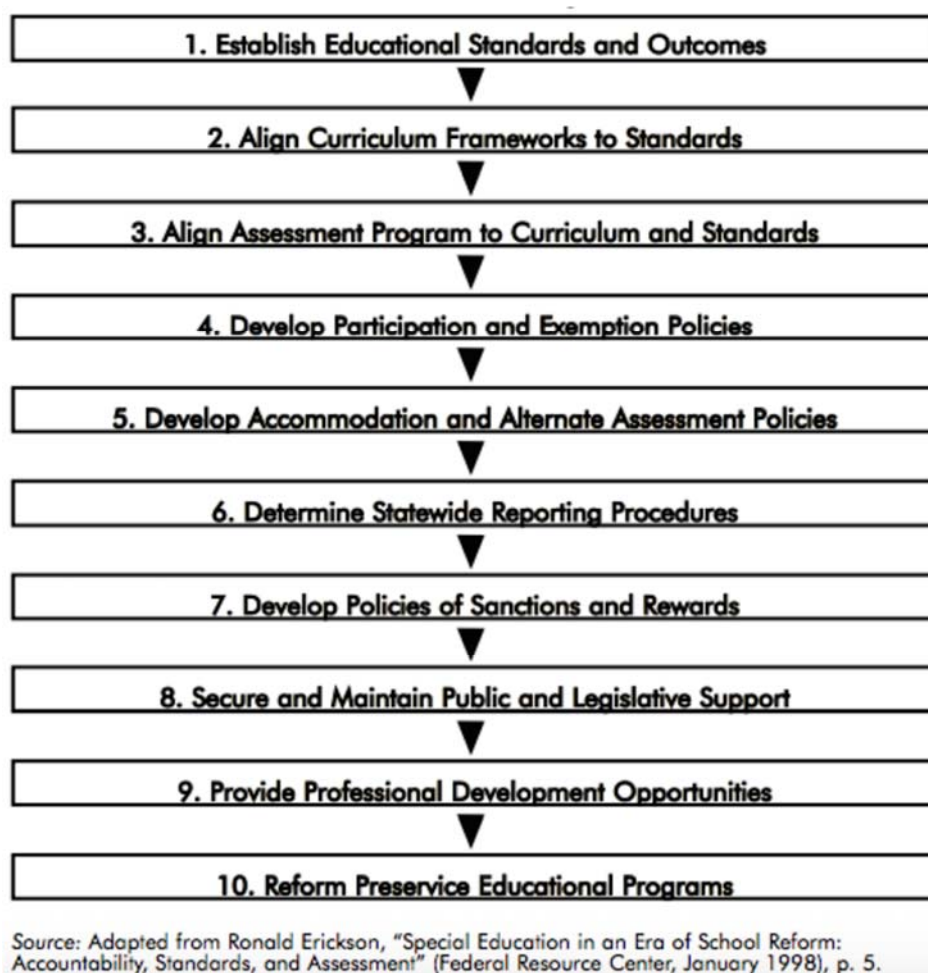
Access to the general education curriculum in a meaningful way allows schools to provide information to meet the unique learner's needs and creates a commensurate partnership in the educational process for students with individual learning needs. As required by IDEA, students with disabilities should receive their educational services with general education students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with partnership that allows for "equal access and maximum benefit" (Taylor, 2011, p. 49).

One of the tools used to ensure access is granted for students and procedural rights are followed comes from IDEA, providing schools with a requirement to make an individualized education program (IEP) for students. Yell et al. (2007) summarize findings from the *Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District v Michael F, 1997* case, which established the expectation that the IEP provide meaningful benefit to a student by meeting the following criteria:

1. The program must be individualized on the basis of the student's assessment and performance.
2. The program must be administered in the least restrictive environment.
3. The services must be provided in a coordinated and collaborative manner by key stakeholders.
4. Positive academic and nonacademic benefits must be demonstrated. (p. 6)

As IDEA began impacting classrooms nationwide, change focused on student needs. The 1997 IDEA amendments included a new focus on having high expectations for development in both academic and functional skills, and allowing access to the general education curriculum (Zirkel, 2013). Educational progress and measurement of

this progress became the expected norm for students after 1997. Finn, Rotherham and Hokanson (2001, p. 66) shared a flowchart for results-based effectiveness and accountability to help create a visual representation of these extensive supports (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Flowchart of necessary steps for results-based effectiveness and accountability under IDEA '97.

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), aligning it with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001). NCLB requires school districts to monitor and respond to student performance on state assessments based on student subgroups. A component of this act mandated responsibility for the education of students with disabilities by adults in both the school and home settings (Turnbull, 2005). IDEIA was now connected to NCLB, bringing in new measures of accountability for student progress. The presumption was that school leaders would now have a plan for helping students with disabilities succeed both academically and functionally.

Research stresses the value of school leaders being educated about and responsive to special education when programming for schools. DiPaola, Tschannen-Morgan, and Walther-Thomas (2004) found that principals need to have the capacity to build a culture that sets high academic expectations for student outcomes. This is a needed skill to support teachers as they serve students. Leadership that empowers this kind of school climate requires a focus on an inclusive school culture that is centered in high-quality instruction with supportive relationships (DiPaola et al., 2004). Knowledge of how to build an inclusive culture must be threaded into a system that produces a legal knowledge base around special education. IDEIA is “the main law governing the educational rights of eligible students with disabilities in schools,” making this highly valuable information that principals should be knowledgeable of (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p. 59). A comprehensive understanding of the skills and needed areas of support for students with disabilities allows principals to make intelligent decisions for students (Cline, 1981). It is

imperative for principals to understand the students being served as they plan for academic programs and hire personnel. Jacobs, Tonnsen, and Baker (2004) found that school leaders, specifically principals, are a major factor in ensuring meaningful academic and functional instruction for students with disabilities.

Students, parents and guardians, and teachers all benefit when principals are well versed in with the components of IDEIA. IDEIA regulations stipulate “parent involvement in the educational process which brings together two distinct perspectives to work toward a common goal for the student’s academic, behavioral, and social needs” (Muller & Carranza, 2011, p. 2). These regulations provide an opportunity for parents and the school team to work together to effectively serve a student. All parts of the team are needed to provide input and frame the student’s plan. A complete picture of the student can be presented when teams work in tandem to build and implement educational plans. As IDEIA is implemented, a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is a required component in the planning for students with disabilities. To ensure that planning occurs at the highest level, the principal, as the leader of the school team, must be knowledgeable of the processes of IDEIA to ensure the best possible FAPE for each student. Special education legal knowledge is now expected from principals (Jacobs et al., 2004).

***FAPE.*** FAPE is addressed under IDEIA. Zirkel (2013) expressed that “scholars and practitioners in special education have both the advancing knowledge and continuing obligation to address FAPE under IDEA” (p. 497). While implementation of what constitutes FAPE for students continues to be clarified, the EAHCA originally defined

FAPE as educational services that are “provided at public expense, under public supervision, meet the standard of the State educational agency, include schooling at the preschool, elementary, and secondary setting of the state, and is provided in conformity with IDEA” (Yell et al., 2007, p. 2). Much thought, discussion, and legal action have occurred regarding what constitutes an appropriate education for students. The concepts of “free” and “public” have been easier concepts for school systems to navigate.

One case which set a national standard for FAPE was the *Board of Education v. Rowley* in 1982 (Kehoe, 1994; Patterson, 2000). This case involved a deaf student, Amy Rowley, of deaf parents, who was considered twice exceptional. She was classified as a gifted student with a high IQ and a student with a hearing impairment (Kehoe, 1994; Yell et al., 2007). While this case was tried at the district, state, and national level, the Supreme Court of the United States raised the question of congressional intent of IDEA. The question at the heart of this case inquired whether “Congress mean[t] for schools to maximize the potential of each child with a disability, or did it expect schools to eliminate the effects of the disability as much as possible?” (Patterson, 2000, p. 18). The result of this case, Congress determined that in order to deliver FAPE a school district must provide individualized instruction to support a student with a disability to benefit educationally (Patterson, 2000; Turnbull, 2005; Yell et al., 2007; Zirkel, 2013). It was, in fact, the obligation of schools to provide students with disabilities with FAPE (Kehoe, 1994).

Zirkel (2013) challenged a post-Rowley educational world to shift thinking for students with disabilities. Zirkel proposed that IEP teams consider that “adequacy for

eligible children, rather than access for excluded children” is what needed to be the focus of today’s classroom (p. 506). Adequacy, as defined by Jacobs et al. (2004), consisted of an academic program that offered a full range of curricula and programming as is made available to nondisabled children. The responsibility for planning this type of program for students, is in part, a direct responsibility of the school principal.

***Relationship between FAPE and the IEP.*** In an effort to provide a meaningful FAPE for students, the original legislation of EAHCA required that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed for each qualified student (Phillips, 2008; Yell et al., 2007). In an IEP, the specially designed services are clearly explained and documented with specifics on time allocated for services, the professional who will be providing the services, location of these services, and frequency the these specially designed services will be provided to the student. All of this is done to ensure needed supports are in place to provide a student with access to the general education curriculum. Keogh (2007) indicated the IEP is a significant factor in planning services for students with specialized needs. The IEP is the blueprint for a student’s access to FAPE (Taylor, 2010; Yell et al., 2007). It is critical for principals to have a basic understanding of all the parts of an IEP as they plan the specialized instruction for students with disabilities. Some of the factors principals should consider include: programming needs based on curriculum, teacher and student schedules, instructional goals for the student, facility space, grading policies, and potential team teaching needs to support learning (Bateman & Bateman, 2001).



***Process of the team building an IEP.*** An IEP is the guiding force connecting all of the aforementioned factors in a student's educational day. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services in the United States Department of Education (DOE) provides a guide for principals and members of an IEP team to use when determining which components are needed when building a plan for a student. For students in public schools who participate in special education and/or receive related services, they must have specially designed instruction and services to ensure a compliant IEP. "Each IEP must be designed for one student and needs to be a truly individualized document" (Kupper, 2000, Introduction).

In Ohio, the procedural safeguards notice regarding an IEP which guides school personnel, parents/guardians, and students is called, *Whose IDEA Is This? A Parent's Guide to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2012). This document is used in schools across the state of Ohio and explains what components need to be in a compliant IEP to meet state standards. One goal of this document is to provide clarity for parents/guardians, students, and school personnel by providing a definition for IEPs to ensure that teams can have common language while they work to craft an IEP.

According to ODE (2012), an IEP is a written statement for a student with a disability outlining educational goal and objectives the students will work on in the coming year. Needed support services to meet the set goals are outlined in the IEP. The process used to collect student data and build an IEP begins with an evaluation of the student in the area or areas related to his/her suspected disability. The results from the

evaluation(s) are then used to make decisions about what the appropriate educational program for the student should include (Kupper, 2000). The IEP team meets, sharing relevant student data, ideas, knowledge of the student, and curricular needs. Next, the team determines whether the student is eligible for services if he/she meets the definition of one of the disability categories as defined in the definitions section of *Whose IDEA Is This?* (IDEA, 2004; ODE, 2012). Finally, if a student is found eligible for services, within thirty calendar days from this point, the team must build and implement an IEP (Kupper, 2000). Another applicable timeline is that of the reevaluation process, occurring every three years from the original identification. The team again collects data relevant to areas of potential change to determine if the student continues to be a student with a disability and an educational need (Kupper, 2000).

It is critical that a principal be knowledgeable of the required timelines. A principal could be a team member in the IEP process and could possibly serve as the district or local education agency (LEA) representative required for each team. The school system reaches out to the parents, student, and teachers and begins to prepare a draft copy of the IEP. During this time, it is imperative for all parties to work together as a team for the best results. Parents are the true experts on their child and can provide meaningful data to the school team when planning for student needs (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). Once a draft has been written in collaboration with team members, the school system contacts all parties to notify them of a time and place to discuss the proposed plan. A time and place that works for the parent/guardian(s), student, and the educational team must all be agreed upon (Kupper, 2000). When the team is meeting,

each member of the team has equal invitation and opportunity for participation. Once the parent/guardian or student (if they are eighteen years of age or older) gives consent for the proposed plan, the IEP is signed and put into action as a living document to guide instruction and action related to the student's needs. Each party leaves with a copy of the IEP, and the entire process is completed when a prior written notice form has been issued.

Once services are officially provided, progress towards mastery of goals is measured. Based upon state mandated timelines, this progress is reported to the parent/guardian/student (if of age) in a formal document. As the school year progresses, the IEP is used to guide action in school for the student. At the end of the IEP timeframe, the team reviews successes and challenges, student data, and builds a new IEP with continued or new goals, starting the process over again (Kupper, 2000).

***Components of an IEP.*** The process of building an IEP is complex and involved as it brings a team of experts together to review and create a specialized education plan for the student. The goal of the IEP is to create FAPE. Access to the general education curriculum for the student with a disability is key. Keogh (2007) offers that the concept of equal educational opportunities for each student, including those with non-traditional abilities, is important to educators at both the state and national level. A tool used to provide access to the general education curriculum is an IEP. ODE (2014) states, "Each school district shall adopt and implement written policies and procedures approved by the Ohio [D]epartment of [E]ducation, [O]ffice for [E]xceptional [C]hildren, that ensure an [I]ndividualized [E]ducation [P]rogram (IEP) is developed and implemented for each

child with a disability” (p. 117). This program needs to be documented on the state approved IEP form, known as the PR-07 (ODE, 2012; see Appendix C) which is a specific IEP form that school districts are required to use when building a compliant education program for a student with disabilities.

While other states have forms that can vary between districts, Ohio mandates a uniform approach and form that contains fourteen to fifteen sections specific to the legal requirements for the IEP in Ohio and builds a comprehensive plan for the educational team and the student. Section fifteen of the Ohio IEP form is applicable to students who are identified with a visual impairment and is therefore not required for all students. As previously mentioned, ODE’s procedural safeguards notice (i.e., *Whose IDEA Is This?*) explains the special education requirements and provides guidelines for a compliant IEP. In Ohio, information about a student’s current functioning, as well as his/her future is required: what the student is currently learning and the level at which he/she is functioning academically. Goals for progress are to be clearly stated and annually measured based on benchmarks and/or short-term objectives. The plan functions to help the team meet the student’s educational needs resulting from his/her disability (ODE, 2012b). Student progress must be measured and reported to parents/guardians and the student, if they are at least the age of majority. A “statement of special education and related services and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel” must also be included (ODE, 2012b, p. 20). The expectation is that students with disabilities have the right to participate with all students with and without disabilities.

Information about individually required accommodations to be used when participating in in state and district-wide assessments are included along with an explanation as to why a different assessment is appropriate for those who qualify for an alternate assessment (ODE, 2012b). Districts are required to clearly list the date the school district plans to begin services outlined in the IEP and defines the length of time services will be in place.

At the age of seventeen (a year before the age of majority), the school district must provide a statement to the parents/guardians and the seventeen-year-old student that when the student turns eighteen, he/she will reach the age of majority (ODE, 2012b). At the age of majority, students are officially in charge of making educational decisions for themselves, but will be able to consult parents/guardians at any time. If a student is cognitively unable to do this, the parents/guardians may file for guardianship to maintain authority over educational decisions for their child. Finally, states and individual school districts have the right to design forms as they chose, to organize and document an IEP; however, as aforementioned, the state of Ohio requires all school districts to use the state-developed IEP form (Kupper, 2000; ODE, 2012b).

In summary, the process of building an IEP is complex and involved as it brings a team of experts together to review and create a specialized education plan for the student. The goal of the IEP is to create FAPE for students. The IEP is used as a framework to help the teachers map out a personalized plan for student. The ultimate goal of this plan is to ensure learning opportunities and demonstrate mastery of concepts. An IEP provides an official plan to create access to the curriculum and monitors the student's progress

towards mastery in the educational setting. Ohio has one form used statewide to document the plan. This information is needed by aspiring principals in a theoretical lens as they participate in coursework and prepare for the principalship. This information is needed by practicing principals, and mastery of it is modeled through implementation. This information is valuable to policy makers as they structure decisions to solidify protocols.

### **Problem Statement**

As legislation changes, principals' knowledge of responsive special education practices is crucial. Responsive practice allows principals consider the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student on an individual basis and seek to exceed the expectations for meeting them. Responsive practice aims to meet these needs at all levels allowing the student the highest possible levels of service based on the school environment. Federal and state laws guiding special education compel principals to ensure appropriate delivery of education services through academic programming and a need to understand the IDEIA regulations. "More importantly, they are responsible for knowing and respecting the rights of their students" (Militello et al., 2009, p. 27). Changes in IDEA from the original 1990 version to 1997 increased expectations for learning opportunities for students. After the 2004 reauthorization, accountability increased which added another level of expertise needed by principals (Zirkel, 2013). Legislation that created a need for specific focus on subgroup performance came through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which impacted expectations for principals nationwide. NCLB is described by Yell, Shriner, and Katsiyannis (2006a) as a "rigorous

accountability system for states and public schools that involves rewards and sanctions based on students' academic performance" (p. 2). Research by Bateman and Bateman (2001; 2014) emphasized the importance of the role of principal in the implementation of service for students with disabilities.

With changes in legislation, the educational and political expectations continue to mount for principals. In 2008, ODE constructed the Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES) which reinforced specific expectations of access to general education curriculum concepts for each student. Components of the learning and differentiation sections of the OPES evaluation tool, outline the requirement for principals to create learning environments that create access for all students. The obligations of implementing instructional models that allow access for students on an individual level have been established, which is now part of the job responsibilities for principals. OPES magnifies these obligations for principals in the state of Ohio, and the time has come for clearly delineated special education legal foundations to exist for principals (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Expectations and requirements for principals to meet the needs of students and teachers that serve students with disabilities, continue to increase in both number and intensity. School districts need principals who are able to respond to the academic and legal needs of students; however, no state approved instrument or document solidifies an agreed upon standard for special education legal knowledge for them.

With the growing list of responsibilities, the need to include specific training on special education legal knowledge in principal preparation is now present. Relevant questions include: Is there a formal mechanism for principals in the state of Ohio to

acquire an agreed upon base level of special education legal knowledge? Does this need exist for principals; and if so, would all principals require this knowledge? Will this knowledge allow principals to provide programming for students with disabilities in a more effective manner?

### **Significance of the Study**

The professional and practical significance of the present research study focused on Ohio principals' current levels of functioning in terms of special education legal knowledge. Understanding their current knowledge base may impact programming decisions for students across the state of Ohio. Principals, being the decision makers at the building level and involved at the district level, directly impact the educational opportunities available to students. The action they are able to take stems from information they have accessible to them. The result of this research provides information that could be used by superintendents, principals, and ODE for planning professional learning opportunities for principals related to special education legal knowledge. This information can also be useful for pre-service and practicing principals.

Use of a survey format allowed for data collection from principals in rural, urban, and suburban secondary settings with the goal of providing information that can be useful at the state level for meeting diverse needs in various locations. A potential result from the study could lead to possible statewide certification made available to principals for successful mastery of a base level of special education legal knowledge. In addition, information from this research would be useful in determining a statewide professional development program for principals.



The study adds to the literature as it provides data on the extent to which practicing secondary principals have special education legal knowledge specific to special education services in Ohio. In addition, data were provided on what additional information is needed and would provide educational benefit for principals. Militello, Schimmel, & Eberwein, (2009) shared research that predicts that one in five principals can expect to be involved in legal action during their careers. This is a harsh reality of the profession and continued research on special education legal knowledge provides a tool in preparing for or avoiding legal action. Little data exists from principals regarding what they need regarding professional development and in what format they would like to receive this professional development. This study fills a gap in the literature and can be used at the district and state level to frame professional development related to special education legal issues. The gap in the literature surrounding principals' perceptions of professional learning needs was also addressed. Whereas there is literature on what researchers believe principals need to know, there is limited literature from current practitioners related to their own needs. Legal knowledge that comes after due process has been initiated is knowledge that has come too late.

**Aspiring principals.** The results of the study will be of interest to aspiring principals as they could be limited in their experience with IEP compliance regulations and practices. Whereas principal preparation programs may have one course for issues in special education, a large percentage of time in this type of class involves student discipline. An aspiring principal in the state of Ohio will need information on how to read and understand all parts of an IEP. A basic understanding of the difference between an

accommodation and a modification is necessary, as well as understanding how to help a team of teachers collect data for a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to build a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). An aspiring principal also needs to understand the importance of student-teacher ratio limitations for scheduling students into courses in both the elementary and secondary settings, as these limits are specified in the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities (ODE, 2014).

**Practicing principals.** Although the field is reporting principals' limited content knowledge related to special education, it is difficult to determine what principals need to know. Providing access to the general education curriculum for students served through an IEP in a LRE, is mandated; however, it is unclear whether principals have the skills to make this happen for all students.

According to ODE (2012), there are thirteen categories of disability under which a student can qualify for services. When participating in an IEP meeting, it is important that a principal have a basic knowledge of the disability category under which the specific student is qualifying and the educational needs and possible instructional strategies that will result from his/her specific needs. Additionally, there is the need for the principal to understand the resources that exist at both the district and school building level to meet the student needs. If the principal is a former general education teacher, they may not be as familiar with specialized instructional needs and the resources that may provide meaningful connections for the student. Services and funds may differ vastly for students based on need. In addition to understanding individual needs, a

principal must also understand and accept the ethical responsibilities they have to ensure access to quality services so that a student receives FAPE.

For example, consider a student who is identified as deaf-blind. This student's principal would need to be knowledgeable about communication devices and assistive technology, they could need to know questions to ask to consider if access to an occupational therapist or even a physical therapist to support engagement with assistive technologies. The principal would need to understand the complicated political stance on interveners in Ohio. These are examples of different resources that principals could need to be educated on when they plan for programming to serve a student with multiple disabilities. A principal leading an IEP meeting would need this knowledge to help the team make an appropriate decision for a student based on the available data. There is a need to have multiple types of knowledge for providing leadership as a principal to students with disabilities. The principal must possess knowledge in the legal technicalities of the setting, in the possible resources that may or may not exist to serve the student, and in the requirements for providing services.

Principals are charged with being knowledgeable about the Ohio Operating Standards for Children with Disabilities (ODE, 2014). In the "delivery of services" section of the document, state regulations outline (a) the number of students allowed to work with an intervention specialist per period of the day, (b) the age ranges that are allowed to be in the classroom at the same time, and (c) the potential requirements for paraprofessionals to be provided for the students. Violation of these rules could cause

legal action to be taken, making this vital special education legal knowledge for a practicing principal in Ohio.

**Policy makers.** Another group that would benefit from findings from this study include policy makers who have worked with colleges and universities in the state of Ohio. Specifically, principal licensure is a possible area of impact. Policy makers might question if there is a need to have more classes with a focus on how to support programming needs for students with disabilities, the legal aspects of working with parents and student advocates, as well as how to work with a mediator. In the state of Ohio, much time and money has been spent on building the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) and the Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES) model for school districts providing a statewide structured evaluation of teachers and principals. Policy makers at ODE may also benefit from learning about the professional educational needs of the principals throughout Ohio.

Two concerns from a building or district perspective when serving students with disabilities are the moral obligations to serve students by providing a quality education, and the fear of a legal misstep that could lead to due process and compensatory time. Statistics indicate that one in five principals in the state of Ohio will be involved in due process during their career (Zirkel, 2006), which can be stressful, accompanied with fear of financial penalties and consideration of loss of licensure. An examination of current practices regarding the professional learning needs of principals should aid in lowering the stress and damages resulting from a due process situation. Findings can lead to

additional professional learning for principals as they serve students with disabilities in schools across Ohio.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature to provide the principal perspective on the needs of special educational legal knowledge for practitioners. Specific groups that may be impacted by additional literature in this field include aspiring principals, practicing principals, and policy makers. Each of these groups has a unique perspective on the principalship and the connection special educational legal knowledge plays to successful service in the role of building leader. While considering the groups this research may impact, specific research questions helped to organize the data collected from current principals. The main research question guiding the study was:

- What is the perception (urban, suburban, and rural) secondary principals in Ohio have of their own special education legal knowledge used while serving as a representative of the school district?

The three objectives for this research study were:

- To describe the demographics of principals in Ohio related to length and breadth of experience, training, and special education experience and knowledge;
- To determine principals' perceptions regarding their special education legal knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team; and
- To determine the effects of the demographic variables (e.g.,

urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school) on principals' levels of special education legal knowledge.

### **Overview of Methodology**

A descriptive study using quantitative survey methodology was the approach used to obtain the data from the principals in this study. The population for this study was principals (head and/or assistant) in middle and high school settings. Sampling survey allowed the research to gather data from a sample that represents a population (principals). Descriptive data about behavior can be gathered from participant recall along with demographics of the participants. The methodological approach was quantitative and demographic characteristics/variables were collected as either interval or categorical data. The *Special Education Legal Knowledge* questionnaire was developed by the researcher after an exhaustive search of the empirical literature revealed no pre-existing instrument that would meet the needs of the researcher. The questionnaire contained several sections; these sections focused on the following issues, knowledge of special education legal law; attendance at professional development training; and demographics/characteristic of the respondents. Prior to data analysis the data were examined to ensure that the parametric data assumption were met. Descriptives and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to the rural, urban, and suburban middle and high school principals in Ohio. Principals from parochial, vocational, online, and charter settings did not have their voices included in this study. As a result of omitting principals from these

settings, the results may not be applicable to all secondary principals in the state of Ohio. The sample might not be representative of principals across the United States. While it may be possible to generalize the results to principals in other Midwestern states, discretion should be used.

The study survey instrument was administered online. Information about the survey and follow up response reminders were sent through both email and with phone calls. This format was guided by the procedures set forth in the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christina, 2014). The survey itself was delivered via an online survey software called Qualtrics. Research regarding return rates of Internet surveys provides mixed results and there are both positives and negatives associated with using this delivery method. Potential network issues can lead to spam concerns or problematic access to email. The research response rate can be affected by the use of an Internet survey when considering the heavy flow of email traffic that comes through the inbox of a principal. It is important for research to be deemed worthy of a principal's time, seeing the value in spending time to complete the survey. As such, the researcher worked to limit the cost in terms of time and energy for principals by presenting a survey that was clear and concise while being respectful of time. In an attempt to limit the extent of these potential threats to validity, written communication through email and follow up phone calls were used to contact the principals.

## Definitions

High School	High schools include a low grade of 6 <sup>th</sup> and a high grade of 12 <sup>th</sup> and may also include a student who has completed all course work requirements for graduation requirements and has selected to continue in school to have additional preparation for postsecondary education or training, employability, and independent living until the age of 22.
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	An IEP is created for a student to allow for communication between school and home, guide instruction for teachers, allow for monitoring of present levels of performance, set goals for progress, and create a tool to evaluate growth (Bateman & Bateman, 2001).
Intermediate, Middle and Junior High Schools	These schools will include a low grade of 5 <sup>th</sup> or 6 <sup>th</sup> grade and a high grade of 8 <sup>th</sup> or 9 <sup>th</sup> .
Managerial Leadership	A managerial leadership style entails allocating resources and managing “school operations in order to ensure a safe and productive learning environment” (ODE , 2005, p. 42).
Political Leadership	A political leadership style requires the school administrator to “promote the success of every student by advocating,



nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to learning and growth of the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 28).

Principal	For the proposed study, the principal is defined as a member of the leadership team for a school. Principal also refers to the work done by assistant principals.
Principal Preparation Program	Any program that leads to the certification and issuance of a principal license in the state of Ohio.
Principal Responsibilities	Principal responsibilities include, but are not limited to the following components of instructional leadership as defined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), “instructional leaders have six key roles: (1) making student and adult learning the priority; (2) setting high expectations for performance; (3) gearing content and instruction to standards; (4) creating a culture of continuous learning for adults; (5) using multiple sources of data to assess learning; and (6) activating the community’s support for school success” (2001, pp. 5-10).

Professional Learning	Professional learning is defined as reflection on and improvement in practice, based on knowledge, discussion, and engagement in the needs of student learning (Gersten et al., 1997).
Rural School District	Average or high average student poverty and a small or very small student population in a census-defined territory that is five miles or more from an urbanized area, operationalized as National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) locale codes 41-43 (ODE, 2013a).
Secondary School Setting	Secondary schools are the grade level of schools included in this study and serve students in grades six through twelve. These schools have students who have an IEP that includes the completed transitional component in sections four and five. These schools can also include students who have completed the graduation requirements, but have selected to continue in school to have additional preparation for postsecondary education or training, employability, and independent living up until the age of 22.
Special Education	Specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to the parent/guardian, to meet the unique needs of a student with an

identified disability. Special education is a coordinated system of services that combines social and academic supports to serve students and ensure access to curriculum (DiPaola et al., 2004).

Suburban School District	Low or very low student poverty with average or large student population. School districts located in a place outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area (less than 100,000 or up to >250,000) operationalized as NCES locale codes 21-23 (ODE, 2013a).
Urban School District	High or very high student poverty with an average or very large student population. School districts located in a place inside an urban area and inside a principal city (less than 100,000 or up to >250,000) operationalized as NCES locale codes 11-13 (ODE, 2013b).

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced a research study that examined the special education legal knowledge needs of secondary principals in the state of Ohio. The beginning of the chapter presented background information on IDEA and how regulations around this have impacted the school experience for students with disabilities and the principals who serve them. Background on special education with a focus on the historical context. An explanation of IDEA and FAPE was provided. Next the relationship between FAPE and

the IEP was discussed followed by the process of building an IEP team. The components of an IEP were presented. The problem statement for the dissertation was clearly outlined. The significance of the study was presented in connection with the research questions related to the special education legal knowledge needs of principals and the problem statement which is key to understanding the needs principals must consider as they make decisions that impact students. Informed decision making is a critical skill for principals as they plan programming for students. Next, an overview of the methodology was provided and information on the delimitations of the study were outlined. The chapter concluded with key definitions of terms relevant to the study.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

The chapter opens with a contextual framework for understanding the support and education that will assist principals in meeting the expectations set by IDEIA to serve students. The impact of legislation and research on the evolving role of the principalship is examined, followed by a review and analysis of the evolution of the principalship within the legal framework of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). As student needs and societal demands have changed, the role of the principal has evolved. IDEA and NCLB marked the onset of the accountability era and have had a direct and continuing influence on the choices and actions principals take as they serve students qualifying for special education services. Therefore, it is important to understand the legislation as it influences the knowledge and actions principals must take in order to meet legal mandates.

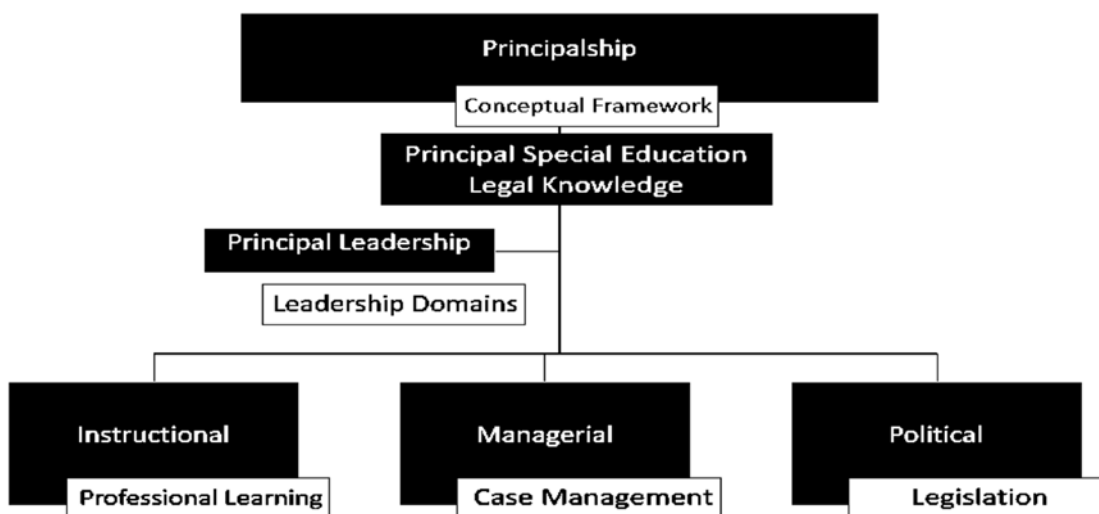
Researchers analyzing expectations for principal leadership have concluded that the principal creates and maintains the expectations for climate, culture, instructional programming, and overall program success (Greenfield, 1987; Monteith, 1994; Olivia, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1990; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Each of these areas are directly impacted by the current legal environment. The chapter reviews current literature examining the principal's impact on students with disabilities within the principal leadership domains. The ODE Standards help structure three leadership domains that frame the principalship: instructional, managerial, and political (ODE, 2015a). Together, these domains define expectations for principals' leadership, particularly with respect to creating an environment that ensures students with disabilities receive the most

appropriate education possible, which includes providing teachers with professional learning and setting expectations for building capacity. It is the principal who provides the links between teachers, students, and school so that students with disabilities receive the best possible education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A body of literature exists on the practices of effective school principal leadership theory and the actions principals take to impact students in the school setting (Goldring & Camburn, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Where a gap exists is in research that analyzes the practical knowledge principals use to respond to issues and needed action in their work (Goldring & Camburn, 2008). There are limits on the time and attention principals can devote to specific issues as they are expected to simultaneously respond to various needs. Principals must make decisions about which areas to prioritize first and which to put off as they organize their time. Having a comprehensive understanding of special education legal knowledge is a tool principals use to help successfully prioritize their decisions. All thoughts and priorities are considered at real-world speed with little time available in a school day to reflect and consider if each decision made was the very best one possible. Principals must make as many correct and responsive decisions as possible especially around the academic programming and legal requirements for their students with disabilities. Special education legal knowledge impacts principal leadership responsibilities. Each of the three leadership domains has a direct connection to the need for adequate special education legal knowledge that allows a principal to make responsive decisions and move forward

with actions. Figure 2 provides a visual model of the relationship between the special education legal knowledge and the three leadership domains that principals must function within. This model provides a concrete representation of the connections between the principalship, special education legal knowledge, and the leadership domains. All of these are components that will impact the work of the principalship.



*Figure 2.* Model of relationship between a principal’s knowledge of special education laws and the three leadership domains.

**Instructional leadership.** The instructional leadership domain involves the professional learning principals need for themselves and for the teachers they lead. These are skills that will serve leaders in any school setting but there is a specific Ohio connection to instructional leadership. In 2013, the Ohio Assessment for Educators (OAE) leadership standards were released which is a framework for educational leadership that define the three leadership domains within which a principal must work.

The OAE has an instructional leadership component a domain entitled, visionary and inclusive leadership (OAE, 2013). The goal of this component of the assessment is to set the expectations for leadership to develop and articulate a shared vision, to collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and to promote the success of all students (OAE, 2013). Intervention specialists have professional knowledge regarding strategies and tools that will impact how students learn and gain access to general education curriculum. The legalities of IEPs include compliance needed for attempts for documentation, the phrasing of discussions in IEP meetings, the strategies needed to teach, and those required for documentation of student progress.

There is an additional side to the IEP process that for many students, requires support from the principal. An example of this is the Prior Written Notice form (PR-01), a requirement specific to IEPs in the state of Ohio to document the conversations and decisions made during a meeting related to a student's IEP. The PR-01 form is a recent form that ODE requires to be completed at the end of the IEP meeting. Because of the recent addition of this form, teacher training programs may or may not include instruction on how to properly complete the PR-01 form and when to do so. However, ODE expects IEP meetings to conclude with this form. Therefore, principals can be expected to bridge this learning gap that special education teachers may have regarding this form. Principals are "bound to deliver educational services as required by law and are responsible for knowing and respecting the rights of their students and teachers" (Militello et al., 2009, p. 27). Therefore, principals must be knowledgeable in both state and federal law at a basic level. This is one part of the instructional leadership principals will need to provide for



professional learning both for themselves and their teachers as programming is built for the school.

Monteith (1994) operationalizes the work of many in helping to define the expectations of principals to frame the culture for the school and to guide the organization in the implementation of an effective instructional program (Greenfield, 1988; Olivia, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1990; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Setting the tone and expectation of high standards for each student is part of the instructional leadership domain of the principalship. In order to prepare a plan for each student, it is imperative that principals have the knowledge they need to understand programming to serve each student. To serve students with disabilities, it is necessary to have special education legal knowledge. Special education legal knowledge and the principal's grasp of it are part of the instructional leadership needed to craft a vision for a school (Billingsley, 2004). An academic plan and a vision are both components of responsive programming to serve students with disabilities. The focus of principal behaviors to support student achievement and principal behaviors in general, determine the extent to which school leaders will impact organizational focus for student achievement (Urlick & Bowers, 2014). What is important to the principal becomes important to those who provide service and leadership in the school.

One aspect of instructional leadership that fits into the function of the job as principal, as well as a commitment made by the principal to the stakeholders, is building a vision for the school. Creating a vision for the program, and the mission of the school, setting up the expectations for the institution, and planning to live the commitments made

for attendees of the institution are components of instructional leadership. Preparation for this type of instructional leadership will need to be intentional. Research by Murphy and Shipman (1999) related to leadership dispositions and knowledge has been used by the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to set goals for principals in identifying the defining commitments successful principals make to their schools. One component of this is knowledge of the needs of the organization. Knowing and understanding the organization's needs allows for the creation of an inclusive vision that is realistic and achievable. The requirement to provide the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities creates the need to support inclusion in classrooms and curriculum. Inclusion as a framework, coupled with high expectations for each student, is a component that a vision for any school can be built upon. Creating a vision for the school that sets high expectations for each student is part of the instructional leadership principals must model (DiPaola, Tschannen-Morgan, & Walther-Thomas, 2004).

One of the responsibilities assigned to principals is to create a vision and set up the frameworks needed to achieve it. Building a vision for the school is an important component of the instructional leadership domain in the work of a principal. The level of a principal's special education legal knowledge is part of the instructional leadership needed to craft a vision for a school. In Ohio, expectations for this skill set are outlined specifically in the Ohio Assessments for Educators (OAE, 2013) and included in the twelve components of visionary and inclusive leadership. Specifically, component nine (i.e., "ensure the inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups in change efforts and use the experiences and perspectives of those with diverse backgrounds to achieve the vision;")

OAE, 2013, p. 2) connects perfectly with the wide range of needs principals must be knowledgeable on when programming for students with disabilities. [REDACTED]

Building a vision that invites others to engage can require a shift in thinking for some. The work of cultural change—development that prepares adults to exhibit new or different behaviors—is intensive. According to Kotter (2012), changing the behavior of adults is one of the biggest challenges for an organization trying to maximize the product it delivers. There is value for principals in learning how to succeed in this work. An organization that supports professional learning has a focus on student learning and prepares both principals and teachers to respond to the needs of learners (Easton, 2008). The ultimate goal of professional learning is reflection on and improvement in practice based on knowledge that is relevant to the needs of student learning (Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler & Schiller 1997). Principals must plan for the professional growth of their teachers, as they are the resource that directly impacts student learning.

The ability to facilitate professional learning is a significant area of instructional leadership expected of principals which is an important component of building capacity in those who lead the school. Bredeson and Johansson (2004) define professional development as learning opportunities that “engage, cause reflection, and strengthen capacities to impact practice” (p. 387). Klinger (2004) adds that a “systematic body of knowledge provides a strong foundation” for both the work and theories involved in the educational setting (p. 248). Principals have both the authority and responsibility to frame the professional learning that guides the instruction for staff during a school year. This is a chance to connect the vision for the school to direct action to support effective

programming, which helps to build and maintain increased capacity. The Ohio Principal Evaluation System (2015) measures principals' ability to build a shared vision for continual improvement of the staff. Part of this improvement must come from a vision that values professional learning and leads to high expectations for the educational team. Principals need to model the capacity to improve. This skill will allow principals to provide a concrete example for teachers who seek to build their own capacity in providing quality instruction (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009).

**Managerial leadership.** The managerial leadership domain impacts principals through case management for academic programming for students with disabilities. Direct job duties for principals include school safety, assessment, discipline, application of laws, creating a plan to document credit acquisition, and ensuring meaningful access to general education resources (Lewis, 2015). These needs are especially great in the secondary school setting, where high-stakes testing and academic progress impacts students directly as they complete requirements that will directly impact their ability to graduate. The impact can be positive, or in the worst case, impede the acquisition of knowledge and credits as students move toward high school graduation and reaching significant school landmarks (DiPaola et al., 2004). Schools are responsible for academic content that directly leads to preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities for students and programming for students who need access to both academic and vocational content can be extensive. Principals need to understand the programming components for students with disabilities as they schedule for the entire building. Part of the managerial leadership domain for principals includes the knowledge to make effective programming

decisions for students and to ensure appropriate classes are offered to individual students. Because these can be challenging decisions, principals need to have a working knowledge of the programming needed that will allow access to graduation and preparation for life, school, and the workforce after high school.

Programming decisions include preparing programming for teachers as they directly impact students. Principals must be ready to guide all members of the organization, including those who welcome learning and those who fear change. Both principals and teachers must choose to engage with the process and be open to sharing practices with peers in discussion of what is working to impact students. Mizell (2010) conducted research on the expectations for district and building leaders in implementing systems that impact student achievement through skilled teachers. The focus of this research is to ensure the understanding that the final impact must be on students. However, the way to impact students actually starts with principals who understand their own responsibilities and are then best able to serve teachers. “Principals need professional development to address their specific roles and responsibilities” (Mizell, 2010, p. 7). Mizell’s research (2010) found that time built into the school year requiring continued growth and reflection on practice for both principals and teachers is time well spent. To do this successfully, consistent time must be dedicated so both parties can discuss and dissect student data and analyze needed content knowledge.

Having and implementing special educational legal knowledge in decision making is an explicit component of the managerial leadership domain. Procedural requirements that lead to compliance and academic programming that allow for appropriate

services for students with disabilities is a part of the managerial leadership principals must master and model in their work (Monteith, 1994). Record keeping, a system to organize credits, IEP information that is available to the team of teachers who need it when planning programming, and recording student progress are all parts of the compliance requirements that are included in the managerial domain. The OAE for principals connects the managerial domain with the student learning section of the OAE (2013). Principals are expected to “understand how to advocate, nurture, and sustain a positive culture of learning that emphasizes high expectations and an instructional program that promotes success for all student groups” (OAE, 2013, p. 3). All of these are nuanced items that have great impact for principals as they work to create planning that serves students and avoids due process issues.

Another component of the management domain is teacher evaluation. In Ohio, principals must be credentialed to provide an official evaluation using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). This credentialing does not require the demonstration of any specific skill set when considering the evaluation of an intervention specialist who serves students with disabilities, which could present challenges in the quality of the evaluation process. A study by Monteith (2000) considered the concern that principals had minimal to limited training in special education. Findings indicated that approximately 40% of principals lacked formal training in special education; yet more than 75% of those surveyed reported they were responsible for supervising intervention specialists and supporting programming for students with disabilities. Supervision of teachers is an activity specific to the management domain. More than 85% of principals surveyed felt

formal training in special education is necessary to be a successful principal (Monteith, 2000). The managerial domain is not glamorous and can be filled with minutia; however, it is the domain that will empower a principal to lead with solution-based thinking which will help avoid mistakes that can be problematic at a larger level.

Monitoring compliance with special education regulations is a component of managerial leadership for principals which is comprised of monitoring and recording of student progress. A structured learning environment with organizational systems is part of programming that supports the monitoring of student progress (Valentine & Prater, 2011). NCLB also requires monitoring to ensure principals are knowledgeable of students' needs as they are able to master content and produce results that meet the expectations of state assessments. Monitoring comes in the form of reports that must be provided to students and parents based on movement toward mastery of IEP goals, which in the state of Ohio, are called progress reports. The IEP sets a specific timeline for these reports to be shared with stakeholders. These activities are examples of allocating the time and data management needed for progress monitoring.

**Political leadership.** The political leadership domain can at times be one of the most challenging for principals to navigate. This domain requires principals to collaborate with stakeholders, negotiate building-level issues, and respond to legislative requirements that impact students and the school as an organization. OAE operationalized this as the need to have an understanding of “the interplay of the political, social, economic, legal, ethical, and cultural contexts of education in promoting the success of all student groups” (OAE, 2013, p. 3). Part of successful political leadership is the need

for principals to master the specific component of the legalities that come with the position. Political leadership described by OAE (2013) requires principals to “understand the legal dimensions of educational leadership” (p. 11).

The political domain is also where principals are held accountable for the outcomes they have produced. Principals serve as the leaders of their schools and commit to being responsible for those they serve. The political leadership domain is a chance to model the kind of thinking that shows, “On my watch, you will be all you can be.” In order to help students, teachers, and stakeholders achieve at the highest level, principals must establish policies that meet legal standards and demonstrate that they possess the skills to understand and comply with policy, regulation, and law (Militello et al., 2009). Principals must possess the current legal knowledge to anticipate and survive the political landscape and understand, respond to, and anticipate future educational developments.

Part of the political leadership domain comes in having and owning the language of power. Special education legal knowledge allows a principal to speak, act, and exist in the language of power which allows a principal to know and understand the rules that regulate actions related to students with disabilities. Understanding the rules allows one to serve at a high level. The language of power impacts the political domain and the social competencies and knowledge of human capital that allow a principal to structure his/her actions for success in the political leadership domain. Part of this is the ability to create a belief in stakeholders that a principal has enough knowledge to problem solve and implement structures that work.



One component of the political domain is to be able to negotiate the relationships that impact the overall culture and climate of a school. Principals that have the ability to build relationships will have a different kind of political power with those they serve which happens when words and actions connect. When a principal's ongoing words and actions demonstrate a personal investment and a willingness to do whatever it takes to provide the best education possible for their students, a different level of political leadership can be exhibited (DiPaola et al., 2004).

Continuing to improve the quality of staff performance with a focus on student outcomes is a political endeavor as it involves two of principals' most important stakeholders. The students, teachers, and educational staff that serve students are principals' two key stakeholder groups. The needs of these two groups shape decisions principals make on a daily basis. The ability to work successfully with both groups will be gauged in principals' final evaluations. The ability to navigate the political needs of both groups is also publicly available in the state report card which is an example of where student outcomes, legal knowledge, and programming knowledge meet.

Principals are held publicly accountable for student success in Ohio. In 2007–2008, a pilot program was offered to districts statewide to gauge a principal's effectiveness in leading a school. As previously mentioned, during the 2009–2010 school year, the state board of education adopted the “Ohio Guidelines and Principal Evaluation Model Framework” (Ohio Principal Evaluation System Model, 2015, p. 3). Appendix C contains the Ohio Principal Evaluation System standards and elements. This document is a rubric-based system built upon the Ohio Standards for Principals (Ohio Principal

Evaluation System Model, 2015, p. 3). “Knowing district, state, and federal policies, laws, and procedures requires substantial time for study and application” (Mizell, 2010, pp. 6-7). Administrators who “routinely develop their own knowledge and skills model for students that learning is important and useful. Their ongoing development creates a culture of learning throughout the school and supports educators’ efforts to engage students in learning” (Mizell, 2010, p. 18).

The Ohio Principal Evaluation System Model (2015) and the Ohio Standards for Principals (ODE, n.d.) both have three standards that directly connect to the political leadership domain for administrators. The standards are divided into guiding elements on which principals receive specific feedback from their supervisors or superintendents. In this evaluation system, standards 1, 2, and 4 set the expectation that principals are proficient in building, implementing, and evaluating professional learning to impact student learning and achievement:

- Standard 1: principals help create a shared vision and clear goals for their schools and ensure continuous progress toward achieving the goals.
  - Standard 2: principals support the implementation of high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students.
  - Standard 4: principals establish and sustain collaborative learning and shared leadership to promote learning and achievement of all students.
- (Ohio Principal Evaluation System Model, 2015, p. 3).

Each of these standards fits into the broad work of negotiating the interests of varied groups to reach agreement about policy in a manner that impacts student outcomes. This is where principals are judged on their ability to monitor and respond to educational requirements set for students at the state level. The political leadership domain is strongly tied to the need for special educational legal knowledge for principals. The evaluation rubric is divided into four possible categories: ineffective, developing, skilled, and accomplished. The framework is designed for principals to have a starting point (from developing to skilled), with a small group rated as accomplished. Ratings of skilled or above would be the goal for experienced administrators. A rating of ineffective in an area would be a cause for concern and would signify weakness and a needed area of growth. In standard 2, element 2.2 (“principals ensure instructional practices are effective and meet the needs of all students”) is an example of connecting knowledge to teachers to aid in the development of their instructional methods (Ohio Principal Performance Rating Rubric, 2015, p. 2). This document is used statewide and establishes the requirement for principals to consider practice that identifies them as both leaders and learners. As a leader of professional development for the entire staff, principals benefit from being trained in this skill set.

Research presents a clear picture that professional learning is important for both teachers and principals. The end product of professional learning is a positive impact on student growth and achievement (Mizell, 2010). There are expectations set for principals in the state of Ohio for continuing their professional growth so they are best able to serve students and teachers. An organized explanation for these expectations is laid out in the

OPES rubric. These expectations can be used as a tool for planning to ensure principals are progressing and extending their knowledge. An area of high importance for continual education for principals is serving students with disabilities. Principals need to maintain current proficiency in the skill sets required for programing, compliance, and serving to students with disabilities through implementation of requirements from federal regulations. To prepare for skilled leadership, practitioners must have a working understanding of IDEIA.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)**

The education of each student, especially the education of children with exceptionalities, is an area of specialization for schools in the United States. The work being done in classrooms to ensure access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities is a characteristic of the U.S. education system that serves as a worldwide model (Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler, & Schiller, 1997; Keogh, 2007; McKenna, 1992). The history of a free public education in both the elementary and secondary setting began in the late 1870s and was completed with all states mandating attendance in 1918 (Katz, 1976).

In the mid-1970s, the education of students with disabilities became a specific area of commitment from schools. In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). The statement of purpose, spelled out in section 601, explained that at the time there were more than seven million students with disabilities in the US. Of the seven million, more than half were not receiving appropriate education services, and one million were completely excluded from

the traditional school setting (EAHCA, 1975). EAHCA opened the door to free and appropriate education that had value for learners. Students who had historically struggled to get through the door, now had legal support empowering them to join their classmates and participate in a beneficial way in school. “PL 94-142 [EAHCA] was landmark legislation as it assured access to public education for all children, without regard for disabling condition” and in each state, nationwide (Keogh, 2007, p. 67).

Although EAHCA was signed in 1975, state and federal court battles challenged its implementation. When EAHCA took effect nationwide in 1978, “education for all” policies became reality in classrooms for students (Martin et al., 1996, p. 26). However, previous work had been done to raise awareness about the needs of children with exceptionalities. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (2007), the law was built upon multiple components. Together those components provided a stable foundation for students with disabilities to get quality access to education. EAHCA offered a framework to (a) improve access to educational content, (b) improve access to educational content, (c) plan to identify students with disabilities and respond with meaningful programming, (d) provide structure to evaluate student progress, and (e) plan for due process support for students and families. The work needed to support students was being done in both schoolhouses and courthouses; the actions of few impacted the experiences of many.

Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Smith (2007) offer a historical perspective of the challenges facing students with disabilities and their families prior to the passage of EAHCA. Their research describes school facilities that did not allow students access to

classrooms or to enroll in school. Some schools claimed that students with disabilities could not contribute in class due to their disabilities. The result was either the total exclusion of numerous students with disabilities in varied school settings or the student's admission into the school setting but the denial of an "effective appropriate education" (Turnbull et al., 2007, p. 15).

Two historically significant cases in the in the early 1970s helped lead the way to the enactment of EAHCA: *The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth* in 1971 and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* in 1972 (Kehoe, 1994; Keogh, 2007; Zigmond, 2003). In 1971, students represented by the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) sued the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This caused a national conversation to occur regarding educational access and involved 13 students who under current identification language would have had intellectual disabilities. At the time, Pennsylvania allowed public schools to bar entry to students who had not attained "a mental age of 5 years" (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens [PARC] v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2015). The children's families and PARC took the state school system and state school superintendent to court, successfully arguing—using language relevant to the time period—that policy expectations, lived through law, means that access to education is legally required for every student (Keogh, 2007; Turnbull et al., 2004; Weintraub & Abeson, 1974; Zigmond, 2003).

The *PARC* case helped establish the concept that each student, regardless of potential limiting conditions, was owed a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The

court ruling determined that students were guaranteed a free and appropriate education regardless of cognitive ability. While implementing an appropriate education for each student could be challenging for a school district, it was found to be unconstitutional to limit access to education (Keogh, 2007). The case also changed thinking about the importance of including students with cognitive impairments with other students in a traditional classroom. Specifically inspired by this case, schools began to take action to ensure that academic instruction for students must produce learning for students of all abilities. Learning could include access to both academic concepts and functional skills needed to participate in an environment with neuro-typical peers. This brought about a shift in mindset; the expectation was that students needed to be given access to learning environments focused on academic skills in addition to functional skills, and the sooner this could happen for students, the better (Weintraub & Abeson, 1974).

The other case that had an impact on special education was *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (Turnbull et al., 2004; Weintraub & Abeson, 1974). “The *Mills* plaintiffs alleged in their complaint that on the basis of their having various physical and mental disorders, they [students] were excluded from education programs in the District of Columbia” (Dunn et al., 1975, p. 12). The school district claimed that educating such children would be an undue financial burden. However, the court rejected their claim, stating,

If sufficient funds are not available to finance all of the services and programs that are needed and desirable in the system, then the available funds must be expended equitably in such a manner that no child is entirely excluded from a publicly

supported education consistent with his needs and ability to benefit there from.

(*Mills vs. Board of Education District of Columbia*, 1972)

The *Mills* case established the state's responsibility to educate students with disabilities based on the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution (Office of Special Education, 2007). It also helped eliminate the misconception that some students were unable to be educated. *Mills v. the Board of Education of District of Columbia* helped set the precedent that students would have an education based on specific needs.

Students in schools nationwide began to benefit from the right to be included in the educational setting. A focus on the education of children with exceptionalities was beginning. Additional structures were added to EAHCA, and it was officially renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). The goal of IDEA is to afford students who are identified with a disability a free and appropriate public education where specially designed instruction is made available based on needs (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Phillips, 2008; Turnbull, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2004; Yell et al., 2006a). IDEA became a requirement by Congress to support states in complying with their constitutional duty to provide a public education for students with disabilities (Martin et al., 1996). As an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team makes decisions about what constitutes appropriate needs and plans for a student, they must develop a written plan to serve the student. This IEP is a written legal document that explains the instructional and related services designed to meet the needs



of the specific student based on current levels of achievement through annual goals (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Phillips, 2008).

IDEA outlined six governing principles to ensure educational rights for students with disabilities from birth to age 2 and from age 3 to age 21 (Turnbull et al., 2004). These principles include a zero-reject rule, meaning that all students can be educated; a nondiscriminatory evaluation; appropriate education in the least restrictive environment appropriate; procedural due process rights; and parent and student participation in the educational process (Turnbull et al., 2004, p. 20). IDEA created the need for a cooperative relationship between the school, a student, and the family unit. The IEP team includes a specific group of people:

- The student
- A parent(s)/guardian(s)
- A general education teacher
- A special education teacher
- A district representative
- A team member who can explain how evaluation results will be impacted by instruction (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p. 66; ODE, 2012b, p. 21).

Group members must also understand the purpose and essence of IDEA:

Special education exists to provide educational services to students with disabilities who (a) have a disability covered by the law and (b) need special education services to learn. When general education has not met a student's unique educational needs, the student requires a "special" education that is

individualized and results in meaningful educational benefit. (Yell et al., 2006a, p. 19)

IDEA included language on the right to participate in state and district assessments; the Act's reauthorization in 2004 included participation with accommodations and the possibility of an alternate assessment option (Turnbull, 2005; Zigmond, 2003). IDEA also required teachers to meet highly qualified status under the requirements of NCLB. IDEA further required that IEPs include transition procedures to identify relevant education and training, employment, and independent living (as needed) post-school goals, noting who will be responsible for offering instruction in these areas and linking the student with potentially needed community resources (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Bateman and Bateman (2014) challenge principals to think of the IEP document as an instructional tool that invites communication among IEP team members and as a framework for managing that process. IDEA is the legislation that frames the educational rights of eligible students with disabilities in schools. Knowledge related to this legislation is highly valuable information for principals (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). "The principal is responsible for the education of all students in the school" (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p. 9). Actively engaging in IEP meetings is a leadership opportunity for a school principal, and a chance to impact educational decisions for students. In order to be fully prepared to meet this challenge for each student, the principal must be knowledgeable about the nature and needs of students with disabilities in order to make intelligent educational decisions (Cline, 1981).

## **Role of Principals in Providing FAPE**

For all students to have access to FAPE, they must have a place to engage in this opportunity. The space where FAPE takes place is a school, and schools must have leadership to function which comes from both teachers and principals. Principals have long played a role in the education system and can have a significant impact on student learning. Student achievement has historically been, and continues to be, a focus for principals. Principals lead the educational team of teachers and parents/guardians as they work together to engage students in learning. Policies continue to be created and implemented to focus on students' academic success. Principals must understand what they are required to do, in order to take action in supporting FAPE for students. Research from Hirth and Valesky (1991) has contributed to the literature surrounding the need for additional training for principals in the area of special education legal knowledge. The authors examined coursework of graduate programs in school administration and found nearly 60% of graduate programs in the study had no requirements related to special education for aspiring principals. About one quarter of the programs included in the survey had specific requirements to demonstrate mastery of special education legal knowledge.

Monteith (1994, p. 10) stated "it is clear that principals need and want training in special education" if they are to be prepared to plan and program for students in a time when classrooms are moving towards full inclusion and the LRE must be considered for every student. The need for principals to have a basic special education legal knowledge so they are able to make informed decisions is real. Militello et al. (2009) worked with

the National Association of Secondary School Principals accessing a database that included principals from approximately forty-five states with almost five hundred principals responding to their legal education law survey. One of the chief findings from this research indicated principals need to become informed and engaged in basic school law information as they are expected to be prepared to provide information to both teachers and students. Militello et al. (2009) also noted that one in five principals can expect to be involved in legal action during their career. This is a harsh reality of the profession and continued research on special education legal knowledge could provide a tool in preparing for or avoiding legal action.

Bateman and Bateman, (2014) and DiPaola et al. (2004) provide multiple examples in educational research that address the importance of the principal within a school setting. The principal sets the climate and tone for teaching and learning in the school building. If repeated studies have shown this impact, the time has come for principals to increase their skill set and their ability to serve a more diverse student body. While the term “all” creates the appearance of encompassing the group, a principal who is prepared to serve “each” student may be more prepared to serve an entire group of students. Having an understanding of special education is a must for the principal who supervises programming for students with disabilities in schools (Jacobs, Tonnsen, & Baker, 2004; Militello et al., 2009; Monteith, 1994). A working knowledge of the components of IDEA is essential to the skill set principals must master. An integral part of IDEA is the policies for compliance the document spells out so schools can set up

programming to meet expected requirements. Policies are created and implemented to focus resources and attention on the academic success of students.

IDEIA includes language on the right to participate in state and district assessments; the Act's reauthorization in 2004 included participation with accommodations and the possibility of an alternate assessment option (Turnbull, 2005; Zigmond, 2003). The latest version also sets the expectation for teachers to meet highly qualified status. The expectation is that teachers who are highly qualified to teach their content will be most prepared to empower students as learners. All of these expectations are set up by the federal education act titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB), passed in 2001.

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

NCLB is seen by many as one of the most influential pieces of federal legislation in the educational setting since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Yell et al., 2006b). NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 1965. ESEA was enacted to provide equitable educational opportunities to disadvantaged students who had previously lacked access to all possible educational experiences (Thomas & Brady, 2005). ESEA provided a funding source for schools to provide for the needed resources for the education of disadvantaged and vulnerable students (Thomas & Brady, 2005). In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized and NCLB started impacting schools nationwide.

NCLB set the expectation that by the 2013–2014 school year, all students would be proficient in reading and math based on their state assessments and the scores set to

model proficient mastery of content (Eckes & Swando, 2009; Yell et al., 2006b). NCLB created an accountability system focused on student performance. If a school meets the requirements for having students score at the expected level or above, they have met the obligations of NCLB. Schools that have not meet these expectations face consequences that come in a variety of forms. NCLB legislation came at a time of change in the federal government's role in K-12 education, when increased connection to the states became the norm. The initial goal of NCLB was to increase students' academic experiences, moving past academic jargon such as "rigor" and actually setting up plans for schools to align assessments to state standards and prepare students for critical thinking (DiPaola et al., 2004).

NCLB requirements set the expectation that principals would become knowledgeable about student subgroups. The student population as a whole was divided into specific subgroups based on individual criteria such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities. The performance of each category of students must be considered to meet NCLB requirements (Eckes & Swando, 2009). NCLB requires that student achievement be measured by tests closely aligned with comprehensive state academic standards (DiPaola et al., 2004). Another component of this legislation that impacts both students and principals is the expectation that teachers who serve students with disabilities must meet specific criteria that identifies the teacher as highly qualified to teach content in that academic area (Bateman & Bateman, 2014). This component of the law has a specific impact in the secondary setting in Ohio, as credits can be issued only for instruction delivered by a Highly

Qualified Teacher (HQT). A final expectation set by NCLB is the focus on instruction that stems from evidence-based practice founded in peer-reviewed research.

During the 2015-2016 school year, NCLB was reauthorized and is now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA is closely aligned to NCLB but does allow states to have more flexibility in setting goals for student achievement at the state and local level. States were given the 2016-2017 school year to plan for setting specific achievement goals and to have time to meet with stakeholders from across the state. Full implementation of state plans will be due by the 2017-2018 school year (ODE, 2016).

**NCLB's impact on principals.** NCLB's proficiency tests carry consequences for the schools and districts that administer them. "Congress's primary goal in passing NCLB was to hold states and public schools accountable for improving student achievement in reading and math" (Yell et al., 2006a, p. 32). Schools that fail to bring enough of their students to proficiency face escalating mandates, such as having to offer public school choice or provide supplemental education services. If the school is considered "in need of improvement" for five consecutive years, it risks being restructured or taken over by the state. In Ohio, one of the first changes that will occur if a school is "restructured" or "taken over" is a change in leadership, starting with the school principal. "Moreover, NCLB mandates that states develop measurable milestones for schools to use to gauge their success in improving student achievement until the goal of 100% student proficiency" is achieved (Yell et al., 2006a, p. 32). NCLB was originally designed to have this rate of student proficiency achieved by the 2013-2014 school year. The principal's focus must include student achievement; for many, that stems from

instructional leadership. Shared instructional leadership, where the principal works with teacher-based teams to make curricular decisions, has been found to have a major leadership effect on student achievement (Urlick & Bowers, 2014).

In the current educational setting, principals must be instructional leaders who can work with teams of teachers to create learning frameworks that engage students and produce measurable academic results. Through the NCLB lens, results are measured and valued from one metric: test scores. Under ESEA, schools received federal funding to support low-income students; NCLB ties that federal funding to specific targets on annual assessments (Guilfoyle, 2006). Because test scores are connected to the funds needed to successfully run a school, principals must be knowledgeable about student performance; since the passage of NCLB, student performance is measured by scores on state-selected assessments. “NCLB established a rigorous accountability system for states and public schools that involves rewards and sanctions based on students’ performance” (Yell et al., 2006a, p. 2). A principal is now required to focus on test scores for two reasons: the moral and ethical imperative to serve students, and the fact that student performance is linked to job security. Therefore, principal’s ability to stay employed can depend heavily on students’ test scores.

In Ohio, students participate in state assessments in math and reading in a variety of grades in the elementary, middle, and high school settings. The results are compiled to provide a rating for the school on a state report card. These ratings consider everything from the school’s graduation rate to the percentage of students who are meeting academic expectations. Each subgroup receives a rating and then the overall performance of the



school is rated based on the composite score. In the 2014–2015 school year, the Ohio Department of Education suspended the state report card results based on a new assessment with higher cut scores, which resulted in lower student performance scores statewide.

**NCLB connection to IDEA.**NCLB’s requirements consider students’ test scores and divide the data into categories. Information about the students is used to determine which subgroup the student would be in. There are four main subgroups: socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, English proficiency, and race and ethnicity (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Eckes & Swando, 2009). Students in each subgroup must be tested and their scores reported by group, as well as part of the overall school population:

NCLB requires that for schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), states must test 95% of students in each subgroup and report each subgroup’s results separately—ensuring that schools cannot “hide” the low performance of any particular group of students. (Eckes & Swando, 2009, p. 2480)

While NCLB and IDEA both require the principal to be knowledgeable about students, the major connection between the two is that they require principals to know how to provide programming to improve student learning. IDEA requires an individualized approach that allows for an appropriate and free public education; NCLB requires that all students be assessed on an equal playing field, with all test scores counting the same, even when there are documented differences for students with an IEP. Eckes and Swando (2009) present longitudinal data from multiple states showing that whereas both general education students and those with disabilities have grown

academically from the increased rigor of content, the gap between the two groups has not closed. NCLB requires that the gap between the two will eventually close. IDEIA does not and will not require students to meet one expectation when the concepts that frame IDEIA stem from an individual focus. If NCLB considers the perspective of the group, IDEIA considers the perspective of the individual; they cannot and will not be the same. The connection between NCLB and IDEIA offers both positives and negatives for schools.

A major outcome of NCLB was to connect its new requirements with the existing requirements in IDEIA. The considerable impact that NCLB has on IDEIA stems from the requirement that students with disabilities be included in statewide assessments, that teachers preparing students for these assessments obtain highly qualified status, and that the tools used to structure special education services for students are founded on peer-reviewed research. Progress is now measured for each student to ensure academic growth (DiPaola et al., 2003; Yell et al., 2006).

### **The Principalship**

The term “principal” appeared in work done by Horace Mann in the mid-1800s (Pierce, 1935, cited in Lattuca, 2012) and was used to describe someone who worked in a role that had defined expectations and helped to set requirements for others. When clear expectations are provided, behavior, and outcomes can be directly impacted. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the needs of school management began to grow more complex, causing a need for leadership (Seyfarth, 1999, cited in Lattuca, 2012). School systems created a position called “principal teacher” who was charged with the specific tasks of

maintaining the building, making hiring decisions, giving information to teachers, and ensuring student needs were met (Lattuca, 2012, p. 225). All of these responsibilities were paramount for a principal's success, as they were social leaders. Their role continued to grow, with increasing responsibilities being added based on societal requirements.

Education in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century focused on communal need and appropriately shaping the character of students who would become community members and leaders. Learning was centered in religion and framed expectations in high moral character for school leaders (Thomas, 2001). According to Tyack and Hansot (1982), ideals of the self-image 19<sup>th</sup>-century school leaders wanted to obtain could be found in National Education Association documents in which short biographies of leaders were printed. These documents contained common terms such as “earnest,” “pure,” “true scholar,” and “Christian character” (p. 16). To become a school leader was to commit to a life of service (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The focus of a school principal at the time was to engage students in civic education and training for compliance with religious and societal rules (Thomas, 2001).

Murphy (1998) explains the historical context for the progress of growth seen through the school leadership lens. In the 1800s, school leaders provided growth and religious insight during the “ideological era” (1820–1899). Principals were viewed as community leaders and those who could provide meaningful direction. A shift came in the early 1900s when technical competencies were becoming the desired trait in leaders (Murphy, 1998). The connection between school and the business world was

strengthening and industry needed workers who would be educated while still yielding to management. A focus on productivity was at the forefront during the “prescriptive era” (1900–1946) and formal leadership began to be established (Lashway, 1999; Murphy, 1998). The next phase of school leadership included a focus on “theoretical ideas from the social sciences over the seat-of-the-pants advice” (Lashway, 1999, p. 2). Principals who were content experts experienced success, which became a marketable skill and job requirement for principals in the “scientific era” from 1947 to 1985 (Lashway, 1999; Murphy, 1998). The current era of leadership, known as the “dialectic period” (1986–present), focuses on preparation programs that influence principals’ skill sets (Lashway, 1999; Murphy, 1998). This period has been marked by a connection between accountability and reflection so that principals can meet the needs of diverse learners and to differentiate their skill sets to solve problems and be ready for new skills that teachers need to prepare students. The final descriptor of this era is a focus on standards and evaluation to provide feedback to principals on their performance to impact student achievement. This dialectic period requires principals to have effective skills in both instructional and managerial domains. In summary, this is a period where society is calling on principals to “make a difference” in their schools (Lyons & Algozzie, 2006, p. 10).

**Principal knowledge of academic standards.** The current educational climate requires principals to have a deep understanding of the academic content standards that set up learning expectations for students. It is important principals have an understanding of what and how students are expected to learn as they plan programming. In Ohio, the

Ohio Department of Education (ODE) creates and implements academic content standards. When the National Commission on Excellence in Education authored *A Nation at Risk* (1983), it compelled ODE to begin to categorize specific learning concepts into academic areas where content ideas presented were directly connected with assessment as evidence of mastery (Heffner, 2010). In 1994, ODE introduced a statewide competency-based program to ensure academic standards were sufficiently rigorous to produce academic results. The adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) intensified focus on clearly defined academic standards in Ohio. These standards would be the framework used to build student knowledge, which started from the Governor's Commission for Student Success in 2000 and has continued into present-day classrooms in Ohio (Heffner, 2010).

The academic standards Ohio principals must be well versed in today are the Ohio Academic Content Standards (OACS) and the Ohio Academic Content Standards—Extended (OACS-E). OACS are specific parts of curriculum in the areas of English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science. The OACS-E serve students with significant cognitive disabilities to ensure access to academic content in all areas (ODE, 2012c). In 2010, ODE began to shift the focus from general standards to a more focused and deeper understanding in specific areas of academic content. Prior to 2010, the curricular focus was “a mile wide and an inch deep,” knowing a little bit about many things (Heffner, 2010, slide 8). ODE changed course, placing a more intense focus on content that was intentionally selected to foster problem-solving and real-world application of academic concepts. These standards help teachers and students clearly

understand what information they need to learn in the general education setting. The goal of these standards is to stretch students and encourage them to think critically as they move toward mastery of content (ODE, 2012c). The standards prepare students for college and career readiness, with a focus on coherence between content and grades to allow for rigor in all concepts (Heffner, 2010).

As student needs and societal demands have changed, the role of the principal has evolved to become more responsive to those changes. One of the catalysts for principal evolution was the onset of the accountability era. For some practitioners, the increased scrutiny on principal practice came with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. The principalship since the inception of No Child Left Behind has encountered increased expectations, which requires principals to become more data savvy and able to speak intelligently on student performance within several demographic subgroups.

**Principal professional development standards.** Principals are charged with creating a learning environment that fosters growth and success for each student, and Ohio's Standards for Principals provide guidance and outline expectations for those who occupy school leadership positions. Principal leadership is a major component of school success (Praisner, 2003; Jacobs et al., 2004). In terms of leadership expectations, Monteith's research (2000) shares the collective view that the principal creates and maintains the expectations for climate, culture, instructional programming, and overall program success (Greenfield, 1988; Olivia, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1990; Smith & Andrews, 1989).

In October 2004, Ohio Governor Robert Taft adopted and signed legislation that led to a uniform set of operating procedures for school personnel. Senate Bill 2, drafted after a year of input from stakeholders across Ohio, solidified recommendations made by the Educator Standards Board (ESB). In October 2005, the ESB was charged with the task of building and implementing standards for teachers and principals in Ohio. The result was a comprehensive document called the *Standards for Ohio Educators Book*, which frames the expectations and responsibilities for educators statewide. It outlines the state standards for teaching professionals and principals and for professional development.

Section Three of the Ohio Standards (ODE, 2005b) explains the standards for principals:

- Responsibility to have a clear vision to move forward seeking continuous achievement for students.
- Supporting high-impact strategies for students in an effort to frame meaningful instruction in all classrooms.
- Building a positive learning environment through well-designated resources.
- School-wide efforts into shared leadership among teachers and administration to create a team to serve students.
- Engaging community members, parents, and guardians in the educational process to serve students. (ODE, 2005b, p. 41)

In light of the expectations for principals to serve students, teachers, and families, this unified set of standards provides guidance for principals as they work to set a framework for themselves.

**Principal impact on students with disabilities.** Principals are committed to guarantee learning for each student in school, which includes meeting the educational requirements of students with special education needs (Alford et al., 2005; Hansen, 2007; Patterson, 2001). Angelle and Bilton (2009) determined that principals are now expected to know how to support teachers as they work to build a classroom climate where the learning needs of each are met. The extant literature supporting the impact of a school principal on the educational program is vast. Having high expectations for all students must be a foundational belief for principals as they work to impact the educational experience for students. IDEIA sets the expectation that educational programming from the general education curriculum will be made accessible and meaningful for students who qualify for special education services (Yell et al., 2006; Zirkel, 2013). Part of ensuring this access to content is a principal's responsibility. Principals must be able to discern what students must understand and master to plan appropriate academic programming. The principal's impact on the school's academic program and increasing student success is of great importance (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

A current area of research focuses on principals' work developing teachers, and helping them grow in their own professional learning. When a teacher is highly skilled in understanding student learning, students' abilities to model content mastery will improve. When a principal spends time in shared instructional leadership with teachers, there is



high return in student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Urick & Bowers, 2014), which is how principals can and will have a direct impact on the students they serve. Understanding their impact on student growth, principals should have a plan to engage teachers and harness their focus on student learning. A tool principals can use to support teachers as they reflect on student learning is the importance of understanding and implementing research-based strategies from peer-reviewed academic sources (Yell et al., 2006a). Teachers need access to this type of information, which principals can provide through appropriate professional development. Responsive practice allows principals to provide exposure and practice with peer-reviewed strategies to support teachers as they impact student growth. The actions displayed by administrators reflect the areas of priority where they spend time and attention. Principals frame and communicate values and teachers reinforce these values in action through the learning opportunities created for students (Deal & Peterson, 1998, p. 30).

Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (2014) report the balance needed to provide empowering leadership, defined as teaching and learning about the act of distributing power to accept the importance of self-discipline. While empowering teams of teachers is critical, it is imperative for those in school leadership to know how to teach the adults they lead to replace traditional bureaucracy with a framework for values through discipline. Teaching and creating learning experiences gives life to the values set forth by the principal to lead the action in the school (Senge et al., 2014). The principal's values galvanize the actions of others. Principals have the ability to directly affect teachers and teachers have the ability to directly affect students. Principals are the

connection between the three groups in a school. Principals who take the responsibility to impact special education teachers help teachers gain the tools and skills needed to support student growth (Lasky, Karge, Robb, & McCabe, 1995).

If the principal places a high priority on the education of students with disabilities and this trait is valued in teachers, it will cause action and focus on the part of teachers (Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), 2001; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2001). Sharing a vision of the importance of student impact with teachers and sharing leadership are ways principals can affect educational outcomes for students with disabilities. By ensuring that teachers have the needed tools for programming, principals can build a framework to help students achieve academically. Goor, Schwenn, and Boyer (1997) support the core belief that principals must place value on the education of students with disabilities to program effectively. Principals increase the breadth of their influence over student achievement when they are able to share instructional leadership with teachers (Urick & Bowers, 2014).

There is growing research supporting the importance of the role of the principal in creating an environment that shares instructional leadership with teachers and its benefit for students. While the critical role of the principal in supporting teachers to improve students' academic growth is well supported generally, there is a paucity of research specific to this role as it applies to students with disabilities. Jacobs et al. (2004) question the limited research on the role of the principal in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. In a report on the 2001-2002 national study from the President's Commission

on Excellence in Special Education, Yell et al. (2006a) found evidence for the need of principal support of students with disabilities in academic programming. Yell et al. (2006a) recommended action that requires administrators to decrease their focus on compliance only and increase their focus on student achievement and results in academic growth. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) continue to work on this gap in the research, finding that limited information exists specifically related to the roles and responsibilities of principals as they support students with disabilities and the special educators who serve them. In another study, Lasky and Karge (2006) cite the need for research on training for principals focused on special education law. This perceived lack of research-based review of principal practice to support students with disabilities has existed since the inception of EAHCA.

Research on the impact of the principal on the education of students with disabilities began with Nevin in 1979. Nevin's study of 56 schools in Vermont outlined specific competencies listed as essential to principal performance, determining that the following competencies were necessary to provide high-quality service to students with disabilities (a) evaluating program data to make decisions based on student need, (b) interpreting federal and state laws for compliance with EAHCA, and (c) having an understanding of due process requirements. Nevin (1979) found that additional training to support administrators was needed to build their competencies in the areas of "maintaining knowledge of current trends, research, and programs for handicapped [sic] children. The next highest training needs were in the areas of keeping data based records, planning programs, interpreting mandates, and using evaluation data for program

revision” (p. 364). No additional studies of the impact on principals on the education of children with exceptionalities were found that year.

The lack of educational research that existed around this topic at a time when the education of students with disabilities had become law makes a statement. Where could principals go to learn how to maintain knowledge of current trends if so little information was available? In 1981, Cline examined principals’ knowledge and attitudes toward children with disabilities and discovered that “of major importance is the lack of knowledge on the part of principals concerning handicapped students. It appears that a major emphasis by teacher trainers and in-service programs must be on educating principals” (p. 174). These studies are significant because they were considered initial attempts to examine the role of the principal as they worked to address the academic success of students with disabilities.

While the task of learning special education rules and regulations is large, it is possible for principals to take it one step at a time in an organized fashion. It is also vital they accept this responsibility and obtain the knowledge. As Jacobs et al. note, “Having a basic knowledge of special education appears to be fundamental to a principal’s ability to supervise special education programs” (2004, p. 8).

There are key areas of special education legal knowledge that provide principals with a map of how to create successful student programming. Research by Burrello and Zadnik (1986) established the importance of a principal’s ability to determine staff qualifications and set job requirements, evaluate program effectiveness on students’ academic outcomes, resolve conflict, and provide program leadership. Principals must

have competencies in all of these areas if they are to be effective instructional leaders and participate in shared leadership for students with disabilities who learn in today's classrooms. "Training relative to knowledge and laws in special education is paramount to the efficient and effective operation of special education programs for administrators," and this knowledge impacts how principals can serve their school in productive ways (Jacobs et al., 2004, p. 10). To have an understanding of where the special education legal knowledge fits into the multiple facets of the principalship is imperative for quality decision-making, as much is asked of principals. A tool that aids in sorting through all of this is a comprehensive understanding of the leadership domains that impact the principalship and how special education legal knowledge fits in each.

### **Principal Leadership Domains**

The principalship can be complicated and demanding as there are many facets of the job. Legislative and social changes can affect the expectations placed upon principals. Principals can be expected to provide a response to new information, while factoring in educational and social norms at any time. When analyzing the various components of the job, there are specific skills sets needed for specific types of work. Schools are dynamic organizations with ever-changing needs. From an organizational lens, schools are ever-changing and complicated, and demands for information come to principals on multiple fronts simultaneously (Goldring, Huff, Math, & Camburn, 2008). Principals are tasked with making decisions about how to best allocate their time to maximize their impact on the school as an organization and must be ready to do so at any time (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2011).

When examining principal leadership, the expectation of quality decisions in a constantly evolving environment comes from district-level leadership. These requirements move down the leadership chain to school principals. Jones and Howley (2009) conducted research on superintendents to examine the practices needed to determine how time is devoted to specific leadership tasks. In their research, the contextual variable of school enrollment, locale, socio-economic status, school funding, and percentage of minority students were all considered. Findings indicate that district-level leadership creates the expectation for principal action at the building level.

Rayfield and Diamantes (2011) investigated the leadership tasks required from principals connecting practitioners to state-level educational administration and supervision programs for the K-12 setting in Ohio. Working with a focus group of acting principals, the team categorized principal duties, highlighted specific trends, and constructed a framework for job-specific components to the principalship. Their list of 25 job-specific items—such as compliance with state mandates, budget management, and special education supervision—was given to practicing principals to help determine leadership domains. Empirical data from this research found that two leadership domains, instructional leadership and managerial duties, impacted all areas of principals' work.

Valentine and Prater (2011) offer a perspective in principal leadership behavior with research analyzing the impact of three leadership domains (managerial, instructional, and transformational) on the principalship. These three domains were connected through the lens of principal impact on student achievement via state standardized test results from public rural, suburban, and urban high schools grades nine

through twelve in Missouri. Two assessments were used to determine leadership domain activity for principals: The Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) adapted from Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) to consider principal transformational leadership, and the Audit of Principal Effectiveness (APE) adapted from Valentine and Bowman (1988). The addition of transformational leadership in this research considers the ability of a principal to build a team that can problem-solve, collaborate, and have collective capacity that is strong (Marks & Printy, 2003). Leadership behaviors and domains were a key area of study during this time. Specific to Ohio, the Ohio Assessments for Educators (OAE) was released in the hopes to impact practice statewide. In 2013, OAE was created to provide a framework specific to Ohio which set a focus for school leadership in the following domains: visionary and inclusive leadership, student learning, systems for building capacity, resource management, and educational law. Valentine and Prater (2011) found that leadership behaviors of high school principals can impact student achievement. In particular, three transformational leadership behaviors by principals impacted variance in assessment scores.

Valentine and Prater's (2011) model found in Figure 3, presents specific leadership behaviors that impact the school setting. A focus on setting a vision, fostering group goals, and providing a model are all factors a principal can use to impact success in student learning in their school. Principals operate within specific social contexts which are different in each school and can include everything from local politics to the socioeconomic status of students in the school. The social context includes the needs of the school and the community as a whole which impact the principalship in any setting in

an all-encompassing manner. There are district leadership behaviors that can also shape the impact a principal has on a school to impact student learning. Nine of these behaviors are noted in Figure 3, and each is modeled by principals and fits into one of the three leadership domains of the principalship.



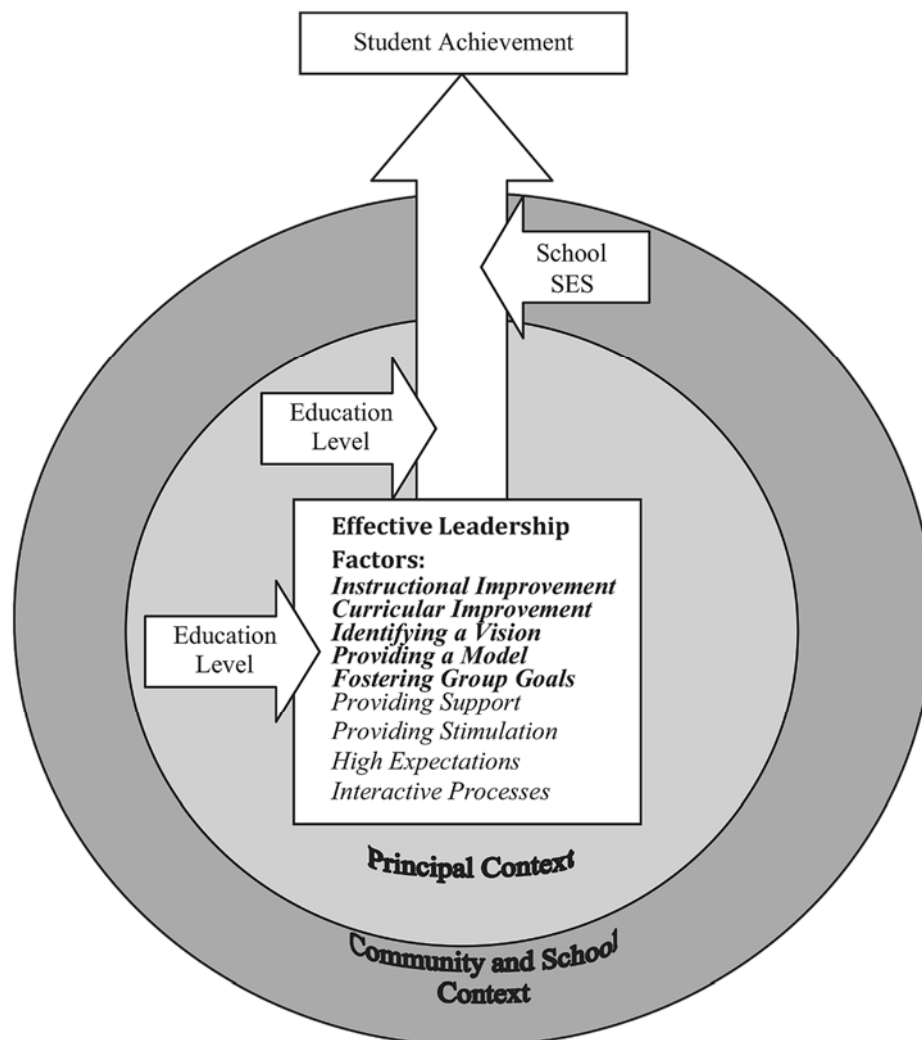


Figure 3. Valentine and Prater's model for principal impact on student achievement.

Reprinted from "Instructional, Transformational, and Managerial Leadership and Student Achievement: High School Principals Make a Difference," by J. W. Valentine and M. Prater, 2011, *NASSP Bulletin*, 95(1)5–30, p. 21.

Research into leadership domains for principals was furthered by Lewis (2015) with a definition of specific leadership domains. Lewis grounds his work in theory from Cuban (1988) and Jones and Howley (2009). Cuban theorized that three leadership

domains affect the school setting: instructional, managerial, and political. Jones and Howley examined the practices needed to determine how much of a principal's time is devoted to specific leadership tasks while also considering the contextual variables that affect a school.

Lewis (2015) operationalized definitions and specific actions for the three leadership domains that impact principal action and proposed instructional leadership includes six components principals will focus on:

making student and adult learning the priority; setting high expectations for performance; gearing content and instruction to standards; creating a culture of continuous learning for adults; using multiple sources of data to assess learning; and activating the community's support for school success. (p. 26)

Lewis defined managerial leadership with direction from the Ohio Standards for Principals (2007) drafted by ODE. Managerial leadership creates a safe and secure learning environment as a result of leading school operations and effectively allocating school resources. According to Lewis (2015), political leadership is directly impacted by the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC ) standards in which principals engage with legal, social, economic, and political factors to promote success for each student.

Lewis (2015) conducted research with middle school principals in Ohio using a self-analysis of the time spent in each leadership domain which also considered the locale and specific school contexts that impacted each principal's time allocation. Lewis then created an organizational chart to consider the leadership domains associated with

activities for which principals are directly responsible. A model of the activities required by the position of school principal by leadership domain can be found in Figure 4.

Principals will engage in specific tasks while functioning within each domain; Figure 4 provides a clear map of the skills principals must model for each of the three leadership domains.



Figure 4. A model of principals' activities divided by leadership domain. Adapted from Lewis, 2015, p. 65-66.

The activities outlined by Lewis (2015) comprise the tasks and actions principals must undertake to meet the responsibilities of their positions. The components of principal leadership domains directly impact the actions required and executed by principals. All actions taken by principals can be coded by their leadership domain and can be placed into one of the three leadership domains.

**Conclusion.** All three of the of principal leadership domains (instructional, managerial, and political) impact the work of the principalship and special education legal knowledge impacts each of the leadership domains. The policies, activities, and actions taken by principals when serving students with disabilities directly impact all three leadership domains. This framework connects special education legal knowledge to the principalship as a whole and it is not possible to succeed at one without the other. In a time when compliance is mandated, special education legal knowledge is vital for principals to have as they move through the domains, completing their required tasks. Special education legal knowledge and the amount a principal possesses are a part of the instructional leadership needed to craft a vision for a school (Billingsley, 2004). An academic plan and vision are both components of responsive programming to serve students with disabilities. The focus of principal behaviors to support student achievement and principal behaviors in general, determines the extent to which school leaders will impact an organizational focus on student achievement (Urlick & Bowers, 2014). What is important to the principal, becomes important to those who provide service and leadership in the school.

**Summary**

This chapter first discussed IDEA, a historical context of the court cases that impacted it, and the connections of NCLB to IDEA. Next, attention was turned to the principalship as an institution and how principals can impact students with disabilities and how the principal can support their access to quality to education. There is a paucity of research specific to the role of principals as it applies explicitly to students with disabilities. Finally, the chapter reviewed the leadership domains that impact the principalship which include the instructional, managerial, and political domains. Special education legal knowledge impacts each of these domains.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the type of data collection used during this study. A population of high school and middle school assistant and head principals were selected for this study. The school district types selected for the study included rural, suburban, and urban according to typology codes in Ohio. The organization of the items on the instrument is presented next, followed by an explanation of data collection, analyses, and a summary of the chapter.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine and capture the current special education legal knowledge principals in Ohio possess as they serve as a team member or the official district representative on an IEP team. Special education legal knowledge as it relates to the IEP and due process components of the state process, the characteristics of principals, and the possible impact of locale were investigated in this study. The main research question guiding the study was:

- What is the perception (urban, suburban, and rural) secondary principals in Ohio have of their own special education legal knowledge used while serving as a representative of the school district?

The three objectives for this research study were:

- To describe the demographics of principals in Ohio related to length and breadth of experience, training, and special education experience and knowledge;
- To determine principals' perceptions regarding their special education legal

knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team; and

- To determine the effects of the demographic variables (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school) on principals' levels of special education legal knowledge.

### **Methodology**

According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) and Muijs (2004), quantitative research with a numeric focus provides a chance to explain phenomena, to understand information, by collecting numerical data and analyzing it statistically. Descriptive statistics are a specific kind of data analysis and fits well with survey research. This is a method that can be used when a researcher would “want to look at relationships between variables occurring in particular real-life contexts” (Muijs, 2004, p. 38). “Inferential statistics allow researchers to find ways to connect with the data and enable a researcher to make a supposition about a population based on a sample from the population being studied” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 494). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in this research study.

Vogt et al. (2014) describe survey research at its core as a plan to code and analyze data in a meaningful way. The data for this study provided information on the skill set and potential needs of principals surrounding special education legal knowledge, which enables principals to make programming decisions to effectively serve students. Survey research created the opportunity for comparison between groups of respondents where experiences and perceptions of knowledge can be considered (Muijs, 2004). Hoy



(2010) shares the importance of examining the relationships between multiple variables; the proper time order relationship will need to be established to show evidence of a cause and effect of the variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). An additional component to the study was the specific inclusion of secondary school principals as the respondents.

### **Research Design**

A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design was selected for the proposed study. Cross-sectional survey research allowed for a one point in time contact with participants from multiple groups (Dillman et al., 2014; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Muijs, 2004). This research design plan fit the needs of the current study as it allowed for a snapshot in time of principal knowledge and potential learning needs. This design also allowed for a sample of principals from rural, urban, and suburban settings to be included. The data allowed for perspectives from multiple settings and potentially varied perceptions to be considered.

Time is a factor in the survey design selected. The researcher is a current practitioner who can speak of the pressures placed on time for principals as they need to complete multiple tasks with efficiency. Knowing this, the same approach was taken to set the duration of time for the proposed survey. It was imperative to consider time in the design of this survey given how many different duties fill a principal's day.

Cross-sectional survey research has its challenges; one that was considered is the potential difficulty to establish time order. Johnson and Christensen (2008) state two conditions are needed for establishing cause and effect, one is time order and the second is how variables change over time. Data collected from principals from one point in time

makes it harder to measure changes that may have occurred in them over time. Changes in special education legal knowledge may occur in time-based experiences with students and IEP meetings.

**Research context.** An additional aspect to the selected research design is a contextual focus. Contextualization helps researchers identify the time frame and setting in which an event occurred (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). The goal is to consider the space in life and the time and place events occur in to learn more about the impact of experiences observed. The importance of considering the context of practicing principals as they work through challenges and questions regarding special education is highly valued in the current research. Wineburg, Reisman, and Gillis (2015) explain the stabilizing force of contextualization as it “anchors texts in place and time” (p. 637). Data that are collected and analyzed from the respondents through survey research could be used to impact school settings statewide. Patterns, ideas, and themes exist in responses from practitioners that can impact future practice. Johnson and Christensen (2008) stress the importance of researchers understanding both the “conditions that existed at the time of occurrence,” which assist in understanding concepts emerging from collected data” (p. 433).

For this study, the researcher secured contextual data utilizing the Common Core of Data program (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Next, data from ODE were considered using state typology codes of Ohio School Districts to identify the locale of each possible principal’s school (i.e., rural, urban, suburban; ODE, 2013a). Determining the climate that frames data collection is important. It is also important to

understand and share the pictures presented by the data produced. Vogt et al. (2014) discuss how the use of descriptive statistics allows for research to present the story of the respondents being studied. The ultimate goal for this research was to present the story of the respondents and to use the data in a meaningful way to share information about potential needs for principals in the state of Ohio for continuing professional learning.

**Population.** The population for this study was all secondary principals in the state of Ohio who work in rural, urban, and suburban districts. For the purpose of this study, a principal is defined any administrator who holds a principal license in Ohio. The role of an assistant principal is filled by duties that a principal must complete. The role is not to be an assistant to the principal. The level of service included an assistant or head position. The principal license held was the determining factor of a respondent meeting criteria to participate. The respondents who were assistant principals were teammates on the school leadership team and met all requirements to hold principal licensure in Ohio.

Secondary principals were chosen as they work with students who have an IEP that includes the transition component designed to help prepare students for success upon graduation in post-secondary education or training, independent living skills, and employability. These requirements are planned for and formalized in sections four and five of the Ohio IEP document. These sections are required for students starting at the age of fourteen *Whose IDEA Is This?* (IDEA, 2004; ODE, 2012b) and only impacts students in the secondary setting. Sections four and five are specific areas where knowledge of the IEP and the requirements of IDEA are needed to make appropriate decisions as a building leader and representative of the school district. Secondary principals provide leadership

in the setting where students begin to accrue the high school credits necessary to move towards or meet graduation requirements. Graduation is the final step of the schooling experience and signifies the successful completion of the K-12 educational program. The specific pressures of these job responsibilities as they relate to students in this grade band and the way they impact principals' perceptions of special education legal knowledge are of particular interest to the researcher. This specialized grade-band of schooling requires specific knowledge of the rules and regulations of IDEA to ensure students have access to the programming they qualify for and deserve. This programming is built on an individual basis; knowledge of the rules in IDEA is critical to ensure compliant service delivery.

ODE "classifies public school districts by typology for research purposes based on a statistical analysis of shared demographic and geographic characteristics" (ODE, 2013a, para. 1). Three district types (i.e., rural, urban, and suburban) were selected for study in this research, as these major grouping descriptors were used to classify typology for schools in Ohio. ODE consulted various resources to determine the factors to type districts including the 2010 U.S. Census, ODE statistical reports, and taxation documents, to update information from the 2007 district typology report (ODE, 2013b). The four major groupings for district types in and descriptors can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

*Categorization of School Type Groupings*

Locale	General factors	Unique factors
Rural	Average student poverty Small population and enrollment Small student minority population Significant agricultural tax base Low parental educational attainment	Small tax base Low population density
Small town	Average student poverty Average population and enrollment Average minority population Mix of agricultural and professional employment Average parental educational attainment	Low population density
Suburban	Low student poverty Large population and enrollment Average student minority population Primarily professional employment High parental attainment	Large tax base
Urban	High student poverty Very large population and enrollment High student minority population Average parental educational attainment Mix of professional and nonagricultural employment	High population density

*Note.* From ODE (2013b, p. 7).

The code system includes a numerical designation for each type of district. Districts are represented with codes from 0 - 8. There are 609 school districts in Ohio (ODE, 2013a). These districts serve approximately 1.69 million students according to the 2014-2015 fact and figure information (ODE, 2015b). Of the 609 school districts, 231 qualify as codes one or two in the typology report, meaning they are identified as rural

school districts. One hundred twenty-three districts meet requirements to be typology codes five and six, i.e., suburban school districts. There are 55 urban schools in typology codes seven and eight (ODE, 2013a). According to data released from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), there are 1,470 schools in Ohio that met the definition of middle school and high school for the current study.

Middle schools were defined as schools that had grade limits with a low grade of fifth and a high grade of ninth. Various districts define schools serving these grades as intermediate, middle, junior high. For this research study, the schools in this grade band configuration were classified as middle schools. The student population grades for high school were limited to schools that had a low grade of sixth and a high grade of twelfth. Public middle and high schools were selected for this survey to ensure students receiving special education services were a part of the student base. There was the possibility that students with disabilities may not be represented in a traditional way in charter, private, and parochial schools. In these types of schools there is the option for selection of students in a way that does not exist in a public-school setting. As a result, only public secondary schools were selected for this study.

**Sample size.** The sample population of focus for this study included principals who work in urban, suburban, and rural middle and high schools in Ohio. Numerically, the researcher wanted to establish a sample that would produce a 95% level of confidence for data from the respondents. The needed sample size to produce this was a total of 305 middle and high school principals. In an effort to include a wide range of respondents, survey information was sent to principals and assistant principals. Principals serving at

any level (e.g., assistant or head) are certified in the state of Ohio to make decisions regarding special education legal issues. Principals serving at any level may serve as a representative of the district in IEP meetings. In addition to including multiple licensed principals from buildings, the researcher made the decision to over sample. The total number of individuals that responded to the survey was 412 but the number of usable surveys was 245 (15.8%). Usable surveys were defined as surveys that contained no missing data within the survey but not including the demographic variables. As the usable survey number was smaller than the needed sample size of 305 (for 95% confidence interval) the researcher acknowledge that the confidence interval was larger than 95% but within the 90% level.

Vogt et al. (2014) present a clear picture for researchers that “the bigger the better” and that “it never hurts statistically to have more cases” (p. 300). However, while sample size is important, it is not the only piece to consider when conducting credible research. Fowler (2014) shares that for many survey samples, small fractions of total populations are included which does not impact the research in a negative way when generalizing data from the sample to the total population for the group of interest. Level of precision when considering a margin of error is an additional factor that must be considered beyond sample size.

### **Research Analysis**

The research design selected for this study was a descriptive/explanatory design where the demographic variables were described and then utilized as the independent variables and the likert-like scale was the dependent variable. Online survey software

(i.e., Qualtrics) was used to gather perception data from principals working in urban, rural, and suburban middle and high schools in Ohio around their current special education legal knowledge and how this impacted their work. Perception data were also collected from principals surrounding their interest in continued professional development and their learning style preferences for professional development. Knowledge data were aggregated and analyzed from principals to determine their expertise surrounding the components on an IEP in the state of Ohio and their proficiency in the elements of the due process system. One of the relationships of key interest was considering the variable of special education legal knowledge and the perceived need for future training to increase that knowledge. An additional variable relationship examined was special education legal knowledge and the style for future professional learning around future legal knowledge. Muijs (2014) challenges researchers to remember when looking at the relationship between variables it is important to consider if the relationship is statistically significant between the variables and if so, what is the strength of this relationship? A simple random sample is the cornerstone of all sampling methods (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 225). A simple random sample includes the option for all to be included in the respondent pool. Fowler (2014) explains that simple random sampling allows for members of a total population to be selected one at time, independent of each other and without replacement, equating the procedure to a sample being drawn from a hat. For this research study, this would mean every middle and high school principal in the state of Ohio had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study. The survey included principals of public middle and high schools in districts coded



as urban, rural, and suburban. This allowed for the results to be more accurately generalized to the total population. Multiple factors needed to be considered when constructing a sample. For this research, a large enough sample size needed to be selected to allow for “sufficient information for interpretation and replication” (Vogt et al., 2014, p. 208). Given the time and financial constraints of building a data set that is inclusive to principals statewide added additional challenges. The ultimate goal was for a minimum of 150 principals to respond to the research survey and the result was total of 245 useable surveys collected.

The study considered the following seven variables: special education legal knowledge, special education professional learning needs, locale, gender, prior teaching certification, years of experience, years of experience, SES of student population, and number of IEP meetings attended. The dependent variables in the study were special education legal knowledge and professional learning needs.

### **Instrumentation**

The goal of this research was to better understand the impact of various factors of the principalship that impact the amount of special education legal knowledge which a principal possesses. The available literature on special education legal knowledge and the impact on teachers, students and parents is plentiful. As one starts to look for literature specific to principals, the amount of existing literature gets smaller. Militello et al. (2009) published a study on principal legal knowledge and how gaps in this knowledge impact practice. This research conducted at a national level was specific to secondary school principals, which included a random sample of the 8,000 members of NASSP. The goal

was to determine their basic legal knowledge on the rights of students and teachers and how this knowledge is used to impact the daily work of a principal. The results of the study found that “85% of the principals reported they would change their behavior if they had more legal knowledge” (Militello et al., 2009, p. 27). While the survey created for this research included sections on special education, this was not the focus of the entire survey.

As a researcher and practicing principal, this work was fascinating to learn about. This interest led to a search for more specific special education legal knowledge for principals, however, there was limited research available. This caused a need for the researcher to work to create an instrument that would allow data collection specific to principals in Ohio around special education legal knowledge. An initial step included the need to operationalize what special education legal knowledge was. To do so, three documents were consulted to build the instrument. The ODE Office for Exceptional Children produced a document, *Annotations for the IEP PR-07*, and State Support Team 6, an Ohio education service center, produced an *IEP Compliance Checklist* (2016). Statewide, teachers, principals, and special education directors use these documents to determine and quantify needed components in compliant IEPs. Additional information was framed from the procedural safeguards that set the standards for the work done around special education in the state of Ohio. This document, *Whose IDEA is This?* (ODE, 2012b), is the parents’ procedural safeguards guide to the IDEIA of 2004. From these sources, a three section survey was created. The survey is included in Appendix D.

Section one of the survey allowed for demographic data collection. This section included questions about current assignment, years of experience, gender, certification before the principalship, estimates of the number of IEP meetings attended as a district representative, and feedback on professional development attended. Section two of the survey was created to collect information about the special education legal knowledge of secondary principals. This section included 26 knowledge statements that principals rated their confidence using a likert-type scale with choices that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Section two also presented questions that assessed legal knowledge in the components of the IEP and knowledge in the dispute resolution process. In section three, professional learning needs options were presented to respondents. Professional learning needs, possible topics, frequency of desired trainings, and provider options were all data collection points.

Content analysis was used to identify important components from each of the documents to operationalize the concept of special education legal knowledge. Krippendorff (1989) describes the value of content analysis as a research tool as it creates clarity in the meaning and message of a concept. The construct of special education legal knowledge is broad and could create multiple images for principals. The construct is what is of value to measure, more important than specific single components of the IEP or single items in the survey (DeVellis, 2012). The IEP service areas and the procedural safeguards were both considered, ensuring all areas of the special education process could be presented to respondents. Content analysis allows for meaning to be appropriately applied to data to a context (Krippendorff, 1989). Including both

components was important because it represented the entire process of an IEP. Principals must to be able to respond to the academic, programming, and legal needs of students. This comprehensive approach helped to quantify special education legal knowledge.

The next step in review of the instrument included consultation from teachers, principals, and special education directors. The method for question review was a think-aloud which helped with improved clarity for questions, fluency in wording, and improvement in interpretation. A think-aloud allows for a constructive critique to occur on a document, having a group of potential participants use the instrument and provide feedback while actively engaged with the process (Van den haak, De Jong, & Schellens, 2003). This kind of feedback can result in possible changes, additions, and enhancements to create a more user-friendly tool that has increased content validity. The experts selected to participate in the think-aloud sections were from urban and suburban school districts in Ohio and Michigan. Feedback from these groups helped to frame formatting decisions for the instrument. An example of feedback impact was scale development in which the final proposed product included positively worded items. DeVellis (2012) shares the importance of using positively worded times as they allow for assessment of the “construct of interest” (p. 83). Feedback from the group expressed that framing questions in this manner could allow for a respondent to move through the instrument at a smoother pace. As a result of the feedback provided, specific language was changed to be written in a similar style to language from the procedural safeguards (ODE, 2012b).

By assessing the relationship between components of the IEP and key parts of the procedural safeguards, the researcher can evaluate possible relationships of working

information for principals (DeVellis, 2012). This allowed the researcher to analyze the latent variable of special education legal knowledge for secondary principals in Ohio. Items were selected in section two of the survey to target relationships between constructs for general knowledge of the components of the IEP. There are fourteen components of an IEP (fifteen components for students identified with a visual impairment) in the state of Ohio. All parts of the IEP do not have the same impact on overall legal knowledge. The survey was produced for strategic data collection on the constructs most needed for comprehensive special education legal knowledge. The survey was developed to consider various constructs that reflect the latent variable of special education legal knowledge. DeVellis (2012) operationalizes the term latent variable as a quantity that exists as a potential, while also growing and changing, which fit the concept of special education legal knowledge well. “An aspect of the latent variable is that it is typically a characteristic of the individual who is the source of data” (DeVellis, 2012, p. 18). Data collection from principals allowed for the assessment of the latent variable, i.e., special education legal knowledge.

Using the survey from Militello et al. (2009) as a framework, the researcher built a survey for data collection with three distinct parts each designed to measure a different construct. Part one considered contextual information for prior and present administrative experiences and demographic information. Part two evaluated special education legal knowledge. Part three considered the potential future needs for professional learning and the format which principals prefer to learn in. Militello and his team created a survey that included a section on legal knowledge. Respondents had forced choice question items

with answer options of true, false, or unsure. The researcher created different response categories for the special education legal knowledge section using a Likert-type scale. The scale in the current survey including the following ratings: 1 = “Strongly Agree,” 2 = “Agree,” 3 = “Disagree,” 4 = “Strongly Disagree.” Four items were intentionally selected for response choice options. Part three of the survey is necessary as it includes a section on description of professional learning needs for special education legal knowledge. This section also included forced choice responses for survey items. Literature on questionnaire design found that five to seven choices were most commonly used. The value in creating scales that fit into this range comes from the need to provide validity and reliability (Jones & Loe, 2013).

**Organization of the items on the instrument.** The researcher organized the items on the instrument in a sequence specific to the flow of information. The researcher asked respondents who they are, what they know, what they want to learn, and what format would they like to learn it in. Part one of the survey instrument collected data on the contextual experiences of the respondents. Data from this section were coded based on the locale of the respondent, urban, suburban, or rural. Part two of the survey instrument allowed for data to be compiled while responding to questions using a Likert-type scale. Questions from this section were designed to quantify the special education legal knowledge of principals. Part three of the survey was assembled to explore a description of professional learning needs for special education legal knowledge. Statistical analysis of the results allowed the researcher to consider the frequency of

responses to identify trends in the data for potential professional development needs for principals statewide.

**Data collection.** For the survey distribution, the researcher loaded the instrument into Qualtrics so it could be sent out electronically to principals. The list of contact email addresses was composed from information provided by the Ohio Department of Education. Once this list was obtained, individual school websites were checked to locate the name and email addresses of assistant principals. Most, but not all, of the middle schools and high schools had assistant principals. Permission to use Qualtrics came from the College of Education at Ohio University. Qualtrics allowed for secure data collection and storage for respondent information. Following Dillman's et al. (2014) method, the researcher created a plan using mixed methods of communication to invite principals to participate in the survey. Communication methods included email and phone calls to respondents. An initial email was sent to inform respondents with general information about the survey, and this email included a link to the survey. Follow-up emails were sent to respondents to invite them to participate in the survey. Follow-up phone calls were made to respondents who had started but had not finished the survey. The researcher worked with the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to include appropriate consent information for all participants. Appendix E includes the IRB approval for the survey.

**Data analysis.** The questionnaire consisted of various sections such as demographics and scale items with likert-like response categories (four response categories) and a section that focused on training needs with a yes/no response (binary).

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) as the statistical procedures. Data were reported according to whether the data were categorical, interval, or ratio. Frequencies and means were utilized to summarize the demographic and characteristic variables and the yes/no response section. The questionnaire consisted of questions that focused on the perception of the respondents' knowledge of special education legal knowledge and the scale response items were four likert-like responses. Because the questionnaire used the response format of likert-like the scales a grand mean score was determined for the questionnaire (SELK). Data reported by response category (likert-like) also had an interpretive scale that assisted in the understanding of results of the scores. The interpretive scale was developed by the researcher. Questionnaire data were examined to ensure that the assumptions of parametric data were not violated. Review of the data indicated no violations of normality and independence. Researcher utilized the Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance in order to meet the assumption of variance homogeneity and then proceeded with the ANOVA analysis. Results from this study could add to the literature as it provides respondent analysis on the extent to which current, practicing principals have special education legal knowledge specific to special education services in Ohio. In addition, as knowledge was quantified, data are now available for what new information is needed and beneficial for principals. Little data exist from principals regarding what they need and in what format they would like to receive professional development. Inclusion of their experiences and opinions on the topic addresses a gap in the literature and could be used at a district and statewide level to frame professional development



around this content. A gap in the literature surrounding principals' perceptions of professional learning needs would also be addressed. While there is literature on what researchers believe principals need to know; there is very limited literature from current practitioners surrounding their actual needs. Legal knowledge that comes when a due process has been initiated is knowledge that has come too late.

A study considering the legal and professional learning needs of principals provides meaningful information to those who program and plan for school districts in Ohio. Data identifying potential needed topics provides understanding on how to support principals in effectively using professional learning as a tool for increasing their special education legal knowledge. Information from practitioners could be examined at a school, district, or state level when thinking about how to responsively prepare principals to meet the needs of students with disabilities and the teachers who serve them. Militello et al. (2009) shared research that predicts that one in five principals can expect to be involved in legal action during their career. This is a relevant time for school leaders in Ohio to come together and implement a plan for providing ways for principals to engage in professional learning around special education legal knowledge.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented information on methodology and the objectives that framed the research study. Additional information included sections on research design, research context, and research analysis. An explanation of the dependent variable, the special educational legal knowledge questionnaire scale was presented. A description of the research that impacted the instrument and the process used to build and organize the

instrument were shared. The process selected for data collection was explained.

Information about the specific data collected and analyses used are presented in detail in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter presents the findings of a study designed to explore the perceptions of secondary principals in Ohio regarding their special education legal knowledge and need for training in this area. The research question was: What is the perception (urban, suburban, and rural) secondary principals in Ohio have of their own special education legal knowledge used while serving as a representative of the school district? The objectives were to: (a) describe the demographics of principals in Ohio related to length and breadth of experience, training, and special education experience and knowledge; (b) determine principals' perceptions regarding their special education legal knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team; and (c) determine the effects of the demographic variables (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school) on principals' levels of special education legal knowledge. The chapter begins by presenting specific demographic information to frame respondent experiences. Next, knowledge levels were determined from the data analysis on two parts of special education legal knowledge, IEP components, and knowledge of the dispute resolution process. Finally, analysis regarding the professional learning needs from practitioners is presented.

### **Objective One**

Results will be presented by research objective. The first objective is to describe the demographics of principals in Ohio related to length and breadth of experience, training, and special education experience and knowledge.

**Current professional assignment.** Respondents were asked to indicate their current assignment. Response options were Principal, Assistant/Vice Principal, or Other. The responses were as follows: Principals (n = 187, 76.3%) and Assistant/Vice Principals (n = 57, 23.3%). There was a third option for respondents, “Other,” where respondents could indicate their current assignment. One respondent chose Other but did not fill in a current assignment description (n = 1, .4%).

**Years of experience as a school principal.** Respondents were asked to indicate their number of years working as a school principal (including the years they had served as both an assistant and/or head) principal. The original data were collected as an open-ended response with the respondent writing the exact number of years as a school principal. The overall mean was 10.11 years with a standard deviation of 6.29 and a total of 244 participants responded. The original data were then grouped into the following categories for ease of analysis: (a) 0-5, (b) 6-10; (c) 11-15, (d) 16-20, (e) 21-25, (f) 26-30, and (g) 31-35. The years working as a principal ranged from 0 years to 35 years. Table 2 demonstrates the data within the researcher-developed categories.

Table 2

*Years of Experience Distribution of Secondary Principals in Ohio*

Years of experience	n	Percentage
0-5	70	28.7
6-10	76	31.1
11-15	51	20.9
16-20	34	13.9
21-25	8	3.3
26-30	3	1.2
31-35	2	.8
Total	244	

*Note.* One respondent failed to respond.  $M = 10.11$ ;  $SD = 6.22$ .

**Gender.** The respondents were asked to indicate their gender as one of two categories: female or male. The majority of the respondents in the survey indicated their gender as male ( $n = 180$ , 74%), while the remainder reported being female ( $n = 65$ , 26%).

**Teaching certification.** The respondents were asked to indicate what certification/licensure they held before they became an administrator. Response choices were as follows: general education, intervention specialist (i.e., special education), or other. A total of 245 individuals responded to this question. A majority of the respondents indicated they had previous certification in general education ( $n = 208$ , 84.90%). There were 19 (7.80%) respondents who were previously certified in special education. Eighteen (7.30%) of the respondents indicated their previous certification was in the “other” category, which they listed as being dually certified in general and special education ( $n = 3$ ), career-tech ( $n = 2$ ), music education ( $n = 2$ ), English ( $n = 1$ ), both general education and intervention specialist but the intervention specialist had expired, health ( $n = 2$ ), physical education ( $n = 3$ ) and intervention specialist ( $n = 1$ ), long term

substitute (n = 1), agriculture (n = 1), business education and business education (n = 1), and assistant superintendent, school psychologist (n = 1).

**Number of IEP meetings attended.** The respondents were asked to estimate the number of IEP meetings they attended during a typical school year. The number of estimated IEP meeting they attended a year ranged from 0 to 180 IEP meetings. Due to the nature of these estimated data, these data were presented as a range only. The estimated number of meetings was regrouped into categories for ease of data analysis. The categories included: (a) 0 - 25, (b) 26 - 50, (c) 51 - 75, (d) 76 - 100, (e) 101 - 125, (f) 126 - 150, (g) 151 - 175, and (h) 176 - 200. Table 3 shows these data in the researcher determined categories.

Table 3

*Estimated Number of IEP Meetings Attended During School Year*

Number of IEP meetings attended	n	Percentage
0 - 25	123	50.2
26 - 50	87	35.5
51 - 75	15	6.1
76 - 100	15	6.1
101 - 125	2	.8
126 - 150	2	.8
151 - 175	0	0
176 - 200	1	.4

*Note.* Two respondents indicated that assistant principal goes to the meetings. One respondent indicated they went to 60 as an assistant principal and 5 as principal.

**Number of IEP meetings attended as a district representative.** Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage (from 0 to 100%) of IEP meetings they attended as the district representative. When a respondent attends an IEP meeting as the district

representative, they are assuming the responsibility to speak on behalf of the district on matters related to resources, general education curriculum, and as someone who can supervise instruction that is specially designed to meet the individual needs of a student with disabilities (ODE, 2012b). This is the highest level of responsibility a principal can accept on behalf of the school district during an IEP meeting. Respondents reported this response as an open-ended response and the data ranged from 0 to 100% of the IEP meetings a year. The data were regrouped into categories for ease of data analysis. Responses were grouped into the following percent categories: (a) 10-20, (b) 21-30, (c) 31-40, (d) 41-50, (e) 51-60, (f) 61-70, (g) 71-80, (h) 81-90, and (i) 91-100. Table 4 presents these data in the researcher developed categories.

Table 4

*Estimated Number of IEP Meetings Attended as District Representative*

Percentage of IEP meetings as the district representative	n	Percentage
0-10	56	23.2
11-20	26	10.8
21-30	23	9.5
31-40	13	5.4
41-50	11	4.6
51-60	7	2.9
61-70	3	1.2
71-80	14	5.8
81-90	14	5.8
90-100	74	30.7

*Note.* Four respondents failed to respond to this question.

**Special education legal knowledge training.** The respondents were asked to provide feedback for Ohio principal licensure requirements surrounding coursework

regarding special education. Respondents were asked to respond to each of the special education legal knowledge course trainings in which they participated. Each question is listed below along with the mean and standard deviation for the respondents. The response categories and the interpretative response categories are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Level of Impact of Special Education Legal Knowledge Training*

Special education law courses	n	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	Category <sup>b</sup>
Coursework during certification	231	2.89	.96	UI
Coursework as principal	166	2.92	.91	UI
Professional development in last 10 years	221	3.19	.87	UI

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Response scale: 1 = not useful (NU), impacting my work on a quarterly basis or less, 2 = moderately useful (MU), impacting my work on a monthly basis, 3 = useful (U), impacting my work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, 4 = very useful (VU), impacting my weekly or daily work. <sup>b</sup> Interpretive scale: 1 – 1.75= NU, 1.76 – 2.50= MU, 2.51 – 3.25= U, and 3.26 – 4.00= VU.

An additional category was available for respondents, “other” (n = 31) was provided as a way to gain professional knowledge about special education legal knowledge outside of the three possibilities listed. Those responding in the “other” category provided information about how they gained special education legal knowledge training as a principal. Specific responses included online resources (n = 2), professional development (n = 14), Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators conference (n = 2), collaboration with colleagues (n = 5), general school law class (n = 2), discipline and the law (n = 1), special education director (n = 2), compliance through internal monitoring (n = 1), n/a (n = 1), and none (n = 1).



Frequency tables for respondent data on the level of impact professional learning has had on their work from the three possible legal knowledge settings are included in Table 6. The possible levels for legal knowledge provide a range from not useful, impacting work on a quarterly basis or less to very useful impacting work on a weekly or daily basis.

Table 6

*Usefulness and Impact of Special Education Legal Knowledge Training*

Type of special education legal knowledge training	n	%
<b>Principal training and/or certification<sup>1</sup></b>		
Not useful, impacting my work on a quarterly basis or less	16	11.4
Moderately useful, impacting work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	71	45.3
Useful, impacting my weekly on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	66	38.4
Very useful, impacting my weekly or daily work	78	4.9
Total	231	100.0
<b>Course work as principal<sup>2</sup></b>		
Not useful, impacting my work on a quarterly basis or less	10	6.0
Moderately useful, impacting work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	47	28.3
Useful, impacting weekly on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	56	33.7
Very useful, impacting my weekly or daily work	53	31.9
Total	166	100.0
<b>Professional development as a principal during the past 10 years<sup>3</sup></b>		
Not useful, impacting my work on a quarterly basis or less	9	4.1
Moderately useful, impacting work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	40	18.1
Useful, impacting my weekly on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	73	33.0
Very useful, impacting my weekly or daily work	99	44.8
Total	221	100.0

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> = Fourteen respondents did not provide an answer to this question. This means they did not participate in this type of training. <sup>2</sup> = Seventy-nine respondents did not provide an answer to this question. This means they did not participate in this type of training. <sup>3</sup> = Twenty-four respondents did not provide an answer to this question. This response indicates they did not participate in this type of training.

**Objective Two**

The second objective for this research study was to determine principals' perceptions regarding their special education legal knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team.

**Special education legal knowledge.** Respondents were presented with a questionnaire that included positively worded statements about specific special education

legal knowledge components that respondents may or may not understand. A majority of the questions were related to the fourteen parts of an IEP document in Ohio. An additional set of questions were included to allow for data collection on the general knowledge respondents had regarding the legal specifics of administrative review, mediation, facilitation, and understanding of an impartial due process hearing. This section of the survey was created to quantify the special education legal knowledge possessed by secondary principals in Ohio. The data were analyzed by calculating means and standard deviations of the summed scores.

A Likert-type response category was used for the questionnaire with the responses being as follows: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree was used. Given the scale, a low score would indicate high level of knowledge about the various sections of the IEP. A scale was created by the researcher to assist in the interpretation of the responses: 1 – 1.75 = strongly agree, 1.76 - 2.50 = agree, 2.51 - 3.25 = disagree, and 3.26 - 4.00 = strongly disagree. A component of the analysis included determining the means and standard deviations of the responses for each item in the special education legal knowledge part of the survey. The item that received the highest level of agreement from respondents was “[students with disabilities] SWD in clubs & sports” with a mean 1.58 (SD = 0.56). The item that received the second highest level of agreement from respondents was “meeting participants” with a mean of 1.44 (SD = 0.52). Using the interpretive scale, both of those questions scored in the “strongly agree” range.

The item with the lowest level of agreement was “impartial due process hearing” with a mean of 2.46 (SD = 0.77). The item with the second lowest level of agreement from respondents was “facilitator” with a mean of 2.37 (SD = 0.749). The response to both items fell within the “strongly disagree” range. When considered as a whole, the response to the majority of the items (26 items) fell within the “strongly agree” range on the interpretive scale. The overall mean for special education legal knowledge for respondents was 1.8, and the standard deviation for the group was .41.

Table 7 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations for each item pertaining to special education legal knowledge. These scores represent the principals’ levels of agreement with the special education legal knowledge components. Table 9 provides an examination of the categorical breakdown for each question on the survey.

Table 7

*Level of Agreement on Special Education Legal Knowledge of IEP*

Special Education Legal Knowledge IEP Questions	M <sup>a</sup>	SD	Category <sup>b</sup>
SWD in clubs & sports	1.37	.517	SA
Meeting participants	1.44	.522	SA
Modification or accommodation	1.53	.562	SA
Least restrictive environment	1.58	.564	SA
Student profile-explain PINS	1.61	.559	SA
Future planning- postsecondary transition	1.62	.612	SA
Baseline data, needed PD	1.63	.637	SA
Credit data & information for graduation	1.63	.733	SA
State & district testing information	1.67	.609	SA
Specially designed services to consider	1.70	.577	SA
Prior Written Notice	1.71	.622	SA
Future planning statements & goals	1.73	.572	SA
Postsecondary transition school & work	1.77	.606	A
Transition services school responsibility	1.80	.633	A
Course of study, adult linkage support	1.80	.697	A
Explanation of measured progress	1.82	.616	A
Determine well written goals & objectives	1.87	.602	A
PLAAFP with clear instructional levels	1.95	.747	A
Progress in gen ed curriculum- PLAAFP	2.02	.730	A
Qualifications needed for ESY services	2.02	.768	A
Determine quality post-secondary goals	2.04	.688	A
Operating Standards delivery of services	2.07	.674	A
Administrative review	2.11	.670	A
Mediation process	2.33	.718	A

Table 7: continued

IEP Facilitation	2.37	.749	A
Impartial due process hearing	2.46	.770	A

*Note.* N= 245. <sup>a</sup> Response scale: 1 = strongly agree (SA), 2 = agree (A), 3 = disagree (D), and 4 = strongly disagree (DA). <sup>b</sup> Interpretive scale: 1 – 1.75= SA, 1.76 – 2.50= A, 2.51 – 3.25= D, and 3.26 – 4.00= SD

**Professional learning needs.** The third section of the survey was designed to collect data on the professional learning needs of principals for potential future training. Respondents were asked to indicate what areas of special education legal knowledge where they might desire in order to assist teacher with IEP implementation. These possible trainings would provide information pertaining to the IEP form and IEP processes. Table 8 summarizes data regarding professional learning needs to assist teachers with IEP implementation. The respondents were asked to select all that apply in terms of professional learning. Table 8 shows the response of the principals and their perceived need of additional learning options.

Table 8

*Perceived Need for Special Education Legal Knowledge on IEP*

Possible professional learning options	n	%
Academic programming for students	74	17.7
Academic assessment resources for students with disabilities	84	20.0
Team teaching strategies for intervention specialists and general education teachers	144	34.4
Data collection tools and strategies to use for writing IEP goals	105	25.1
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas	12	2.9
Total	419	100.0

*Note.* Some respondents had multiple needs so the total number of responses is above 245 total respondents.

Respondents were asked to provide information on the areas of special education legal knowledge specific to their perceived needs for professional learning regarding procedures for managing dispute resolution procedures between a parent/guardian and a school district who have differences over an IEP. Table 9 reflects the need of the respondents for additional training following disputes.

Table 9

*Perceived Need for Special Education Legal Knowledge on Disputes Resolution*

Procedures for managing dispute resolution	n	%
Administrative review	128	27.5
Mediation	120	25.8
IEP facilitation	77	16.5
Impartial due process hearing	126	27.0
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas	15	3.2
Total	466	100.0

*Note.* Respondents were asked to rank in order of need. Some respondents had multiple needs so the total number of responses is above 245.

Respondents were asked to indicate what professional learning procedures they needed additional training so they could provide information and training to assist teachers in avoiding disputes. Table 10 provides data relevant to principals' professional learning options as they develop teacher capacity. The respondents were asked to select all that apply in terms of professional learning.

Table 10

*Professional Learning Needs by Principals to Assist Teachers to Avoid Disputes*

Possible topics principals can provide training for teachers on to help limit IEP disputes	n	%
Record keeping and data collection for progress reports	92	23.8
Resolving conflicts and legal questions/concerns	128	33.1
Facilitating IEP meetings successfully and efficiently	71	18.3
Writing compliant IEPs.	76	19.6
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas	20	5.2
Total	387	100.0

*Note.* Respondents were asked to rank in order of need. Some respondents had multiple needs so the total number of responses is above 245.

In addition, respondents were asked to provide data on the areas of special education legal knowledge pertaining to preference for a professional learning opportunity that is delivered in one of five styles: (a) on site somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to receive information with limited interaction/working on my own; (b) on site somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to receive information while working with a group from my school district/building team; (c) off site at a local educational service center or meeting center, interactive professional development where a product or plan is created that can be taken back to the school for implementation; (d) modules through online/distance learning completed based on my own schedule and time preferences; and (e) I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas. The respondents indicated how they prefer their learning opportunities delivered in Table 11.



Table 11

*Professional Learning Preferences*

Delivery choices	n	%
On site, somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to receive information with limited interaction/working on my own.	21	8.6
On site, somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to received information while working with a group from my district/building team.	105	51.5
Off site at a local educational service center or meeting center, interactive professional development where a product or plan is created that can be taken back to the school for implementation.	44	21.6
Modules through online/distance learning completed based on my own schedule and time preferences.	23	11.3
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.	11	4.8
Total	204	100.0

*Note.* 41 respondents did not answer this question.

Principals were asked to indicate how often they would like to receive professional learning around special education knowledge. This question focused on the number of sessions per school year. Table 12 reflects the number of times during the school year in which a principal desires their training.

Table 12

*Number of Desired Professional Learning Sessions*

Amount of professional learning around special education legal knowledge	n	%
One session/school semester/two sessions per school year	107	52.5
One session per school year	71	35.8
One session every other school year	16	7.8
One session every three years	4	2.0
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas	6	2.9
Total	204	100.0

*Note.* 41 respondents did not answer this question.

Respondents were asked to respond the following question: “I believe the best team to provide this professional development session on special education legal knowledge would come from (select all that apply).” These data are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

*Preference of Best Team to Provide Special Education Legal Professional Learning*

Educational team to provide principals professional development	n	%
My current school district central office special education staff	64	26.3
My current school district central office special education staff working with the local education service center	86	35.4
My current school district central office staff working with the Ohio Department of Education Office for Exceptional Children	71	29.2
My current school district central office special education staff working with a state college/university	15	6.2
I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas	7	2.9
Total	243	100

*Note.* 41 respondents did not respond.

### Objective Three

The final research objective was to describe the effects of demographic variables urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school status on the level of special education legal knowledge questionnaire.

**Gender.** A comparison of the special education legal knowledge between males and females was determined through calculation of one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The mean item score for females was slightly higher than that for males. Table 14 indicates the sample size, mean knowledge score, and results for comparison for gender. There was a statistically significant difference between males and females ( $p = .004$ ), which can be found in Table 15.

Table 14

*Special Education Legal Knowledge Means and Standard Deviations by Gender*

Gender	n	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Male	180	1.878	.401
Female	65	1.706	0.442
Total <sup>b</sup>	245	1.832	0.419

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Interpretive scale: 1.00 – 1.75 = Strongly Agree; 1.76 – 2.5 = Agree; 2.51 – 3.25 = Disagree; and 3.26 – 4.00 = Strongly Disagree. <sup>b</sup> Reported as overall item mean and standard deviation.

Data from Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance revealed the presence of equal variance between the different gender groups ( $F_{1, 243} = 2.331, p = .128$ ). The differences in special education legal knowledge between the gender groups was statistically significant ( $F_{1, 243} = 8.235, p = .004$ ). Table 18 illustrates the ANOVA results for differences in special education legal knowledge needs by gender.

Table 15

*Differences in Special Education Legal Knowledge by Gender*

Differences in special education legal knowledge by gender	df	SS	MS	F <sup>a</sup>	P <sup>b</sup>
Between Groups	1	1.404	1.404	8.234	.004
Within Groups	243	41.436	.171		
Total	244	42.804			

<sup>a</sup> One Way Analysis of Variance

<sup>b</sup> .05 Alpha Level for the Two-Tailed Test of Significance

**Years of experience as a principal.** Differences in overall special education legal knowledge was examined by the reported years of experiences as a principal. The years of experience with the lowest mean scores was (M = 1.705) was the “26 to 30” years categorized as strongly agreeable on the interpretive scale.

Years of experience considers the time principals have spent working in schools as an assistant/vice principal or as a head principal. These allow the data to provide a sense of the depth of service respondents possess. Table 16 indicates the sample sizes, mean agreement score and standard deviation of the respondents by years of experience on the questionnaire.

Table 16

*Special Education Legal Knowledge Means and Standard Deviations by Years of Experience*

Years of experience	N	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
0-5 Years	70	1.852	.424
6-10 Years	76	1.820	.427
11-15 Years	51	1.730	.417
16-20 Years	34	2.003	.307
21-25 Years	8	1.793	.545
26-30 Years	3	1.705	.421
31-35 Years	2	2.07	.108
Total	244	1.836	.416

*Note:* One respondent failed to respond to years of experience completed item or provide data for calculation of the years of experience. <sup>a</sup> Interpretive scale: 1.00 – 1.75 = strongly agree; 1.76 – 2.5 = agree; 2.51 – 3.25 = disagree; and 3.26 – 4.00 = strongly disagree. <sup>b</sup> Reported as overall item mean and standard deviation.

Results from Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance revealed the presence of equal variance between the different age groups ( $F_{1, 237} = 1.886, p = .084$ ). The differences in overall special education legal knowledge between the age groups were not statistically significant ( $F_{6, 237} = 1.706, p = .120$ ). Table 17 illustrates the ANOVA results for differences in overall special education legal knowledge by years of experiences as a principal.

Table 17

*Differences in Special Education Legal Knowledge by Years of Experience*

Differences in special education legal knowledge by years of experience	df	SS	MS	F <sup>a</sup>	P <sup>b</sup>
Between Groups	6	1.745	.291	1.706	.120
Within Groups	237	40.400	.171		
Total	243	42.145			

<sup>a</sup> One Way Analysis of Variance

<sup>b</sup> .05 Alpha Level for the Two-Tailed Test of Significance

**Title I schools.** Differences in overall special education legal knowledge scores were also examined by the Title I school status of the respondents. The group reporting the lowest overall special education legal knowledge mean item score ( $M = 1.801$ ), which was categorized as “agree” on the interpretive scale, was the Title I status of “No.” The sample sizes, mean agreement, and standard deviation of the scores based on whether or not the schools were identified as Title 1 schools is shown in Table 18.

Table 18

*Special Education Legal Knowledge Means and Standard Deviations by Title I Status*

Title I Status	n	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Yes	143	1.848	.421
No	86	1.801	.418
Total	229	1.830	.419

Results from Levene’s Test of Homogeneity of Variance revealed the presence of equal variance between the two groups ( $F_{1, 227} = .379, p = .539$ ). The differences in overall special education legal knowledge based on whether or not a school was

designated a Title I school were not statistically significant ( $F_{1, 227} = .661, p = .417$ ).

Table 19 illustrates the ANOVA results for differences in overall special education legal knowledge based on whether or not the respondent's school is a Title I school status.

Table 19

*Differences in Special Education Legal Knowledge by Title I Status*

Differences in special education legal Knowledge by Title I status	df	SS	MS	F <sup>a</sup>	p <sup>b</sup>
Between Groups	1	1.404	.117	.661	.417
Within Groups	227	41.436	.117		
Total	228	40.185			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> One Way Analysis of Variance. <sup>b</sup> .05 Alpha Level for the Two-Tailed Test of Significance.

**Typology code for schools.** The data were coded by the researcher for all possible respondents to determine whether the school they lead meets the typology codes to be considered a rural, suburban, or urban school. The results below show the differences between the school types. The sample sizes, overall special education legal knowledge item means and standard deviations for school typology code of respondents are indicated in Table 20.

Table 20

*Special Education Legal Knowledge Means and Standard Deviations by Typology Codes*

Typology codes school type	n	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Suburban	137	1.797	.413
Urban	71	1.835	.429
Rural	23	2.040	.373
Total	231	1.833	.419

Results from the Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance revealed the presence of equal variance between the three typology codes for schools ( $F_{2, 228} = 1.207$ ,  $p = .301$ ). The one way ANOVA indicated a weak statistically significant difference between the typology codes for schools with Suburban schools having a statistically significant lower mean than either rural or urban schools (Suburban schools had a higher mean at 1.79 which was statistically significant from the Urban school at a mean of 2.04). Table 21 illustrates the ANOVA results for the differences in overall special education legal knowledge as identified by typology of the respondents' school location.

Table 21

*Differences in Special Education Legal Knowledge by Typology Codes*

Differences in special education legal knowledge by typology code	df	SS	MS	F <sup>a</sup>	P <sup>b</sup>
Between Groups	2	1.156	.578	3.357	.037
Within Groups	228	39.262	.172		
Total	230	40.419			

<sup>a</sup> One Way Analysis of Variance

<sup>b</sup> .05 Alpha Level for the Two-Tailed Test of Significance



**School level.** The data were coded for all possible respondents to determine whether the school they lead is to be considered a middle school or a high school. The results in Table 22 reflects the group size, mean agreement score and standard deviation for the recorded sample.

Table 22

*Special Education Legal Knowledge Means and Standard Deviations by School Level*

School Level	n	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Middle School	117	1.819	.392
High School	126	1.857	.433
Total	243	1.839	.413

Results from the Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances indicated the presence of equal variance between middle school and high school responding principals based on the special education legal knowledge ( $F_{1, 241} = .872, p = .351$ ). Table 23 illustrates the ANOVA results for the differences in overall special education legal knowledge for school level.

Table 23

*Differences in Special Education Legal Knowledge by School Level*

Differences in special education legal knowledge by school level	df	SS	MS	F <sup>a</sup>	P <sup>b</sup>
Between Groups	1	.086	.086	.500	.480
Within Groups	241	41.262	.172		
Total	230	40.419			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> One Way Analysis of Variance

<sup>b</sup> .05 Alpha Level for the Two-Tailed Test of Significance

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed findings from the study. The data collected provided information at a respondent level in terms of gender, years of experience, and number of IEP meetings attended. Information was also considered from a district level when considering data from the district typology information. Knowledge levels were determined from the data analysis around special education legal knowledge. Two district parts of special education legal knowledge emerged, IEP components and knowledge of the dispute resolution process. Results regarding the professional learning needs from practitioners specific to the types of information they desire more knowledge of and the style in which they would value learning this information were presented

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The final chapter of this dissertation considers the research question: what is the perception (urban, suburban, and rural) secondary principals in Ohio have of their own special education legal knowledge used while serving as a representative of the school district? Next, the research problem and a brief overview of the methodology is presented. The major findings are discussed, and implications for practice and further research are presented.

### **Problem Statement**

As legislation changes, principals' knowledge of responsive special education practices is crucial. With these changes in legislation, the educational and political expectations continue to mount for principals. As the list of responsibilities grows, the need to include specific training on special education legal knowledge in principal preparation is now present. This study examined and determined principals' perceptions of special education legal knowledge for secondary principals in Ohio. Specifically, this research considered the following question:

- What is the perception (urban, suburban, and rural) secondary principals in Ohio have of their own special education legal knowledge used while serving as a representative of the school district?

The three objectives for this research study were:

- To describe the demographics of principals in Ohio related to length and breadth of experience, training, and special education experience and knowledge;

- To determine principals' perceptions regarding their special education legal knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team; and
- To determine the effects of the demographic variables (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school) on principals' levels of special education legal knowledge.

### **Review of the Methods**

This study collected data from rural, suburban, and urban secondary practicing principals in Ohio. The researcher-created survey used in this study consisted of three sections: contextual experience, principal perceptions of legal knowledge, and professional learning needs for special education legal knowledge. Data were collected using an online survey software (Qualtrics). A total of 412 principals began the survey, but only 245 completed the survey. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVAs.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The majority of respondents to the survey were principals ( $n = 187, 76.3\%$ ); the remainder of the respondents were assistant/vice principals ( $n = 57, 23.3\%$ ). The majority of respondents had between six and ten years of experience as a principal ( $n = 76, 31.1\%$ ). The second largest group of respondents had between zero to five years of experience ( $n = 70, 28.7\%$ ). The majority of the respondents indicated their gender as male ( $n = 180, 74\%$ ); female respondents ( $n = 65, 26\%$ ). The locale information showed a majority of the respondents were from a suburban area ( $n = 137, 58.5\%$ ). Data from

respondents in rural locales produced a return rate of (n = 71, 31.5% ) and urban respondents had the following return rate (n = 23, 10%). The certification/licensure held prior to becoming an administrator data showed the majority of respondents held a general education license before moving into the principalship (n = 208, 84.90%). There were 19 (7.8%) principals who whose previous certification was as intervention specialists (special education). The certification/licensure results held prior to becoming an administrator mirror the results found in work from Wakeman et al. (2006) in the nationwide survey of secondary school administrators around special education issues. “92% of the responding principals reported not having a special education teaching license or certification” (Wakeman et al., 2006, p. 158). Evidence from both studies found that general education teachers go into the principalship at higher rates than intervention specialists.

When considering the number of IEPs meetings the respondents estimated they attended during a typical school year, the majority of respondents attended 0 to 25 IEP meetings per school year (n = 123; 50.2%). The second largest group estimated they attended 26 to 50 IEP meetings per school year (n = 87; 35.5%). A second category of IEP data were established considering the estimated percentage of IEP meetings attended as the district representative. The largest number of respondents reported that they attended 90 to 100 meetings during a school year while serving as the district representative (n = 74; 30.7%). Fifty-six (23.2%) respondents estimated they attended between 0-10 meetings during the school year while serving as the district representative.

Regarding their level of special education legal knowledge, respondents seemed to have knowledge at the level of compliance. This baseline information provided evidence that respondents have the highest levels of confidence in their knowledge of sections of the the IEP that addressed nonacademic and extracurricular activities, meeting participants, specially designed instruction, least restrictive environment for students, and understanding the student profile.

Respondent data provided evidence for specific information on special education legal training they received over the past ten years. The majority of respondents characterized the impact of their training from professional development on special education legal requirements during the last 10 years as “very useful, impacting my weekly or daily work” (n = 99; 44.8%). The second highest rating was “useful, impacting my work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis” (n = 73; 33.0%). Specific areas where continued training is desired for special education legal knowledge by respondents as practitioners were on the process of the administrative review (n = 127; 27.5%) followed by components of an impartial due process hearing (n = 126; 27%).

An additional area of professional learning for principals, specific to their needs as an instructional leader, was also considered in the survey. The majority of respondents indicated they would like development in “team teaching strategies for intervention specialists and general education teachers” (n = 144; 34.4%), followed by “data collection tools and strategies to use for writing IEP goals” (n = 105; 25.1%). The final professional learning type presented to respondents in the survey gauged the need principals believe they have to help build teacher capacity. The majority of respondents

indicated they would most like to receive professional learning around “resolving conflicts and legal questions/concerns” (n = 128; 33.1%) and “record keeping and data collection for progress reports” (n = 92; 23.8%). A delivery style for desired professional learning was presented to respondents, and respondents indicated they would want “my current school district central office special education staff working with the local education service center and I am able to received information while working with a group from my district/building team” (n = 105; 51.5. %). The second highest rated delivery option for respondents was “off site at a local educational service center or meeting center, interactive professional development where a product or plan is created that can be taken back to the school for implementation” (n = 44; 21.6%).

### **Discussion of Results**

**Principals’ perceptions of special education legal knowledge.** This research study sought to determine principals’ perceptions regarding their special education legal knowledge when serving as a representative of their school district on the IEP team. Respondents perceived higher levels of confidence in their knowledge around specific sections of the IEP (i.e., nonacademic and extracurricular activities, meeting participants, specially designed instruction, least restrictive environment, and student profile). Knowing about nonacademic and extracurricular activities means that the respondents felt they have knowledge of students with disabilities abilities to participate in all clubs, no-cut sports, and social activities. Having knowledge about IEP meeting participants means that the respondents know who needs to attend the IEP meeting and the roles they will serve at the meeting. Specially designed instruction means knowing the difference

between accommodations and modifications. Having knowledge about the least restrictive environment means that the respondents understand that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature of the disability is such that education in regular classes, even with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Finally, having knowledge about the student profile section of the Ohio IEP means that the respondents felt they were able to read the narrative of this section and determine the preferences, interests, needs, and strengths of a student.

These findings connect with research from the leadership domains for principals and are a part of the special education legal knowledge that principals must possess as a school leader. Lewis (2015) operationalized definitions and specific actions for the three leadership domains, managerial, political, and instructional that guide principal action. The results produced from this study found that special educational legal knowledge frames needed action by principals in all three domains. The managerial leadership domain impacts principals through their case management for academic programming for students with disabilities. In the meeting participants section of the IEP, principals must have a plan for compliance for securing all needed signatures as the final permission for the implementation of the IEP. Procedural requirements that lead to compliance and academic programming that allows for appropriate services for students with disabilities is a part of the managerial leadership principals must master and model in their work (Monteith, 1994).



Part of the political leadership domain that influences a principal's ability to impact students comes knowledge. Specifically, principal knowledge from understanding and being able to utilize the language of power. Special education legal knowledge allows a principal to speak, act, and exist in the language of power. This allows a principal to know and understand the rules that regulate actions taken around students with disabilities. This skill set is modeled in two areas of the respondents' compliance knowledge. The area of nonacademic and extracurricular activities is a key for principals to understand. This is an area of political leadership from principals as compliance knowledge of this component of the IEP determines what opportunities can and should be provided to students with disabilities. In addition, an understanding of the least restrictive environment is another area where political leadership will need to be exercised.

The instructional domain of principal leadership that directly connects with special education legal knowledge includes respondent data on specially designed instruction, specifically, knowing the difference between accommodations and modifications. This is a skill set that will connect principals with the need to build capacity in teachers, to help lead in the example of setting high expectations for each student, and to support programming decisions for academic issues for students. Curriculum is directly impacted by the accommodations and modifications made available to students. Principals need to be knowledgeable in this to provide leadership. "Administrators who routinely develop their own knowledge and skills model for students that learning is important and useful. Their ongoing development creates a

culture of learning throughout the school and supports educators' efforts to engage students in learning" (Mizell, 2010, p. 14).

Overall, respondents were least confident in their special education legal knowledge in their ability to understand the parts of the dispute resolution process. This component of special education legal knowledge is the skill set surrounding the practices and steps needed to participate with ODE while working with a student and/or their parent to resolve areas of difference regarding the IEP. Respondents were the least confident in their knowledge levels in the following five areas: impartial due process hearing (knowing how to prepare an educational team that includes the correct staff to respond to an impartial due process hearing), IEP facilitator (knowing what the procedural steps are to work with the ODE and a parent/guardian/student to represent the district while working with an IEP facilitator), mediation (knowing how to explain the benefits of mediation for settling a dispute regarding IEP concerns), administrative review (knowing how to use procedures in the correct order during an administrative review, including a parent/guardian's right to request a review of student evaluation and educational placement from the district and how to respond to request for this data), and Ohio Operating Standards for Children with Disabilities (knowing how to use the "delivery of services" section to determine state regulations for the number of students who are able to work with an intervention specialist per period of the day, the age ranges that are allowed to be in the classroom at the same time, and the potential requirements for paraprofessionals to be provided for the students).

Considering the possible areas of special educational legal knowledge, respondents provided data modeling their highest levels of confidence are centered in general knowledge of IEP components. Of these five areas showing the highest levels of knowledge, three items do not deal with instruction or programing, but are based on compliance. This knowledge requires potentially lower levels of capacity to master the content. Regarding the knowledge statements that produced the lowest levels of practitioner confidence, the content areas of these statements require the highest levels of direct action on the part of principals. These five areas require a high level of special education legal knowledge to be able to work through the dispute resolution process and to understand the regulations regarding the delivery of services requirements. This knowledge requires potentially higher levels of capacity to master the content.

This study also considered the effects of demographic variables of respondents (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, size of school, gender, years in current assignment, Title I school) on principals' levels of special education legal knowledge. Analysis allowed for the examination of the effects of demographic variables on respondent data. Two areas showed statistical significance in the differences between groups. One of the areas to show an effect of demographic variables on knowledge levels was gender. This comparison considered responses from male and female principals. The study found that females viewed themselves as having higher levels of special education legal knowledge. Respondents showed a difference between the two groups. The differences in special education legal knowledge between the gender groups was statistically significant ( $F_{1,1} = 1.404, p = .004$ ).

The other area of demographics in which there was a statistically significant result was the difference between respondents from the rural, suburban, and urban settings. The respondents from rural and suburban locales perceived themselves as having higher levels of special education legal knowledge. The respondents from urban locales perceived themselves as having lower levels of special education legal knowledge. The differences in special education legal knowledge between the rural, suburban and urban was statistically significant ( $p = .037$ ). There were no statistically significant results for respondents in their perception of special education legal knowledge in any other demographic areas. These areas of demographics included of years in experience, Title I status, school level (i.e., middle school vs. high school), position type (i.e., assistant principal or head principal), and school size.

**Professional learning needs.** The respondent data from section three of the survey indicated that principals would be interested in having access to professional learning around special education legal knowledge at a minimum of once per school year and a maximum of once per semester or twice per school year. Principals need to be educated in ways to model the capacity to stretch teaching quality so that student learning is directly impacted (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009). The respondents indicated they would prefer onsite team-based trainings which would allow them to work with teams from their district or building ( $n = 105, 51.5\%$ ). Principals' second choice would be professional learning provided off-site at a local educational service center or meeting center, in the form of interactive professional development where a product or plan is created that can be taken back to the school for implementation ( $n = 44, 21.6\%$ ).

Professional learning for principals is valuable as it can impact the both students and teachers. Special education legal knowledge and the amount a principal possesses of this knowledge are a part of the instructional leadership needed to craft a vision for a school (Billingsley, 2004). An academic plan and a vision are both components of programming needed to serve students with disabilities. The focus of principal behaviors to support student achievement and principal behaviors in general determine the extent to which the school leaders will impact organizational focus for student achievement (Urick & Bowers, 2014). What is important to the principal becomes important to those who provide service and leadership in the classrooms of the school.

### **Implications**

Research from Wakeman et al. (2006) shared the importance of the lack of principal knowledge related to special education, a concept which is seen repeatedly by educational researchers. Wakeman et al. shared the combined research of colleagues determining that “the need for professional development for principals in special education has been well established” (Collins & White, 2001; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Goor et al., 1997; Lasky & Karge, 1995; Monteith, 2000; Sage & Burrello, 1994; Smith & Colon, 1998; Strahan, 1999; Valente, 2001; Valesky & Hirth, 1992) (p. 154). Wakeman et al. (2006) recommend that proficient principals must come to the job armed with education and comfort in the current issues of special education. A base level of general knowledge of special education must exist for principals leading schools. One gap in the existing literature is that there is not a specific, standardized definition of special education legal knowledge. Results from this research study have

operationalized the special education legal knowledge definition to include two separate components. One component is the need to know about components of the IEP that frame programming and services. The second component includes legal knowledge in the dispute resolution process. Increasing the existing skill set of principals in both of these areas would allow principals to build their capacity in special education and be more able to serve the diverse needs of their students. At the state and national level, it is an exciting time to be connected to special education. It is also a time of clarity, and mastering this skill set is vital for principals if they want to survive and advance in future school settings by being able to respond to the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The majority of the respondents to this survey, (n = 76, 31.1%) reported having between six and ten years of experience as a principal. The second largest group of respondents had between zero to five years of experience (n = 70, 28.7%). This means practitioners have the potential to continue to be in the field for multiple years, even decades for some. This is a time of change at the national level for special education. The ability to stay abreast of current legislation, mandates, and responsive practice are a part of the expectation for practicing principals and the time is right to implement programming to support principals in building capacity in special education legal knowledge specific to the components of the IEP and the dispute resolution process. Practitioners need to know the current rules and possess a skill set that allows them to adapt to change.

Additional changes will likely come from the legal system. There is currently a case being heard before the Supreme Court *Andrew F. v. Douglas County*. At issue is the

“level of educational benefit that school districts must confer on children with disabilities to provide them with the free appropriate public education guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (SCOTUS Blog, 1/18/17). This is also a time of national focus on special education issues that has not been seen since before the implementation of the EAHCA. Lastly, this is a time of potential and possibly significant change in the national regulations that frame education. Specifically, special education as part of the educational system was reviewed for the purposes of this study. With a new education secretary being selected by a new presidential administration, the time to focus on special education is extremely poignant. Strauss, (2017) in The Washington Post, reported on specific questions asked of the nominee for Secretary of Education about knowledge of IDEA about how much impact the state level should or could have in the implementation of the federally mandated IDEA, during confirmation hearings in January of 2017. While this is a time of change, principals must be ready for both legal changes and changes in students’ needs of. A plan to provide consistent professional learning could increase principals’ abilities to respond to changes in programming.

The implications from this research highlight two specific areas on which to focus when considering possible action that could be taken as a result of participants’ stated needs. This action could immediately impact practitioners. A first action to consider is the need for increased professional learning around special education legal knowledge for principals. There are two specific types of special education legal knowledge that need to be addressed. The first type of special education legal knowledge needed builds capacity for principals in the components of the IEP. The second would increase skill sets in the

legal knowledge of the dispute resolution process at the state level. Specific professional learning opportunities provided for practicing principals should be made available starting at the state level. This new knowledge and training could be provided to state trainers at State Support Teams (SSTs) and through Educational Service Centers (ESCs). SSTs and ESCs could provide training for principals with up to date current information and regulations impacting their practice. A variety of professional learning style options could be offered. One possibility is a train the trainer model where district special education directors and superintendents receive training and then return to the district to train principals from his/her district, ensuring district-specific planning and implementation.

An additional implication from this research is that specific groups of respondents indicated they have different levels of confidence in their special education legal knowledge. Two specific groups providing differing levels of knowledge from their peers were female principals and urban principals. Female respondents indicated they have higher confidence in their special education legal knowledge than their male counterparts. While this is a positive result that female respondents feel confident in their knowledge levels, the percentage of male respondents ( $n = 180, 74\%$ ) was significantly higher than that of females ( $n = 65, 26\%$ ). If the majority of principals in the survey were males, does this same level of disparity in gender exist in school systems across Ohio for leadership roles? If so, would specific action be beneficial in supporting male principals to increase their special education legal knowledge? This leads to a question of what type of professional learning should be made available to practitioners moving forward for



special education legal knowledge in the areas of IEP components and in dispute resolution.

### **Recommendations**

The time has come for principals to have access to regular, sustained, meaningful professional learning surrounding special education legal knowledge. This expertise is needed to prepare school leaders so they are able to plan for programming that allows for students with disabilities to benefit from the school setting and prepare to become self-sustaining graduates qualified for post-secondary educational settings, college, and/or the work force. Principals need access to professional learning around components of the IEP and dispute resolution processes to best prepare them to meet the current and future needs of students with disabilities. The ultimate goal of education is to prepare students to have the necessary skills to build the lives they want. Goals and skills will look different when consider the planning needs for students on an individual level. This is the inherent purpose of having special education requirements, so instruction can be specially designed to meet the needs of each student. A base level of special education legal knowledge for those running schools is imperative as school leaders work to support students in their educational journey.

**For principal training.** Findings from this research study indicate a need for continued education for principals as they build capacity in special education. Research from Wakeman et al., (2006) supports the importance of the lack of principal knowledge seen repeatedly by educational researchers. Wakeman and colleagues share the combined research of colleagues and indicate that “the need for professional development for

principals in special education has been well established” (p. 154). (For example, see Collins & White, 2001; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Goor et al., 1997; Lasky & Karge, 1995; Monteith, 2000; Sage & Burrello, 1994; Smith & Colon, 1998; Strahan, 1999; Valente, 2001; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). While this is an excellent starting point, the next steps in the task of increasing principal special education knowledge is to recognize the gaps in the literature and address them with additional research and reports of findings.

**On the components of an IEP.** Principals need to be educated in the components of an IEP and have a baseline level of legal knowledge about the dispute resolution process that frames potential legal actions around an IEP. There is a difference between the two, in that one guides educational and service actions which lead to an effective educational experience for the student, and one that guides overall compliance with the laws that guide the special education process. When a principal understands the technical components of an IEP, this allows them to frame service delivery more effectively which supports access to general education curriculum for students with disabilities.

**On dispute resolution.** Knowledge around the dispute resolution process allows for correction if a problem arises. Whereas the ultimate goal is that problems will be avoided as a result of IEP content knowledge, the school world is not perfect. It is responsive practice to educate principals so they can be prepared to take action when a problem does arise. This type of thinking is the safest plan for a practitioner. Principals need to prepare for “when” rather than “if” problems happen. Knowledge of the steps of the dispute resolution process allows practitioners to adequately plan and problem-solve.

Principals mastering this knowledge, even at a basic level, would better allow an effective response from the school district if the need for a review or mediation arose. Success in handling a dispute at those levels could actually prevent a disagreement from turning into a larger problem. Skills in the dispute resolution process could lower the need to move to the facilitation step and ultimately could prevent a due process from even needing to occur. Prevention of this highest level of district and student and/or parent dispute would be a major indicator of successful knowledge mastery on the part of the principal.

**On transition process.** Principal capacity specific to the transition planning sections of an IEP is needed. Knowledge statements that lead to the summarization of age-appropriate transition assessments for students and an understanding of postsecondary goals in education and training, employment, and independent living for students were not in the top five responses of agreement for respondents. Transition sections of the IEP specifically requires postsecondary goals. Effort to capture respondent knowledge in the area of transition came from the statement “I know how to recognize well-written postsecondary goals.” This statement received the highest score possible from the statements found in the IEP knowledge portion of the survey, meaning that the lowest number of respondents agreed they have knowledge about this concept. Understanding that transition is a specialty area in need of additional training for secondary principals is important information and valuable for policy makers. Specifically, district special education directors, executive level members of district leadership teams, superintendents, and officials from the Office for Exceptional Children

at ODE all need this information. The findings from this study provides evidence of specific deficit areas for practitioners that could be addressed and potentially improved with professional learning.

**On serving as a district representative.** The data from the study showed an all or nothing phenomenon for principals who need to serve as the district representative at IEP meetings. Principals either attend most of their meetings while serving as the district representative or they attend very few meetings while serving as the district representative. Principals need to understand the responsibilities of serving as the district representative on the IEP team.

#### **For a New Type of Training**

Data from respondents indicated the majority of respondents would value professional development at a minimum of once per school year and a maximum of once per semester. The respondents indicated a preference for learning in a team, working with people from their school district or school building and desiring to leave with a product or action plan of some type. Specific to this area, there was evidence that male and female respondents to the survey view their levels of special education differently which is important information to have and address through future professional learning sessions.

Based on the findings from this study, the addition of a new type of professional learning offered to principals is warranted. A possibility would be to model this professional learning from already successful programs from ODE available through the OTES or OPES models. Both designs include professional learning where principals

from multiple settings and districts come together to engage in dialogue, review of research, professional learning, exposure to case studies, and utilize established learning protocols to process with colleagues. These activities typically conclude with the opportunity to participate in multiple practice assessments. Following the OTES and OPES model, at the conclusion of a two-day training, the participants take a skill-based assessment. Upon modeling knowledge mastery of the required skills, principals receive an OTES or OPES credential which is valid for two years. This same model could be implemented for special education legal knowledge and at the conclusion of a two-day course, principals could be issued a credentialing title indicating they have a specific level of special education legal knowledge in both the components of an IEP and in the dispute resolution process.

Expanding this already implemented model could allow for the addition of what the researcher has titled an Ohio Special Education Legal Knowledge Credential (OSELKC). This credential could be an optional certification or credential offered to principals during a pilot year made available in one or all of the three school locales chosen for the survey. If evaluation data from the pilot program yields positive results, the credentialing program could be offered statewide and practitioners could seek OSELKC as a way to build capacity and increase their marketability. ODE could research the possibility of providing data on the district and state report cards for the percentages of OSELKC principals a district has leading buildings. ODE could create a leveled system with optional participation where districts meeting specific percentages of principals holding OSELKC could receive a district level status to be included on the district report

cards. Data could be collected to determine if districts with higher levels of OSELKC participated in higher or lower levels of dispute resolution activities through ODE. Principals could then be given the option to take a refresher course every two years to demonstrate they are continuing to maintain their level of knowledge and as an opportunity to remain current on present day practice and regulations. The ultimate goal of a plan like this would be to make programming attractive to participants and to make high percentages of OSELKC administrators desirable to superintendents.

**Offer specialized professional learning by locale.** An additional recommendation is the need for more research on respondent differences by locale. Rural and suburban respondents to this survey reported higher levels of confidence in their special education legal knowledge than their urban counterparts. Why would there be a difference in the levels of perceived special education legal knowledge by respondents? While this answer may never be known, acknowledging and responding to these perceived differences could be an action step taken at the district and state level. Additional training based on locale could be addressed by making trainings available to practitioners at varied levels.

### **For Preparing principals for Potential Changes in Legislation and Implementation**

Whereas rule changes or differences in leadership at the national level may impact the action principals need to take, changes in the expectation of needs and services of students could also impact principals. An area of focus for principals moving forward as they serve students with disabilities could include access to technology. Current regulations in IDEA require access to the general education curriculum, as technology

continues to increase in and decrease in price, the time may come when technology provided by the district to a student with disabilities becomes a prominent issue. Assistive technology and assistive devices in their current forms could change and access to technology in all classroom settings could become a growing requirement to ensure access to the general education curriculum. If technology is needed in all classroom settings, then a plan for homebound tools could soon follow. Given the increased homework expectations of the secondary school setting, home-based access for technology to complete assignments is a reasonable possibility to consider. If a school district becomes responsible for providing technology for the school setting, and providing a plan for use at home, then the issue of cost and who is responsible for funding these pieces of technology will soon be a discussion in school districts statewide. The discussion of technology provides a slippery slope. If services are made available to one age group, educated students and parents could begin to ask for these services for students of all ages with disabilities. Technology allows for inclusion in incredible ways and can be an equalizer in the educational setting for students with disabilities.

While technology in the secondary setting is a potential need, an additional area for consideration is a long-term plan to allow for the use of technology for students of all ages. Students with disabilities who are in pre-kindergarten settings all the way up to the senior preparing for high school graduation could benefit from access to technology. The need for access to technology at a pre-K through high school level makes it an issue of district-level importance. Traditionally, issues of district-level importance rise to the level of needing policy, which could be impacted by state level decisions. If states identify a

need for policy on issues of technology to responsively serve students with disabilities, then it will be time for OSEP to step in. Before principals know it, potential changes could be mandated at the federal level, providing a tool that allows for inclusion in school at the highest level possible. Technology is just one of potential future issues that could face principals as they prepare for serving students with disabilities.

### **For Future Research**

Future research could include studying how to specifically prepare principals in the area of special education legal knowledge, dispute resolution, transition process, and in their responsibilities of serving as the district representative. If there is an *all or nothing* experience for principals, then it would produce the most positive results to help practitioners prepare under the thinking that they will be responsible for performing district representative duties. If this skill set is needed, they will be ready to respond.

Another recommendation to be considered could be the personalization of an additional section of OSELKC trainings. Perhaps a survey of principals from urban settings should be undertaken to determine if there are specific sections of IEP components or response to dispute resolution that are a particular need or area of interest for urban principals. Data could be collected during a pilot year of OSELKC trainings, and once evaluated, additional training could be developed specific to the needs reported by practitioners in urban settings. Enhanced professional learning opportunities could be made available to principals which could also allow for different levels of OSELKC qualifications to be earned. While the pool of research regarding principals in the urban setting is rich, there is nearly non-existent research addressing urban principals' needs



related to special education legal knowledge. There is no peer reviewed research specific to the needs of urban principals and their special education legal knowledge needs specific to the components of an IEP and legal knowledge in the dispute resolution process, which is a significant gap that exists in current educational literature.

### **Limitations**


Due to the limited response rate, this study is limited in terms of generalizability. The data also excluded principals from private and charter settings which could have produced data that may have differed from the public-school settings. The researcher attempted to limit issues with non-responders by reaching out to encourage respondents to either start or finish the survey. Non-responder bias can be an area of concern with all questionnaires and should be noted as a limitation.

The usable sample size was too small to allow for additional statistics such as regression. A larger usable sample would have enabled the researcher to examine which demographic variable contributed the most to the variance found in the Special Education Legal Knowledge Questionnaire.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a review of the problem statement, followed by a review of the methods and a summary of the major findings. Next, a discussion of the major results was presented with a focus on the connection of results of this study and how they support previously reviewed research. Implications and recommendations were presented for practice and research. The chapter ends with a review of the limitations of the study.

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## Appendix A: Permission to Use Figure 1

Ali LaBarre <ablabarre@gmail.com>

9/17/16 ☆ ↶ ↷

to ValentineJ ▾

Hello Dr. Valentine,

I hope you well! My name is Ali LaBarre and I am doctoral student at Ohio University. I am writing to request your permission to use a graphic from an article you published in 2011 with Mike Prater. This article was titled Instructional, Transformational, and Managerial Leadership and Student Achievement: High School Principals Make a Difference," *NASSP Bulletin*, 95(1)5–30. This was an excellent article. As a practicing high school principal I connected with it personally.

I am working on my dissertation on special education legal knowledge for principals in Ohio.

I would like to officially request your permission to use the attached graphic in my ch. 2. I will give full credit to you and your team citing your work.

With your permission I would cite the graphic in the following way directly under the figure:

*Figure 1.* Valentine and Prater's model for principal impact on student achievement. Reprinted from "Instructional, Transformational, and Managerial Leadership and Student Achievement: High School Principals Make a Difference," by J. W. Valentine and M. Prater, 2011, *NASSP Bulletin*, 95(1)5–30, p. 21. Reprinted with permission.

With your permission may I please use this graphic?

Thank you for your time!

Valentine, Jerry W. (Emeritus) <ValentineJ@missouri.edu>

9/18/16 ☆ ↶ ↷

to me ▾

Ali

You did an excellent job explaining the visual you wished to use. You would be surprised to see how many times vague and confusing requests are made. My compliments on your request.


Per your request, "Yes, you have permission to use the visual in your study with appropriate citation as noted."

Dr. Prater and I wish you the best with your research.

Jerry Valentine

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## Appendix B: Permission to Use Figure 4

 **Ali LaBarre** <ablabarre@gmail.com> 9/18/16 ☆ ↶  
to Colon ▾

Hello Dr. Lewis,

I hope you well! My name is Ali LaBarre and I am doctoral student at Ohio University. I am writing to request your permission to recreate a graphic from your dissertation titled Intermediate, Middle, & Junior High School Principals' Perceptions of Contextual Influences on their Leadership Behaviors, (2015).

I am working on my dissertation on special education legal knowledge for principals in Ohio and this graphic connects to my conceptual framework.

I would like to officially request your permission to use the attached adapted graphic in my ch. 2. I will give full credit to you citing your work in text and references.

With your permission I would cite the adapted graphic in the following way directly under the figure:

*Figure 2. A model of principals' activities divided by leadership domain. Adapted from Lewis, 2015, p. 65-66. Reprinted with permission.*

With your permission may I please use this graphic?

Thank you for your time!



**Appendix C: Supplemental Files**

Supplemental File A contains the Ohio Principal Evaluation Rubric. Supplemental File B contains the Ohio Individualized Education Program Form (PR-07).

## Appendix D: Survey

### Principal perception of special education legal knowledge

#### Part 1: Contextual Experience

Please respond to the following questions designed to highlight your contextual and school administrator experience.

1. Please indicate your current assignment
  - a. Principal
  - b. Assistant/Vice Principal
2. Please indicate how many years you have been working as a school principal (include the years you have served as both an assistant and/or head) principal:
3. Please indicate your gender
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
4. Please indicate your certification/licensure before you became an administrator
  - a. General Education
  - b. Intervention Specialist (Special Education Certified)
  - c. Other:
5. Please estimate the number of Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings you attend during a typical school year:
6. Please estimate the percentage of IEP meetings you attend where you **serve as the district representative**: Select percentage:
7. Within the state of Ohio principal licensure requirements mandate course work regarding special education. For each of the following special education legal knowledge trainings you have participated in, please rate the impact of the training. [use Qualtrics matrix table]

	Not useful, impacting my work on a quarterly basis or less	Moderately useful, impacting my work on a monthly basis	Useful, impacting my work on a monthly or bi-monthly basis	Very useful, impacting my weekly or daily work	Not Applicable
Special education law course (college/university level) as a part of principal training and/or certification					
Special education law course (college/university level) since assuming principalship					
Special education law workshop or professional development during the past 10 years					
Other:					

**Part 2: Special Education Legal Knowledge**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following knowledge statements pertaining to the IEP form and process, from your perspective as a representative of the school district on the IEP team.

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<b>Future Planning</b>				
I know how to interpret the future planning statements prepared by an intervention specialist to determine the appropriateness of post graduation/employment goals based on needs found in the Evaluation Team Report (ETR).				
<b>Student Profile</b>				
I am able to review the student profile to and cite statements related to the student's interests, needs, preferences, and strengths, if asked by a parent/guardian or teacher.				
<b>Postsecondary Transition Information</b>				
I am able to identify in this section what plans being set in place to support learning, living, and working needs post high school graduation.				
<b>Future Planning, Postsecondary Transition, Postsecondary Transition Services</b>				
I know that student 14 years and older must have a statement of transition service needs, a summarization of age-appropriate transition assessments, and postsecondary goals in education and training, employment, and independent living (as appropriate).				
I know that the implementation of transition services and activities should not be the responsibility of the parent or student.				
I know how many credits are needed for graduation in my district for graduation. I know how to apply credit data to an accurate course of student to help move a student toward achievement of postsecondary goals.				
I know that the school district is not held accountable if the student does not achieve postsecondary goals after exiting high school; however, the district is accountable for providing a course of study, transition services and activities, and linkages to adult services that would help the child achieve postsecondary goals.				
I know how to recognize well-written postsecondary goals.				
I would be able to connect staff members with district officials who could provide help for writing measurable baseline data or would know where to connect them with professional development resources if I determined there was a need prior to the IEP meeting.				



I know how to explain how progress will be measured in this section of the IEP based on the choices selected by the intervention specialist.				
<b>Measurable Annual Goals</b>				
I know that the PLAAFP should indicate how the student’s disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum, regardless of the instructional setting.				
I know that the PLAAFP and the annual goals should include quantifiable instructional levels.				
I know how to recognize well-written annual goals and objectives or benchmarks.				
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
<b>Specially Designed Service</b>				
I know that all specially designed services need to be considered and documented for all students with disabilities, but that not all students will need every form of specially designed services.				
I know the difference between an accommodation and a modification.				
<b>General Factors</b>				
I know how to explain the procedures used in my district to determine if a student qualifies for Extended School Year (ESY) services to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).				
<b>Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities and Least Restrictive Environment</b>				
I know that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular education classes, even with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily				
I know that students with disabilities may participate in all clubs, no-cut sports, social activities such as dances and mixers that are available to all students, if the student desires; and I know that students with disabilities may try out for and make teams based on the same criteria as students without disabilities.				
<b>Statewide and District Testing</b>				

I know how to determine if a student will participate in assessments with accommodations.				
<b>Meeting Participants</b>				
I know who must be in attendance at an IEP meeting and the role they will serve in while attending this meeting.				
<b>Signatures</b>				
I know how to explain in everyday language to explain to parents/students what a Prior Written Notice. I know how to explain what a PWN is used for why it is important.				
<b>Administrative Review</b>				
I know how to use procedures in the correct order during an administrative review. I know this includes a parent/guardian’s right to request a review of student evaluation and educational placement from the district and I know how to respond to request for this data				
<b>Ohio Operating Standards for Children with Disabilities</b>				
I know how to use the “Delivery of Services” section to determine state regulations for the number of students who are able to work with an intervention specialist per period of the day, the age ranges that are allowed to be in the classroom at the same time, and the potential requirements for paraprofessionals to be provided for the students				
<b>Mediation</b>				
I know how to explain to explain the benefits of mediation for settling a dispute regarding IEP concerns. Some benefits include the use of a trained facilitator to serve as a third party to help the group find a solution both sides can find acceptable.				
<b>IEP Facilitator</b>				
I know what the procedural steps are to work with the Ohio Department of Education and a parent/guardian/student to represent the district while working with an IEP Facilitator.				
<b>Impartial Due Process Hearing</b>				
I know how to prepare an educational team that includes the correct staff to respond to an impartial due process hearing.				

### Part 3: Description of professional learning needs for special education legal knowledge

Please rank the top three following areas of special education legal knowledge pertaining to the IEP form and process in order of your need for professional learning (1 represents the area of the highest need). [use Qualtrics rank order]

Front page

Special instructional factors

Student profile

Future planning, postsecondary transition, and postsecondary transition services

Measurable annual goals

Specially designed services

General factors

Nonacademic and extracurricular activities and least restrictive environment

Statewide and district testing

Meeting participants and signatures

Administrative review, mediation, IEP facilitator, impartial due process hearing

2. I would prefer professional learning in the following areas so I am able to help teachers with IEP implementation in the following areas (select all that apply):

a. Academic programming for students

b. Academic assessment resources for student with disabilities

c. Team teaching strategies for intervention specialists and general education teachers

d. Data collection tools and strategies to use for writing IEP goals

e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.

3. I would prefer professional learning in the procedures for managing the following dispute resolution procedures between a parent/guardian and a school district regarding differences over an IEP (select all that apply)

a. Administrative Review

b. Mediation

c. IEP facilitation

d. Impartial due process hearing

e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.

4. I would prefer professional learning in the procedures for managing the following areas so that I could provide information and training for the teachers in our school to help limit and avoid dispute concerns (select all that apply):
  - a. Record keeping and data collection for progress reports
  - b. Resolving conflicts and legal questions/concerns
  - c. Facilitating IEP meetings successfully and efficiently
  - d. Writing compliant IEPs
  - e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.
5. I would prefer a professional learning opportunity that is delivered in the following style (select one):
  - a. On site somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to receive information with limited interaction/working on my own
  - b. On site somewhere in my school district where instructors provide all education and I am able to receive information while working with a group from my school district/building team
  - c. Off site at a local educational service center or meeting center, interactive professional development where a product or plan is created that can be taken back to the school for implementation
  - d. Modules through online/distance learning completed based on my own schedule and time preferences
  - e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.
6. I believe the following amount professional learning around special education legal knowledge would be beneficial for me (select one)
  - a. One session per school semester/two sessions per school year
  - b. One session per school year
  - c. One session every other school year
  - d. One session every three years
  - e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas.
7. I believe the best team to provide this professional development session on special education legal knowledge would come from (select all that apply)
  - a. My current school district central office special education staff
  - b. My current school district central office special education staff working with the local education service center

- c. My current school district central office staff working with the Ohio Department of Education Office of Exceptional Children
- d. My current school district central office special education staff working with a state college/university
- e. I would not benefit from professional learning in any of these areas

## Appendix E: IRB Approval

**From:** [compliance@ohio.edu](mailto:compliance@ohio.edu) <[compliance@ohio.edu](mailto:compliance@ohio.edu)>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 18, 2016 3:18 PM  
**To:** Labarre, Alison  
**Subject:** LEO: IRB PROTOCOL 16-E-186 APPROVED



Project Number	16-E-186
Project Status	APPROVED
Committee:	Office of Research Compliance
Compliance Contact:	Shelly Rex ( <a href="mailto:rexs@ohio.edu">rexs@ohio.edu</a> )
Primary Investigator:	Alison Labarre
Project Title:	Principal perception of special education legal knowledge
Level of Review:	EXEMPT

The Ohio University Office of Research Compliance reviewed and approved by exempt review the above referenced research. The Office of Research Compliance was able to provide exempt approval under 45 CFR 46.101(b) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for exempt review, as indicated below.

IRB Approval:	07/18/2016 11:18:58 AM
Review Category:	2

**Waivers: Waiver of signature--online study**

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations must be obtained, if needed. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under the Ohio University OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00000095. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Compliance staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.



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