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## **Examining the Efficacy of Inclusive Practices and its Impact on the Academic Achievement of High School Students with Mild to Moderate Disabilities**

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EXAMINING THE EFFICACY OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND ITS IMPACT ON  
THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH  
MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Paulette Cobb

May 2018

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by

Paulette Cobb

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## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING THE EFFICACY OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES

by Paulette Cobb

There is extensive research in elementary education on effective practices that support academic success for students with mild to moderate disabilities in general education; however there is a dearth of research on high school inclusion practices. A survey examined the current inclusionary practices at a Central Coast High School. California State Standardized Assessment scores of 11<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Art and Math classes were also analyzed by groups. Overall, findings indicated that inclusionary practices were implemented to different degrees, but none were *fully in place* i.e., *practices building relationships* was rated the highest and *instructional practices* was rated lowest. In addition, findings indicated that students with disabilities exceeded the state SBAC scores in the area of English but not math. Longitudinal research is needed to further identify secondary practices that impact Math scores for students with disabilities along with continued examination of inclusive high school practices.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Individuals Disabilities Education Act (2004) mandates that students are to be educated in the least restrictive environment. The underlying intent of the law is to provide a meaningful education for students with disabilities with typical peers in general education classrooms. The least restrictive environment mandate also allows for more restrictive placements denying students with special needs the opportunity to contribute educationally and socially in general education classes. At the high school level, special day classes and functional skills classes minimize opportunities for accessing the core curriculum as well as accessing instruction by content specialists. Furthermore, school districts are increasingly required to implement rigorous curriculum, high-stakes standardized tests, and intensive requirements for a high school diploma for all students. Therefore, students with mild to moderate disabilities fall further and further behind. To offset and reverse this trend secondary educators have increased inclusionary efforts in order to increase achievement for students with disabilities (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Johnson, Stout, & Thurlow, 2009; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2016), inclusive practices at the secondary level are less pervasive than at the elementary level. However, at the secondary level, Blackorby, Wagner, Cameto, Davies, Lavine, and Newman (2005) found students in inclusion programs performed better based upon both standards-based assessment and grade level achievement when compared to their segregated peers with comparable disabilities.

Increased efforts are vital as students with disabilities denied access to general education classes fall further behind each year, adding to the crisis educators confront regarding student achievement as reported by Cole, Waldron, and Majid (2004) and Valenzuela (2005). Ultimately, denying access to general education limits the opportunity to achieve the academic success that high schools require of their students. However, for decades educational inequity has been a public struggle. As stated by Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1954, while overseeing the case of Brown versus the Board of Education, “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms” (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p.219). Equitable opportunity is imperative in public schools because of the impact schools have on children. According to the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD, 2014), students in the United States spend approximately 7,000 hours in school throughout their elementary and secondary school experience. Inevitably, being excluded from this extensive time with peers, curriculum, and general education teachers will cause students with disabilities to fall behind; Valenzuela (2005) described this as subtractive schooling. Subtractive schooling is the theory that students fall further behind when denied access to resources other students may have in school. Additionally, The California Statewide Task Force (2015) indicated that students with disabilities could achieve at a much higher rate than educators had previously anticipated when given the opportunity to learn with their general education peers.

Multiple studies guided the direction of this research. The research conducted by Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009), and Blackorby et al. (2005) recognized the benefits of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms in both the elementary and secondary settings. Jordan et al. specifically found that effective teaching skills included (a) high levels of student engagement made possible by good classroom and time management skills; (b) the scaffolding of learning which is adapted to students' current levels of understanding; (c) actively engaging students in higher-order thinking; and (d) focusing on success. When researchers engaged in this extensive study on inclusion, they found the aforementioned strategies support students with disabilities are truly best practices for all students, regardless of their needs. Likewise, a study conducted by The Donahue Institute (2004) identified 11 practices found in schools that have increased success for students with disabilities in general education. The researchers also found that the practices identified most effective in supporting all students also lead to increased academic success for students with disabilities. This study included 114 Massachusetts K-8 schools to determine which schools outperformed others regarding students with disabilities on state standardized assessment. Finally, researchers identified four school districts to examine in order to determine the practices and policies in place at higher achieving schools (Thurlow, 2005). The study also reported a lack of empirical data on the high school level, thus a gap in literature is present in this area. This became the primary basis for this study.

## **Statement of Problem**

Identifying predictors of success for inclusion such as: (a) instructional setting, (b) collaboration, (c) instruction, (d) in-class support, (e) relationships, and (f) effective use of resources was the primary intent of this dissertation. The hypothesis was that in a high school with these effective practices, one would also find above average testing results on state standardized assessments for students with disabilities. In California, a group of experts including Michael Kirst and members on the State Board of Education, Linda Darling-Hammond from California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and Tom Torlakson, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, also found this an educational priority. They supported research and development of a critical report for California, ONE SYSTEM: Reforming Education to Serve All Students (2015), which revisited the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Specifically, the basis of this report was to identify how schools can better serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

As defined by the Legislative Analyst's Office (2003), the definition of LRE refers to a federal principle that whenever possible, as determined appropriate by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), students with disabilities should be educated in classes with peers who are non-disabled. Providing students with disabilities general education opportunities is essential to achieve social justice and equity. Inclusion is incorporating students with disabilities into regular education classrooms. For the purpose of this study, inclusion is defined as a practice regarding the process of blending both general and special education reform initiatives and strategies so all students are active and

fully participating members of the school community. Inclusion is a principle that accepts diverse individuals and understands they should be part of a positive learning environment. Additionally, inclusion integrates students with disabilities into a school community that views diversity as normal, and ensures a high quality of education for each student to meet traditional curricular standards (Ferguson, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 2013; Stein, 2016).

Despite the identified importance, there appears to be very slow growth in schools regarding inclusion and students with disabilities. An example of stalled progress is the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (Public Law 94-142, 1975). This act has been legally challenged and reinterpreted over the past three decades by dissatisfied families of students with disabilities. Specifically, revisions of the federal policy occurred in 1990, 1997, and 2004, and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Despite these iterations, IDEIA's main purpose intended to afford all students the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), including students with disabilities in the LRE. Specifically, IDEIA prohibits discrimination based on disability in school programs funded by federal agencies. Therefore, the problem that public schools face today is that, although they must adhere to IDEIA, many students with disabilities continue to be isolated from their general education peers and detached from core curriculum when placed in segregated special education classes.

The California Statewide Task Force (2015) was formed because, "far too many children and young adults in California's schools are not acquiring the skills they will

need to succeed in postsecondary education and secure stable employment. To be effective, schools must serve all children as the unique individuals they are” (p.1). The report also stressed that all students be considered general education students first. Educators have a collective responsibility to ensure all students receive the education and the supports they need to maximize their potential. However, segregation of students with disabilities from general education peers is evident from the beginning of students’ educational experiences.

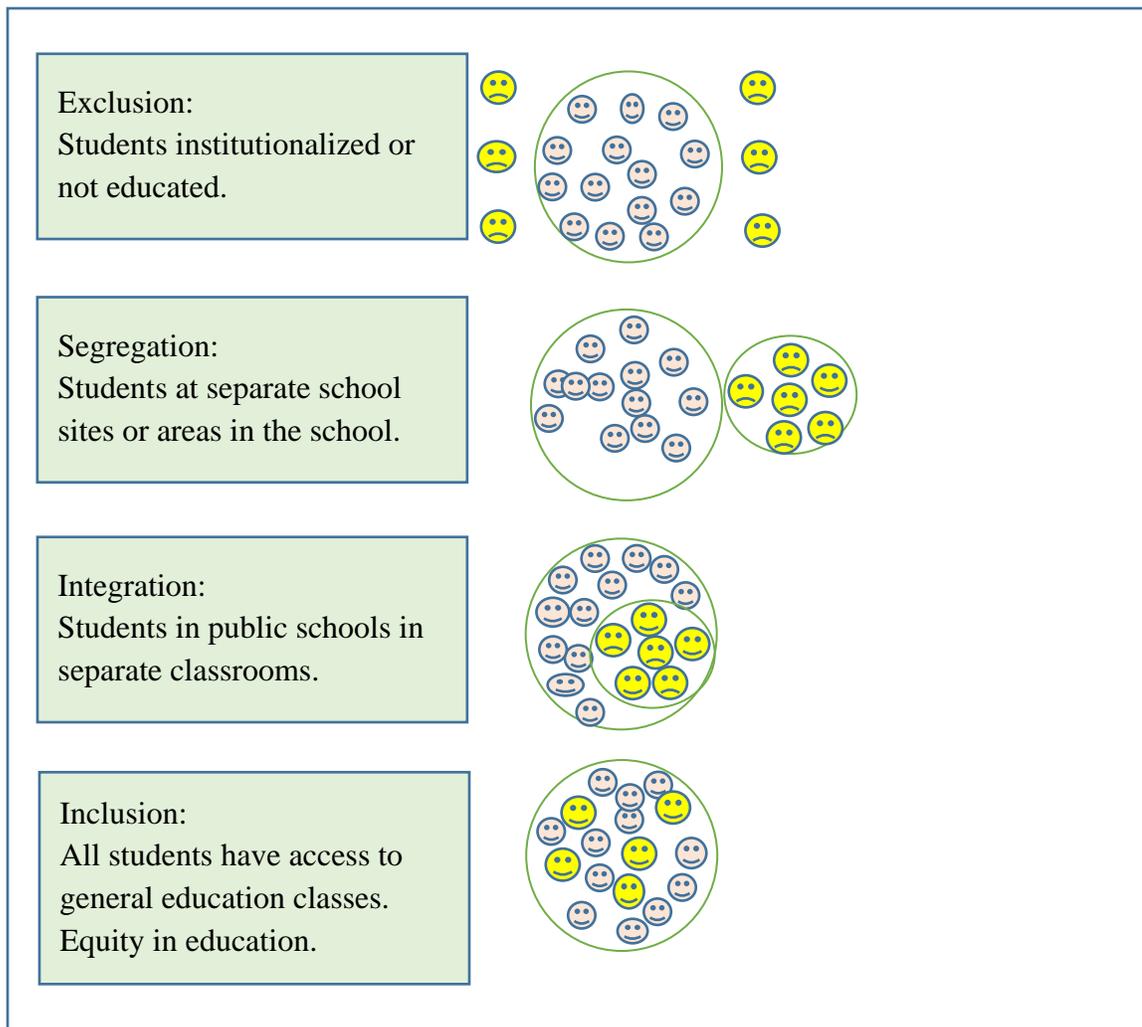
There continues to be a need to identify practices to support more inclusive programming to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, particularly on the secondary education level. Although there is much research on post-secondary outcomes in general (Baer, Flexer, Beck, Amstutz et al., 2003; Blackorby, Hancock, & Siegel, 1993; Harvey, 2002; Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2013), there is much less research available regarding the impact of inclusion on students with mild to moderate disabilities at the high school level. One example was a literature review conducted by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, and Kaplan (2007). They reviewed 26 studies regarding the benefits of inclusion for all students and only 15% of the literature examined was at the high school level. Knowing the significance of inclusion both educationally and socially, educators have an obligation to create an educational system that provides students with mild to moderate disabilities equitable access to the teachers and resources with the same opportunities as their general education peers at all levels. Noticeably, there continues to be a gap in research at the public comprehensive high school level. Therefore, this dissertation examined inclusionary practices in one public

comprehensive high school in Central California (referred to as ABC High School to protect confidentiality) in an effort to provide educational leaders insight on promoting and sustaining inclusion in their schools.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine identified practices that influence high school classrooms and determine if these practices create a learning environment that promotes academic success for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Specifically, this study examined the practices identified by Thurlow (2005) regarding the findings of the Donohue Institute (2004), and adapted a tool created by Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014) which was in line with the findings of the Donohue Institute. This study examined educational practices specifically in the area of secondary education.

This study will guide recommendations for future research based on the findings from ABC High School and their inclusionary practices. Figure 1, Theoretical Framework of the Evolution towards Inclusion in Education, offers a graphic of the goal in education if considering all students are general education students first. The figure shows how the most restrictive environment is one that excludes students entirely from accessing equitable education. Exclusion was the initial practice that families argued against and the reason behind further advocacy of LRE in IDEIA. The figure progresses from the most restrictive model at the top to the least restrictive model at the bottom: exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion.



*Figure 1.* Theoretical framework of the evolution towards inclusion in education adapted from Instituto Alana (2016). A summary of the evidence on inclusive education. Within the framework, the larger ring represents the general education environment. The smaller ring in the framework represents the distinct separation of students with disabilities. Student faces are smiling when they are fully participating members of the general education environment and not smiling when isolated.

## **Research Questions**

The researcher set forth the following research questions in order to examine the inclusionary practices for students with disabilities at the high school level:

1. As reported by teachers and managers, to what extent have practices that promote inclusion been implemented at the examined high school?
2. What similarities and differences exist between teacher and manager responses at the examined high school?
3. What is the influence of the implementation of inclusion practice on 11th grade English Language Arts and Math state test scores?

## **Definition of Terms**

1. The Least Restrictive Environment, as defined by the Legislative Analyst's Office (2003), refers to a federal principle that, as determined appropriate by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), students with disabilities should be educated in classes with peers who are non-disabled.
2. Inclusion is incorporating students with disabilities into regular education classrooms. For the purpose of this study, inclusion is a practice regarding the process of blending both general and special education reform initiatives and strategies so all students are active and fully participating members of the school community. Inclusion is a belief system that accepts diverse individuals and understands they should be part of a positive learning environment. Additionally, inclusion integrates students with disabilities into a school community that views

diversity as normal and ensures a high quality of education for each student to meet traditional curricular standards (Ferguson, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 2013; Stein, 2016).

3. The term co-teaching evolved out of the idea of cooperative teaching and was based on the cooperative relationship built between the teaching partners in the general education classroom (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Federal Legislation and Inclusion**

The Federal Education of all Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142 (EHA; 1975) is arguably the most critical legislation for students in special education in the history of public education. Since 1975, developing inclusionary programs which offer special education students equal access to general education classes in the least restrictive environment has been a challenge in the United States and globally. Evidence is found in the 61 studies considered for this review. Research from Canada, Norway, England, and Australia were all considered in addition to literature from the United States because throughout the world school systems are faced with similar challenges (Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007; Grima-Farrell, Long, Bentley-Williams, & Laws, 2014; Kalambouka et al., 2007; Ruijs, & Peetsma, 2009).

In the United States, EHA (1975) was the first legislation to define equity for students with disabilities who either had not been educated, or who had been provided inadequate education in isolation at segregated sites (Yell et al., 1998). This law was reauthorized and is better known today as IDEIA. Such legislative and policy reforms are often thought to provide answers to inequity in schools. In fact, one can recognize a parallel between implementation of IDEIA and the results of the seminal case of *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954), in which the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment must be upheld. This case mandated that no group should be arbitrarily discriminated against, including those individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the

court's unanimous decision stated that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal (Yell et al., 1998). Although this case is best known for its strong defense against racial segregation, it also supported students with disabilities, and their access to a nondiscriminatory education. Like IDEIA, *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954) was intended to reverse legal segregation in public schools. Practices and mindsets in education were positively influenced by these initiatives; however, despite decades of effort and changes, there is still much work to do. When referring to the lack of initiative to revise and improve legislation, regarding equity, López and Burciaga (2014) insightfully stated, “Very few individuals are willing to part ways with the decision itself, despite its many flaws and failed promises. Simply put: We believe in *Brown* and we hang onto it dearly like an old teddy bear or precious family heirloom” (p. 807). Like *Brown versus Board of Education*, those impacted by IDEIA cling tightly to what the law represents to the students, despite the multitude of iterations it has endured.

This study addresses secondary education for students with disabilities in an effort to identify practices that are supporting equity and inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education classroom.

### **Standardized Measures**

Wagner et al. (2005) supported a broad study by the Federal Department of Education in which researchers examined academic abilities of high school students based on subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson III (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather 2001). The results of the standardized assessment assisted in further examining outcomes of secondary school students with disabilities as they transitioned to post-secondary life. Their findings

revealed a gap in achievement in core academics (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) between students with disabilities and their general education peers in high school. Although typically 50% of students in the general population score at the mean of 100 or above, and 50 % score below, it was found that 77 % to 86 % of youth with disabilities had standard scores below the mean across subtests. Additionally, 12 % more students with disabilities scored two standard deviations below the mean than their general education peers. Moreover, students with disabilities had the greatest difficulty with passage comprehension. The mean passage comprehension standard score was 79 (low), which is significantly lower than any other academic finding for students with disabilities.

An unintended stepping-stone to utilizing inclusive practices more faithfully in order to raise student achievement was the strict federal mandates regarding standardized accountability measures. No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) was authorized during President George W. Bush's Administration and measured school success with required statewide public school testing. NCLB required that both special education and general education students master the general curriculum and reach passing levels of academic performance. Federal initiatives such as IDEIA and NCLB have provoked efforts to increase inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Goodman, Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Duffy, & Kitta, 2011; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012). Furthermore, there have been considerable increases in general education placements and corresponding reductions in more restrictive pull-out programming over the past several decades (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson,

2011). However, on a national assessment of mathematical proficiency only 8% of students with disabilities scored at or above the proficient level (Lee, Griggs, & Dion, 2007). The National Assessment of Educational Progress is supported by the U.S. Department of Education in order to report assessment results for public and private school students in the nation, and for public school students in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools. The results from the 2015 mathematics and reading assessments represented approximately 279,000 fourth-graders and 273,000 eighth-graders. The Nation's Report Card (2015) indicated that students with disabilities made no gain in Math achievement between the years of 2011 and 2015.

One can contend that the intensive requirements regarding IDEA, and poor achievement would compel educators to have a sense of urgency, and would motivate school reformers to pay attention to the effectiveness of inclusion programs (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Hardman (2009) was of the opinion that NCLB stimulated increased inclusionary practices in schools around the nation as educators were challenged to find ways to raise the achievement of students with learning differences in order to meet their AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) goals. According to Blackorby et al. (2005), results of standards-based achievement tests for students with disabilities who were included in general education classes at the secondary level proved that students performed closer to grade level than their special education peers who were segregated throughout their education. The research examined subgroups of students with moderate disabilities, including autism and cognitive disabilities, and found that although students with disabilities continue to perform less well on achievement tests at the

secondary level than general education peers, they outperformed segregated peers with disabilities. Students who are included in general education settings experience higher levels of understanding and success. When students with disabilities were held to the same measures as general education students, it was found beneficial to expose them to the same curriculum as general education peers. Research provides a relationship between increased success on standardized measures and increased efforts by schools to include students with disabilities at higher rates within general education classes with full access to general education teachers, curriculum, and peers (Cortiella & Burnette, 2008; Huberman & Parrish, 2011).

### **Issues and Trends in Research on Inclusion**

Research supports the notion that teachers in schools who are successful in implementing inclusionary practices also utilize a multitude of methods to meet the needs of all their students (Forian, 2012; McLesky, Walderon & Redd, 2014). This section of the literature review analyzes studies regarding practices in inclusive settings. Overall, research finds that there are a variety of practices that have been successful in establishing positive results for inclusive programs (Cortiella & Burnette, 2008; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Hoppey, 2016; Jordan et al., 2009; Morningstar, Shogren, & Lee, 2015; Murawski & Dieker, 2004; Thurlow, 2005). What needs to be developed is a cohesive plan so that school districts throughout the states and the nation have some uniformity in understanding the expectations of the programs at all levels.

The inclusionary practice of educating students within general education courses can take several forms. Dieker and Murawski (2003) conducted a study with the specific

focus on co-teaching at the secondary level. They specifically clarified the term co-teaching which evolved out of the idea of cooperative teaching and was based on the cooperative relationship built between the teaching partners in the general education classroom (Friend et al., 2010). The researchers developed a guideline for educators to support the implementation of co-teaching within the schools to eliminate the segregation of the students with disabilities. Their primary recommendation was for schools to proactively focus on ensuring that teachers are well informed about the co-teaching model, and that teaching partners are given time to communicate about (a) curriculum, (b) co-planning, (c) assessment, (d) behavioral issues, and (e) IEP's. Educators are warned against being reactive and taking "the ready, fire, aim approach (which) negates what we know about change needing time and professional buy-in" (Murawski & Dieker, 2004, p. 54). Thoughtful and systematic planning is essential in creating a successful co-teaching program.

Hoppey (2016) conducted a longitudinal study regarding inclusive instruction. This study included an examination of a school-university partnership which prepared teachers to work in inclusive settings at a rural school in which students with mild to moderate disabilities were successfully included into general education classes. The work at the school focused specifically on developing knowledge about inclusion through pre-service training, and professional development, through weekly PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings. The researcher examined the steps taken by the school to implement a successful inclusion program. The school in the study showed marked improvement over a six-year period. The findings emphasized the focus on the

importance of school wide shared knowledge regarding an inclusion model. Hoppey also recognized that few educators, both in-service and pre-service, were prepared to collaborate with other educators to meet the needs of diverse students within inclusive classrooms. These findings included both special and general education teachers. This study showed notable improvement in various areas. Specifically, for students in inclusive environments, standardized assessment scores rose from 36% proficient to 64% proficient in Math, and ELA (English Language Arts) scores raised from 32% proficient to 70% proficient on standardized testing. The number of students with disabilities included in general education classes increased from 50% to over 90% during the six-year study. Students showed meaningful gains in peer relationships, social skills, and reduction of challenging behaviors. In a report for the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Cortiella and Burnette (2008) reported they found professional development and a shared vision school-wide were the key components of this school's success.

Morningstar et al. (2015) conducted a descriptive study which examined 65 classrooms in six schools on the impact of inclusion on all students. They found that these school successfully utilized Universal Design for Learning, behavioral interventions with class wide-behavioral expectations, and adaptations and modifications (i.e., enlarging print, graphic organizers, or scribes) for students who required those supports. This success emphasized high quality differentiated instruction, assessment, progress monitoring, and curricular and instructional accommodations. However, notably several studies found inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms required effective implementation and thoughtful practice by teachers or the school

would most likely experience failure in this area (Huberman & Parrish, 2011; Salend & Duhaney, 2011).

Thurlow (2005) cited a study from the University of Massachusetts, The Donahue Institute (2004) which analyzed urban public schools and identified 11 practices central to successful achievement of elementary and middle school students with special needs, with requirements for what will work in high schools:

- A pervasive emphasis on curriculum alignment with the state standards;
- Effective systems to support curriculum alignment;
- Emphasis on inclusion and access to the curriculum;
- Culture and practices that support high standards and student achievement;
- A well-disciplined academic and social environment;
- Use of student assessment data to inform decision making;
- Unified practice supported by targeted professional development;
- Access to resources to support key initiatives;
- Effective staff member recruitment, retention, and deployment;
- Flexible leaders and staff that work effectively in a dynamic environment; and
- Effective leadership

This study was done at the direction of the Massachusetts State Legislator, and in conjunction with the Massachusetts Office of Education. It was a large study, examining 33 school districts over several years. Additionally, a number of studies found similar results in their research (Cortiella & Burnette, 2008; Hoppey, 2016; Morningstar et al.,

2015). These practices were considered when adapting and modifying the survey developed for this study.

### **The Impact of Inclusion on Students in Classrooms**

This section of the review identifies studies that report on inclusive education and its impact on students in the classroom. Extensive studies of inclusionary practices in special education repeatedly outline the benefits and drawbacks of educating students within the general education setting. For students with disabilities, many studies describe instructional methods that extend beyond the typical adaptations and help to promote progress in the core content areas (Baker, Gersten, & Scanlon, 2002; Cortiella & Burnette, 2008; Huberman & Parrish, 2011; Kalambouka et al., 2007; Murawski & Swanson 2001; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). There is a powerful quote regarding inclusion cited by Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) on the rationale behind including students with disabilities in the classrooms at the primary and secondary levels:

Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire system (Articles 2.4 and 2.5, the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994. (p. 67).

With such a clear calling to include students in the mainstream, one must review findings that support such a statement. Studies regarding secondary education have concluded that, for students with autism, numerous factors influence the trend of students spending more time in general education classes as they move into secondary education. These factors included: (a) parents and teachers are more focused on academic priorities in the

secondary setting, (b) the quantity of intensive support services found at the elementary level is reduced at the secondary level by specialized academic curriculums, and (c) students with autism spent less time in supportive services and more time in inclusionary settings (Campbell, 2007; Mire, Raff, Brewton, & Goin-Kochel, 2015; Spaulding, Matthew, Lerner & Gadow, 2015; Staniland & Byrne, 2013).

A comprehensive review of literature completed by Kalambouka et al. (2007), found that 81% of the studies reported neutral or positive effects regarding the impact of inclusion of special education students on fellow students in general education classes, but only a small portion of these studies focused specifically on secondary education. Those studies concerning the secondary level found mixed results regarding the effects of inclusion on general education peers. General education students did neither better nor worse academically when students with disabilities were included in their general education classes. Moreover, there were some negative academic outcomes, but they were combined with positive outcomes and consequently a neutral result. According to this literature review, secondary school environments are more likely to report more negative outcomes for general education students than in the primary school environment (Block & Zeman, 1996; Cawley, Hayden, Cade & Baker-Krocynski, 2002; Lundeen & Lundeen, 1993). One finding in Cawley et al. (2002), indicated that students with behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties had no negative impact on the peers or the achievement in the general education classroom, and only a few studies reported behavioral and social emotional struggles and how these struggles impacted students in secondary classes (Block & Zeman, 1996; Cawley et al., 2002, Lundeen & Lundeen,

1993). It was determined that more research is necessary to investigate the supports needed within secondary general education classes for students with disabilities, including those with behavioral needs.

Past research reports significant benefits regarding inclusion for all students within the general education-learning environment. Differentiated methods and supports for students with disabilities benefited all students in the class. Jordan et al. (2009) examined numerous studies spanning several decades in order to defend the idea that all students achieve at a higher rate in classrooms with inclusive programs. Findings included the benefits of (a) effective teaching skills, (b) high levels of student engagement relating to strong classroom and time management skills, (c) differentiating instruction and scaffolding learning based on need, and (d) engaging students in higher-order thinking. Moreover, the researchers cited a number of studies, including one with 11,000 students in the United States. Some of these studies specifically examined secondary education and reported that students with disabilities who spent more time in mainstream classes outperformed their segregated peers on achievement tests and performed closer to grade level (Blackorby et al., 2005; Kalamouka et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2005). Additionally, a study examining instructional quality (i.e., district size, finances, socioeconomic status) by Rudloff (2014) found a positive association between increasing the percentage of time students with disabilities spend in general education classrooms and ACT mathematic scores. Furthermore, the study connected lower dropout rates even though findings also suggested that students with disabilities needed more than four years to graduate with a standard diploma.

Importantly, there are findings that indicate the benefits of inclusion continue after students with disabilities exit high school. Research found opportunities to participate in secondary school curricula and inclusive work environments for students with severe disabilities resulted in positive outcomes for them as adults. These students were considered more capable by teachers, families, future employers, and their self-perceptions (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, et al. (2009) wrote a literature review which analyzed in-school predictors of secondary success. A number of these studies included students with mild to moderate disabilities at the secondary level. These secondary level studies considered academic placement, time in general education classes, family and peer interactions, and intellect levels. They concluded that access to inclusion in the general curriculum academically, and in typical work experiences while in school were predictors of post-school success (Baer et al., 2003; Blackorby, Hancock, & Siegel, 1993; Harvey, 2002). Additionally, Rojewski, Lee, and Gregg (2015) determined students spending 80% or more of their time in inclusive general education settings were twice as likely to enroll in postsecondary education when compared to students receiving fewer credits in inclusive classrooms. These researchers posited, that the students who earned, “a majority of their high school credit in inclusive classrooms may have educational aspirations raised by exposure to higher academic standards and expectations of student performance” (p. 216). These results included notable effects of inclusion in general education on postsecondary education outcomes for adolescents with learning and emotional-behavioral disabilities.

Huberman and Parrish (2011) conducted a comprehensive study of four large, diverse school districts in California. This study is noteworthy because of the size of the study, the diverse demographics, and its mixed methodology. In addition, the districts studied were unified and included high schools as well as elementary schools. They specifically examined the results of the California State Standardized Testing during the 2006-2007 school year. It was reported that even in high poverty districts, students with disabilities at all grade levels who spent 80% or more time in general education classrooms had positive trends in their testing results when compared to their special education peers who did not have this opportunity. However, in the Huberman and Parrish study researchers warned, "Increased general education placements may also lead to poorer than predicted performance when such placements were not well implemented" (p. 3). An example of this may be found by Goodman et al. (2011) who studied the records of 67,749 students with mild disabilities in Georgia during a 6-year period to determine the effects of inclusion on graduation rates. Although there was a 62% increase in the rate of inclusion for students with mild disabilities, graduation rates over this same period remained stable at less than 30%. Additionally, they found that between the end of Grade 8 and Grade 12, thousands of students left school. Researchers posit that one general curriculum is not meeting the needs of all students. Therefore, supports within the general education classrooms must be a priority.

Murawski and Swanson (2001) synthesized 86 articles examining the mean effect size of inclusionary practices on English Language Arts and Math. The study included all levels of students from kindergarten to grade 12. Their research ultimately found co-

teaching to be a moderately effective method for influencing student outcomes.

Murawski and Dieker reported that students at the middle school and high school level struggled in general education classes. They also found that teachers benefitted from teacher-friendly strategies that were specific to the secondary level. They recommend that schools at the secondary level focus on three major areas regarding co-teaching: planning, instruction, and assessment. Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, and Doughty (2015) report that a lack of success for students with disabilities at the secondary level can be attributed to (a) miscommunication between educators, (b) increased difficulty and complexity in assignments, and (c) teachers' struggles in addressing diverse learning needs because secondary education has a strong focus on curriculum mastery.

Cole, Waldron, and Majid (2004) studied how inclusive education affected both general education and special education students in elementary classrooms. The study included 606 students and found that in the classrooms with inclusionary practices, both groups of students outperformed students in non-inclusive classrooms. The researchers credit this success to the additional support that was provided in the inclusive classroom. Cortiella and Burnette (2008) studied five successful elementary schools across the nation. Their findings concluded that raising teacher expectations and not using student disabilities as an excuse to exclude students from general education settings was vital. They also found that close collaboration with general education teachers to align goals with general education standards was paramount to success. They reported that, although overall school approaches differed, the commonality in every successful school was that they made inclusive practices the cornerstone of their improvement plan.

In sum, this chapter identified (a) federal legislation around inclusion; (b) standardized measures for students with disabilities; (c) the impact of the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms, and (d) issues and trends regarding inclusion in schools. While the findings included mixed results at the high school level and positive results at the elementary level, there were some implications for future research regarding secondary education and inclusionary practices. Specifically, findings of large studies of elementary education regarding the benefits of inclusionary practices could be replicated and support secondary education efforts (Cole et al., 2004; Cortiella & Burnette, 2008).

Huberman and Parrish (2011) found that when practices were not well implemented there could be failure. That is, when inclusion was not well supported these programs were abandoned to a more traditional model. It appears that an educational system working toward a cohesive model should identify the areas that will move a school district from a traditional model to an inclusive learning community with appropriate supports. Therefore, recommendations on how to comprehensively move a school district from a deficit thinking and segregated traditional model to a more inclusive one, specifically at the secondary level, is an area that would benefit from more extensive research and recommendations. Chapter three explicates the dissertation's research design, setting, participants, and the survey used to identify the answers to the three research questions detailed in chapter one. Additionally, chapter three specifies how the research questions were operationalized by the researcher to determine what practices

promote successful inclusionary practices for students with mild to moderate disabilities in a comprehensive high school in California (ABC High School).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Method**

This study utilized the comparison of survey data and the analysis of standardized assessment data to identify trends and practices regarding inclusion and achievement of secondary students with mild to moderate disabilities. The purpose of this study was to identify practices most effective in supporting all students, but in particular those practices that lead to increased academic success for students with disabilities at the high school level. This chapter describes the research design, setting of the research, participants, procedures, confidentiality, risks, and benefits of the research.

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized a multiple methods design employing quantitative elements. In order to study inclusion programs for students with mild to moderate disabilities in one public comprehensive high school, the researcher collected and analyzed data to accomplish the following: (a) identify key practices evident in an identified comprehensive public high school, and (b) determine what areas of improvement may be identified. Purposefully, these areas were operationalized into three specific research questions:

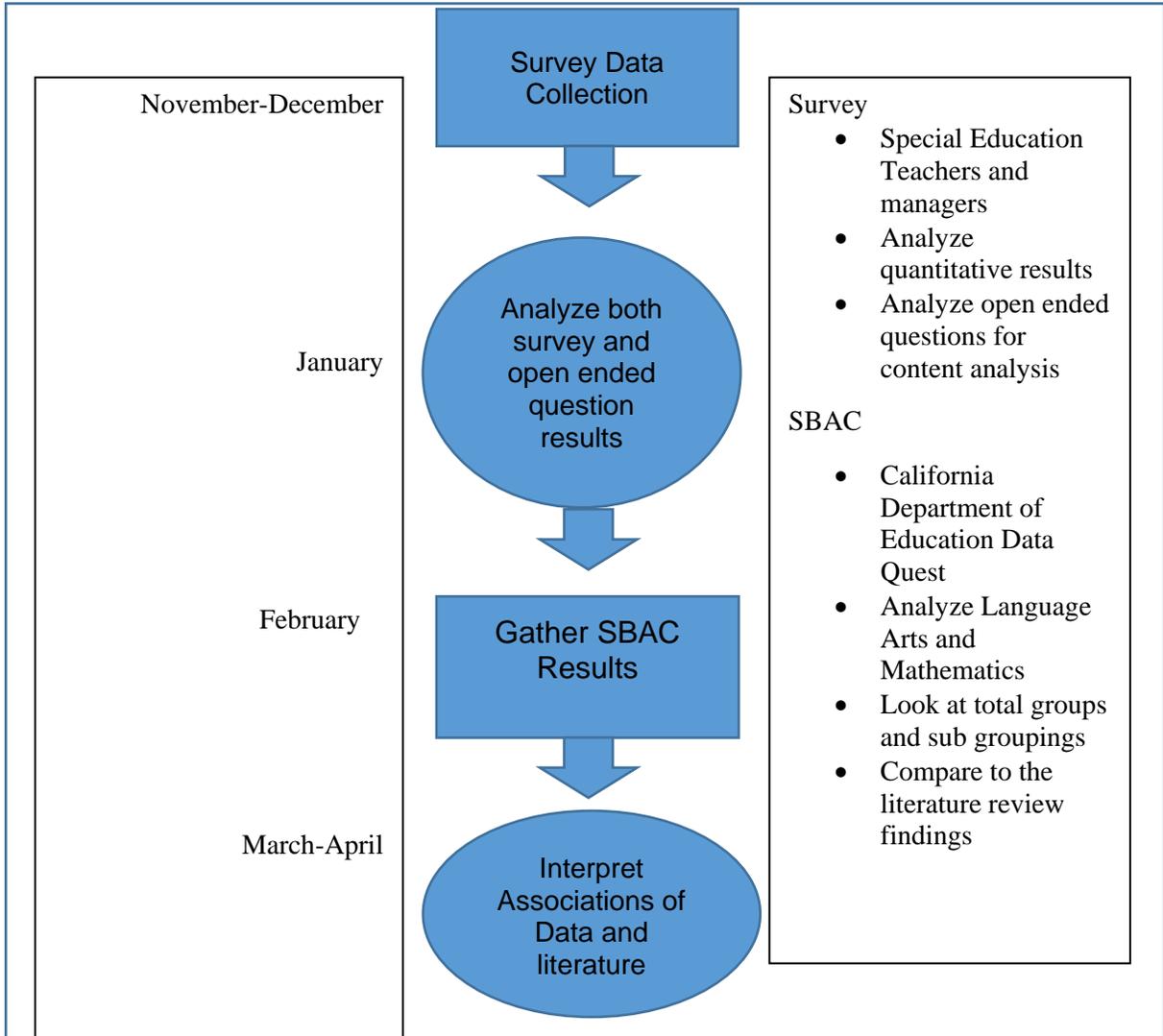
1. As reported by teachers and managers, to what extent have practices that promote inclusion been implemented at the examined high school?
2. What similarities and differences exist between teacher and manager responses at the examined high school?

3. What is the influence of the implementation of inclusion practice on 11th grade English Language Arts and Math state test scores?

Additionally, this research followed an explanatory sequential design. Creswell (2014) explained that, “the strength of this design lies in the fact that the two phases build upon each other so that there are distinct, easily recognized stages of conducting the design” (p. 38). This design includes a voluntary survey with a 3-point Likert type scale (see Appendix B). The scale is as follows: 3 = in place, 2 = improvement needed, 1 = not in place. There was also one open-ended question at the end of each of the six sections of the survey in order to possibly create a more robust data set. One hundred and twenty-five teachers, and 16 site managers at a comprehensive rural high school (ABC High School) were given this survey.

The second method was the analysis of the school’s standardized state testing for all 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in English Language Arts and Math, including students with disabilities. This analysis provided a measure of whether the use of specified practices corresponded with higher achievement rates for students with disabilities. The survey questions provided insight into practices teachers and managers utilized at their school. In addition, there was an analysis of the responses from managers and teachers to determine any comparisons regarding inclusive practices. The final step provided the comparison of data to state-wide testing which supported the analysis of the impact of these practices on students. An organizational framework was provided for this study (see Figure 2). The intent in providing this organizational framework was to clarify the timeline, design, and multiple steps involved in this research study. The timeline was from November to April

and was aligned with steps and actions taken by the researcher. These included (a) data collection, (b) data analysis, (c) interpretation of the data, and (d) specifics of data collection and analysis.



*Figure 2.* Organizational framework based on the recommendation that an organizational tool be created in order to provide a framework regarding a mixed methods study (Cresswell, 2004). Although this is a multiple method study, this useful tool was adapted because this methodology was complex and included multiple steps. In the figure, the squares represent data collection, the circles indicate interpretation of the data, and the arrows represent a sequential methods study.

## **Setting**

This study took place at a comprehensive public high school in rural Central California. There were six districts in Central and Northern California identified as potentially viable. High schools were considered viable because they self-reported inclusionary practices which included reduction of segregated special education classrooms over two years or more for students with mild to moderate disabilities. The final determination regarding the one high school to study was due to convenience sampling.

According to California Department of Education, as of the 2016-2017 school year, the school educated 2,915 students grades 9 to 12. Of these students, 321 or 11 % were identified as students with disabilities. In 2017-2018, San Benito High School District had the following students in their special education program: (a) 98 ninth grade students, (b) 78 tenth grade students, (c) 73 eleventh grade students, (d) 65 twelfth grade students and, (e) 28 adult students in the transition program. 43.3 percent of the students, excluding those in the adult transition program, are in general education more than 80 % of their day.

ABC High School qualified as having an inclusive program because there were students with mild to moderate disabilities included in general education classes over the past four years. Additionally, there were increased levels of support for these students throughout the day both within and outside of the general education setting. Supports included (a) co-teaching, (b) academy classes for reteaching opportunities, (c) tutorials, and (d) increased professional development for all teachers regarding inclusive practices.

An example of the program growth, is the co-taught program which included six classrooms in 2015-2016. By 2019-2020, there will be at least 14 co-taught classes. Co-taught classes are offered in the subjects of English, Math, Science, and Social Science and have been present at all grade levels of English and in Algebra I for three years. There have been co-teaching classes in Geometry for two years, and History and Biology for one year. Moreover, there are now Academy classes available for students who are in general education classes throughout the day. This gives the opportunity to reteach lessons in a small environment, practice organizational skills, or get any additional support needed for success in general education classes. Academy classes at ABC High School have also grown in number. There were four classes in 2015-2016 and there will be eight classes in 2019-2020. To support the growth of inclusion and create a shared vision, there is a district strategic growth plan to continue to expand co-teaching options in all subject areas over the next two years, reaching full implementation in the 2019-2020 school year.

Racial and ethnic data for the high school in this study is found in Data Quest, which provides publically available data (one year behind the current academic year). Data Quest (2017) reported a population of 69.9% Latino, 25.7% White, 1.4% Asian, 1.1% Filipino, .04% Black, and .02% Native American. Of the student population 1,483 students were considered socio-economically disadvantaged, 386 of the students were identified as English Language Learners, and 321 of the students were identified as students with disabilities.

## **Participants**

The total sample of 36 participants was comprised of teachers and managers between the ages of 22 and 65. Participation was voluntary and participants had the option to opt-out of the research at any time. There was no exclusionary criteria employed.

**Group data.** Surveys were distributed to 125 teachers in all departments at a comprehensive high school and 16 surveys were distributed to managers. Of the total surveys distributed, 25.5% were returned and analyzed ( $N = 36$ ). Of the 36 surveys, 75% ( $n = 27$ ) were teachers and 25% ( $n = 9$ ) were management. Of the respondents, 75% ( $n = 27$ ) considered were general educators and 25% ( $n = 9$ ) of both teachers and managers were special educators. Furthermore, there were different levels of teaching experience among the respondents as follows: (a) 33.3% of the respondents ( $n = 12$ ) had 1 to 5 years of teaching experience; (b) 30.5% of the respondents ( $n = 11$ ) had 20 or more years of experience; (c) 16.6% of the respondents ( $n = 6$ ) had 11 to 15 years of experience; (d) 13.8% of the respondents ( $n = 5$ ) had 6 to 10 years of experience, and (e) 5.5% of the respondents ( $n = 2$ ) had 16 to 20 years of teaching experience.

**Teachers.** Teachers across all departments of the school were surveyed and the total of teacher responses ( $n = 27$ ) were analyzed. Nineteen percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the teachers who responded were special education teachers. A couple of teachers ( $n = 2$ ) were subject matter teachers who also had special education credentialing (e.g., a special education teacher who co-teaches in a general education math class held both a special education credential and single subject math competency). The English Department represented 22.2% of the respondents ( $n=6$ ); the Science Department represented 22.2% of the

respondents ( $n = 6$ ); the Social Science Department represented 14.8% of the respondents ( $n = 4$ ); the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department represented 11.1% of the respondents ( $n = 3$ ); the Math Department represented 11.1% of the respondents ( $n = 3$ ); and Special Day Class Teachers represented 11.1% of the teacher responses ( $n = 3$ ). In addition, teachers varied in what grade levels (9-12 grade) and how many of these high school grade levels the individual teacher taught. Thirty-three percent ( $n = 9$ ) of the teachers taught all four high school grade levels, 25.9% ( $n = 7$ ) taught three high school grade levels, 22.2% ( $n = 6$ ) taught two high school grade levels, and 18.5% of all teachers ( $n = 5$ ) who responded taught one grade level.

**Managers.** Managers comprised 25% ( $n = 9$ ) of the respondents. Managers included superintendent, directors, principal, vice-principals, coordinators and program specialists. Fifty-six percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the managers who responded were general educators.

### **Survey**

All teachers, administrators, and management personnel in the high school were invited to participate in the study. The survey was a paper survey, adapted with approval from an assessment of school practices related to inclusive education (Stetson & Associates, Inc., 2014) (see Appendix A). All participants received a packet that included an introduction to the study, an informed consent letter assuring confidentiality, and the paper survey.

The procedure began with a letter of consent (see Appendix B). This letter informed participants that there was implicit consent if they continued the survey, and that they could opt out at any time. The survey included the following demographics (a) position,

(b) years of teaching, (c) subject, and (d) grade taught. The 31 survey questions were formatted into a 3-point Likert type scale format adapted from the work by Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014). The scale was as follows: 3 = in place, 2 = improvement needed, 1= not in place. Each section also included one open-ended question. This survey interrelated with the 11 practices identified as essential to elementary or middle school student success by The Donahue Institute (2004). As cited by Thurlow, (2005) these practices included the following:

- Curriculum alignment with the state standards,
- Effective systems to support curriculum alignment,
- Emphasis on inclusion and access to the curriculum,
- Culture and practices that support high standards and student achievement,
- A well-disciplined academic and social environment,
- Use of student assessment data to inform decision making,
- Unified practice supported by targeted professional development,
- Access to resources to support key initiatives,
- Effective staff member recruitment, retention, and deployment,
- Flexible leaders and staff that work effectively in a dynamic environment, and
- Effective leadership.

The researcher analyzed these practices in order to adapt a survey tool that would assist in answering the research questions posed in this study. The final survey contained 31 questions that were categorized into six sections: (a) instructional setting, (b)

collaboration, (c) instructional practices, (d) in-class support, (e) relationships, and (f) effective use of resources.

## **Procedures**

This study included a pilot and two distinct stages of data collection. First, a pilot survey was given to two administrators and two teachers at a high school who were not included in the study. This pilot was used to calibrate time in taking the survey and to ensure clarity. Participants were asked to give feedback to determine the clarity of the survey questions. This verbal input was utilized to adjust the survey format accordingly, as well as create face validity.

The Primary Investigator (PI) provided a special education administrative staff member with copies of the letter of consent and the survey, which were distributed to staff mailboxes. There were directions for those taking the survey to deposit their responses into the locked mailbox located in the Staff Lounge. Outside of the demographics of teacher, manager, subject, grade, special or general educator, and years teaching, there were no other distinguishing factors. All participants were given the opportunity to discontinue participation in the study.

Next, teachers, and managers completed the survey. The survey served as the primary source of data when examining effective practices at the school. Embedded in the survey were six open-ended questions. The aim of these questions was to clarify responses and analyze them with scaled survey results. The questions on the survey served to identify effective practices utilized at the school, as reported by teachers as well as management.

Additionally, the data was analyzed to determine any similarities or differences in responses between managers, and teachers.

Finally, the researcher collected publicly available school data from the California Department of Education using Data Quest (2017). Student Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores in eleventh grade English Language Arts and Math were compared to the state averages. Additionally, these results were compared with survey results. This analysis helped determine if the identified practices were present at the school and if there was an impact on enhancing student learning outcomes when compared to the state.

### **Confidentiality**

No identifying information on participants, including name, gender or race, were collected in this study. Demographic information gathered regarding participants on the surveys included: Title, Teacher, or Manager, grade level taught, subject taught, general education or special education teacher, and years of educational experience. However, the demographic information collected was enough to identify individual teachers; consequently, the confidentiality was maintained in the reporting of the data in a manner that does not lead to identifying individuals who participate. The data was reported as groups (i.e., grade level; 9, 10, 11, 12, or subject matter; English, Math etc.). Individual teacher responses within the research did not include demographic data to identify the individual. Additionally, the school district was not referred to by pseudonym, and only general geographical information and general student demographic information was reported. Surveys were completed and returned to a locked mailbox located in the staff

lounge (one in each of the four lounges were available). Each Friday, the boxes were brought to the PI by the special education administrative staff member to be unlocked, and the surveys were then collected. Surveys were not be collected individually from respondents. Over three consecutive Fridays, the mailboxes were relocked and returned to the staff lounges. The collected surveys were kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office, or in a locked file cabinet at the residence of the PI.

Data was compiled using Excel, and the researcher recorded data on a master spreadsheet on a password protected computer. To protect confidentiality, only an ID number and demographics were assigned to individual participants. Data and materials were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office where only the researcher had access to the documents. Electronic files were stored on a password protected computer and iPhone.

### **Risks and Benefits**

Some people may feel nervous, or be concerned that their identity along with responses may be revealed if they take part in this type of research. However, no identifying information was used in the final report. Responses were anonymous and confidentiality was protected. When necessary, ID numbers were used when analyzing and disseminating results in the final report. While the researcher did not anticipate any direct benefits to individual participants, this study will allow the researcher to better understand the successes and barriers that educators at ABC High School were encountering in their work regarding inclusion. There was also a Letter of Cooperation from the District Superintendent agreeing to participate in this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of effective inclusionary practices in high school classrooms and determine if these practices promote academic success for students with mild to moderate disabilities. What follows are the results of the study focused on a Central California comprehensive high school (ABC High School) and the inclusionary practices employed at the school. The research analyzed the influence of these supports on achievement of students with mild to moderate disabilities. This chapter reports the results of survey data and open-ended questions posed to teachers and managers. Additionally, it reports SBAC scores for ELA and Math for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.

#### **Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and content analyses were utilized in this study. Specifically, descriptive statistics (i.e., percentage scores, means and standard deviations) were used to examine the 36 participant responses to 31 Likert type scale questions. The survey included a three point scale as follows: 3 = in place, 2 = improvement needed, 1 = not in place. Additionally, six open-ended questions were analyzed, utilizing the following quantitative content analysis process: (a) responses from common questions on each survey were typed word for word, (b) responses were read and reread, and assigned an initial by categories, so that a more thorough analysis could be made, (c) categories were combined and coded according to like themes to assist in organizing the information, and

(d) percentage scores were obtained and reported for each category (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). The results of this study are presented according to each research question.

**Research Question 1: As reported by teachers and managers, to what extent have practices that promote inclusion been implemented at the examined high school?**

All survey responses were recorded and analyzed to find the overall mean score and standard deviation based on a 3-point Likert type scale (3 = in place; 2 = improvement needed; and 1= not in place). Furthermore, the data was expressly analyzed in each of the six practices (e.g., instructional setting, collaboration, instructional practices, in-class support, relationships, and resources) to find the mean score and standard deviation.

Based on 36 participant responses, the overall mean score of all six practices was 2.55 with a standard deviation of .56. The six areas were further analyzed by category in order to determine the extent that each of the six practices were implemented. In order of highest mean to lowest mean the categories ranked as follows:

(a) relationships ( $M = 2.79$ ;  $SD = .41$ ), (b) instructional setting ( $M = 2.62$ ;  $SD = .47$ ), (c) resources ( $M = 2.58$ ;  $SD = .52$ ), (d) collaboration ( $M = 2.52$ ;  $SD = .57$ ), (e) in-class support ( $M = 2.51$ ;  $SD = .70$ ), and (f) instructional practices ( $M = 2.34$ ;  $SD = .57$ ) (see Figure 3).

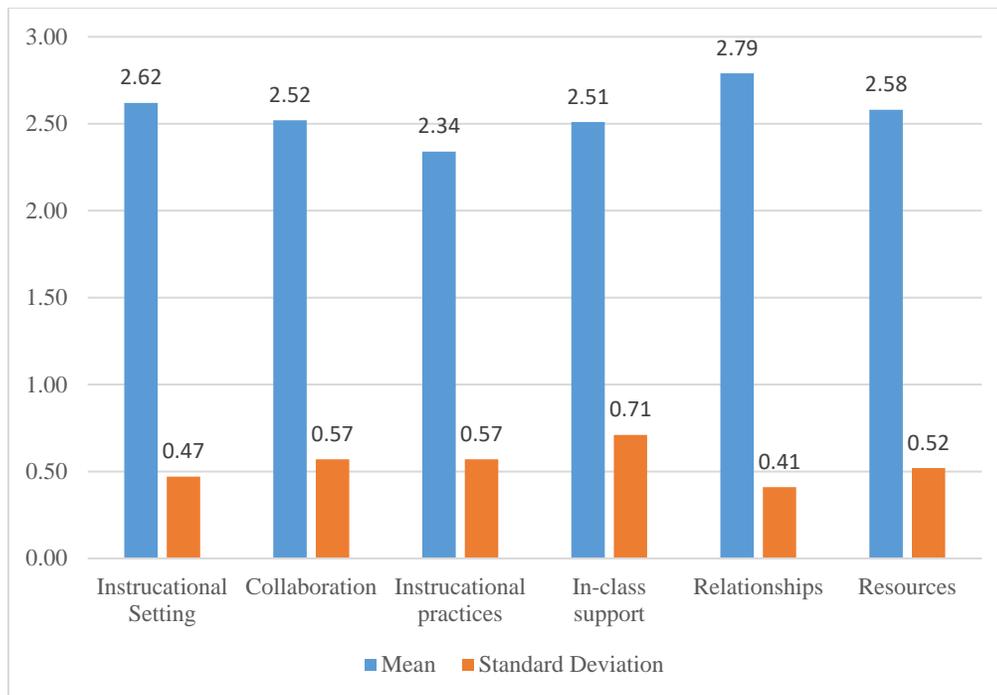


Figure 3. Overall mean and standard deviation of six practices by group

**Instructional setting.** The first practice analyzed was instructional setting, which included six individual questions. This practice was found to be an area of relative strength with the second greatest overall mean ( $M = 2.72$ ). Two questions had a mean score above 2.80 (e.g., Question 5 and Question 1). Both questions related to the high school facilities. One question had a mean score of 2.79 (e.g., Question 4). This question pertained to the location of individual special education classes on campus. Finally, three questions had a mean score of 2.62 (e.g., Question 2, Question 3, and Question 6) (see Table 1).

Overall, 55 % of the responses to open ended questions in the area of instructional setting were identified as positive whereas 45% of the responses were identified as negative. All open-ended responses specifically about facilities were positive. There were 14 responses regarding student placement in general education and more than half

(57.1%) of the input was negative. Specifically, the concerns included the acceptance and willingness of general education teachers to support students with disabilities in their classroom. One special education math teacher with 9 to 11 years of experience commented, “I don't think some general education teachers want to deal with the educational needs of special education students”. A general education World Languages teacher with 9-11 years of experience observed, “There is a lot of forward movement to including student populations into the general education population. However, it appears that teaching staff are hesitant to this inclusion due to the large class sizes (less available individualized instructional time), lack of confidence in behavior management, and lack of knowledge in ways to support students”.

Table 1

*Mean and Standard Deviation by Instructional Setting and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	Students are educated on their home campus	2.85	0.36
Question 2	Accommodations and modifications are made for Gen Ed access	2.62	0.49
Question 3	The general education setting is the first consideration	2.62	0.56
Question 4	SPED instructional settings are around the school	2.79	0.48
Question 5	Facilities for SPED are comparable to Gen Ed	2.89	0.33
Question 6	Decisions are made based on student need and not availability	2.62	0.5

**Collaboration.** Eight individual questions were analyzed in the area of collaboration. This area has an overall mean score of 2.52 and a standard deviation of .57. Question three had a mean score of 2.87 ( $SD = .45$ ) and asked if special education teachers were full members of the school faculty. Question one probed about school leaders and their expectations regarding collaboration. This question had a mean score of 2.77 ( $SD = .40$ ). Question two inquired about special education teachers and their participation as

members in department meetings and had a mean score of 2.70 ( $SD = .54$ ). Question eight had a mean score of 2.52 ( $SD = .51$ ) and questioned whether all general education teachers are aware of student IEP's when they enter their class for instruction. Finally, four questions had a mean score below 2.50. Question four ( $M = 2.43$ ;  $SD = .56$ ), question five ( $M = 2.23$ ;  $SD = .55$ ), question six ( $M = 2.37$ ;  $SD = .64$ ), and question seven ( $M = 2.43$ ;  $SD = .64$ ) each related to collaborative planning. Specifically, (a) skills concerning collaboration, (b) general education and special education teachers planning together, and (c) time for planning (see Table 2).

Results of the open ended responses in the area of collaboration, found the majority of comments (68%) to be negative. One manager with 1 to 5 years of experience responded, "There is great collaboration between the co-teachers who teach together. However, that is not universal with all SPED and Gen Ed teachers. There could be more collaboration for mainstreamed students and SDC (Special Day Class) students". Notably, time was a key theme and concern in this area. There were nine comments regarding time and more than half (67%) were negative. Primarily, respondents felt there was not enough time for collaboration.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviation by Types of Collaboration and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	School leaders discuss expectations for collaboration, equity and mutual respect	2.77	0.4
Question 2	SPED teachers are members of grade level/ department teams	2.70	0.54
Question 3	SPED teachers are considered full members of school faculty	2.87	0.45
Question 4	Personnel are skilled in collaboration/ planning techniques	2.43	0.56
Question 5	General education and SPED plan together	2.23	0.55
Question 6	Sufficient time is available to support quality planning	2.37	0.64
Question 7	School teams openly share teaching styles, instructional expectations and have shared ownership	2.43	.64
Question 8	All faculty members are aware of IEP's	2.52	.51

*Note.* IEP = Individualized Education plan

**Instructional practices.** This practice was analyzed examining six individual questions. Results indicated that participants identified this as an area of need ( $M = 2.34$ ;  $SD = .57$ ). The highest score was question one, which had a mean score of 2.63 ( $SD = .55$ ). The remaining five questions all had mean scores that ranged from 2.45 to 2.17 and the standard deviations (variability) ranged from .46 to .71. The questions had varied topics regarding instructional practices at ABC High School. Specifically, (a) single curricular frameworks are available for all students in all departments ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = .53$ ), (b) accommodations and modifications are available for all students in the classroom ( $M = 2.32$ ;  $SD = .47$ ), (c) teachers know the difference between accommodations and modifications for students ( $M = 2.29$ ;  $SD = .46$ ), (d) lecture is replaced by differentiated instruction ( $M = 2.19$ ;  $SD = .54$ ) and, (e) a campus wide behavioral support plan is in place ( $M = 2.17$ ;  $SD = .71$ ) (see Table 3).

Open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis. It was found that the responses indicated instructional practices were (a) in place, (b) in place but not in all areas, and (c) not in place. Forty-two percent of the responses pointed out that the instructional practices were *in place*, but *needed more development* in some areas. For example, one manager with 20 or more years of experience responded, “this is an area (instructional practices) of focus moving forward. The greatest area of strength is that some teachers are practicing differentiated instruction. The area of need is to build this practice school-wide”. A special education teacher who co-taught in Social Sciences and had 1 to 5 years of experience commented that practices varied based on department. Thirty-eight percent of the responses indicated that practices were *not in place*. A special

education math teacher with 9 to 11 years of experience and who co-taught with a general education teacher responded, “I think our general education teachers need more training and we all need a clear understanding of how to modify the curriculum to meet the needs of special education students in general education classes. I don’t think many of our general education teachers have or are making any changes to the way they have always taught”. Nineteen percent of the respondents felt the practices were *in place*. A general education English teacher with 6 to 11 years of experience identified that students with resource specialist services receive the same curriculum as their general education peers. When compared it was found that teachers (92%) and managers (78%) both identified instructional practices as *needs improvement* at ABC High School.

Table 3

*Mean and Standard Deviation by Instructional Practice and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	A variety of Instructional strategies are used in the classroom	2.63	0.55
Question 2	Lecture is replaced by differentiated instruction	2.19	0.54
Question 3	A single curricular framework for all	2.45	0.53
Question 4	Teachers know the difference between accommodations and modifications	2.29	0.46
Question 5	Accommodations and modifications are applied for all students	2.32	0.47
Question 6	Campus wide behavioral support is in place.	2.17	0.71

**In-class support.** This category had five questions and a group mean score of 2.51 ( $SD = .71$ ). Question one had a mean score of 2.63 ( $SD = .55$ ). The remaining four questions had mean scores that ranged from 2.19 to 2.45. The range of variability was .47 to .55. In-class support had varied topics regarding practices in the classroom at ABC High School. Specifically, support included (a) planning time and administrative support

to increase success of in class support ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = .53$ ), (b) no single approach such as co-teaching is offered for inclusion ( $M = 2.32$ ;  $SD = .47$ ), (c) peers are trained and used as support appropriately within the classroom ( $M = 2.29$ ;  $SD = .46$ ), and, (d) training for staff to provide in-class support ( $M = 2.19$ ;  $SD = .54$ ) (see Table 4).

Of the total open-ended responses ( $n = 23$ ) in the category of in-class support, 52% were negative, 39% were positive, and two comments were neither negative or positive. Based on responses, a trend was identified for more in-class support. These supports included peer support, training, time, and more in-class support for teachers and students.

Table 4

*Mean and Standard Deviation by In-class Support and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	Related services provide services within the gen ed classroom	2.63	0.55
Question 2	Staff is trained in providing in class support in gen ed	2.19	0.54
Question 3	There are systems in place: planning time administrative support to increase success of in class support	2.45	0.53
Question 4	Peers are used as tutors and are trained and used appropriately	2.29	0.46
Question 5	No single approach such as co-teaching is utilized	2.32	0.47

**Relationships.** This category had four questions and the highest overall group mean score of all practices of 2.79 ( $SD = .41$ ). The highest mean score in this sub-group was question one, which pertained to formal strategies for building positive student relationships ( $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = .37$ ). Question three asked participants to rate whether or not special education students were full members of the school community ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = .31$ ). Question four queried about parents feeling welcome and valued at the high

school ( $M = 2.29$ ;  $SD = .47$ ). Finally, Question two asked if relationships flourished between general education and special education students at the high school ( $M = 2.19$ ;  $SD = .45$ ) (see Table 5).

When asked for examples of positive peer and family relationships, 100% of the open-ended responses ( $n = 12$ ) were positive. Both teachers and managers identified a positive effect of both formal and informal efforts to build relationships. These responses countered question 2 on the survey in the area of relationships which had the lowest mean ( $M = 2.19$ ). A general education Science teacher with 1 to 5 years of experience responded, “We do an awesome job with this! The social benefits of inclusion are priceless! Our students are all accepted by their peers. Being a special education student in our school does not carry a stigma or negative association.” Another teacher stated, “the social aspect of this school is my favorite part of this campus- everyone is so loving, patient, and inclusive- both formally and informally”. The only piece of advice offered in the responses was from a manager with more than 20 years’ experience who commented, “We can improve how we partner with our parents.”

Table 5

*Mean and Standard Deviation by Relationships and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	The school uses more than one formal strategy to encourage positive student relationships	2.84	0.37
Question 2	Relationships flourish between gen and SPED students	2.19	0.45
Question 3	SPED students are considered full members of the school community	2.45	0.31
Question 4	Parents feel welcome and valued in the educational	2.29	0.47

**Resources.** This category had five questions and had a total mean score of 2.58 ( $SD = .52$ ). Question two, probed the provision of staff training and in-class support and had a mean score of 2.70 ( $SD = .47$ ). Question one had a mean score of 2.67 ( $SD = .59$ ) and inquired about special education students and if they received related services (e.g., speech etc.) within the classroom setting. Question three has a mean score of 2.60 ( $SD = .50$ ) and inquired about planning time and administrative support related to in-class support. Question 5 had a mean score of 2.58 ( $SD = .51$ ) and asked whether there were multiple approaches to in-class support. Finally, question four was about the use of peer tutors in the inclusionary setting and had a mean score of 2.37 ( $SD = .50$ ) (see Table 6).

The open-ended responses for the category of resources were all regarding personnel. The majority of the responses (67%) were positive. Thirty-three percent of the responses were negative. A special education teacher with 6 to 10 years of experience responded, “Resources are used to the best possible way. Staffing and scheduling is a challenge on any campus, but it is constantly being looked at and revised”. One comment was made regarding the need for peer tutors in Special Day Classes that serve students with moderate needs in English and Math. This comment recommended more support in that area at ABC High School.

Table 6

*Mean and Standard Deviation by Resources and Group*

Question		Mean	Standard Deviation
Question 1	Related services provide services within the gen ed classroom	2.67	0.59
Question 2	Staff is trained in providing in class support in gen ed	2.70	0.47
Question 3	There are systems in place: planning time administrative support to increase success of in class support	2.60	0.50
Question 4	Peers are used as tutors and are trained and used appropriately	2.37	0.50
Question 5	No single approach such as co-teaching is utilized	2.58	0.51

**Research Question 2: What comparisons exist between Teachers and Managers?**

Overall, the mean scores for teachers and managers of the six categories were as follows: (a) instructional setting ( $M = 2.72$ ), (b) collaboration ( $M = 2.52$ ), (c) instructional practices ( $M = 2.29$ ), (d) in-class support ( $M = 2.58$ ), (e) relationships ( $M = 2.80$ ), and (f) resources ( $M = 2.62$ ). When analyzed as a whole group for the six practices the results indicated overall scores of managers as ( $M = 2.57$ ;  $SD = .51$ ) and

teachers as ( $M = 2.50$ ;  $SD = .59$ ). Although the number of the teachers ( $n = 27$ ) and managers ( $n = 9$ ) in each group were different, the similarities of responses among all participants is apparent in how both groups view these essential practices at their school.

Of note, managers scored higher regarding in-class support than teachers (manager  $M = 2.69$ , teacher  $M = 2.46$ ). In contrast, the category of instructional practices was scored higher by teachers than managers (teacher  $M = 2.38$ , manager  $M = 2.20$ ) (see Figure 4).

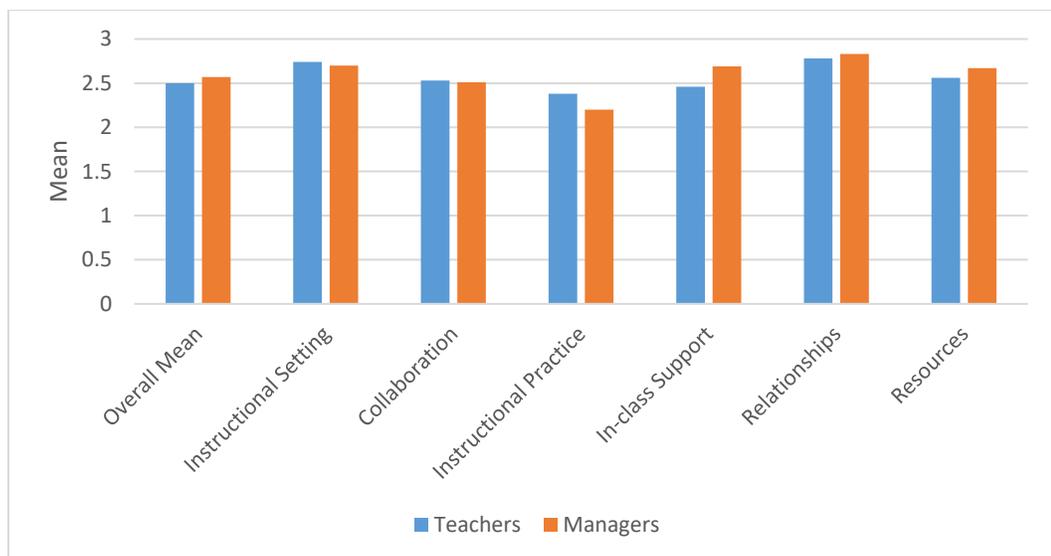


Figure 4. Teacher and manager mean scores by practice

In order to examine all six categories more closely, the open-ended questions were analyzed once again using contextual analysis to identify similarities and differences of data between managers and teachers.

**Instructional setting.** Over half of both managers and teachers (55% or greater) had positive responses to this query. However, when analyzed more closely, it was found that managers positively commented about the facilities and the physical aspects of the

instructional settings. However, even though each of these comments were considered positive responses to the same question, the subject was not analogous. For example, one manager responded, “we have comprehensive programs including SD (severely disabled), ED (emotionally disabled). Co-taught, RSP (resource specialist program) classes are situated throughout the campus. Facilities have recently been updated for SD.” These were focused on the physical aspects of the question, the facilities and the layout of classrooms. In comparison, a teacher’s response included, “general education (programming) needs to be the first setting considered for student placement. That is an area that I feel we are improving on”. Another example from a teacher included, “we work hard to include most of our special populations in our academic settings”. These responses were directed at the classroom itself.

**Collaborative practices.** In the area of collaboration, seven out of 10 participants in both groups had negative responses to the open-ended question. Responses were considered negative when the response indicated a need for improvement in collaborative practices. For example, one manager responded, “Teachers receive IEP's (Individualized education plans) at a glance, but may not always be able to interpret them or have organizational systems to keep them organized and keep track of accommodations implemented.” Similarly, a general education teacher commented, “IEP's are sent, but follow-up is lacking.” This indicates a need for improvement in the area of follow-through of IEP’s.

**Instructional practices.** Notably, all responses (100%) of both teachers and managers in the area of instructional practices indicated a need for more support. In other

words, although both teachers and managers felt there was some improvement, no responses indicated there was full implementation or mastery of instructional practices. The following types of responses were found in both groups' responses and might indicate a need for improvement; (a) "some groups", (b) "progressing", (c) "aren't quite there", (d) "continued improvement", (e) "depending on department", and (f) "more progress needed". Additionally, a manager commented that there were some practices already implemented, but there was still a need for them to be built school wide. This is comparable to a teacher who specifically stated some classrooms differentiate instruction while others rely on lecture in their instructional practices.

**In-class supports.** This open-ended question was posed to participants specifically to identify areas of success. However, almost half (48%) of all responses from both teachers and managers included a statement of something more that was needed or could be done better rather than successes. For example, a negative response was from a teacher who indicated an overall need for more support for general education classes as students with disabilities are now included at a higher rate. A manager indicated the need for more training, "The emphasis on increasing co-teaching classes needs to continue. Continue training with aides and staff." However, despite the agreement that more needs to be done and lack of specificity about successes, 80% of management responses were positive and 30% of teacher responses were positive.

**Peer or family relationships.** There were 13 responses in this area, and 11 were about the positive peer and social relationships built on this campus. Again, this contradicts the survey findings regarding relationships. There were two comments about

parent communication. Both of these were offered as examples of relationships that are important, and one was made by a teacher and one was made by a manager. Of the 13 responses, there was only one made by a manager, making it impossible to compare any open-ended question data about relationships at the high school.

**Resources.** The comments in this area were limited and made primarily by teachers. However, all comments from both teachers and managers focused on support personnel. For example, one manager and one teacher commented on the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom. The manager responded that the school site is, “looking for ways to utilize paraprofessional most effectively”. A special education teacher commented, “I use paraprofessionals in lessons to help aid students”. The majority of the remaining respondents mentioned either positive case manager support or peer support for students with disabilities in the classroom.

**Research Question 3: What is the influence of the implementation of these practices on 11th grade English Language Arts and Math state test scores?**

**English Language Arts.** SBAC results in ELA and Math were retrieved from California Department of Education’s website via DataQuest. The results for eleventh grade special education students who participated in state testing at ABC High School in 2017, as well as the average for eleventh grade special education students for the state, were examined. ELA scores indicated that ABC High School was outperforming the state based on scores in the combined areas of *met* and *exceeds standards*. Specifically, in the area of ELA 15% of students with disabilities at ABC High School *met standards* and 4% of the students *exceeded standards*. In comparison, 13% of the state population *met standards* and 4% *exceeded standards*. Notably, *nearly met* results for ABC High School

were 10% higher than the state results. Also, the *not met* results were 13% lower for ABC High School (see Figure 5).

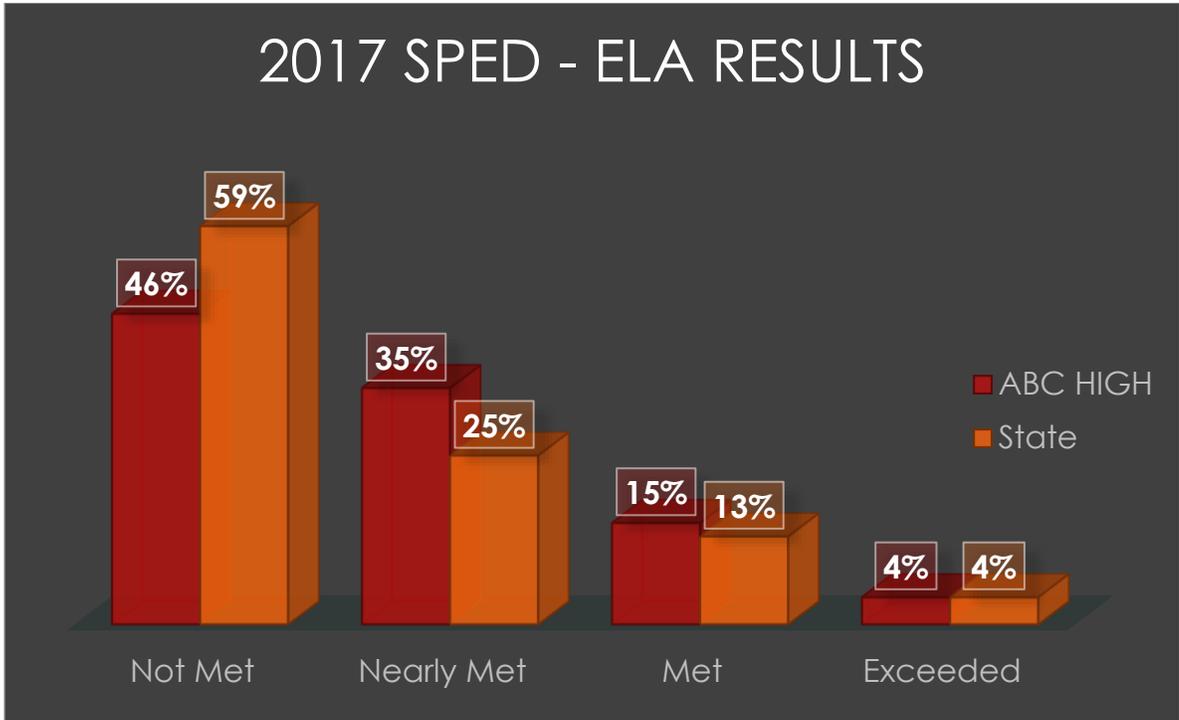
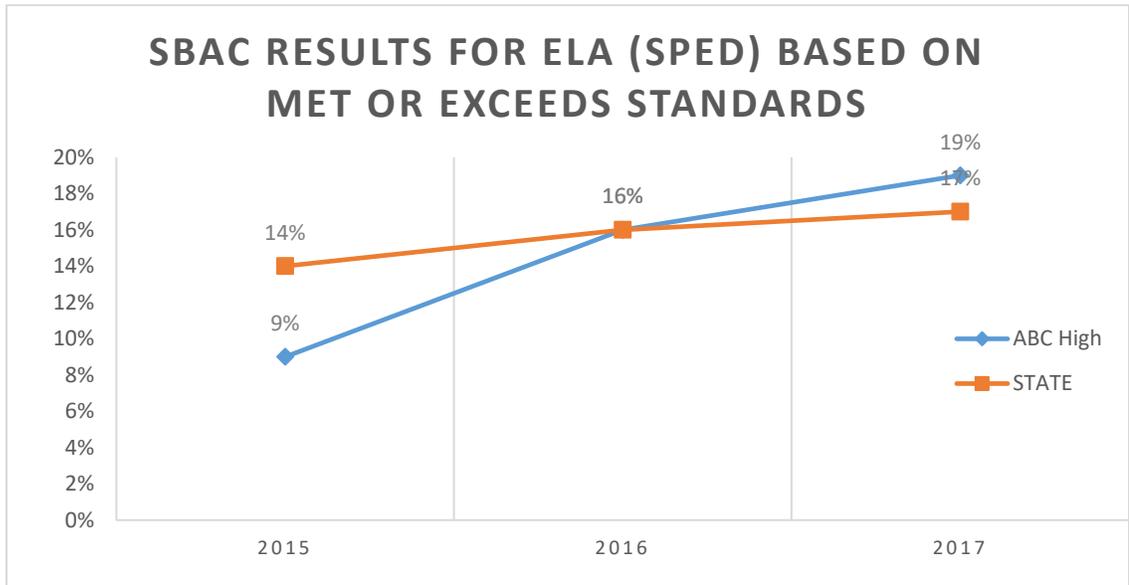


Figure 5. 2017 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) results in ELA for comparison of SPED results for ABC High School and the State of California by percentages and standards.

In order to create a comprehensive look at the data, a 3-year longitudinal data was examined to determine how ABC High School students with disabilities have been progressing in ELA in relation to the State of California. The findings demonstrated that there has been a positive change over the past three years for students with disabilities at ABC High School. Scores have increased 10% since 2015, whereas the state has grown three percent over the same time period. Additionally, in 2015 ABC High School was performing below the state average with 9% of students with disabilities scoring *met* or

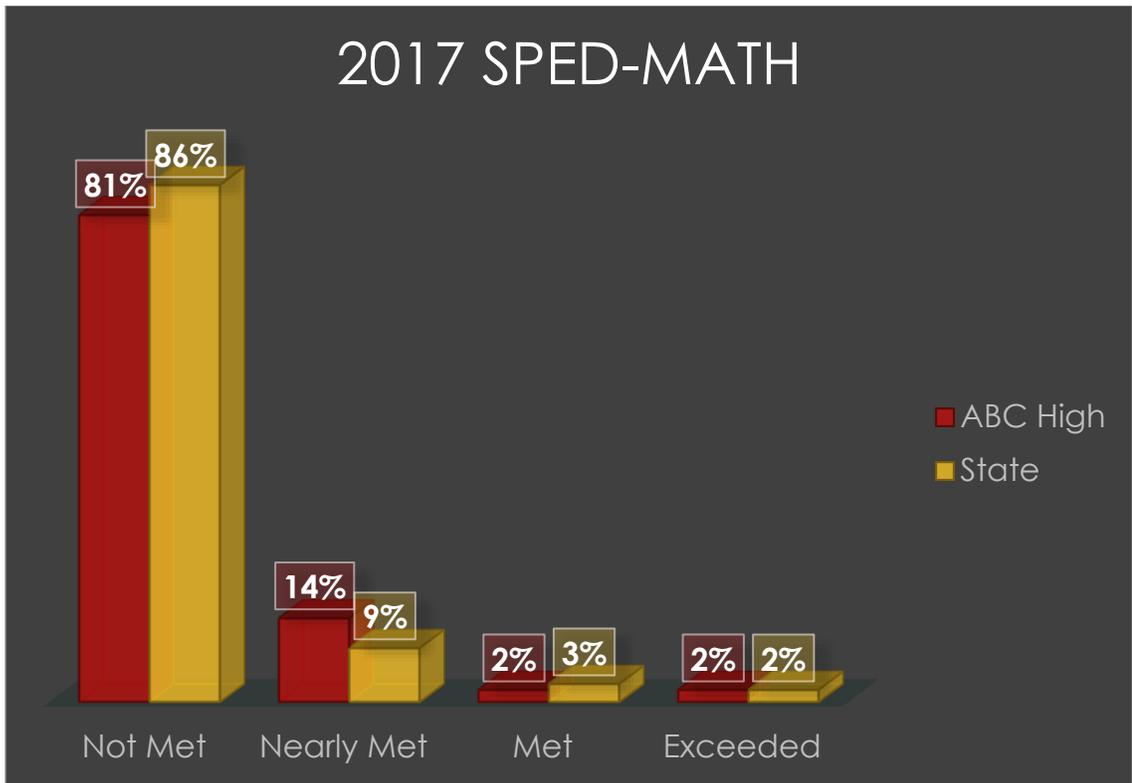
*exceeds* standards in comparison to the state students, who achieved 14% *met or exceeds* standards on SBAC test results. According to 2016 testing results, both ABC High School and the state had 16% of the students with disabilities in the *met or exceeded* standard ranges. Moreover, data indicated ABC High School exceeded the state in 2017 with 19% while the state had 17% of the students with disabilities *meeting or exceeding* standards. Perhaps, if ABC High school and the state were to continue on this trajectory, the high school would continue to grow 3.3% annually, while the state would grow one percent annually (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Three-year trend comparison of ABC High School and State of California SBAC results in ELA by percentages from 2015-2017.

**Math.** SBAC results in Math were retrieved from California Department of Education’s website via DataQuest. The results for eleventh grade students with disabilities who participated in state testing at ABC High School in 2017 as well as the average for eleventh grade students with disabilities for the State of California were

analyzed for this research question. Results indicated that both ABC High School and the State of California had very few students who *met* or *exceeded* standards in the area of math. Specifically, the state had one percent higher than ABC High School with five percent of the students with disabilities *meeting* or *exceeding* standards in math. Upon further examination, it was found that ABC High school had 14% of students with disabilities who *nearly met* standards in comparison to 9% of the students across the state. In other words, 5% more students at ABC High school were closer to meeting standards than the state. However, these differences were minor and should be examined over time to analyze trends (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7. 2017 SBAC results in Math for students with disabilities for ABC High School and the State of California by percentages and standards.*

A further examination was made by analyzing a three year trend for students with disabilities in the area of Math. This was done to evaluate the comparison in achievement between ABC High School and the State of California. The comparison demonstrated an observable trend that both ABC High School and the State of California have not achieved a high level of success or any consistent growth over the three examined years (2015-2017) in the area of Math. For ABC High School, there was a marginal amount of growth (4%) in 2016; however, that was followed by a 2% drop the following year. Overall, the high school had 2% growth over the three year period. In comparison, the state had similar results growing 3% in 2016 only to decrease by 1% the following year.

In total, there has been 2% growth over the three years for the students with disabilities in the state. In sum, over the three years there has been low score for both ABC High school and the State of California when examining the score in Math for students with disabilities. Although both entities made a small amount of growth the second year, this was followed by a dip in 2017 (see Figure 8).

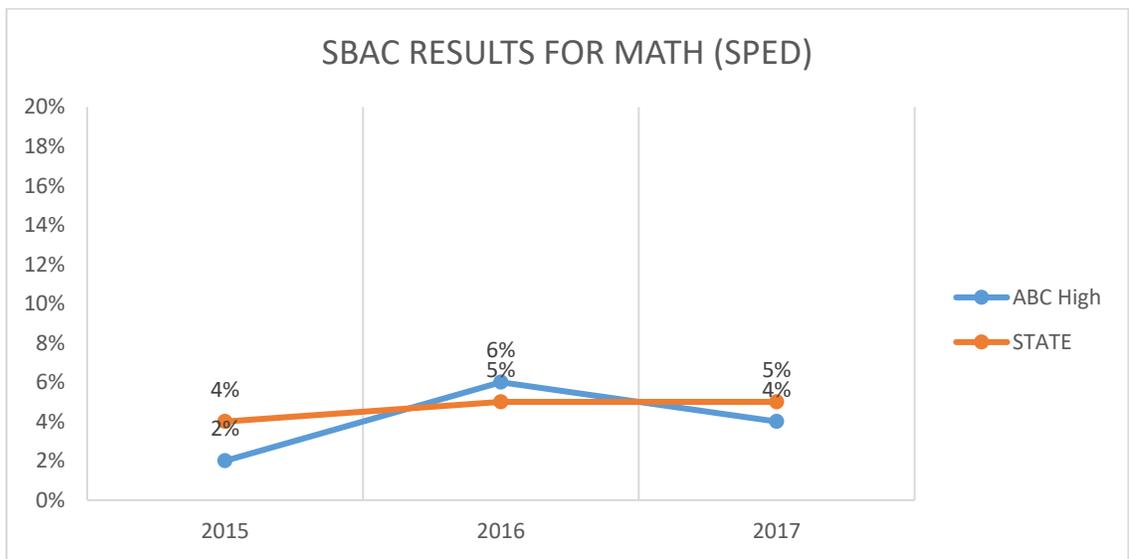


Figure 8. Three-year trend comparison of ABC High School and State of California SBAC results for Math by percentage from 2015-2017.

### Summary

This chapter reported the results of survey data and open ended questions posed to teachers and managers as well as compared SBAC scores for ELA and Math for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students at both ABC High School and the State of California for students with disabilities. The data was analyzed to determine (a) to what extent practices that promote inclusion have been implemented, (b) comparisons of responses between teachers and

managers at ABC High School, and (c) the influence of these practices on standardized testing.

Overall survey results indicated that the six examined areas in inclusionary practice were not completely in place, and there is room for improvement at ABC High School. Specifically, there were areas identified as more effectively in place (relationships) and areas identified as being implemented less effectively (instructional practices). Open-ended questions corresponded in these areas. Specifically, all responses regarding relationships were positive for both managers and teachers. Open-ended responses for managers and teachers regarding instructional practices reflected an overwhelming opinion that this areas needs improvement and increased implementation. Instructional setting was found as an area of relative strength based on survey data. However, the open-ended questions found the teachers and managers approached the responses from a slightly different viewpoint. Managers focused on the physical aspects of the instructional facility (building and location) and teachers focused on the classroom itself.

The final analysis was based on SBAC scores. These scores were evaluated for 2017 as well as over a 3-year period from 2015 to 2017. The findings indicated the students with disabilities at ABC High school have been experiencing steady improvement over the past three years in the area of ELA. Additionally, scores have risen from performing below the state average to above the state average over that period of time. Comparatively, the State of California has a slower improvement trend and the average score was below that of ABC High School in 2017. On the other hand, the scores

analyzed for Math show similarly poor results for both ABC High School and the State of California with equally small gains and losses over the three years.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### Introduction

The purpose of this multiple-methods study was to examine the inclusive practices implemented at ABC High School, beliefs of teachers and managers about these practices, and the influence of these practices on the standardized testing achievement of students with mild to moderate disabilities.

The major findings of this study indicated that the six examined areas of inclusionary practice were all present, but not *fully in place* at ABC High School. Markedly, there were areas that were identified as more effectively in place than others. The category of relationships had the greatest mean score which indicated that teachers and managers identified these practices most effectively in place. In contrast, the area of instructional practices was rated lowest of all six practices, which indicated that teachers and managers recognized that instructional practices were not adequately in place and in need of improvement.

Upon evaluation, there were congruent responses between survey data and the open-ended questions regarding the practice identified as most effectively in place (relationships) and the area identified as being implemented least effectively (instructional practices) in place. Specifically, all responses regarding relationships were positive for both managers and teachers. Conversely, open-ended responses for teachers and managers concerning instructional practices indicated a significant need for improvement and increased implementation in this area. These findings directly related to

the survey results. These areas are notable points that align with the ideas of Smith et al. (2015) who report a lack of success for students with disabilities at the secondary level due to (a) miscommunication between educators, (b) increased difficulty and complexity in assignments, and (c) teachers struggles in addressing diverse learning needs because secondary education has a strong focus on curriculum mastery. All of these may relate to relationships and instructional practices examined in this study.

Major findings on the SBAC scores established that students with disabilities at ABC High school have been experiencing steady improvement over the past three years in the area of ELA but not in Math. Most notably, ELA scores differed between ABC High School and the State of California. ABC High School scores for students with disabilities grew steadily over the past three years and exceeded the state average in 2017 by two percent. This was a notable improvement in relation to three years prior when the state was outperforming ABC school by 5%. However, Math scores reflected equally poor outcomes for students with disabilities both at ABC High School and on the state level without significant growth over the examined three year period. There were similar findings based on the Nation's Report Card (2015). This report indicated that students with disabilities nationwide made no gain in math achievement of standardized assessment between the years of 2011 and 2015. Each year the score stayed at 218, which was considered basic. In sum, the findings indicated that students with disabilities at ABC High School were exceeding the results for eleventh graders on SBAC testing in ELA in California. Furthermore, it was found that math scores were not higher than the

state results and, in fact, both at the school level and the state level these results were equally unimpressive.

Overall, the findings indicated that the practices at ABC High School may have positively influenced their standardized ELA test scores, but not the Math scores. Moreover, past research indicates that this maybe a trend nationwide. This final chapter discussed the results of this study in terms of findings, implications, limitations, and future research.

### **Inclusionary Practices**

The most remarkable finding of the study was that both teachers and managers felt there were areas of strength and need for improvement in the six practices. This need for improvement is reflected in the overall mean score for participants ( $M=2.55$ ) for all areas. This score was between the highest rating of 3 (*practice is in place*), and 2 (*practice needs improvement*). The mean scores for teachers and managers of the six categories were essentially the same. Therefore, it appears there were similar beliefs between teachers and managers regarding the practices at ABC High School when analyzed as a group. The results indicated some practices were more developed and utilized than others. For example, practices regarding instructional setting had the highest overall mean. This included having facilities available that are comparable for both students with disabilities and general education students ( $M = 2.89$ ). Results also indicate that some practices need improvement; instructional practices being the area with the lowest overall mean. An example of this would be lecture being replaced by differentiated instruction in general education classrooms ( $M = 2.19$ ), and campus wide behavioral supports being

implemented ( $M = 2.17$ ). It should also be noted that none of the practices were completely absent and, more notably, none of the six areas had a mean score below 2.0. This suggested that respondents did not feel there was an area that was *not in place*. Moreover, when looking at the SBAC standardized testing scores, one could also infer from the increased ELA scores over time (when inclusionary practices were in place) of a possible relationship between these practices. This finding is partnered with flat unimpressive results in Math and reiterates that ABC High School has strengths but also room for improvement. The finding related to math begs the question why the different outcomes in ELA and Math. More research is required to conclusively examine these differences and the reasoning behind them.

**Relationships.** The highest results based on survey responses were in the practices involving relationships. Both the Likert type scale responses and open-ended responses were positive. One teacher specifically noted that being a student with disabilities does not carry a stigma at ABC High School. This could be attributed to the formal strategies in place at the school to support students with disabilities of all types. For example, co-teaching was available in all subjects and grades and most students were not segregated into separate classrooms for core curriculum. Additionally, there was a predominant club on campus (i.e., Circle of Friends) that implicitly taught general education students how to build strong social relationships with students with disabilities. In addition, there was disability awareness provided to all freshman on campus, and there were activities in place, such as Gifted Cheer, found at sporting events throughout the school year. The intentional focus on inclusionary relationships as well as academic and social

opportunities led to more access and subsequently general education peer relationships and experiences at ABC High School for students with disabilities. It is notable that these types of inclusionary practices have been reported to increase achievement on (a) standardized testing, and (b) improved post-secondary outcomes in the area of graduation rate and college attendance (Huberman & Parrish, 2011; Rojewski et al., 2015).

Huberman and Parrish identified four school districts whose students with disabilities attained higher achievement based on state testing scores. They then studied the practices these four districts had in common. One commonality found between the districts was that their programs all embraced inclusionary practices. The schools allowed for access to core curriculum to students with disabilities as well as shared curriculum for general education and special education students. Furthermore, coordination between general education and special education teachers was emphasized at these districts. In the longitudinal study by Rojewski et al., researchers found that students with disabilities earning 80% or more of their academic credits in general education settings (inclusive placement) were twice as likely to enroll and continue in postsecondary education, when compared to students who received fewer credits in inclusive classroom settings.

Moreover, they found that students with disabilities who communicated that some of their friends planned to attend a 4-year college were 1.32 times more likely to experience more positive secondary experiences. These experiences included more work outcomes (employment), than students who indicated that none of their friends planned to pursue a 4-year college education. Therefore, the inclusion both academically and socially is essential for success beyond high school.

**Instructional setting.** Practices related to instructional setting were an area of strength for ABC High School. These practices specifically related to facilities, classroom setting, and accommodations made in order to give students with disabilities access to general education settings. This strength may be connected to the prior category of relationships. That is, students given opportunities to access the instructional setting in the same manner as general education peers were also more likely to partake in relationship building with both peers and teachers. It stands to reason that both relationships and access to instructional setting are relative strengths because of their developed symbiotic relationship. Both of these practices (relationships and instructional setting) were identified as two of six essential practices that support successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and consequently improved achievement for students (Stetson, 2014; Thurlow, 2005). Specifically, Stetson created the survey that was adapted for the collection of data in this study because the findings matched so closely with the work of Thurlow. From the findings of the current study, one may assume that these two particular practices have a strong influence on each other as effective practices.

Open-ended responses in this area were not completely congruent to the survey results. All responses about the physical facilities were positive. Students were reported to be physically educated in an integrated manner around the campus. Also, the facilities that provided access for students with disabilities were upgraded with a focus on student engagement (i.e., flexible learning environments). However, open-ended responses regarding classroom setting were found to hold some concerns. Specifically, there were

concerns that not all general education teachers were open to having special education students in their classes. Their rationale was based on oversized classes, class populations becoming unbalanced due to students with intensive needs, and classroom management needs. These areas are worthy of further investigation and research at the secondary level in order to identify ways to support general education teachers regarding these concerns.

The evident areas of strength in facilities coupled with the concerns expressed in the open-ended questions may reflect the reasons that practices around instructional setting were not considered *fully in place*. It is recommended that when planning future classes that class size, balancing classrooms heterogeneously, and professional development regarding differentiated instruction and classroom management be taken into account. With increase numbers of students with disabilities being included in general education classes, it is now evident that teachers need additional support. Therefore, these efforts should also be clearly articulated to teachers so they build their confidence as they analyze their classroom needs and instructional practices.

**Instructional practices.** When examined, it was found that both managers and teachers felt there was need for improvement in instructional practices. Specifically, this was an area where both teacher and managers reported that practices such as differentiated instruction or co-teaching were not universally in place. There were explicit responses that requested more universal implementation of the practices that were being done well in this high school. These suggestions included co-teaching and cooperative learning versus direct instruction in more classrooms. The need to focus on instructional practices is vital because previous research reported methods and supports for students

with disabilities benefited all students (both general education and special education) within the general education learning environment (Jordan et al., 2009). Examples of recommended practices by Jordan included the following: (a) effective teaching skills, (b) high levels of student engagement relating to strong classroom and time management skills, (c) differentiating instruction and scaffolding learning based on need, and (d) engaging students in higher-order thinking. It is recommended that ABC High School continue to support the effective practices already in place through professional development. It was noted that ABC High School had already begun this process with peer walks that allowed teachers to observe co-teaching and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) classes. Both of these approaches encourage and nurture active learning techniques.

**SBAC results.** Standardized testing results analyzed for students with disabilities at both ABC High School and at the state level revealed different findings for English Language Arts and Math. ELA results indicated ABC High School was performing above the State average for students with disabilities in this area. This is similar to the findings of Blackorby et al. (2005) who reported that results of standards-based achievement tests for students with disabilities who were included in general education classes at the secondary level performed closer to grade level than their special education peers who were segregated throughout their education. However, results were not the same for Math. ABC High School and the State of California have equally poor results with minimal growth for student with mild to moderate disabilities in Math.

Prior research determined a positive relationship between increased success on standardized measures and increased efforts to include students with disabilities at higher rates within general education classes with full access to general education teachers, curriculum, and peers (Cortiella & Burnette, 2008; Huberman & Parrish, 2011). Like Huberman and Parrish, Cortiella and Burnette identified multiple schools in which students with disabilities had a higher level of success on standardized assessment when they were taught in inclusive classrooms. The commonalities between the schools were (a) they each included students with disabilities in general education settings, (b) had collaboration between teachers in order to analyze data to inform instruction, and (c) restructured procedures to support the shift away from separate learning environments for students with disabilities. This pattern appears to have held true for ELA at ABC High School, but it did not hold true in Math. The study by Huberman and Parrish proved that four different school districts with inclusion outperformed the state in both English Language Arts and Math. Upon reflection, ABC High School may have fallen short for multiple reasons. First, inclusion in Math classrooms grew more slowly at ABC High School than the ELA classrooms. There were four co-taught classes in ELA in 2015-2016 while there was only two co-taught Algebra I classes. Subsequently, in 2017-18, there were six co-taught ELA classes and four co-taught Math classes including two Algebra I classes and two Geometry classes. It is possible that the slower gains in the area of Math could be related to the number of opportunities students had in math co-taught classes. A second reason might simply be the potential bias students with disabilities in high school may have about the subject area of Math. If negative discussions had occurred at the

elementary level by parents, siblings, or others were not proficient in the area of Math, it is possible certain students arrived at the secondary level with a deeply engrained belief that they cannot master mathematical concepts. This may be a difficult barrier for high school teachers to overcome, and could be compounded by a student who has both a negative mindset and a learning disability. As researchers consider how to best serve students with disabilities in the general education Math classrooms, mathematical mindset or attitude towards math might be areas of further investigation.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

**Relationships and instructional setting.** There is an indication that, despite the reported strengths in the area of building relationships, one may need to first build a trusting relationship between general education teachers and students with disabilities. Open ended questions revealed a feeling that general education teachers felt apprehension when including students with mild to moderate disabilities in their classrooms. Their reports included discipline concerns or intensive academic supports. A connection to this could be responses that indicated IEP's are not well understood and oftentimes not addressed adequately by either the case manager or the general education teachers. It appears that the teachers at ABC High School need more knowledge to better understand the academic goals of their students with disabilities. After all, prior research indicated that students with disabilities within the general education classroom, even with behavior challenges, have neutral or positive effects overall (Kalambouka et al., 2007). Notably one study included in the literature review of Kalambouka et al. indicated that even students with behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties had no negative impact on the

general education classroom. Only two studies reported behavioral and social emotional struggles and how these struggles impacted students in secondary classes (Block & Zeman, 1996; Cawley et al., 2002). This is an area that needs further examination in order to better support high school teachers when they include students with disabilities into their classrooms.

General education teachers may have had unsubstantiated concerns regarding including students with disabilities in their classrooms. One may posit that perhaps improving relationships and the understanding of students with disabilities in the areas of ELA and Math will positively impact standardized test scores. For example, increasing the understanding of the students who need visual supports and educating the teacher on how to provide these supports may positively impact student achievement. Also, if a teacher fully understands the needs of the learner, than the learner may have more confidence and ask for assistance. Building relationships between teachers and students may also help alter the mindset needed for improvement in the area of Math. This may be a challenge for secondary teachers as they teach so many more students daily than the elementary educator. Therefore, it is recommended that school districts continue to look for ways to increase teacher and student interactions on the high school level.

**Instructional practices.** This study identified instructional practices as an area in need of improvement for ABC High School. As mentioned in the literature review, Morningstar et al. (2015) conducted a study and found that the successful inclusionary schools were proficient at utilizing Universal Design for Learning, behavioral interventions with class wide-behavioral expectations, and adaptations and modifications

within the general education classrooms. This success was attributed to high quality differentiated instruction, assessment, and progress monitoring, in addition to curricular and instructional accommodations. It is recommended that educational leaders at the secondary level continue to look at tiered systems of support (e.g., RTI, Response to Intervention; UDL, Universal Design for Learning, MTSS, Multi-Tier System of Supports). ABC High School had initiated the process of looking at their systems and curriculum for both academic and social emotional learning through MTSS. This emphasis on an inclusionary approach by the district aligns with the academic improvements they experienced on SBAC ELA results. Additionally, results of the survey at ABC High School indicated that many successful practices were in place, but were not utilized in all classrooms. For example, one teacher's response indicated that although some teachers used active engagement strategies, many teachers still defaulted to traditional lectures as their primary source of instruction. Another commented that some departments were more effective in their inclusive teaching practices than others. Consistent implementation of effective techniques should be in place in all classrooms in order to continue positive academic achievement in the area of standardized assessment. Additionally, ABC High School should monitor achievement and effective practices by department to identify which departments may need more support in implementing inclusive practices.

### **Limitations**

This study may have been influenced by a number of limitations. One main limitation was the amount of time for data collection. Due to time limits, the data collection had to

occur during a very specific time period during the winter of 2017. The data collection included only one high school district and the participants were chosen using convenience sampling. Therefore, generalizations beyond ABC high school should be made with caution. Furthermore, ABC High School District was the researcher's employer. Personal bias may have had an unconscious impact on the outcome of the study. Finally, the researcher was the only one who conducted this study, therefore analysis was not conducted by persons blind to this study and unintentional bias may have occurred.

### **Future Research**

There is a need to continue to study secondary education in light of its inclusive practices. Specifically, it would be beneficial to conduct a larger, comparative study of multiple high schools and districts. Also, longitudinal studies of inclusionary practices and standardized assessment on the secondary education level would be valuable. Researchers could then identify trends in schools by school, district, and over a period of time regarding the impact of effective practices on academic achievement.

Based on this study, more research in the area of math regarding achievement in Math and ELA would be valuable. This examination could specify the practices most effective in promoting gains in both subjects, as well as identify if there are specific differentiated practices for each subject matter (ELA or Math).

Most importantly, future studies should focus on how to provide educators the information and tools they need to fully meet the requirements of IDEIA. Over the years, there have been increases in general education placements and corresponding reductions

in more restrictive pull-out programming (McLeskey et al., 2011). It behooves educators to continue this line of research in order to understand how to fully support educators as they implement inclusive practices on the high school level.

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Appendix A  
Survey

1

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE PRACTICES		3	2	1
		Team Assessment of Practices		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING	1. Students are educated on their home campus.			
	2. Faculty members consider how accommodations, modifications, and other supports can be used to ensure that the student can be educated in the general education classroom whenever appropriate.			
	3. The general education classroom is the first consideration when instructional setting is discussed.			
	4. Special education instructional settings (when located outside of the general education classroom) are placed throughout the school building within age, grade, or department appropriate areas.			
	5. The facilities used by special populations students (when specialized services are required) are comparable to the facilities available for general education students.			
	6. Decisions about instructional setting are determined on the basis of student needs and not on the basis of labels or available services.			

Please tell us more about the instructional setting at your school.

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION PRACTICES		3	2	1
		Team Assessment of Practices		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
COLLABORATION	7. School leaders explicitly discuss the expectation for collaboration, equity, and mutual respect among all faculty members.			
	8. Special populations personnel are members of grade level/department teams.			
	9. Special populations personnel are considered full members of the school faculty.			
	10. Personnel are skilled in collaboration/planning techniques.			
	11. General education and special populations teachers regularly plan together.			
	12. Sufficient time is available to support quality planning.			
	13. School teams openly discuss such issues as teaching styles and philosophies, instructional and behavioral expectations, and shared ownership to enhance the success of their collaboration.			
	14. All faculty members are knowledgeable of the contents of each student's IEP for whom they are responsible.			

What is your overall experience regarding collaborative practices at your school.

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES		3	2	1
		Team Assessment of Practices		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
INSTRUCTION	15. Instructional personnel use a variety of highly effective instructional strategies (multi-level instruction, activity-based instruction, cooperative learning, etc.)			
	16. Lecture-based instruction has been replaced by differentiated instruction as the predominant instructional methodology in use in our classrooms.			
	17. There is a single curricular framework for all students, rather than a parallel curriculum for special needs students ( <i>access to the general curriculum is assured</i> ).			
	18. Teachers know the difference between instructional accommodations and curricular modifications and that there is a hierarchy of use (i.e. modifications are used only when accommodations alone are not effective).			
	19. Instructional accommodations and curricular modifications are applied appropriately for all students who require them.			
	20. A campus-wide behavioral support system is in place, resulting in a positive, proactive learning environment for all students.			

Please share some details about instructional practices typically utilized at your school.

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

		3	2	1
EFFECTIVE IN-CLASS SUPPORT PRACTICES		Team Assessment of Practices		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
IN-CLASS SUPPORT	21. There is an emphasis on increasing the amount and quality of in-class support options for special needs students including co-teaching, support facilitation, and use of peers.			
	22. Related services personnel (OTs, PTs, etc.) and speech/language pathologists (SLPs) provide their services within the general education classroom when appropriate.			
	23. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and related services personnel receive training in providing in-class support services to students and their general education teachers.			
	24. There are systems in place, such as sufficient planning time and strong administrative support to facilitate the success of in-class models of support.			
	25. Peers are effectively used as tutors and natural supports for special needs students; are trained for these roles; and are used appropriately.			
	26. No single approach, such as co-teaching, is selected as <b>the</b> model for inclusive education.			

What are the in-class supports you perceive as most successful at your school?

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

EFFECTIVE PEER AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS		3	2	1
		Team Assessment of Practices		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
Relationships	24. The school uses one or more formal strategies for increasing positive student-to-student relationships (ex. Circle of Friends, PALs, etc.)			
	25. In-school relationships flourish between general education and special populations students.			
	26. Special populations students are considered full members of the school community.			
	27. Parents feel that they are welcome and valued partners in the educational process.			

Please give an example of an effective peer or family relationship you have experienced.

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Please mark the answer that best reflects practices at your school  
 3= in place, 2= improvement needed, 1=not in place

		3	2	1
<b>EFFECTIVE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES BASED ON PREVIOUS REVIEW</b>		<b>Team Assessment of Practices</b>		
		In Place	Improvement Needed	Not in Place
<b>EFFECTIVE USE OF PERSONNEL</b>	28. Resources are used wisely before additional staff are requested. These resources include:			
	a. Use of peer tutors.			
	b. Instructional strategies that are supportive of student needs in the classroom.			
	c. Instructional settings that are aligned with inclusive practices.			
	d. Scheduling strategies that result in an efficient use of staff.			
	e. Effective use of paraprofessionals that positively impact personnel needs.			

Please share a specific example of use of resources or personnel at your school.

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Adapted from Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2014)

Appendix B  
Consent Letter

## Request for your Participation in Research

Dr. Peg Hughes  
Department Chair

Master's Degree:  
Special Education

Education Specialist  
Credential:  
Mild/Moderate Disabilities  
Moderate/Severe Disabilities  
Early Childhood Disabilities

Intern Option

Added Authorization

Undergraduate Minor

### **Examining the Impact of Effective Practices on the Academic Achievement of High School Students with Mild to Moderate Disabilities** Paulette Cobb, Graduate Student and Peg Hughes, San Jose State Special Education Department Chair, Professor, and Faculty Advisor.

This research study will explore inclusionary practices and how they affect academics for students with mild to moderate disabilities. The study is being conducted by Paulette Cobb, the Director of Special Education at San Benito High School, and a graduate student at San Jose State University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an educator who works in a high school with inclusionary practices for students, and considered an expert in this area. Please take your time to make your decision about participation. If you have any questions, you may ask the researcher.

#### WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to examine which practices are found to be present within the high school setting when the school implements inclusionary practices for students with mild to moderate disabilities, and how these practices impact achievement.

#### WHO PAYS FOR THIS STUDY?

This study is conducted by a student and has not received any funding.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH STUDY?

If you consent to participate in the study, you will fill out survey, which has two parts. The first part is composed of 31 multiple choice questions and explores your perception of the school in the areas identified as important in promoting success in academics for students who are included in general education. The last part is a short demographic survey that asks about your role at the school, subject taught, grade level, and the years you have worked as a teacher.

The questionnaire will be administered at your work place, for your convenience.

WILL INFORMATION ABOUT ME BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Absolutely, your information will be kept confidential, and confidentiality is a priority of the study. You will not be asked for your name and you will be returning your survey in a locked mailbox in which only the researcher can open. The demographic info that will be collected is enough to identify individual teachers. However, you may choose to skip any questions. Information will not be reported in a way that could identify you in the final report.

The only organizations that may look at and/or copy research records to make sure that the study was done properly include:

San Jose State University, College of Education

San Jose State University, Institutional Review Board

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

You will be in the study for the length of time it takes you to answer the survey questions, approximately 15-20 minutes.

CAN I DECLINE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

Yes. You can decide to stop at any time while taking the survey. This survey is completely voluntary.

WHAT RISKS CAN I EXPECT FROM BEING IN THE STUDY?

Some people may feel nervous about taking part in the research. However, no identifying information will be used in the final report. Responses will be confidential. The school name will not be used in the final report.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to individual participants, this study will allow us to better understand the successes, and barriers, that educators in high schools are encountering as they implement inclusionary practices.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be charged for participating in the study.

WHAT WILL I GET FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

No compensation will be given for participating in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS IF I TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can decline to participate in the entire study, or any part of the study, without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or your workplace. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is not penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

#### WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY?

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during the study.

For more information about the study, please contact Paulette Cobb at (408)772-4725 or [paulette.cobb@sjsu.edu](mailto:paulette.cobb@sjsu.edu).

For complaints about the research, please contact Dr. Arnold Danzig, Director, EdD at San Jose State University, (408)924-3722.

For questions about participant's rights, or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research, San Jose State University, (408)924-2479.

#### CONSENT

Your consent is your choice. You may want to participate in the entire study or in a part of the study.

You have the right to not answer any question you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your relations with San Jose State University. You have the right to decline participation in the study.

Your completion and return of the survey indicates your willingness to participate. You may keep this consent document for your records. Please refrain from writing your name on the questionnaire. Your name will not be collected to ensure confidentiality of the survey.