A shared responsibility for all students:
Toward a definition of inclusive schools

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Executive Summary

Recently, researchers from the Center on Education and Lifelong Learning, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community completed a yearlong study on the academic progress of students across inclusive and traditional settings (Waldron & Cole, 2000). The results from this study indicate that students (with and without disabilities) educated in inclusive elementary settings made as great or greater academic gains than students educated in schools that utilize a more traditional, pull out model for supporting students with disabilities. Not surprisingly, school personnel and others concerned with effective school practices responded to the year one report with the question, “What is happening in the inclusive schools where student academic progress was great?”

The purpose of the present study is to examine and describe the teaching practices and school structures that exist within three inclusive elementary schools. Using a descriptive case study design, it provides a detailed portrayal of the teaching practices and school structures in three elementary schools that consider themselves to be inclusive.

Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions:

- What are the curriculum and instructional practices being used in these classrooms?
- What are the school structures and climate in the three schools?
- What role does leadership play in these three schools?
- What are the classroom environments established by teachers in these three schools?
- What are the attitudes and beliefs of faculty and staff in the three schools?
- What kind of parent involvement exists? How are parents involved in the three schools?

From this study comes a working definition of inclusion; one that recognizes that inclusion is more than simply physically placing students together in the same classroom. Our analysis, and the conclusions drawn from our time in these schools, ultimately focuses on the practices in the three schools that 1) develop and sustain classrooms that are responsive to diverse social/emotional needs, 2) develop and sustain classrooms that are responsive to diverse academic needs and 3) empower all educators to take responsibility for teaching all students. We also acknowledge that isolated classrooms featuring inclusive practices do not make an inclusive school and that an inclusive school is a culture in which everyone in the school community honors diversity and shares the responsibility for teaching all students. Through this study, we
have come to understand that two of the biggest challenges for inclusive schools are sustaining inclusive practices and ensuring that systems are adaptable to new and complex challenges.

Using our working definition of inclusion, we are able to make some definitive statements with respect to structures and practices that ensure the academic, social and emotional inclusion of all students in schools.

1. The way in which supports (whether they come from the special education system, from Title 1, from ESL etc) are organized and delivered must be flexible and adaptive. Service delivery systems must be able to adjust as conditions and circumstances in schools change. This also requires that schools review and renew their purposes over time. Systems that are adaptive and flexible have the capacity to change, alter or shift and the ability to learn from experiences. Such systems are more sustainable.

2. Providing more individualized instruction to an individual student or a small group of students is appropriate when it is flexible and does not lead to isolation or segregation. It is clear from our time in these schools that there are times when certain students may need more one-on-one instruction or support.

3. Meeting the needs of diverse groups of students requires intense collaboration. It is clear from our study that no single teacher has all of the tools to teach all of the students. Inclusive schools require structures that provide the time and support for collaboration. A collaborative culture must be nurtured and cultivated between grade levels, content areas, parents, support staff and administrators.

4. The use of ICAN (Individualized Curriculum and Assessment Notebook) supports inclusion by offering teachers a tool for creating classroom projects that are interdisciplinary, differentiated, and multi-leveled. ICAN is a valuable tool for inclusive schools because its design is grounded in these beliefs: a) Students learn in different ways and at their own pace; b) A complete education promotes student development in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains; c) There are credible means to accurately measure student learning beyond standardized tests; d) There is value in documenting continuous progress; e) Planning, instruction, and assessment are based on student needs; and f) Instruction can be individualized while referenced to standards. The reporting tool is also useful as it involves parents in their students’ individual growth.
5. Thematic, integrated instruction allows for differentiation while maintaining a common curricular focus. This allows for greater student collaboration, small group instruction and peer support. Themes offer a way for special educators to design enrichment activities that reinforce students’ connections to the general education curriculum without the need for additional common planning time with general education teachers.

6. Project-based instruction allows students to engage in multiple activities within the classroom. In other words, students have much greater control over their own academic activity. Multiple methods of instruction are used to present information.

7. Accommodations and adaptations are an important consideration for all students.

8. Homework should be viewed as a tool to assess where students need extra help and/or to change instruction. Homework should not be over-emphasized in the classroom and should not be punitive.

9. Assessment should not be based on ranking or sorting students hierarchically but to identify individual student strengths and weaknesses to the student and to change instruction to better meet individual needs. Assessments should be meaningful to students and parents.

10. Effective classroom management entails much more than decreasing the frequency or severity of behavioral infractions. Effective environments must be created, and this requires that all adults in the school share responsibility for creating environments that are academically and socially responsive to all students. Educators must build student capacity to engage in pro-social behaviors by consistently modeling, teaching, and organizing academics around behavioral principles.

11. Environments that are highly predictable, where teachers establish and teach procedures and routines in both classroom and non-classroom settings, are important for all students.

12. Attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and meeting the needs of all students are critical to successful inclusion. It is important that staff engage in discussions regarding teaching philosophy, important student outcomes, and practices that support the achievement of such outcomes. The relationship between beliefs and experience is reciprocal. Firmly held convictions about meeting the needs of all students foster the development of structural supports and practices that are responsive to diverse student needs.
13. Administrative support and leadership are critical elements to building inclusive schools that welcome, include and support all students. This leadership is also critical in maintaining and sustaining inclusive programs.

14. Parents have the highest level of satisfaction with schools when multiple forms of communication take place and when that communication is reciprocal (initiated by both the school and the parent).

15. The responsibility and commitment for inclusion must rest with the entire school. The commitment must be for the development of practices and structures that include students in all aspects of the school, not simply with a few classrooms at grade levels.

16. Schools that understand and adopt the principles of brain compatible learning are more likely to have a shared understanding of inclusion. These principles help define a philosophy that focuses on students’ gifts and abilities, rather than their deficits.

17. The multi-age structure and balanced calendar (year around calendar) strongly support inclusive practices. The multi-age structure diminishes the emphasis on “being at grade level” and increases the focus on continual progress toward individual student goals. The balanced calendar affords students opportunities for remediation or enrichment during intersessions, and, because of shorter breaks throughout the year, students do not have long periods of time away from the learning environment.

It is our hope that the following school descriptions will help to inform local educators as they improve alignment and compatibility of regular and special education reforms concerned with curriculum, instruction, evaluation, accountability and administrative procedures. This study provides educators with data to inform change efforts, examples to counter pressures that are barriers to successful inclusion, and specific strategies to sustain improved instruction for all students.
Introduction

While debates rage among educational scholars regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, one thing is clear: "It is not a fad that is going to go away" (Peltier, 1997). Advocates of inclusion maintain that inclusion is beneficial to all students in terms of academic and social growth. Indeed, many scholars believe inclusion to be an issue of social justice and that the burden of proof should fall upon the shoulders of those who wish to segregate students with disabilities. Critics of inclusion note the dearth of empirical research that supports the alleged benefits of inclusive environments. Ironically, no such body of evidence exists that supports the alleged benefits of segregated classroom settings either.

The term *inclusion* is generative to the degree that it is in danger of becoming one of an increasing number of "zombie categories," which Smith (2000) describes as "words whose referents have ceased to exist but nevertheless affect individual and institutional behaviour [sic]." Scholars agree as to the need for research that examines the implementation of inclusion policy (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Smith & Rapport, 1999). Little research exists which examines the specifics of inclusive practice in correlation with standardized assessments of academic progress.

Restructuring and reform efforts that focus on the needs of all students have resulted in schools across the United States creating service delivery models in which students from diverse backgrounds and ability levels are educated together. Educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support requires systemic change. There is evidence that federal, state and local efforts have prompted the necessary systems change that has effectively resulted in increased opportunities for inclusion for many students (Smith, 1997). However, schools often encounter internal and external pressures that compromise the success and sustenance of systems change (Salisbury, Palombaro, & Hollywood, 1993). Fisher, Sax and Grove (2000) have effectively argued that the capacity of teachers and schools to sustain the momentum of change and not revert to former practices and educational structures in response to these pressures is often at risk. For educators to continue to make school-based decisions that are best for all students, they will require complete and extensive research to inform their decisions.

Burrello, Lashley & Beatty (2001) believe that the history and practices of special education provide a useful vantage point or “lens” from which to analyze efforts to improve education for all students. Figure 1 represents three historical discourses in the field of special education.
### Figure 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant</th>
<th>Transitional</th>
<th>Emergent</th>
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| EHA/Mainstreaming  
The Continuum of Services Embodied in EHA/IDEA | REI/Inclusion  
Inclusive Schools  
Effective schools research, critique of EHA/mainstreaming models | Unified Schools  
Learner Centered Schools  
Complex adaptive systems |
| Grounding Assumptions:  
- Disabilities are inherent in children  
- Differential diagnosis is useful  
- Special Education is a rational and coordinated system  
- Diagnosis and identification are necessary to secure resources and services | Grounding Assumptions:  
- All children can learn  
- All children should be educated in their neighborhood schools and communities  
- Schools must accommodate to meet the needs of students with disabilities  
- School personnel require ongoing professional renewal | Grounding Assumptions:  
- All children have a natural capacity for learning  
- All children construct their own knowledge  
- Schools must become learning centers for all members of the community  
- Increasingly diverse learners require differentiated instructional approaches  
- All students have personal learning plans  
- All student performance is authentic and demonstrable |
| Authority: functionalism, bureaucratic professionalism | Authority: critical theory, cultural studies | Authority: pragmatism, new science, adhocratic collaboration |
| Source: (Adapted from Skirtic, 1991) | | |

- Passage of EHA: 1975  
- Regular Education Initiative: 1984  
- APA Learner Centered Principles: 1995

The Continuum of Services discourse has resulted in students with disabilities being separated from their peers as a separate system of education was developed. The assumptions about students with disabilities, coupled with legal provisions, have encouraged school districts and states to support parallel, separate systems for delivering services to students with disabilities. A school following this discourse would identify a large number of students who are not successful in school and assign them to separate classrooms to be taught by specialists with specific training derived from the medical model (Burrello, Lashley & Beatty, 2001).

The Regular Education Initiative, or the Inclusive Schools Movement focuses on returning more students with disabilities to the general education classroom. The assumptions of this discourse relate to the belief that students learn more in integrated settings, learn about individual differences, learn to interact with one another, and are more successful as adults. This
discourse reflects the beginnings of a push for equity and excellence for all students. However, the inclusive schools movement has been highly criticized because it has failed to align with other initiatives to improve schools (Burrello, Lashley & Beatty, 2001).

The Learner Centered Schools discourse represents an attempt to merge “the technologies, outcomes and work relationships associated with inclusive schools with efforts to provide equity and excellence in educational opportunities for all students” (Burrello, Lashley & Beatty, 2001, p. 27). The assumptions are based on the belief that learning is an interactive, social phenomenon. It departs from inclusive schools discourse by arguing for individualization for all learners.

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The present study describes specific characteristics of three school environments that define themselves as inclusive. It is our hope that these school descriptions will help to inform local school educators as they improve alignment and compatibility of regular and special education reforms concerned with curriculum, instruction, evaluation, accountability and administrative procedures. This study provides educators with data to inform change efforts, examples of counter pressures that are barriers to successful inclusion, and specific strategies to sustain improved instruction for all students.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe the teaching practices and school structures that exist within three inclusive elementary schools. Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions:

- What are the curriculum and instructional practices being used in these classrooms?
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Using a descriptive case study design, this study provides a detailed portrayal of the teaching practices and school structures in three elementary schools.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Three schools were selected based on findings from the Indiana Inclusion Study, Year One (Waldron & Cole, 2000). When compared to 12 other schools in the inclusive school sample, students (both with and without disabilities) in these three schools demonstrated high rates of academic progress over the course of the school year.

Teachers were recruited at the suggestion of the building principals. Teachers from four general education classrooms (representing grades 2 through 5) in each school were asked to participate, and all agreed. In addition, special educators and paraprofessionals working in the selected classrooms also participated. All teachers in each of the three schools participated in a teacher survey, and a random sample of parents from each of the selected classrooms participated in a parent survey.

**Data Collection**

During the first week of school, two researchers visited each school for two entire days. The purpose of this visit was to acquire a sense of school and classroom routines, the schedule, and to begin to establish rapport with the participants. Over the course of the school year (September through March), the two researchers returned to the school to observe math and reading instruction in the four participating classrooms, to observe in support settings (speech, tutoring, etc.) and to observe in random settings throughout the school. Observations in these classrooms took place from 5 to 7 different times, lasting about 30-40 minutes for math and 30-40 minutes for reading instruction on each occasion. Other settings were visited three to four times during the school year. Researchers observed unobtrusively in all settings, and no disruption of typical routines was necessary. Each observer recorded field notes. Overall, approximately 50 hours of observation was spent within each of the three schools.
Researchers also interviewed each of the participants individually and in small focus groups. Individual interviews lasted no more than one hour. Interviews were conducted during a time that was convenient for the participant. Interviews took place between October and March of the 2000-01 school year. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

A short survey regarding beliefs about inclusion was used with the entire faculty at each school. The survey, developed and found reliable by Waldron and colleagues (1999), consisted of 30 Likert items. This survey was presented by the researchers and completed by participants during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. The survey required about 20 minutes, and responses were collected and recorded anonymously. At each of the schools, at least 95% of the staff completed the surveys. A parent survey was distributed to all parents of students in the participating classrooms. Parents were asked to respond to seven questions, using either a Likert scale or an open-ended format. These surveys were sent home with the students and returned by mail. The return rate at each of the schools was very small.

Finally, researchers collected school and classroom documents to help them better understand the school. Student notebooks, school mission statements, instructional materials, newsletters, etc. were collected and reviewed.

**Data Analysis**

Hand recorded observation notes were word-processed immediately following site visits in an effort to construct more complete field notes. Observer comments, which might be conceptualized as the first layer of analysis, were recorded during observations and were included in the field notes. The researchers also periodically constructed analytic memos describing emerging themes, patterns and connections (Glaser, 1967). In addition, the entire research team met weekly during data collection for many purposes, including sharing initial impressions of the structures and practices of the schools.

During the first two months of data collection, the research coordinators read through field notes constructed from observations in all classrooms involved in the study. From this reading and familiarity with relevant literature, coding categories and sub codes were developed (Bogdan, 1998). Employing an inductive method of data analysis, frequently occurring concepts within the coded field notes were noted. As more data was collected and reviewed, categories were sometimes collapsed or expanded to more accurately reflect what had been observed within each of the three schools. Reviewing the coded field notes also informed further data collection,
including observations, interviews, and document analysis. Frequently, questions arose from analysis and plans were developed to address these questions through additional data collection. Teacher and principal interview questions and parent surveys were developed, in part, from information gleaned through ongoing analysis of field notes.

Shortly prior to the end of data collection, interview transcriptions, observation field notes, and analytic memos were imported into Folio Views®, an information retrieval software tool. Next, researchers again read through observations and interviews, attaching codes. The first level of codes consisted of simple group codes, which identified school, grade, location, subject area, teacher, etc. The next level of coding was applied to paragraphs. At this level, researchers attached one of fourteen broad coding categories, such as Administrative/Structural Support, Assessment, Attitudes and Beliefs, Classroom Management, and Peer Support.

The team engaged in many hours of dialogue in an effort to define these constructs and discuss examples. Clearly, the codes are overlapping and represent constructs that permeate classrooms and schools. For example, one could make the case that everything that happens in a school reflects attitudes and beliefs. While the team agreed that this was the case, it also reached consensus that there were events and statements contained in the notes that explicitly demonstrated particular attitudes and beliefs. The software allows multiple codes to be applied to the same paragraph, and the team often coded paragraphs with more than one code.

Once these broad analytic codes were assigned, researchers searched for specific examples and quotes reflecting broad constructs and marked them using the highlighter function of Folio Views®. For example, after searching for all records coded as Assessment, researchers marked phrases that represented specific examples of informal and formal assessment activities, references to assessment, preparation for assessment, use of assessment information, etc.

In addition to using Folio Views® as an analytic tool, responses from the teacher surveys were entered into SPSS, a statistical software analysis tool. Initially, frequency counts of each of the items for each of the schools were generated. Researchers next successfully reached consensus and “blind” agreement on the clustering of the 30 items into seven scales. Frequency counts of the seven scales were then used to organize discussions regarding the beliefs of school staff in each of the schools.

Parent surveys were analyzed similarly, though without a statistical analysis tool. After the survey responses were entered into a word processor, four of the questions were arranged
into two pairs, and all responses were sorted according to these pairs. From these pairs, researchers attempted to connect parent attitudes toward school practices to parent perceptions regarding their children’s success in school.

**Washington Public Academy**

The school’s physical structure has been designed with care. All the play facilities have been designed to the latest safety codes and incorporate accessibility for [children with physical disabilities]. Clearly, the commitment to being an inclusive school has been a part of the Washington gestalt since the building and grounds were first designed in 1996.

Washington classrooms are multiage; intermediate students represent the traditional fourth and fifth grades, transitional students represent second and third grades, and primary students are kindergarten and first grade. Each community of classrooms is arranged around a large, open space called the “community area.” The community area features natural lighting and movable walls that allow for compartmentalizing and/or creation of a large “super commons.”

Each classroom has direct access to both the community area and the outside. Most teachers have added a variety of pillows and cushions, along with a more casual seat (e.g., a rocking chair or divan), often located in the corner of the room that is designated as a “community circle” or “family circle” and is used for group activities, such as reading aloud. Floor and table lamps augment the fluorescent lighting and, along with the conspicuous use of earth tones, mark the influence of the CLASS (Connecting Learning Assures Student Success) philosophy.

Washington Public Academy opened in 1998. The school’s mission statement reads as follows:

The staff of Washington Public Academy hold these core convictions:

- Every learner is unique and valuable, and deserves respect.
- Every learner learns in different ways and at his/her own pace.
- The demonstration of the lifelong guidelines through the use of lifeskills helps every person to be successful.
- Community members place a high value on education, and share the responsibility for providing an environment in which all people learn and grow.
Because of these beliefs, they strive as a staff to ensure that:

♦ All learners are in a safe and healthy school environment, where they are nurtured and respected.

♦ All learners are involved in meaningful activities that address their strengths and provide opportunities for growth.

♦ All learners are encouraged to grow academically and socially.

♦ All learners are encouraged to self-reflect, set goals, and do their personal best.

Washington describes itself as an “elective enrollment school,” which is somewhat similar to a magnet school. Washington has an emphasis on science, math and technology. Any student in the district can apply to attend, and there is no discrimination against students by asking on the application if they have a special need, are low-income etc. Students are admitted via a lottery system. Ironically, this has resulted in a large number of students with disabilities attending the school, particularly students with autism.

Washington is a year-round school, operating on a trimester schedule with ample breaks that often feature inter-session classes for students. Approximately 591 students have been selected through the elective enrollment process to attend Washington. Upon completing Washington these students have made a commitment to attend the district’s year-round middle school.

In 2000-2001 there were 586 students enrolled at Washington. The majority of students are white (42%) and African American (37.2%). Smaller groups of students are reported as Hispanic (6.5%), Asian (7.3%), Native American (0.2%), and multiracial (6.8%). The community is a residential suburban community with a population of approximately 91,000 and an assessed value of $1,213,633,751. It is home to families with diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The district has more than 400 international students who represent 41 countries and 50 languages.

Clearly, Washington Public Academy is a unique place. That the faculty, staff, and administration have created a positive gestalt that is truly inclusive and celebrates diversity will be revealed more fully in the following sections of the report.

Administrative Support/Program Structures

Multi-age, CLASS and Inclusion
The multi-age structure allows for diverse ability levels, differentiation of instruction, student mentorship and extended time (two years) with the same teacher. The multiage classroom structure is designed so that teachers base instruction on individual needs and abilities rather than their grade level. There are three multiage levels at Washington. The traditional kindergarten and first grade students are in the Primary classrooms; the traditional second and third grade students make up the Transitional classrooms and the traditional fourth and fifth grade students make up the Intermediate classrooms. The classrooms for each multiage level make up a “community.”

Being a CLASS (Connected Learning Assures Student Success) school provides a solid foundation on which to develop an inclusive school. The CLASS philosophy focuses on students’ gifts and abilities, rather than their deficits. CLASS is an Indiana initiative in over 300 schools which implements brain compatible learning based on the ITI model developed by Susan Kovalik. This model has six learning principles derived from body brain research:

1. Intelligence is a function of experience
2. Emotions are the gatekeeper to learning
3. Humans in all cultures use multiple intelligences to solve problems and create products
4. The brain’s search for meaning is a search for patterns
5. Learning is the acquisition of useful mental programs
6. One’s personality has an impact on learning

The practices that are a part of CLASS are good for all students. The philosophy is also reflected by the consistent display and incorporation of “Lifeskills” (sense of humor, problem solving, friendship, perseverance, curiosity, cooperation, initiative, organization, courage, flexibility, common sense, caring, patience, effort, integrity, and responsibility) and the “8 Smarts” (body smart, word smart, self smart, picture smart, people smart, number smart, nature smart, and music smart), which are blends of multiple intelligence theory and social skills development (www.kovalik.com).

Inclusion at Washington has evolved over time. There are three special education teachers, and each teacher works with a specific learning community. Originally, all students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms for the entire day, and the teachers of special education teamed in the general education classrooms. However, caseloads
have grown and it has become apparent that there are some students who need extra support, particularly at the primary level in the areas of reading and math. Therefore, a structure has evolved in which students are sometimes grouped together for more intensive, supplemental support in skill-based areas (math and reading). This grouping arrangement is not at the expense of the students having access to the entire general education curriculum, but is an addition to the general education activities.

We will sit down with [students] that are included mostly full day. There are a few times I [group] them for maybe 40 minutes or half an hour, but it is during times there isn’t direct instruction [in the classroom]. Like first thing in the morning I [group] students and for the first 40 minutes before specials start to do more basic skills that they don’t necessarily have yet. That is when the class is doing morning journals (teacher interview).

Grouping appears to be flexible and does not seem to occur on the basis of labels. This flexibility also seems to be present in how the instructional assistants are utilized. Because the classrooms are clustered together, an instructional assistant can circulate between two classrooms easily and frequently.

Students with disabilities are placed in all classrooms in the school. Each classroom is a heterogeneous mix; classroom placement is looked at very carefully. The principal reports that they “spend hours” looking at placements for all children, and the process is collaborative. Placements of students with disabilities are made at the same time placements of other students are made. However, special education teachers, in collaboration with their general education partners, look at the list of students with disabilities and consider where they fit best and the kind of environment they need.

Usually the [students with disabilities] are placed first and they will go back and look at the whole class list and make sure there aren’t any real distractible situations that might occur. I had a student [with autism] that was specifically placed in my class this year. I was comfortable. He knew me. Having said that, we look at all the logistics and then you look at the personality of the class after the whole class has been put together and make sure that everybody has a buddy. For the most part, I think it is incredibly successful. I think we have placed the kids well (teacher interview).

Principal’s Role

The participants in this study felt that most, if not all, of the primary support for their inclusive practices comes from their principal. There is a great deal of trust that exists between Cathy and her staff. She is considered an advocate for teachers and students.
I would say most of my support would be from Cathy and that she is just very supportive, whatever the issue is. Cathy trusts us to make good decisions, and that is very empowering. Whatever the situation, it ultimately comes down to: how are we best serving the student? It has to be about the student’s needs, not about what makes your classroom run smooth or easier or whatever. It is about what is best for that student (teacher interviews).

One of the advantages Washington has is that Cathy selected the staff and opened the building with a focus on building an inclusive community of learners. Before the school opened, there was a great deal of discussion among the staff about their philosophy and serving students with and without disabilities. This inclusive culture has been developed and nourished. According to one staff member, “Cathy has pulled together many resources” that teachers can go to for support. For example, the custodians may work with a student who may need extra support or a break in the day by having the student help him empty wastebaskets or other odd jobs around the school. The office secretary may slide into the role of “counselor” on any given day if a student needs a little extra attention or “TLC” from another adult.

Cathy attends the monthly Community meetings (similar to Student Assistance Team meetings where individual student concerns are addressed). She is involved in many classroom observations, helps to create behavior support plans, and accompanies teachers on home visits.

Cathy is extremely complimentary of her staff. She has the highest degree of respect for their work and their ideas, and believes that they are the key decision-makers in the school.

I never give them a directive because I have never had to do that. Plus, I don’t think that is really effective. This staff keeps me hopping because they are always looking, evaluating their practices, and so we have lots of great dialog about things that we can do. But their ideas, everything that they are doing, typically comes from them. Which is awesome! (principal interview).

Planning Time

Teachers within the same Community have common planning time. This includes the special education teacher, who is a member of the community team. While they do not necessarily meet daily, they are all blocked out to be free during the same time. Common planning time for teachers working together has been in place since Washington opened. It appears that in the beginning years of inclusion, meeting formally every week was important. However, it seems less necessary now.

We have our weekly team meetings where we collaborate on what we are
doing. And then we also have times when we just find time to [communicate]… before school, after school, e-mail. We do stuff that way (teacher interview).

Professional Development/Training

A major focus of professional development for Washington has been language arts instruction. Over the past year, they have had a consultant come in and work with the teachers on Saturdays. The consultant has provided extensive modeling and additional strategies in the area of language arts.

Every summer Washington hosts the Summer Institute for Brain Works, which every staff member at Washington has attended at least once. The summer institute provides training on integrated thematic instruction and creating a brain compatible environment for children. Additionally, Washington has quality circles that organize monthly training sessions based on the needs determined by teachers. Quality circles replace the standard committees and focus on the varied initiatives that are happening in the building. The staff views the quality circles as a tremendous resource.

I see the quality circles this year as really being a benefit in helping me work smarter, not harder. It is a place where I can go, even the ones I am not on. It has evolved into something good. It used to be just an extra thing we had to do. But now I feel like I am participating in something worthwhile that is benefiting not just me personally as a teacher but my level and my building (teacher interview).

The school also takes advantage of waiver days provided through the state to do staff development. Also, every staff meeting has a professional development component. Staff meetings are run like a classroom, starting with sharing time and moving into a content portion. Time is allocated for teachers to process and work collaboratively on something. They leave the meeting with either a finished product or a concept that they can take into their classroom.

Washington has provided a great deal of training for their teacher assistants. Usually, about once a month, the assistants will be provided with opportunities to be trained on various aspects of inclusion, behavioral strategies, autism, etc. The assistants are compensated for their time. Additionally, teachers may provide individual support, and pertinent literature and training on more specific curricular aspects of the program, particularly the teacher’s assistants who are supporting students who have one-on-one assistance.
Attitudes and Beliefs

Educators at each of the schools completed a survey of attitudes and beliefs about inclusive school programs. A portion of a regular faculty meeting at each school was devoted to this task. At Washington, 29 adults responded to the survey, representing special and general educators, instructional assistants, and one administrator.

Student differences/Student Characteristics and System Capacity

Two questions dealt with perceived characteristics of students with disabilities. From this limited sampling, it appears that educators at Washington see students with and without disabilities as more alike than different. A large majority of the respondents at Washington do not believe that students with mild disabilities have more behavior problems than their general education peers. About half of respondents agreed that the work habits of students with disabilities were comparable to those of their general education peers, while the remaining half either disagreed or remained neutral with equal frequency.

Five of the survey questions explicitly connected student characteristics to the capacity of the system or the teacher. In general, it appears that educators at Washington feel that the general education classroom can meet the needs of students with disabilities. A large percentage of the teachers disagreed that students with disabilities lack the study skills necessary for the general education classroom. Only a few agreed with this statement. Consistent with the perception that the instructional load of general educators is not decreased by restructuring for inclusion; many educators at Washington believe that students with disabilities need lots of attention and that general education teachers alone cannot provide this amount of attention. While the majority of respondents agreed that students with disabilities need more attention than general educators can provide, about one quarter of respondents did not feel that this was the case. Most educators at Washington do not perceive students with disabilities to have significant behavior problems in the general education classroom. Similarly, most respondents from Washington believe that general education teachers have the necessary instructional skills to teach students with disabilities.

Beliefs about Learning and Outcomes of Inclusion

There is an overwhelming belief at Washington that students should be “taken where they are when they come to [the school] and move them forward so they will be successful” (Principal interview). This is evident in the instructional strategies used in the classroom, the assessment
strategies, the homework policy and the overall multi-age structure. Washington strives to view each child as an individual learner and decide what is best for that child. In fact, parents and community members involved with the development of Washington identified this belief early on as a part of the vision for Washington.

There is an emphasis in this school on multiple intelligences and the “8 smarts”. Posters of the “8 smarts” are found throughout the school, and teachers can be heard referring to student’s strengths as “math smart” or indicating to students that every student has a different “smart” and all are good. Teachers view their role as that of “Learning Leaders” whose job it is to facilitate learning and lead discussions.

Nine of the 30 Likert items on the faculty survey related to learning outcomes for students in inclusive settings. Overall, educators at Washington believe that inclusive school programs are connected to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities.

Almost every respondent agreed that students with mild disabilities benefit from inclusion in the general education classroom and that students with mild disabilities adjust well when placed in general education. A large percentage of respondents agreed that students with mild disabilities make adequate academic progress when placed in general education, while only a small percentage remained neutral. No respondents disagreed. The response pattern for the statement that low achieving students do better academically in general education classrooms was almost exactly the same. Consistent with findings from other research, most respondents felt that students with disabilities show improved social skills when placed in general education classrooms. About two-thirds of the respondents from Washington shared the belief that students with disabilities lose the negative stigma when placed in general education classrooms. All but one respondent reported a belief that general education peers were accepting of students with disabilities. Most respondents (all but one) disagreed that high achieving students were being neglected in inclusive classrooms. Likewise, a very large percentage of educators disagreed that inclusion has negative academic performance outcomes for students without disabilities, and only one respondent agreed.

Homework

Teachers at Washington believe that homework should be a meaningful experience. In fact, it is stated as such in their handbook. They refer to homework as “home activities” so that
parents understand that it is, in fact, an activity to do with their child. At Washington, homework is not a tool to be used in a punitive way.

The way I view homework is that it is really just something for parents to do with their children that is positive and it is involving them in their children’s education. I cannot penalize them for not getting their homework done because at this point it is so much dependent upon a parent reminding them and encouraging them to do that. If they don’t have that at home, I don’t want to penalize them for that. We never lower their assessment because they didn’t or couldn’t handle it (teacher interview).

Homework is generally viewed at Washington as a way to practice what students have already learned in class. For those students who do not have home environments that provide support for this practice, time is found during the day, with the support of the teaching assistants, to allow a child to gain the needed practice.

Teachers state that most homework should not take more than 30 minutes at the most. And if a parent is having a problem with that, they reduce the amount.

My view is that kids are with me 7 hours a day and we are working hard while we are here. I have high expectations for my children. I think that by the time they get home at 4:30; they don’t have a lot of time to really be a kid. And they learn so much by being involved in [other things] that I encourage them to do that. I also think it is important for families to [have time together]. I don’t want homework to be one more thing that they have to get to in an evening (teacher interview).

**Collegiality**

Language that is commonly used with students and among staff includes “friend,” “family,” and “community.” Special and general education teachers see themselves as a team. The adults at Washington like working together; morale is high. As one teacher stated, “Once you teach here you don’t ever want to go anywhere else.” Staff is treated like professionals. Individuals are not hired at Washington unless they are grounded in the same vision and philosophy that the school represents.

Teachers believe that one of the best forms of professional development is working and sharing ideas with their colleagues, whether that be team teaching, sitting together in quality circles, sharing in community meetings, or interacting in staff meetings. One way teachers at Washington share ideas school wide is to put information and materials in a file in the workroom for others to look at if they are looking for new ideas on a particular theme or lesson. All new teachers in the building have mentors.
Because Washington opened as a non-traditional school, it has been under the microscope for the past two years. This has put a great deal of stress on many staff members, so as a school they have begun to focus on creating a climate that encourages and supports staff.

I think that once you teach here, you don’t ever want to go anywhere else. We are treated like professionals, more so than anywhere else [I have been]. I think that is a big reason why people stay and why I don’t ever complain too much (teacher interview).

Commitment to Inclusive Schools

According to responses from the faculty survey, the majority of educators at Washington do not perceive resistance toward inclusion from teachers or parents. While approximately one quarter of respondents claimed to be neutral, a large majority (three-quarters) agreed that parents are supportive of inclusive school programs. Consistent with teacher and parental support for inclusion, many Washington educators believe that general education teachers do not prefer students to be pulled out of classrooms versus having special education services provided in the general education classroom.

One item on the survey portrayed inclusion as an individual rights issue. In general, educators at Washington believe that inclusive programming is a basic right. Eighty-six percent of the educators at Washington agreed that students with disabilities have a basic right to receive their education in the general education classroom. One respondent disagreed with the statement and the remaining 3 respondents remained neutral.

A few of the questions related to resources. In general, the majority of educators at Washington feel that resources are sufficient for inclusion to succeed. A few respondents agreed that the resources are insufficient for successful inclusion. Respondents were almost evenly mixed as to whether the redistribution of special education resources decreased the instructional load of the general education teacher, but more educators disagreed that instructional load decreases. Despite some perceptions of insufficient resources, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that Washington was adequately prepared to implement inclusion.

Assessment

The primary form of assessment at Washington is the ICAN (Individualized Curriculum and Assessment Notebook). ICAN is a computerized system that connects interdisciplinary curriculum to learning benchmarks and individualized student record keeping. ICAN is a database of skill standards developed from national, state and local benchmarks. It offers a
database of themes, components, key concepts, topics, and key points. It provides templates for designing authentic assessment that references the performance standards. The ICAN system replaces traditional grades at Washington.

Each trimester, students prepare Student Showcase Portfolios based on ICAN standards, Lifeskills, and the Lifelong guidelines. Students choose work that reflects one of the Lifeskills, such as “personal best” and write a reflection for each piece they include. They add to these each year they are in a grade level, so they end up with 6 trimesters of work in their portfolios. In addition to the portfolios, trimester reports are generated using the ICAN system.

[The trimester report] describes the skills we have done, the ones I am assessing on and they are rated either “demonstrated” (they have shown me they can do it), “applied” (means that they can do it and take that skill outside of the classroom), “developing” (means they still need to work on it), or “introduced” (means that they have been exposed to the skill but are not showing any real growth yet) (teacher interview).

Teachers and parents alike are completely “sold” on the ICAN system. They feel that it is really geared toward the child. As an assessment tool, the ICAN is able to measure progress on specific skills.

It is perfect, especially for [students with special needs] because their program is to be individualized anyway. But it is great for all the other kids because no two children are on the exact same level at the exact same time in a classroom. It just doesn’t happen (teacher interview).

The continuous progress and not having to put letter grades on kids [is great]. Because I have kids that feel really successful about what they are doing, but if I was in a traditional setting where I had to assign them a letter grade, they would be failing. But they are making tons of growth and that is what they see as progress (teacher focus group interview).

One of the main bulletin boards in the school had posted some of the comments received from parents regarding the ICAN assessment tool. Some examples of these comments include:

“The ICAN is the best, most thorough evaluation of a child’s academic progress I have ever seen!”
“I like that the ICAN is based on standards rather than some ambiguous calculation.”
“The ICAN can help me know what to talk about at parent conferences. It is more useful than a set of grades.”
“It is a blessing to know teachers focus on what my child can do and build from there.”

Throughout the school, one can observe many examples of varied assessment. There is evidence that authentic assessment is extremely important to teachers at Washington.
We are really into authentic assessment. I need to see the work. My students just completed portfolios that they will share at their parent conference. They had to pick their five best pieces of work from the first trimester and write a reflection about each piece of work and then write a summary paragraph about what they learned in that trimester. Some of them would just blow you away. They are awesome. It is very reflective of where they are with their abilities. I also do a lot of anecdotal note-taking. There are times when there are written tests, especially with math. But I want to hear you talk to me. When we check our math in the morning, a lot of times I will say “Don’t tell me the answer, tell me how you got to the answer.” To me that is more important (teacher interview).

The Instructional Assistants also play a major role in the assessment of students that they are working closely with. They regularly share informal assessments with teachers and report developments to the parents as well. The celebration circle is a time when the Assistant might share something like “He had a good day”. Instructional Assistants also share their observations of behavior.

As is true in many schools, there is a great deal of frustration with the mandated statewide assessment, the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP), and the balance of teaching the whole child and teaching the facts necessary to pass ISTEP. However, while teachers feel the pressure of ISTEP at Washington, they tend to keep it in perspective, and feel that because the ICAN is based on state and national standards, they are teaching the necessary skills for students to be successful on ISTEP. And, they are comfortable with the fact that unlike ISTEP, which they view as just a snapshot in time, ICAN measures progress.

It is the state law. People tend to forget it is just one piece [of the puzzle]. The frustrating thing is that I think we could teach our kids to take the test really well, and have really high scores but they would not be learners the way they are here. They would be regurgitating facts and they would be like me when I was a learner. I could memorize anything, but I couldn’t apply. I look at how bright my kids are in my classroom today as far as the way they can think through things, they problem solve and take new information and apply it. To me, that is the heart of learning (teacher focus group interview).

**Instruction**

**Instructional Content**

ICAN and other assessment tools used at Washington drive most, if not all, of the content that is taught at Washington. Much of the content focuses on the theme of the year. Themes are in place for two years, with 6 sub-themes for each trimester in those two years. Examples of the theme at the Intermediate level are “All Systems Go” with trimester sub-themes of “Rockin’ in

Reading content is specifically connected to the themes. For example, intermediate students read a chapter book together about Christopher Columbus (connecting to the Exploring People Systems theme). During the second trimester that focused on the nervous system (Rattling my Brain), reading assignments included books and articles on this topic. A related activity was a Wrinkles Exploration Project to understand how the brain works.

Other reading content was more varied. In the transitional level, oral reading is held daily, and the teachers take turns reading to their classes. An example at the beginning of the year was a story about “warm fuzzies” and having students draw maps of “fuzzyland.” Reading in small groups includes working on phonetic skills with students who need that support.

Integrated within the themes are the state standards. Math curriculum comes directly from ICAN, and because Washington was originally opened with a math and science focus, one can observe a heavy science emphasis in many of the trimester themes.

Math content also includes personal math that is designed and individualized for each student, based on specific needs. This allows students to progress at their own rate on math skills. In the Intermediate Level, teachers use a program called EndWrite for the individualized math.

### Instructional Activities

Instructional activities and subjects are very integrated. Much of the instructional activities at Washington are in the form of projects.

There are a lot of projects here…and they are very detailed. The projects are tough because a lot of them are a problem solving type thing. What is good and what I like is they let [students] finish them in whatever medium works for them. One kid that is obsessed with Legos and can build beautiful, wonderful things with Legos but would have trouble making something out of paper…he did Legos to demonstrate the end product of his project (teacher interview).

Many different types of activities were observed. In one of the transitional classes, students were in three groups working on a book cover project (to summarize a book). A fourth group had a project to create merit badges based on a story they had read. These groups were differentiated according to readiness.
In an intermediate classroom, students drew pictures about the story they had read on Christopher Columbus, then wrote descriptive paragraphs about the pictures and guessed which picture matched the story.

Throughout classrooms at Washington, teachers vary their activities for reading. There seems to be no “typical” reading lesson at Washington. Activities include literature circles, DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), group bookwork, projects, book covers, autobiographies, presentations, and posters. Transitional students wrote autobiographies for one assignment, then turned to biographies, where they would read and report on them. Products for the activities were often differentiated according to interest.

Math activities are also varied. Much of the math involves hands-on, experience-based activities. Because math is more individualized, students can be seen working on a number of activities. Some of these include logic worksheets, manipulatives, Let’s Go Shopping worksheets (for estimates of items needed for goods or services at Kidtown), pattern blocks, and games. Intermediate students work on “algebra” and Hands on Equations.

At Washington, classes at the same level address the same topic, but do not necessarily do the same activities. Because everything is based on ICAN and standards, everyone is addressing standards, but because the teachers all have different styles, they may not do things exactly the same way. However, there is a great deal of sharing between teachers of activities and ideas related to the themes and standards.

**Instructional Strategies**

Modifications and adaptations for students with and without disabilities are a natural part of what teachers do at Washington. During one observation, two students without disabilities were given a shortened math assignment. Adjusting the allotted time, the size, or the level of difficulty are common adaptations to student activities or assignments. Changing the method for receiving information and increasing the alternatives for acceptable student response modes are also frequently used adaptations at Washington. Study Buddies are assigned in several classrooms as a way to help students.

During individual work time, teachers can be seen providing assistance to students as needed, circulating and answering questions, giving suggestions and checking student responses. Teachers are accepting of answers of varying degrees of correctness, thus encouraging participation. Students are also encouraged to participate during community circle time.
The overhead is used in classrooms as a way to address the needs of visual learners. Lessons were often related to students’ experiences and real life knowledge, indicating the extensive professional development teachers in this school have had on brain compatible classrooms. “Jigsaw” was used in several classes, where each learning club read a certain part of the reading assignment and shared what it learned with the entire class.

Throughout the school, there are good examples of teachers understanding and using differentiated instruction. Grouping for activities was flexible; students are grouped by interest, learning profiles and/or readiness. Students are also given many choices throughout the day.

Other strategies observed in various classrooms include: direct instruction, brainstorming, music, reflection, process and product questions in math, questioning to provoke critical thinking, one-on-one instruction, small group instruction, whole group instruction, partner work, books on tape, goal setting, reminders and prompts, multi-level questioning, use of analogies, use of community areas to “catch students up,” and whole class reviews.

**Classroom Management**

Classroom management at Washington is guided by the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills. The lifelong guidelines are truth, trust, active listening, no put downs, and personal best. Lifeskills include integrity, courage, initiative, flexibility, perseverance, organization, sense of humor, effort, common sense, problem solving, responsibility, patience, friendship, curiosity, cooperation, caring, and pride. Children are taught and constantly prompted throughout the day to use their lifeskills and to follow their lifelong guidelines.

What is most impressive about the use of these guidelines is that they are more than just words on paper. They are the very core of classroom and schoolwide behavior systems at Washington. Because of frequent and explicit instruction in these behavioral principles, students, parents, and staff have developed a common language and shared meaning of these skills and guidelines. They are embedded into the curriculum, activities, classroom discussions, and assessment practices.

Students who misbehave in any way are reminded to check their lifelong guidelines or lifeskills to remember what to do. The principles and guidelines are also used in a preventative fashion when teachers acknowledge students who are “showing good active listening” or recognize a student for doing his “personal best.”
The management philosophy at Washington favors discipline that is instructional, rather than punitive.

They are elementary children. They don’t know sometimes always the best thing to do and many of the children come to us with not a lot of discipline. So it is our job to teach that discipline and that self-control. I work really closely with teachers to make it be a teaching time. By the time [a student] makes it [to my office], I know that the teacher has really exhausted all her ideas. So rather than yelling and screaming and pacing with the child, I usually just talk to the child about a lot of different strategies. It is all about teaching them that they are in control of their actions (Principal interview).

Reflecting the belief that discipline should be instructional in nature, the staff at Washington applies consequences that are logical to the behavior and individualized for the student. Thus, “discipline” of students with disabilities as compared to those without disabilities is a non-issue; all students are dealt with individually and in a way that will meet their learning needs with respect to behavior.

I really like to think more of classroom management as opportunities for kids to learn to make better choices than discipline. I try to make the consequences as natural as possible. I like to try to use it instructively and I also don’t like to have posted consequences because I like to handle each situation and each kid as an individual. So I do the same kind of individual things for my non-identified kids as my [students with disabilities]. I think that when you have “first offense you do this, second offense you do this,” I think kids learn how to play the system, they learn how to wriggle around it, argue semantics with you. So I like to base it on lifeskills (teacher interview).

Washington seems committed to the continued development of a non-threatening atmosphere in which there are high expectations for behavior, consistency, and a sense that “it is ok to make mistakes, let’s learn a different way.” Students who misbehave are dealt with by speaking privately to the student; rarely is a student reprimanded publicly.

Often, student behavior problems are handled collaboratively. In more serious cases, the student’s parents and the counselor may be involved in helping to find creative solutions. For students who are a danger to themselves and others, the principal will suspend, though such occasions are very rare.

I believe in keeping kids in school, so I will have them do some time-outs in school where they can be doing some school work rather than at home for an out of school suspension watching television and that kind of thing. My out of school suspensions in this building are very --don’t happen very often because I just don’t believe in it for this age child…I believe it is a teaching time, not a punitive time (principal interview).
A variety of classroom management strategies are used with students. Examples include quiet reminders, redirection, choices, proximity, use of assistants to work with a student during “time out,” shutting off overhead to get attention, classroom economic system, social stories, notes and calls home, and time-outs in the community areas.

### Procedures and Routines

Procedures are stressed from day one at Washington. There are hallway procedures, dismissal procedures, morning procedures, etc. for each location and major activity in the building. Some of these are schoolwide procedures and others are for individual classrooms. The transitional classrooms develop classroom procedures collaboratively between students and teacher, while the intermediate rooms had procedures set by teachers. All are based on lifeskills and lifelong guidelines.

Morning procedures are followed each morning, and in the intermediate rooms include taking out learning logs and binders, copying the agenda into learning logs, and working on math journals. At the end of the day, students enter notes into their learning logs. They each reflect on their day, by specifically noting three pluses (what went well), one wish (what they can do better), and a Lifeskill that they used that day. Learning logs and home journals go home and are signed nightly by parents in each classroom.

The daily agenda is posted in each classroom on one of the writing boards. Students copy the agenda into the learning log in an effort to focus on the events and organization of the day.

As adults, we all like to know what the agenda looks like when we go to a meeting. When those restroom breaks are built in, when we are going to get a little snack break! And I think that is real important for kids too. It is all a part of the philosophy that we have all adopted as a CLASS school (Principal interview).

Hallway procedures start in the classroom, and students are expected to use their “four inch” voices when in line. Once they are in line with their “four inch voices,” students proceed in a line through the hall. There are norms for community circle time, media center time and reading clubhouse procedures.

Chimes are used as a transition procedure in each room. When teachers want to get a students’ attention or need to transition between activities, they ring chimes. This is also a practice with adults in staff meetings. Hand signals are also used; teachers may raise their hands and say, “give me five,” which starts a countdown by the end of which students are expected to be giving the teacher their attention.
At 9:10 a.m., the morning announcements come on the television. A pair of Washington students presents them live via video camera from the media center. Each day, the announcements begin with students rising and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Procedures and routines play a major role in both schoolwide and classroom management systems. Students are clear about expectations, and there is a sense that they understand “how we do things around here.” These procedures and routines provide the predictability and structure that many students need to be successful.

**Peer Support**

The classrooms at Washington are set up with students sitting in learning clubs. These are round or rectangular tables that seat 4-6 students. Students are referred to as members of a learning club, and a lot of group work and collaboration occurs in these groups.

When students are working independently on an activity, they are allowed to talk with other learning club members about their work and are encouraged to help each other. When individuals have questions or need assistance, they are instructed to ask their learning club members for help before asking the teacher.

There is an emphasis on learning together and helping each other. For example, in one classroom, older students were observed helping younger students on a class project. Learning club members are responsible for each other and often are seen encouraging other members. Reading is often done in pairs. During one observation, students were spread around the room, reading individually and in pairs. One pair was a 3rd grade student acting as a “reading coach” for a younger student.

Everyone is assigned a “study buddy” (lower students paired with higher students in terms of readiness). For theme work, books are at different levels, or sometimes a student might read with a reading buddy to help with difficult concepts and words. Other activities that may occur in pairs include math logic worksheets, math games, and other activities.

Because classes are multi-aged, older students are often helpers and mentors to new, first year students. Teachers hold “training sessions” at the beginning of the year to prepare students for this important responsibility. Learning clubs are designed to have some younger and older students, and seating arrangements are designed to best facilitate peer support.
Role of Adults

General education teachers appear to teach and be responsible for all students. General education teachers teach all students for most of the day. While special educators spend time with all students, a great deal of their time is spent with groups of students who need additional support or reinforcement beyond the classroom. Special educators’ roles are varied, and their daily activities are not fixed. For example, they may co-teach, provide supplemental resources to the whole class, or provide more individualized support to small groups of students.

The role of general educators includes making modifications and adaptations for students. The role of the special educator is to provide resources and support to the general educator. The special educator is the teacher of record who is there to support that classroom teacher. They work collaboratively on meeting the needs of all students. I think the special educator is more of a support person for the classroom teacher who does all the paperwork for special education [compliance], and is a member of the [community team]. They spend so much time collaborating that I think it is real important that they are both seen as—no one particular person’s role is more important in helping—but they both work closely together. The general educators play a very vital role with [students with disabilities]…they are instrumental when we have a case conference or a staffing about a particular student with a special need, the general educator is vital because they spend more time with that student than anyone else in the building. So their input is critical to painting a whole picture, the complete picture of what this child is doing (principal interview).

Parents and students refer to special education teachers as members of the team. They are not identified explicitly as special education teachers. Special educators also view their role as one of facilitator and consultant to the general educator.

I make sure that [students and teachers] have the tools they need in the classroom to do the things they do. Like if that means giving them a multiplication table to use while they are doing multiplication…you do it so it is not obvious. Making them be a part of the class as much as possible. A lot of my students don’t see themselves as special ed. students. In fact, a little girl summed it up beautifully. She said, ‘I like this school so much better because in my old school all the LD kids had to go to another classroom and do different work’. And so she really knew there was a blatant difference because they were treated very differently at that school and here they are treated like a part of the regular classroom (teacher interview).

Special educators work with all students; their role is not to single out students with disabilities and work only with them. When the class breaks into groups by readiness, the special educator does not always work with the low group.
Teacher assistants also work with all students, even those assistants that are assigned as one-on-one assistants to particular students. They can be observed preparing materials, helping other children, circulating around the classroom helping groups of children, and talking with students assigned to time-out.

The student we usually stay with is advancing more and doesn’t kind of need you anymore, I mean he still needs you but he is getting to the point where he is saying ‘I can do it myself,’ so therefore you just help out with the other kids. I kind of like browse around, see where there are kids who need help. There are lots of kids that have [learning needs] in the classrooms, so it is not just the kids with disabilities, just kids period [that I try to help] (teacher assistant focus group interview).

Teacher assistants, general educators, and special educators also all play a role in the General Education Intervention Team process, the Individual Education Program (IEP) process, and general planning for classroom instruction. There is a high degree of collaboration among all adults at Washington.

Seven of the faculty survey questions related to staff responsibilities and roles in inclusive programs. In general, respondents indicated that collaboration between special education and general education is desirable and working well, and special education and general education teachers share responsibilities for instruction and assisting all students. Specifically, virtually all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that special education teachers provide assistance only to students with disabilities, and most agreed that special education teachers provide support for all students. Most of the respondents agreed that general education teachers were comfortable team teaching and disagreed that bringing special education services into general education classrooms creates serious difficulties in determining “who is in charge.” Almost all respondents felt that general and special education teachers should collaborate to address the learning problems of all students. Finally, most educators at Washington agreed that general education teachers receive adequate help in making modifications. Clearly, collaboration is strong at Washington.

Home/School Connection

Family involvement began at Washington even before it opened. Families were involved in discussions about what the school should look like; these discussions included families of students with disabilities. Early on, a common understanding emerged.

Many of the parents who came to the community meetings were parents who had students with special needs who were very frustrated with their child’s current placement
in school. They felt that they weren’t benefiting as much as if they were with their peers in general education. That was a common theme and it was interesting because many general education parents typically have fears about having students with special needs in their child’s classroom. But there were many general education parents who also attended those meetings who, probably for the first time in their lives, actually listened to parents who had students with special needs and came to a common understanding (principal interview).

At Washington, the home journals/learning logs and the weekly parent newsletters/calendars are important aspects of communication with parents. A home journal is a daily communication between home and school that allows the teacher, student and parent to write notes or comments about student learning, upcoming events, reminders for individual students, etc.

Once I started doing home journals, I found that it was a really good way for parents to communicate with me. It cut down on phone calls big time because I was spending a lot of my time calling parents back because I had questions about little things that could easily be answered. I check in with students every day using the journal. They take their journals to their seats when they first get to class. They do not put it away until I have checked in with them. This is a time for me to say “good morning” and to give them some individualized attention (teacher interview).

It is just daily communication between home and school. I have them add like a sentence or two about what their favorite part of the day was and a success that they had from the day. I always write a message up on the board asking for things that they need to be reminded of. I have the kids add two or three sentences about a success from the day (teacher interview).

Learning logs are slightly more personalized to a particular child or a particular classroom, but serve the same purpose with respect to communication. In addition, all teachers send home weekly newsletters that include a calendar that highlights the learning activities for the week. Teachers believe that these two tools inform families extremely well. Some families use it to communicate back to teachers more than others. Teachers view it as one modality for communication (in addition to e-mail, phone calls, etc.) and believe that families choose whatever means they feel most comfortable with. Families are also involved with home reading activities. Students read for twenty minutes and parents sign off every night on the home reading log or booklet. Parents may also be involved in school projects and specific events at the school.
The ICAN assessment tool is viewed by both parents and teachers as the best avenue for communication with respect to student learning. Parents feel that ICAN provides them with an opportunity to truly be involved in their children’s learning.

For parents like us who see school and home as a partnership, the ICAN has enabled us to really participate in our children’s education. It lets us know what is going on so that we can connect activities at home with learning at school (parent feedback on ICAN survey).

Classrooms at Washington have phones, which afford teachers immediate access to home if needed.

If there is a problem or whatever, we just call a parent and have the child talk to them. Plus, they can also call their parent if they are worried about something. We had one little one that they had somebody in the hospital and they wanted to call. So they did and the Dad said ‘Mom is out of surgery; she is doing fine.’ He could talk to the child right away. Or a parent can leave a message for us that might give us a ‘heads up’ on something that may be bothering the child (teacher interview).

Parents at Washington completed a survey regarding their involvement in and satisfaction with the schools. Surveys were sent to the parents of students in the classrooms that were the focus of the study. At Washington, 24 surveys were returned. The survey included eight questions that relate to the degree to which parents feel welcome at their child’s school; the type of communication that occurs between parents and teachers; parental satisfaction regarding said communication; the degree of success that parents perceive their children to be enjoying; and the practices linked to such success. Parent responses revealed no dissatisfaction with the types of communication offered by teachers. The types of communication described included conferences, email, home journals, newsletters, telephone, daily contact, in person contact, letters and notes.

When asked, “How much is your child learning this year in school?” one parent responded by choosing “very little.” In response to an open-ended question regarding what is helping or not helping your child to be successful in school, this parent responded, “While in school, having him play with Legos when he should be learning. Having him bring toys to school.”

Four other parents responded by choosing “some” to describe how much their child is learning this year in school. Responses to the open-ended question varied. For example, one parent responded, “I think they jump from topic to topic a lot. It seems difficult for him to master certain skills.” Another parent wrote, “Having the extra teachers and helpers around
really helps. The resource teacher is wonderful.” A third parent argued, “Inexperienced teachers. Our child needs a lot of pushing to learn. Some teachers are not that persistent. Self-responsibility is hard for an eleven year old to comprehend.” Finally, a fourth parent answered, “She needs to be challenged more and will not follow our suggestions on how to make her assignments more challenging or in-depth. She seems to do the minimum required even though she is capable of much more.”

Most of the respondents, however, expressed satisfaction with their children’s learning at Washington. Fourteen parents chose “a lot” to describe the amount of learning their children experienced this year. Several parents cited extra help from teachers and paraprofessionals as things that are helping their children to be successful in school. One parent cited conflicts with other students as hampering.

Five parents chose “a great deal” to describe the amount of learning their children experienced this year. Several parents cited a positive learning environment as one thing that is helping their children to be successful. One parent cited large class size as a negative.

Social Skills

The social skills curriculum at Washington is primarily the lifeskills and lifelong guidelines program, described in some detail above. There is an emphasis throughout the school on helping one another, on being friends and on being “people smart.” Lifeskills are consistently emphasized, non-competitive, and applicable to any ability level. Many teachers use a section of the learning logs to focus on a lifeskill by asking students to write one lifeskill that they used that day and how they used it.

When students have difficulty with behavior, they are typically asked to problem solve and reflect on which lifeskill they should have used. The school’s guidance counselor also visits classrooms and talks with students about conflict resolution.

Summary

The following is a list of structures and practices that support inclusion at Washington:

- Multi-age classrooms that allow for diverse ability levels, differentiated instruction, student mentorship, and extended time with the same teacher.
- The school is a CLASS school and follows CLASS principles.
- The ICAN reporting system and not having traditional grades.
- Team oriented, two trimesters long process for placing individual students in classrooms.
- Choice and input: elective enrollment school, few problems attracting staff, teachers input into governance of school.
- Teachers having input in assigning students to classrooms.
- A commitment to inclusion since the school’s founding.
- Collaborative planning, instruction and assessment and collaborative planning time.
- Shared responsibility between special and general educators for all students.
- Training for classroom assistants.
- Community areas provide common space for more individual work or small group instruction that is not isolated.
- Trimester thematic units
- Home journals/learning logs facilitate communication with home.
- Daily agendas.
- An emphasis on procedures and routines
- Lifeskills and lifelong guidelines that are consistently emphasized and taught
- Integrated curricula
- Repeated opportunities for math problem solving
- Individualized reading instruction from both the general education and special education teachers.
- Individual activities balanced by community activities
- Strong administrative support

**Lincoln Elementary School**

Lincoln Elementary School is a one-level brick building that enrolls approximately 400 children from kindergarten through grade five. Upon entering the building, visitors are directed to sign in the office where a friendly secretary greets them, gives them a visitor’s badge to wear, and answers any questions they may have. Directly outside the office is a large open space containing round tables that seat approximately four to six children. Although this large open area serves as the student cafeteria, it also acts as an instructional area for students who may need
some additional attention or support, an area for grade-wide activities such as principal-led activities that permit grade-level teachers to have collaboration time, and as the location for the school’s after school program. Also, teachers take advantage of this wide-open and easily visible space by displaying large student projects that attract the attention of those walking by.

The school’s classrooms are primarily located along two hallways that meet one another in the student cafeteria area. One hallway houses the primary grades (grades 1 through 3) as well as the resource room, speech/hearing therapist’s office, art and music room, media center, and restrooms. The other hallway has classrooms for grades 4 and 5 in addition to a staircase that leads to a downstairs kindergarten classroom. The hallways are lined with displays of student work and seasonal or holiday posters and bulletin boards. Lincoln’s gymnasium is in the front of the school, near one of the doors to the office. Along with an inside entrance, it has outside doors. Before school starts each day, students who arrive early wait in the gymnasium, where several adults supervise them until they are dismissed to their classrooms at 8:15.

The atmosphere of Lincoln is welcoming and friendly. Greetings and smiles often are exchanged between children and adults upon meeting. Within the teachers’ lounge, staff and faculty are observed exchanging information with one another regarding their personal lives, and on some occasions food is brought in to share in celebration of personal events. Impromptu exchanges of information regarding students often occur in the lounge or hallways. On many occasions, teachers share with one another their concerns regarding student performance, as well as their happiness regarding student success.

Younger students often are led in single file lines throughout the buildings, while older students are allowed to lead themselves to and from their classrooms. Classroom seating arrangements vary according to teacher, but many students are seated in clusters or pairs. Classroom rules are often prominently displayed. Seating arrangements appear to be flexible, as room arrangements and seating assignments in many classrooms may change several times over the school year.

According the faculty/staff handbook, the school’s mission statement is to “provide a positive environment with a continuum of services that will instill in all students the self-esteem, self-discipline, and motivation to master the academic and social skills necessary to ensure success in the world of today and the world of the future.”
Lincoln is located on the fringe of an urban area within a medium-sized community. Its location on a secondary road near a cemetery gives it a rural feel. According to the state’s school profile, most of the students are white (83.2%), and smaller percentages are black (6.8%), Hispanic (2.3%), Asian (1.3%), or multiracial (6.5%). Twenty-six teachers comprise the teaching staff, including the specials teachers, the special education teacher, speech/hearing therapist, media specialist, and Reading Recovery teacher. Of those, fourteen have Master’s degrees. The average numbers of years of teaching experience is approximately fourteen.

**Administrative Support/Program Structures**

Inclusion

Lincoln Elementary School has one special education teacher who holds the title of inclusion coordinator. In addition, there are three assistants who work alongside her to meet the inclusion needs of the students and staff. The inclusion coordinator and her assistants have flexible schedules that allow them to adjust based on teacher feedback and student needs. Often times, the special education staff begin their day by completing “walk-throughs” of their designated grade levels. In a walk-through, the staff person briefly confers with the general education teacher regarding the day’s events and upcoming needs, touches base with students with disabilities (whether directly or indirectly), and tentatively puts together the schedule for the day. Although walk-throughs frequently occur in the morning, they may take place at any time, depending on daily events and circumstances.

In 1989, Lincoln’s school district decided to re-think special education for the district. A year was spent planning with general and special educators in the district. Out of that year came sort of a philosophy that all kids can learn, that children are better served in their neighborhood schools, and that two heads are better than one in terms of figuring out how to serve kids and that sort of ‘everyone is welcome’ [culture]. We implemented in one school and what we saw with our kids was amazing. The academic improvement was amazing. So, the following year we moved to four buildings and again we did a year of planning. The third year, we did eleven schools, one of which was [Lincoln] (Director of Special Education interview).

Each building in the district has a standing neighborhood school committee that meets at a minimum of twice a year. Each building makes decisions as to how to use its special education money.

So, like right now, [Lincoln’s] numbers have just kicked way up. Now, they can add staff if they so choose. If they add staff, that could be aides, or, if they need three aides, then
they could actually hire a teacher in lieu of the aides. That combination and that thought process is the buildings. Every building meets, and they are required to submit their data to me that they have met. They are always to re-look at their plan and make revisions if need be. They are to look at training needs as well (Director of Special Education interview).

As a part of the initial planning, Lincoln decided to use a consultative model for inclusion, in which the special educator is a consultant to all classrooms in the building and teacher assistants work in classrooms. This approach was chosen over a more collaborative, co-teaching approach.

A lot of collaborative models you look at around the state, the way they collaborate is they put a lot of kids in one classroom. I think I would rather not go there. How do you keep those numbers at natural proportion in order to serve the kids? The whole idea with the school based bi-annual meetings is that your practice doesn’t stay the same, that you have to change, that you have to look at your kids, you have to look at your needs, you have to look at what is working, what is not working. (Director of Special Education interview)

Lincoln serves students with a range of disabilities, from students with mild disabilities to students with intensive needs. Students with disabilities are placed in many classrooms at Lincoln; classrooms are not designated as “inclusion” classrooms, and students are not clustered in large groups in any one classroom. Some students with disabilities also receive one-on-one or small group direct instruction from the special educator. Decisions regarding additional support are made jointly by general education and special education teachers.

Principal’s Role

There have been three principals at Lincoln since inclusion began. Mr. Hill, the principal who had been at Lincoln for the majority of the inclusion years, is a highly respected educator in the school district and is loved by the staff in the building. After his retirement, Mr. Bell took the principal position. Mr. Bell was in his first year at the school when the present study began. Both principals were interviewed for the study.

Mr. Hill was very supportive of the inclusion program when he came to Lincoln. While the program was already underway, his support and guidance has ensured its continued success. He has a strong belief that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms.

The first thing I did share with the staff was that I was a strong believer in the inclusion process and shared with them my experience with what I had seen happen with kids [in my previous school] (former principal interview).
Mr. Hill was highly visible in the school and very involved with children. He set up reading challenges for students. Every month, they did a different kind of challenge. One month it involved each class in reading a certain number of books. There was a jigsaw puzzle on the bulletin board, and every time a class reached their designated number of books, it got a piece of the puzzle. The class then had to solve the puzzle. Mr. Hill also took classes to his home during the Christmas season to see his Santa collection.

Teachers report that Mr. Hill understood what was necessary for inclusion to work. He worked hard to give teams common planning time. He ensured that the inclusion coordinator received at least two of the building-level professional development days, so she could be released to work with individual teachers or grade levels once each semester. Such meetings allowed teachers to be involved with the inclusion coordinator in discussions about various aspects of the program. If additional time was needed, Mr. Hill covered the coordinator’s responsibilities so she could be free to meet with teachers.

Mr. Hill believes that the best way to introduce an inclusion program into a school is to help teachers understand that there are alternative ways of serving students with disabilities that may be better than pulling them out. He believes that an important first step is to have staff visit and talk with other schools that are doing it well. Once teachers are interested, he believes that the principal has a responsibility to help them develop the opportunities to make important changes for students.

Mr. Bell, while having a different style of leadership than Mr. Hill, also believes that administrative support is essential to the program.

When [the inclusion coordinator] comes to me with a concern or information, I have found that generally it is something that I can just immediately follow, I can agree with. She and I have not had any disagreements because we’re pretty much alike whenever it comes to inclusion and special needs programs. I think any principal’s role, as far as special education, has to be one of support (principal interview).

Mr. Bell sets up an initial parent meeting prior to a special education referral. He believes that it helps him better understand the parent perspective, and he feels more involved in the process. As a new principal, Mr. Bell believes that his role in the first year is to step back and take in as much as possible, rather than make major changes.

There has also been strong administrative support from the Director of Special Education in Lincoln’s district. She was involved during the early stages of change and is responsible for
much of the success in the district. Unlike the other two schools in this study, the evolution of
inclusion at Lincoln was part of a district-level initiative.

Planning Time

The former principal provided subs at each grade level to cover classes on a regular basis
so that the inclusion coordinator could plan with general education teachers during grade level
planning time. The new principal supports the need for common planning time and indicates that
he intends to try to fit common planning time in as often as possible. He also states that he
currently tries to take large groups of students by grade level into an “early morning assembly,”
where he focuses on a particular social skill with the students, thus giving grade level teachers
additional time together. He intends to continue this practice next year.

Most teachers report that, even with the above opportunities, most common planning
takes place after school. According to the special education teacher, planning with the
paraprofessionals occurs “pretty much day to day, even moment to moment.” However, there is a
commitment to planning together, and teachers clearly understand the value of touching base
frequently with the inclusion coordinator and paraprofessionals.

Professional Development/Training

At Lincoln, general and special educators have equal opportunity for professional
development. The school corporation requires eighteen hours of professional development per
year for certified staff. There is no distinction made between professional development for
special educators and general educators. In the early stages of inclusion at Lincoln, teachers were
given “a lot of staff development on how to work with somebody else in your room” (teacher
interview). Teachers report that in the early stages, one of the most beneficial professional
development activities was the opportunity to visit other schools and learn from them about
inclusion. They found this professional development activity much more valuable than
workshops, although they have also found some value in particular workshops (around specific
issues) and videos. In the past few years, many schools have come to Lincoln to visit and look at
their program. According to the teachers, this not only “confirms that we’re doing a good job”,
but also allows them to reflect on their program.

Paraprofessionals are required to attend a certain number of in-service hours, and there
are a number of workshops available to them as well. The paraprofessionals report that most of
the valuable training for them has come from watching teachers work with students day in and day out.

**Attitudes and Beliefs**

The faculty and staff at Lincoln Elementary all share responsibility for the inclusion program. Students with disabilities are not placed in “inclusion classrooms;” rather, all teachers in the building have the opportunity to include students with disabilities.

**Student Differences/Student Characteristics and System Capacity**

Educators at Lincoln completed a survey of attitudes and beliefs about inclusive school programs. Seventeen adults responded to the survey, representing general education teachers and one special education teacher. The survey, developed and found reliable by Waldron and colleagues (1999), consisted of 30 Likert items.

Five of the survey questions explicitly connected student characteristics to the capacity or level of expectations of the system or teacher. Teachers at Lincoln hold diverging opinions as to whether students with disabilities have skills needed for success in general education. Approximately 30% of the respondents disagreed that students with disabilities lack the study skills necessary for the general education classroom. Another 24% agreed with this statement, while the majority remained neutral. Consistent with the perceptions of inadequate resources, a large number of respondents (70%) at Lincoln believe that students with disabilities need more attention than general education teachers can provide. Many educators at Lincoln disagree that students with disabilities have significant behavior problems when in the general education classroom, although an equal number of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and three respondents agreed that students with disabilities have significant behavior problems in the general education classroom. Despite the level of attention necessary and perceived lack of students’ skills, approximately half of the respondents from Lincoln believe that general education teachers have the necessary instructional skills to teach students with disabilities.

Two questions dealt with perceived characteristics of students with disabilities and how these compared to general education students. From this small sample of questions, it appears that educators at Lincoln are not of one opinion about whether students with and without disabilities are more different than alike with respect to behavior and work habits. Approximately 47% of the respondents at Lincoln agreed that students with mild disabilities have more behavior problems than their general education peers, while 41% disagreed that
students are different in this respect, and a remaining 12% remained uncommitted. Similarly, slightly more than a third of all respondents agreed that work habits of students with disabilities are comparable to general education peers, while 47% disagreed and 17% neither agreed nor disagreed. It should be noted that no one strongly disagreed that students with disabilities have more behavior problems and no one strongly agreed that work habits of the two groups were comparable. A few respondents strongly agreed that students have more behavior problems and several respondents strongly disagreed that work habits were comparable.

**Beliefs About Learning**

Participants interviewed for this study overwhelmingly believe that students with and without disabilities benefit from inclusion.

Inclusion has the most benefit for students without disabilities, in terms of destroying stereotypes and accepting differences. I think they have had the opportunity to understand that not all children learn the same way and that just because a child maybe acts in a different way or looks different, that doesn’t make them less of an important person. They have gotten to interact with children they maybe never would have before, except from a distance (teacher interview).

I think [students with disabilities] grow an awful lot and it also gives them opportunities to do things that they may not have had if they were segregated, where people automatically assume that they would not even try things with these kids. Well, now we try that with these kids (teacher interview).

Their [students with disabilities] confidence is higher, their standards are higher, and their goals are higher. We [used] to sell them short. And, yeah, I know that some kids go further with it than others, but I am sure that they would not go any further if they were in a room all by themselves (teacher interview).

Nine of the thirty survey items related to outcomes for students in inclusive settings. Overall, educators at Lincoln believe that inclusive school programs are connected to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities. The majority of respondents agreed that students with mild disabilities benefit from inclusion in the general education classroom. Similarly, the majority of educators (76%) at Lincoln believe that students with mild disabilities adjust well when placed in general education. Interestingly, just over half of the respondents believe that students with mild disabilities make adequate academic progress when placed in general education, and the remaining half either disagreed or remained neutral. Many of the respondents (41%) agreed that low achieving students do better academically in general education classrooms, though many disagreed (23%) or remained neutral (35%). Consistent with
findings from other research, most respondents felt that students with disabilities gain improved social skills as a result of inclusion. Responses were evenly mixed with respect to the perception that students with disabilities lose the negative stigma when placed in general education classrooms. A large majority of respondents disagreed that general education peers are not accepting of students with disabilities. About half of the respondents do not believe that high achieving students are neglected in inclusive classrooms, yet almost 30% of respondents did believe that this was the case, and another 24% were neutral. Consistent with these responses, almost two thirds (59%) of the respondents from Lincoln disagreed that inclusion has negative academic performance outcomes for students without disabilities, but 18% agreed that performance was negatively affected, and 24% of respondents did not claim agreement or disagreement.

Homework

There appears not to be a school wide homework policy per se, though most teachers assign ten minutes of homework per student grade level. Most teachers do not assign homework on Fridays. Many teachers send home some sort of assignment sheet to share with parents. There is an expectation that parents look at and sign this sheet, and it is returned with the student.

Generally, homework is viewed as a means of practice and/or review of the lessons from the day. Teachers sometimes allow students to start their homework during class time to ensure that everyone understands the assignment and so students can receive help if necessary. Most teachers feel it is important to keep homework in perspective.

I truly believe that if a child is going home and spending an hour outside of class on one subject, I think that is too much. They are learning here. They are practicing at home. I just don’t believe in packing them down at night. I have weekly homework, and I believe in treating every child individually (teacher interview).

If students fail to turn in homework, many teachers require the student to spend the twenty minute recess completing homework, though this practice varies among teachers. There is no penalty for students who do not have parent signatures on their assignment sheets.

Teachers use homework as a means of collecting feedback regarding how well students grasp a particular concept. One teacher stated that if she sees a pattern among students not doing well on a particular homework assignment, she will “re-teach a skill. That’s not their fault. Something is not right about the way it was presented” (teacher interview).

Collegiality
At Lincoln, the success of the inclusion program is dependent on the coordination and collaboration of many individuals. As one teacher stated, “You really have to be a team player” (teacher interview). Teachers believe their school is a special place to work or, in one teacher’s words, “the cream of the crop place” (teacher interview). There is a genuine willingness to work with the inclusion coordinator and her assistants. Lynn, the inclusion coordinator, is highly respected by the staff, as are the teacher assistants in her program. Many teachers report that they are willing to be inclusive because of Lynn. “I think we have become very comfortable with the program, and Lynn has become very comfortable working with us. Inclusion works here because of Lynn” (teacher interview).

Commitment to Inclusive Schools

The teacher survey demonstrates that, in general, teachers at Lincoln believe that resistance to inclusion is minimal or that resistance is not strong enough to threaten the inclusion effort. Only one educator at Lincoln expressed agreement that inclusion will not succeed because of too much teacher resistance. A large percentage of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. While approximately one third of respondents claimed to be neutral, 60% agreed that parents are supportive of inclusive school programs. Despite teachers’ perceptions that teachers and parents are supportive of inclusion, approximately one third of the teachers feel that general educators prefer to send students with disabilities to receive services in pullout programs. Slightly over half of the respondents do not think that teachers prefer to send these students out.

Resistance to inclusion at Lincoln has apparently decreased over the years. Teachers suggest that some of the most resistant teachers are gone:

I think we run up against teachers who do not want something to be successful because it means more work for them or it is just a change. And when you run up against people like that, you run up against barriers that are just discrimination almost. Fortunately, I don’t think we have too much of that anymore. The ones that are really against it are not here anymore and that kind of opened us up. That allowed us to be a school that embraced it instead of fighting it (teacher interview).

Many survey respondents at Lincoln believe that inclusive programming is a basic right for students with disabilities, but an almost equal number are either neutral or do not regard inclusion as such. While a majority of respondents feel that resources are sufficient for inclusion to succeed, a considerable number of educators at Lincoln feel that resources are not sufficient.
Furthermore, most respondents disagreed that the redistribution of special education resources into the general education classroom decreases the load of the general education teacher. Special education personnel and inclusive general education teachers disagreed with the redistribution statement at a higher rate than did those teachers that identified themselves as general educators.

It appears that most teachers at Lincoln believe that, even if additional resources are made available, the effort necessary on the part of general educators is not reduced. Whether there are enough resources to meet the great diversity of academic needs is not clear. Nearly half of the respondents disagreed that high achieving students were neglected in inclusive classrooms, but 29% agreed that these students were being neglected and 24% were neutral on the issue. Inclusive general educators were evenly split on whether high achieving students were neglected, while general education teachers tended toward disagreement. Interestingly, despite the perception that a great amount of resources are necessary, no respondent indicated that Lincoln was not adequately prepared to implement inclusion. As one teacher stated, “I think inclusion is just too important to throw away because of [lack of] money.”

**Assessment**

Classroom assessment at Lincoln varies, from quizzes and tests to large projects. Assessment appears to be focused on gathering information about student progress to inform instructional decisions. One teacher describes how student assessment influences her teaching:

- I just constantly keep notes for myself. It is an on-going, constant thing. Sometimes I can see right in the middle that something is not working and then usually what I do is I sit down either with the group or the whole class and we say ‘What is wrong with this? Why is it not working?’ I realize that what I wanted from the activity, I obviously didn’t explain well, or organize well. And the quality of work that they turn in, you can tell what was successful and what wasn’t. And usually you can figure out why. Either I didn’t explain it well or it wasn’t set up right (teacher interview).

This teacher clearly accepts the idea that if students aren’t learning, it has to be the teaching, not the student. Assessment tools provide her with this information.

There are many examples of teachers making accommodations in the assessment process, including extended time on projects and tests, shortened assignments, tests that are read to students, and test re-takes. These accommodations are available to any student, not just students with disabilities. For some students with disabilities, an I (for improving) might be put on the report card in place of an F. “What we really want to do is reflect what is going on. What does
the $F$ say? It doesn’t really say anything we want to say. So we make some accommodations” (teacher interview).

There is constant feedback from the general education teachers to the special educator regarding student progress. Many general education teachers give weekly progress reports to the special education teacher. This feedback allows the special education teacher to make instructional decisions for individual students that are discussed with general educators or used during one-on-one support.

Out of concern regarding ISTEP scores, the district office has recently asked that all schools do benchmark testing. The purpose is to get a benchmark on a student at a certain grade, assess problems, and work on specific skills to see if it makes a difference. The building principal receives the results of the benchmark testing and takes them back to the teachers for discussion and decisions. While there is still some confusion about the process, some support programs have been designed for students. Some programs provide enrichment or remediation after school. One program involves the librarian, who works with a group of students. Other programs involve flexible grouping of students at grade levels for specific skill work. In some instances, the special educator works with a small group of students (with and without disabilities) who need more direct instruction.

**Instruction**

**Instructional Content**

Textbooks primarily drive instructional content at Lincoln, although individual teachers have effectively supplemented these textbooks with other materials and projects. Saxon math is being used school-wide and is the adopted math program. This structured program allows for continual review and practice.

The school also has an adopted reading text, though many teachers supplement this text with novels and other forms of literature. Many teachers begin the day with Daily Oral Language, and writing is highly emphasized across all of the content areas. For example, some students use pre-writing activities before reading a novel chapter. One classroom was observed using math journals to write in.

While teachers acknowledge that ISTEP and standards determine the textbooks they buy and what content is taught, they still feel that they have a window of creativity to develop projects and experiences to help students learn. There was evidence throughout the school of
grade level thematic units (The Rain Forest in 5th grade), student artwork as a project product, a mock election as a part of a social studies unit, field trips, classroom debates (“Is dogsled racing fair to the dogs?”), and guest speakers.

**Instructional Activities**

Cooperative learning and group work are used in many of the classrooms at Lincoln. Whole group activities, independent learning activities, and small group activities can be seen in the classrooms. The Saxon math program drives math activities. Intermediate teachers were trained and were beginning to use the Four Block method. Various other instructional activities can be observed at Lincoln:

- Teacher reads two poems. Utilizing the theme from the poems, students work in groups of three to generate ideas in response to the statement, “If I were in charge of the world, I would…”
- Students have a choice of writing one complete holiday sentence for each letter in the word “Holiday,” or make up their own holiday song to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” “Twinkle, Twinkle,” or “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”
- ABC Thank You Books and ABC Notebooks (spiral bound notebooks) that have a letter of the alphabet at the top of each page. Students write new words on the appropriate page and take them home to share with their families (2nd grade).
- Introduce a new novel with a creative writing assignment
- Journal writing of weekend activities that are shared and read to the class in morning meeting.
- Reading a story aloud, with time spent to review comprehension concepts with students (main idea, details, inference and prediction).
- Daily Oral Language work
- Word Walls, creating rhyming words, word games
- Partner reading, Independent reading
- Interviews of community members followed by essay writing
- Study guides to complement novels and stories
- Activities to follow up a field trip
- Acting out and role playing math story problems and concepts
- Use of songs to memorize days of week and the months
- Modeling expectations
- Review woven within the presentation of new material
- Finding shapes around the room to match the geometric shapes they were studying. This was followed with providing students with pattern blocks, and asking them to hold up the pattern block to represent a square, etc. Next, students used their pattern blocks to make a large hexagon with a partner, which was used in a lesson about fractions.
- Pre-writing activities followed by a teacher-student conference

**Instructional Strategies**

Many teachers at Lincoln weave review within the presentation of new material. Review is also used on a regular basis as an assessment of how well students understand concepts and to monitor the pace of a lesson. Another commonly used strategy in the classrooms is partner work. There is a sense that working together and helping each other learn is acceptable at Lincoln.

Accommodations and adaptations are common practice. The special education teacher, the teaching assistants, and the general education teachers all feel comfortable making the necessary adaptations for any child. “I may adapt there on the spot. Or I might say to the student, ‘Think about this.’ Or give him hints” (teacher assistant interview).

Study guides are often made by the special education teacher to help students study for a particular quiz or tests. Likewise, tests are often modified in format or length. Teachers also put some of the reading material on tape. The special education teacher reports that, initially, she had the major responsibility for adaptations. However, once the teachers saw how she modified, they became more comfortable with making the necessary adaptations for students in their classrooms.

Teachers strategically group students for various activities. Depending on the activity, students may be grouped heterogeneously or randomly, by student choice or interest, or by readiness. Most teachers report that grouping decisions depend on the activity, and they change often.

Review (or repetition), modeling, independent assistance, scaffolding, and positive reinforcement can be observed in classrooms at Lincoln. Teachers also use environmental cues and proximity to ensure student understanding and engagement. The overhead projector is used
often to visually reinforce directions, expectations, review, or to model or illustrate a concept. The students also use the overhead.

**Classroom Management**

Generally, classroom management at Lincoln is focused on creating a positive environment that fosters a sense of community and belonging. With one obvious exception, teachers deal with behavior issues in a private fashion, talking individually to the student, using proximity, redirection, quiet reminders, or a gentle touch to address behaviors. In one classroom, however, behavior is dealt with more publicly, and there is a greater sense of competition. For example, the teacher may ask all students to stand by their desks. Those that had completed their homework can sit down; the others left standing are admonished for not turning in work and given a consequence. In this same classroom, students are often called out for not listening, following directions, etc.

Removal of recess is a common consequence for misbehavior or for not getting work completed. For students with more chronic behaviors, the teachers report that calling home is effective. Referrals to the office are reserved for severe behaviors.

The fifth grade teachers use a type of token economy with their students. Students use a “checkbook” to keep track of points awarded to them. Students are awarded points for a wide variety of things.

I think it used to be you do what you are supposed to do or you are punished. And now it is almost like we reward them if they are being good. You have to make those rewards, but they are very small. At the end of the week, you can spend those points. [They] have a little check register. [They may have] come in quiet and got their work out, so give yourself 20 points. Or, you forgot your pencil, take away 15 points. It works well (teacher interview).

Teachers believe that they work hard to promote a caring community where student successes are celebrated.

We are a little family. This group [of students] is really starting to click now. If students have a problem with somebody, teach them ways to work it out between themselves. Just teach general understanding of other people. Everyone is entitled to make mistakes. When you make a mistake or you do something wrong, how do you make it better? I really try to de-escalate all that stuff, all that blaming (teacher interview).

There are several students who have individual behavior plans for very specific behaviors. Such plans are usually developed collaboratively with the special education teacher.
Teachers feel they receive a lot of support from the special education teacher in problem solving for these students, in revising plans that aren’t working, and in developing plans for the students. Some students have a less intensive plan and use a behavior checklist to monitor their own behavior and communicate to home and other staff in the building.

**Procedures and Routines**

Many classrooms at Lincoln have student jobs, helpers of the week, or some specific role that the student has to deal with for everyday routines, such as passing out work, collecting attendance, running things to other classrooms, setting up the overhead, etc. Homework schedules also provide specific routines for the classrooms. Students have certain homework on certain nights, and certain procedures for returning and handing in homework. Teachers also have their own methods for quieting the room that seem clearly understood by students. For example, “use your six inch voice,” or “let’s whisper read.” Teachers have a variety of expectations with respect to placement of names on the paper, numbering on papers, folding homework, transitions to group work, and behaviors when another student is talking. Many teachers use a daily agenda posted in the room to let students know the daily schedule.

**Peer Support**

Peer support is encouraged at Lincoln. Cooperative learning groups are used often, and students understand that they should “help each other.” Many examples can be observed in classrooms:

- The teacher calls on various students and asks others to help when someone has difficulty with a word.
- One male student is going through his desk. He has not been following along. The girl sitting next to him reminds him to tear the page out of his practice book and helps him get on task.
- One teacher tells the class to “look at your neighbor and see if they have only two things on their desk. If not, tell them in a gracious way.”
- One student accidentally put something in his desk that he was supposed to turn in. Another student came and told the teacher “He probably just forgot.”
- Students work together on assignments, and ensure that all students have well prepared assignments before handing them in.
- Peer buddies are assisting students having difficulty.
Teachers are purposeful about their seating arrangements in the classrooms to ensure that struggling students have a student nearby that they can ask for help. They also strategically place students apart who do not do well sitting close together.

**Role of Adults**

In general, respondents to the teacher survey at Lincoln indicate that collaboration between special education staff and general education teachers is desirable and working well, and special and general education teachers share responsibilities for instruction and assisting all students. Specifically, a majority of respondents agreed that general educators have the primary responsibility for the education of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Additionally, most of the teachers agreed that special educators provide assistance to all students in the classroom. Teachers at Lincoln appear satisfied with the professional collaboration that has supported inclusion programming. The majority of respondents indicated that general educators are comfortable team teaching with special educators. Finally, almost all respondents affirmed the statement that special and general educators should collaborate on all student learning problems.

The general education teachers credit the special education teacher with the success of the program. As one teacher stated, “Lynn is unique. Lynn has given me training beyond belief without even realizing it” (teacher interview).

Teachers at Lincoln appear very comfortable with their roles. The special educator views herself as part of a team, coordinating with general education teachers as well as the teacher assistants. She states, “It just kind of works out, and I don’t know that this would work in every building with all teachers, but here it has been acceptable that I can just pop in, and I can stand back and wait, or I can write a note on their desk or go over and whisper in an ear while they are teaching” (teacher interview). Her role is truly one of a consultant, providing resources and support to general education teachers. She has created a role that is responsive to the needs of students as well as general education staff.

General education teachers accept the responsibility for teaching all the students in the classroom. One general education teacher calls herself the “primary mover and shaker, just keeping it all together, making sure that I talk to the coordinator [special education teacher] if there is a problem…or when there is something wonderful happening” (teacher interview). Teachers feel comfortable bouncing ideas off of each other and sharing ideas with the special
They have become much more confident in their own ability to make the necessary instructional accommodations for their students. The special educator commented:

They have gained confidence that they can do something on a wing and a prayer at the last minute. That you don’t have to sit down and take a whole lot of time to make an accommodation or make an adaptation, and you don’t really have to be specialized to do that in some way. So what I have found is that they are doing a much bigger proportion of the accommodations that they were five years ago (teacher interview).

Teachers admit that there have been challenges in learning to work as a team and dealing with diverse classrooms, but as one teacher stated, “I am moving away from being a traditional teacher. The times, they are a changing” (teacher interview). The ownership for all students has clearly shifted at Lincoln to being a shared ownership. What was once a “voluntary” option to take students with disabilities in the classroom is now an expectation for all teachers, with the general educator being the primary person in the classroom. As the principal clearly states, “The teacher that feels that they cannot let that special education teacher get further than 25 feet away from herself or himself and the children in the classroom, that teacher will unfortunately not allow any other model than the [special education] teacher in the classroom at all times” (principal interview).

The teacher assistants believe that they are viewed by the students as teachers, and the expectation from the teachers is to provide the support to the students in their classrooms. The assistants start the day with the special educator to make sure that there is nothing unusual that they need to know or deal with. Morning schedules for the assistants are pretty well set, but afternoons are more flexible and time is spent attending to classrooms or students that have needs at that particular moment in time.

**Home School Connection**

We asked parents at the school to complete a survey regarding their involvement in and satisfaction with the their child’s school. The surveys were sent to the parents of students in the classrooms that were the focus of the study. At Lincoln, 22 surveys were returned. The eight-item survey included questions that related to the degree to which parents feel welcome at their children’s schools; the type of communication that occurs between parents and teachers; parental satisfaction regarding said communication; the degree of success that parents perceive their children to be enjoying; and the practices linked to such success. Analysis focused upon parent/teacher communication and successful teaching strategies. Overall, parents that
responded to the survey feel welcome and positive about Lincoln. Responses to individual items are detailed below.

Eleven parents indicated that they feel “Very welcome,” six parents chose “welcome,” and 5 parents chose “Somewhat welcome,” when asked to what degree they feel welcome at Lincoln. No parents chose “Not Welcome.” Responses reveal, however, that some parents are “Dissatisfied” or only “Somewhat satisfied” with the type of communication they share with their child’s teacher.

A clear pattern emerges from an examination of responses to the follow-up question. Parents most frequently expressed dissatisfaction with infrequent communication and communication that had to be initiated by the parent. One person mentioned notes and another mentioned the planner as types of communication with which they were only “Somewhat satisfied.” Almost all those that circled “Satisfied, or “Very Satisfied” indicated that they share more than one type of communication and that communication is frequent, on-going, regular, and not simply in response to student performance or parental need. Parents most often identified some form of written communication, followed by phone, and conference as the types of communication that they find satisfactory.

Parents described a variety of ways in which they are involved in their children’s education, such as attending special school events, helping with projects, and encouraging their children. Most parents indicated involvement in their child’s homework activities (helping, checking, reviewing, and studying). Responses also reveal that parents are involved with homework and other educational activities on a regular and frequent basis.

When asked, “How much is your child learning this year in school?” a majority of parents (16) indicated that their child is learning “A lot” or “A Great deal.” Four parents chose “Some,” and one parent chose “Very little.” Parents elaborated in an open-ended question that queried parents about what they think is helping or not helping their child to be successful in school. Again, responses varied widely. Many parents replied that “good,” “excellent,” “experienced,” “encouraging,” or “positive” teachers contribute to success, and a “moody teacher” or teacher that “does not go out of her way to help” is not contributing to success. Two parents who feel that their child is learning “A lot” explained that low expectations or “slower kids holding others back” are not helpful to their child. Parents also mentioned influence of
friends, family and the child’s own attitude. A few parents talked of classroom atmosphere, availability of materials or hand-on activities as helpful.

Looking only at those parent responses that indicated their children’s learning to be limited, parents expressed frustration with their children’s struggles and expressed some criticism of school practices. For example, one parent spoke of too much homework, two mentioned lack of individual attention, and another identified low expectations as not helpful.

Ten parents responded with a simple “Yes” when asked, “Does your child feel that he/she is having a successful year at school?” Seven others responded with a “Yes,” and they elaborated. Good grades were frequently declared. One parent expressed that her child can do better, and another explained that her child feels successful “because he has been allowed to manipulate the staff into accepting poor, sloppy work below his potential.” All four parents that responded “No” to this question also elaborated. Two parents indicated that their child is struggling with reading. Two others spoke of children feeling bad about their performance or about treatment by the teacher.

Teachers reported using a variety of strategies to communicate homework and other school items to parents, including assignment tracking sheets to be signed by parents, homework logs, and newsletters. Parents are sometimes asked to be guest speakers, and some teachers develop units for parent and child participation. However, there is some acknowledgement that more can be done.

I don’t think we offer enough opportunities for our people to be able to tend to and mend fences that are broken at home. A lot of people will say that is the home situation and school doesn’t have anything to do with that. I am sorry; the school has everything to do with it because we see these kids. If there is a problem at home, it is going to be here, and before we can teach that child, we have to be able to mend a few fences along the way (principal interview).

Social Skills

Social skills are integrated into a variety of content areas at Lincoln. One formal instructional time for these skills to be taught is the early morning assembly conducted by the principal. Each grade level attends this assembly once per week, and the principal focuses on a particular social skill.

Giving students opportunities to have classroom and school responsibilities is another means of teaching social skills. Many classrooms have “Student of the Day” and assigned
weekly jobs. The school also has a student council and “Tiger Patrol,” a program initiated by the principal that uses fifth graders to assist within the school on a variety of issues.

**Summary**

The following is a list of practices and structures that support inclusion at Lincoln Elementary:

- Large number of opportunities for student mentorship and peer support.
- A highly qualified special educator who is highly respected by staff and parents and who has been instrumental in the evolution of inclusion at the school.
- Daily agendas and procedures/routines
- Classroom Assistants
- Use of a wide variety of instructional strategies
- Strong administrative support at the building and district levels.
- Professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals
- Educators believe that inclusion programs are related to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities.
- Flexible schedules
- On-going, formative assessment
- Peer support
- General and special educators sharing responsibility for all students.

**Grant Elementary School**

Grant Elementary School was built in 1957. At that time, a local company had offered to cover design costs for new public schools—as long as it was able to approve the architect selection. An addition was built in 1987 when Grant and another school combined, making it the largest elementary school in the district. The school offers such details as low ceilings in the elementary school, so as not to overwhelm the young students, and ten classrooms that open to playgrounds. This design minimizes the overwhelming effect of having too much hallway travel.

In the lobby is a table welcoming visitors and prompting them to sign in and wear a visitor’s badge. Also on that table is a display board with the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills posted. Like Washington, Grant is a CLASS school, and lifelong guidelines and lifeskills are part of the CLASS philosophy.
Directly facing the main entrance is a wall with a bulletin board displaying photographs and names of teachers from each grade. Each special educator works in two different classrooms at two different grade levels, and their photos are included with the general educators for each of these grades. Nearby is a glass enclosed display case that states the school’s mission statement: “Our vision. We are excited to be here. We are prepared to learn. We use the lifelong guidelines. We will become responsible citizens.”

Student artwork and schoolwork (stories, writing, mathematical graphs, etc.) are displayed throughout the school. Each classroom, including the music and art rooms, has a bulletin board outside of the room, and displays change frequently. Some boards focus on the Accelerated Reader program, posting student names and the number of books they have read (columns for 1-5 books, 6-10 books, etc. and student names stapled below). Others have math work, such as graphs that students in the third grade inclusion classroom have been working on. Some teachers hang up pictures of their students. Others have seasonal and holiday themes (Winter Wonderland, Happy New Year).

Each classroom is connected to another classroom of the same grade level by a miniscule “small group” room. Small group lessons sometimes occur in these rooms. The classrooms are decorated with posters about reading, homework rules, number lines, and types of literature. Several classes also have posted mathematical graphs created by the students as a group (birthday graphs, weather graphs, etc.). Some classrooms have visual reminders of the lifeskills and lifelong guidelines.

During 2000-2001, there were 758 students enrolled. The majority of students are white (86.4%), and smaller groups of students are African American (4.1%), Hispanic (2.6%); Asian (0.9%); and multi-racial (5.9%). There are a small number of students for whom English is a second language.

**Administrative Support/Program Structures**

Inclusion

Inclusion at Grant began more than eight years ago. Since that time, inclusion has evolved and changed. In 1995, the school had the opportunity to participate in a program that provided a process for the school to examine current practice and develop a plan to begin to include students with disabilities in general education. The initial plan was to “cluster” students with disabilities into a couple of classrooms at each grade level with the special educator
working with the general education teacher. The evolution is best described by one of the special education teachers:

We had two [special education] people and we found ourselves popping in and out of classrooms at like 40-minute intervals. We could not schedule the time so that it really fit in, even at the beginning of a reading lesson or the beginning of a math lesson or whatever. It was impossible. The teachers didn’t like it, the general education teachers, because they felt like we were supposed to be including these students in the classroom and they felt like they needed that assistance and they felt like they were not getting the assistance for those kids that they needed. So they weren’t happy. We ended up getting a third teacher. So with that we said that we could pair a teacher for half a day at a grade level. The more time you can spend co-teaching, being in the classroom with the teacher, the teacher is going to be happier, and we will be happier because we will really be getting to know our students. So that has seemed to work out best in our building and we have stuck with that over the years. It is not good when you have like our fifth grade where we have 12 identified [special education] kids and they are all in one classroom, which is pretty impossible. But it would be worse if I were trying to split myself between them. We have decided that this is the best option. And then we do have some kids that have to be pulled for different things that are really quite low. We use our TA’s for that (teacher interview).

Currently at Grant, each grade level (except first, according to the assistants’ interview) has one class designated as the inclusion classroom. Students with disabilities are placed in these classes. This school year there are between five and ten students with disabilities in each of these inclusion classes. “We had always built our classes where we had the same number of low kids, medium kids and high kids in each homeroom. So we just continued doing that except our identified kids were our low population” (principal interview).

There are three special educators at Grant; each one is responsible for two grades, and is thus able to spend half of the day in each classroom. In order for them to be with a class during language arts and math, the schedules are set up as follows: Grades one through three have a math and language arts block in the morning from 8:30-11:00. Grades four through six have a math and language arts block in the afternoon from 12:00-2:30. Special educators each teach one of the lower grades (1-3) and one of the upper grades (4-6), allowing them to teach math/language arts in each of their classes. Specifically, one teaches first and fourth; another teaches second and fifth, and the third teaches third and sixth. Teacher assistants are then used for the balance of the day in the general education classroom. This year, in the first grade, the students are assigned across the first grade rooms. The first grade teachers then ability group for
reading and math instruction. The special educator then works with the teacher who has the low group.

Students with disabilities in grades 2 and 3 receive their math instruction in the general education classroom with the whole class. The special education teacher and general education teacher take turns teaching math on a weekly basis. The other is available to assist students, while also checking in student homework and assignment books. In grades 4 and 5, some students with disabilities remain in the classroom for math instruction. Others are provided with small group instruction outside of the classroom, either by a special education teacher, or by a paraprofessional. The decision for placing students in the whole group instruction or in a small group is based on their individual abilities and not on their labels.

For the most part, grouping for reading and math is not flexible. The same students were observed in these groups for most of the year. Most students with disabilities receive reading instruction in a small group pullout setting. Much of this work is individualized because students within the group are at different levels. There are other language arts activities throughout the day, however, in which all students participate.

We look at kids needs. We have a couple of fourth graders who are really low functioning that come and work with the second grade on their reading instruction. We just kind of review each year what has worked well, what we need to do differently. And in some of our grade levels, it is still the same teacher that is teaching the identified class and has since we started five years or so ago. Other grade levels have chosen to change around. It has usually been, some of that is dependent on how effective the special needs teacher is as well and how that partnering relationship has worked (principal interview).

How decisions are made to pull groups of students out for certain academic content areas is somewhat unclear. However, various interviews and observations indicate that it is the students with disabilities that are pulled.

I have had to pull my math group because I had complaints from parents, parents who do not like to cooperate as far as homework. And I felt it just wasn’t worth hearing the complaints all the time…and they wanted their kids to have something different (teacher interview).

It lightens the load somewhat for [the general education teacher] because she was left without help in the classroom and there were still identified students in the classroom (teacher interview).
It just depends on the make up of the kids on the caseload, which level they are at; it has never been the same every year but this is the first year I have had as much pull out as I have (teacher interview).

Like I said, it may be that we could do more inclusion of some of our kids if we had the time to plan for it, to figure out other ways to do it, other ways to group kids or something. But we just don’t have that time (teacher interview).

Teachers were clear that students with disabilities are being pulled out more this year than in the past. The primary reason given was the lack of common planning time.

Principal’s Role

In the beginning stages of inclusion, the principal provided some incentives. She ensured smaller class sizes for classrooms in which students with disabilities were clustered and common planning time for special and general educators working together. Most teachers, however, feel that those original incentives are no longer in place.

From the beginning of inclusion at Grant, the principal has been an advocate for the program. On more than one occasion, she convinced the central administration to provide additional special education staff. Generally her role, as viewed by the teachers, is more peripheral; she makes herself available when there are program concerns, attends Student Assistant Team meetings, attends monthly grade level meetings, and helps with schedules and parent requests. Most of the direct support and help seems to come from other teachers. “Here, the administration is pretty helpful. I don’t see them that much. Most help that I get [with the inclusion program] is probably from the other teachers” (teacher interview).

The principal believes that Grant’s mission is “just to help kids be the best that they can be while they come to school, feel safe, feel like this is a place they want to be, help kids come to school prepared and ready to learn, so that in the end the kids will be responsible citizens in the community” (principal interview). She believes that she has a strong teaching staff that work well together. There is little turn over in the staff; teachers tend to stay at Grant. She explains that as adults, they try to model among themselves the lifelong guidelines. She believes in her staff and its commitment to making a difference for students at the school.

Governance at Grant is site-based. There is a Site Team that consists of a teacher representative from each grade level and special educator. In addition, the team has a parent representative and a representative from the support staff. The principal cites student achievement and attendance as major challenges that she and the team must address. Currently,
there are fourteen individuals on the team, which the principal describes as “kind of the decision making team for the school” (principal interview).

The principal supports inclusion and believes that for 95% of students with disabilities, the program is working. However, she has concerns with respect to students who present some significant challenges.

Our kids that are the hardest for us to handle here in terms of their needs are our really low functioning where we have a borderline low functioning mild, high functioning moderate. Real borderline kids. Those are the ones that we have the most difficulty knowing how to deal with their needs. Because, even emotionally, they many times don’t fit with their age-level class and so you get some real peer relations problems. Some of our ones that are really functioning down there, I am not sure…I am just not sure (principal interview).

Planning Time

Although the teachers involved in inclusion at Grant initially had common planning time, and had common time during the first year of this study, that time is no longer available to teachers. Many don’t even have lunchtime together, so it is hard to get together to jointly plan lessons and discuss students.

We used to have, but don’t have this year, a co-planning period with the general ed. teacher who we co-taught with. And that was a 50-minute block of time one day a week, which we have totally lost. There were more class periods needed for art and p.e. and the way it was done was our class was given an extra art, music or p.e., …and that was our co-planning time with our teacher. That has kind of disappeared this year. And that has been hard (teacher interview).

Some teachers believe that this loss of common planning time has led to teachers using more pull out of students than in previous years, primarily because teachers do not have a chance to plan lessons together, talk about individual students and the modifications necessary for their success with a lesson, and follow up discussions to monitor and adjust future lessons.

We used to have an hour a week. [The special educator] starts her day downstairs, so I don’t get to talk to her then. She comes in here at twelve o’clock and I usually have duties. [We talk] just a few minutes after school. It is not the best situation. But thank goodness we have done this for four or five years, so we pretty much know. And sometimes, before we take up class, I will go back and talk with her. Or I have put notes on her desk of things she needs to be informed about (teacher interview).

It hasn’t totally fallen apart for us because I have done it with these same two teachers for about six years now, which makes a big difference. If we were trying to do this for the
first year and we had no planning time, we would have had a big mess on our hands (Special Education Teacher interview).

Overall, teachers have managed to communicate and do some collaboration despite the lack of planning time. Teachers indicate that they often meet outside of school, after school, during lunch, etc. However, nearly all teachers note the lack of formal planning time within the school day as being problematic to implementing successful inclusion. An additional problem teachers note is the increase in the numbers of students with disabilities, making the “cluster” of students with disabilities in classrooms larger. Teachers note this change in demographics as a factor in increased pull out.

**Professional Development/Training**

At Grant, the initial training for the development of an inclusive program came through a local university and a federal grant. The project trained teams of teachers from several elementary schools in the district, including Grant. While the initial training was more than six year ago, teachers have had access to continuing opportunities to support the inclusion efforts. The district has sponsored numerous workshops for professional growth, including TESA (Teacher Expectations Equal Student Achievement) training, CLASS training, computer training, and writing workshops. The teaching assistants have gone to workshops on autism.

**Attitudes and Beliefs**

Faculty and staff at Grant seem to have varying attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, its definition, and the nature of the practice itself. There does not appear to be a common, shared meaning of what inclusion at Grant means. In general, students at Grant are referred to by ability level: low, challenging, medium, high functioning, etc. In a few situations, this labeling is quite explicit.

What a wonderful group. One EH, three on medication. Have the attention span of a fly. Worry about each other more than themselves (teacher interview).

We don’t have any superstars in the room this year. I'm glad you did the testing last year (teacher interview).

The kids don’t know it but we use dots [in the grade book] to indicate….dots mean students are low. If it’s two dots they are very low, and three dots, they don’t have a clue (teacher comment during observation).
Other teachers view students as students, all with unique talents, and believe that there should be less pull out in the Grant model of inclusion. One teacher shared with the observer that she does not believe in pulling students out. She indicates that there are varied opinions among the teachers involved in inclusion about pulling students out for reading and math, but she can’t really convince some to change their ways to be more inclusive. She believes that students who are pulled out don’t learn as much, and when they are included they do much better and learn from each other. Another teacher states that it varies, depending on the year: “Some years require more pull out than other years. I believe in inclusion, but I also believe that we need to treat each student as an individual and find the educational program that best fits their needs” (teacher e-mail).

Student Differences/Student Characteristics and System Capacity

At Grant, 25 adults responded to the teacher survey, representing special and general educators, instructional assistants, and two administrators. Educators at Grant appear to have mixed feeling regarding whether students with disabilities have the study skills necessary for success in the general education classroom. While approximately one quarter of the respondents remained uncommitted, three quarters of educators were evenly divided as to whether they believe that students with disabilities have adequate skills for success in general education classrooms. Consistent with the perception of inadequate resources, educators believe that students with disabilities need lots of attention and that general education teachers cannot provide this amount of attention. All but two respondents agreed that students with disabilities need more attention than general educators can provide. Approximately half of the respondents at Grant do not perceive students with disabilities to have significant behavior problems in the general education classroom, and the remaining half were evenly divided between expressing neither agreement nor disagreement and expressing the belief that students with disabilities do have behavior problems in the general education classroom.

With regard to general education teacher skills and student needs, responses again appear mixed, though we can see some trends. Nearly half of all respondents feel that general education teachers have the instructional skills necessary to instruct students with disabilities. While over one-third disagreed that teachers have the necessary skills, 16% remained neutral.

Almost half of the respondents at Grant disagreed that students with mild disabilities have more behavior problems than their general education peers, with about one-third agreeing
with the statement and one-quarter claiming neither agreement nor disagreement. Similarly, about one-third of respondents agreed that work habits of students with disabilities are comparable to general education peers, while almost half disagreed and the remaining neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Beliefs about Learning**

Overall, the majority of educators at Grant believe that inclusive school programs are connected to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Overwhelmingly, educators agreed that students with mild disabilities benefit from inclusion in the general education classroom and that students with mild disabilities adjust well when placed in general education. Respondents were less optimistic with regard to academic progress, yet more than half of respondents agreed that students with mild disabilities make adequate academic progress when placed in general education. Slightly less than one quarter of respondents disagreed that students with disabilities make adequate progress, and the same portion remained neutral. A majority of educators at Grant believe that low-achieving students perform better academically in inclusive classrooms, but some do not believe that this is the case, as more than one-third disagreed, and a few remained neutral. Consistent with findings from other research, most respondents felt that students with disabilities have improved social skills as a result of inclusion. Forty of the respondents from Grant share the belief that students with disabilities lose the negative stigma when placed in general education classrooms, but an almost equal number do not feel that this is so. Though most respondents disagreed that general education students are not accepting of peers with disabilities, several respondents agree that this is the case.

Respondents at Grant expressed divergent beliefs as to whether high achieving students are being neglected in inclusive classrooms, with slightly less than half of respondents believing that high achieving students are neglected. Almost as many respondents disagreed that high achieving students are neglected, and a number of respondents did not commit to one or the other. More than half of respondents from Grant disagreed that inclusion has negative academic performance outcomes for students without disabilities, though approximately one quarter of educators feel that inclusion has negative academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Homework**

Grant has a homework policy, which is basically the school corporation policy. The policy allows for increments of ten minutes per grade, starting with ten minutes at Kindergarten,
twenty minutes at first grade, thirty minutes at second, etc. Individual classrooms also develop homework “policies,” and these vary by teacher. Most classrooms, from second grade on, use assignment books as a way for students to organize their homework assignments and as a communication tool with parents. Homework at Grant is based on a reward/punishment system. In most classrooms, students who return their homework daily are given positive consequences, and those that fail to complete homework are given some type of negative consequence, often missing recess or specials.

At the end of the week, everyone that has done their homework every day, and if they have gotten their parent’s signature [in the assignment book], they get to fill out a little card that says “Way to go!” and we put them in a basket, and we have a drawing, and we pull out two each week, and they get a drink. They enjoy that and they see “Oh, it is the same people.” They are getting their homework five times a week; they are the ones that invariably have their names drawn (teacher interview).

If they don’t do it [homework], then what I will usually do is keep them in at recess time to do it with them, or, on Fridays in math, it is kind of like our game day, and for kids who haven’t done their homework throughout the week, I will do it with them because I know they need that practice. I just insist that it be done, and if they don’t do it at home then they do it with me (teacher interview).

For the most part, the expectation for doing homework is the same for all students, though the homework for students with disabilities is often modified or adapted in some way.

Again, some of that depends on whether it is the student’s choice or whether it is that they don’t know how to do the work. That is one of the first things that we ask, “Can they do the work?” And that again is where you go back to the kids not always doing the same assignment. Some may do the odds and evens, or the odds or the evens. They may answer one question and the other questions they may do verbally (principal interview).

**Collegiality**

According to the principal, Grant is a place where “Kids are loved. The teaching staff is strong and it is a group that really works well together” (principal interview). It is a diverse group, with many different teaching styles. Often, these differing styles cause some disagreements, which affords the staff an opportunity for the “adults to practice and model the lifelong guidelines” (principal interview). Collegial relationships appear to be strongest at individual grade levels and with teaching teams. Connections seem to be within small groups, rather than within the school as a whole.
Commitment to Inclusive Schools

It appears that respondents at Grant may not understand parent perspectives regarding inclusion or that they perceive parent perspectives to be so mixed as to prevent them from making agreements or disagreements about the existence of parent support. Fifty percent of respondents remained neutral on whether parents support inclusion. About 30% agreed that parents are supportive and the remaining 20% disagreed.

Only one educator at Grant agreed with the statement that inclusion would not succeed because of too much teacher resistance. Approximately 71% disagreed and another 25% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Despite teacher support for inclusion, responses were mixed as to whether general education teachers prefer students to be pulled out of classrooms versus having special education services provided in the general education classroom. While many agreed (37%) that general education teachers prefer students to be pulled out, 42% of respondents disagreed that general education teachers prefer this practice, and 21% expressed neither agreement nor disagreement. While teacher resistance to inclusion is not perceived as threatening, the strength of support for the practice is not clear.

Unlike respondents from the other two schools, respondents at Grant appear to have a less unified philosophical commitment to inclusion. Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents from Grant agreed that students with disabilities have a basic right to receive their education in the general education classroom. Almost one-quarter said that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement, and the remaining 12% disagreed that inclusion is a basic right. This contrasts sharply to survey responses from Washington, in which not one person disagreed with the statement, and an overwhelming percentage agreed.

While many respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that there are insufficient resources (in general) for inclusion practices to succeed, almost half of all respondents agreed that resources are insufficient for the success of inclusion, and the remaining one-quarter expressed belief that the sufficiency of resources does not interfere with success. While several respondents agreed that the redistribution of special education resources decreases the instructional load of the general education teacher, most educators at Grant do not feel that this is the case. Despite this ambivalence and mixed perceptions regarding insufficient resources, almost two-thirds of respondents at Grant feel that their school is adequately prepared to implement inclusion.
Assessment

Much of the assessment at Grant is in the form of tests, quizzes, and homework. A standard report card is used as the vehicle to report student progress. For students with disabilities, report cards indicate, in some form, whether the work has been modified. Effort is also figured into the grade.

We work on report cards together. We write on the report card “modified grade and curriculum.” And we collaborate when it is time for report cards. We both modify tests; we talk and we know the kids well enough and we have worked together, that if one of the kids should have two sentences that might be a C. If another student would do two sentences, that might be an F. So we agree. Sometimes [the students] will say “why,” and I will say “you need to do your personal best, and your personal best may or may not be what someone else’s personal best is” (teacher interview).

With identified kids, the tests and things are read; their grades are scaled accordingly. And, now in science and social studies, they get an effort grade rather than an A, B, C, D. If they are putting out all the effort that they can put out, and they are working their tails off, and they still get a D, I am giving them a C or a B on effort. Because they have tried. On their report card I do write, “modified” and then up above, when you write whether they are above, below or on grade level, it is all below grade level. And the parents know. I explain that they are not going to be doing the same kinds of things and their grades are going to be scaled accordingly. Personally, I would just as soon not do report cards for identified kids. I would just do the progress reports and go on (teacher interview).

Because the school has chosen to use Saxon math, much of the math assessment is in the form of timed tests and homework. Often, students exchange papers on the timed tests and grade each other’s tests. Then, students are asked to call out their scores to the teacher. Student progress is often made public at Grant. Students scores are charted or posted in the classrooms, students are asked to call out their timed math test scores to the teacher, and, sometimes, the teacher asks students to stand if they got a 100, 99, 98, or 97. One teacher acknowledged that this may not be educationally sound, but “it saves time.” When students are asked to publicly report their scores, teacher comments often include words of encouragement or praise for improvement. Students also chart their scores in binders. Similar assessment practices occur in other content areas. There are spelling and reading tests and quizzes, homework that is checked and recorded in the grade book, Accelerated Reader tests, and quizzes in Daily Oral Language.
Instruction

Instructional Content

Textbooks primarily drive instructional content at Grant. Overall, content areas are not taught thematically. Saxon math is being used as the primary school wide math program, though some teachers also supplement with other math texts. Saxon math is a highly structured approach. At the early grades, the lessons are scripted so that teachers know what to say and how to say it. Lessons are divided into individual lessons that are covered sequentially. Incremental topics are combined with continual review so that all previously learned material is reviewed in every lesson.

The school does not use a particular reading series. Many teachers use novels and incorporate spelling, vocabulary and written expression skills. Daily oral language is used in many classes, and some teachers have students write in a journal. Teachers also use worksheets as homework or for students to practice a particular skill. The fourth grade divides Language Arts into reading, language, spelling, writing and grammar. The fourth grade teachers then compartmentalize (each taking a different part of the language arts content) and students rotate. This year, some teachers have begun to have “Reading for Information” on Fridays. Students read a newspaper article, Weekly Reader, or other printed material.

Instructional Activities

When students are not grouped by ability, most of the instructional activities are whole group. There are various activities at the beginning of the year that allows students and teachers to get to know each other better. For some, this entails completing a survey about the kinds of literature the student prefers; for others, it may be writing about their summer vacation.

As with instructional content, the math activities are driven by the Saxon math program. Usually, math begins with math circle or math meeting, where students participate in a variety of activities (counting, calendar, weather report, patterns, etc.). This is often followed by the teacher presenting a math lesson to the whole class, usually using the overhead. The students have a worksheet in front of them that they complete as a whole class. This worksheet usually has a homework assignment that accompanies it.

For reading, students are most often separated into reading groups using the STAR test, which is available on the classroom computers. Groups do not always go with the same teacher (rotating between the special and general educator and the paraprofessional). Students also have
the opportunity to participate in D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read) and the computer lab. Handwriting, spelling, and writing are also a part of the language arts program, though the times spent on these areas vary with individual teachers, as do the activities. One spelling activity is called “Grandpa” and variation of the game “Sparkle.” The students line up. They are given a word from their spelling list. Each person says a letter until the word is spelled. If you say the wrong letter, you are out. If the word is spelled correctly, the next person says, “grandpa,” and the person after her/him is out.

In another classroom, students receive a worksheet with the five “important words” from the spelling list. They are asked to make meaningful sentences for each of the five words. While they do this, the teacher does a vocabulary check individually with each student. Once students complete the meaningful sentence worksheet, they are given two other sheets, a Story Test with questions about the story they had read and sheet of “how” and “why” questions. For most of this activity, students quietly work with peers or independently. Students who finish all the worksheets can read the Accelerated Reader books or work on the computer.

**Instructional Strategies**

Teachers at Grant are comfortable making adaptations and modifications. These adaptations seem to be reserved for students with disabilities.

The overhead is used quite often for whole class instruction. This strategy provides students with a visual representation of various aspects of the lesson being taught. It is used extensively for going over the homework assignments, to introduce new concepts, for reviews of concepts already taught, and to model formats for various activities.

There are other visuals used to help reinforce ideas and concepts for students. Saxon math uses a math meeting board, which displays things like the calendar, patterns, numbers etc. There are also visual prompts in some classrooms that illustrate “rules” for punctuation and grammar, phonics charts, and cues for procedures and routines. Visuals are also used to help students focus. For example, key phrases may be highlighted, a pointer may be used to point to specific details, a student may be asked to “touch” to follow along in a reading passage, and the teacher may circulate around the classroom for proximity.

Auditory strategies are also used in the classrooms at Grant. Some teachers use oral repetition for reading and grammar comprehension. Rephrasing and clarifying is very common. Teachers circulate around the classroom, helping students with work and addressing student...
concerns. During whole group instruction, teachers use questioning in a variety of ways and often find ways to ensure that students with disabilities are engaged and participating.

If it is a whole class participation kind of thing and you want [the students with disabilities] to participate, you try to ask them a question that they can be successful with or have a good chance of being successful with, so that they can show what they know. So that you are not trying to stump them or humiliate them or make them feel embarrassed. You try to give them a chance to contribute (teacher interview).

What I am getting ready to do now is to put some thoughts on the overhead for them to write about, and there are some students that have what is called “writing or language expression deficits.” Even in the sixth grade these students have these thoughts and can’t get them on the paper. So that is one of the things that you do…since you know these kids have problems you say, “Okay, tell me what you want to say and I will write it.” And then they can start talking and we might have a whole page (teacher interview).

It is also acceptable in many classrooms for peers to ask other peers for help or to work in groups. Students also are required to have their work “peer checked” on occasion.

**Classroom Management**

It appears that at Grant much of the classroom management is focused on assigning rewards or punishments for completion of homework and behavior. Behavior and attendance is charted for each child and posted in the room. The behavior chart is filled in with a red dot (“bad” behavior), yellow dot (“problem” behavior) or green dot (“good” behavior) at the end of each day. The Weekly Behavior Chart is signed by parents and returned to school each Monday. All students begin the day on green and might be moved to yellow or red for misbehaving during the day. However, students can also “earn their way back to green” by “being very good for the rest of the day” (teacher interview).

For the most part, monitoring student behavior and assigning rewards and consequences is public at Grant. Teachers publicly announce to the class the names of students who did not return homework, write the names of students who need to go to the office or who have lost recess, or call out students by name to either reprimand or praise.

If you [a student] can’t remember that, you’ll have to spend some time during recess writing. You’re not listening (classroom observation).

If he is going to make that much of a disturbance, let’s put him in the back (classroom observation).
[A teacher] tells the students that she will call out names, indicating which student will get a sticker and which student will receive a consequence for not returning completed homework (classroom observation).

There is a feeling at Grant of “old fashioned values” and a more traditional approach to discipline. Much seems to be based on a reward and punishment approach. Many students stay in at recess for not completing work; in fact, taking away recess is a common consequence for a variety of behaviors. Rewards vary from classroom to classroom; often, these rewards are some kind of consumable item such as Skittles, candy, or soft drinks. Other reinforcements for good behavior include stickers, free time, awarding points, trips to the bathroom, and verbal praise.

According to the principal, there is an expectation that teachers deal with behaviors at the classroom level first, before sending students to the office.

First, the teacher does the kinds of things they can do. The teacher would put notes in the assignment books for the parents. The teacher would be expected to talk with the child. Teachers may keep them in at recess. To me, for the parents who don’t think that is very nice, as far as I am concerned that is kind of one of the first courses of action. If a student is not getting done in work time what he needs to get done, then he loses his free time. That is kind of a natural consequence for me. Sometimes they need a quiet place to work; they may come down here and work (principal interview).

One teacher uses “clip strips” for citizenship grades. Each student receives a half sheet of paper at the beginning of the week. The sheet has “strips” or lines indicating grades from A+ to F. Students have to “clip a strip” for the following behaviors: one strip for excessive talking, two strips for disrespect to teacher or classmate, three strips for not following procedures on playground or cafeteria, four strips for not completing homework, and five strips for “other.”

Parents are supposed to sign those. It goes in on Monday for the week, and the parent is supposed to look at it each evening and maybe they have clipped once during the day, they get a warning and then they clip and there is a little code there where they are suppose to write what the reason was that they received a clip (teacher interview).

While Grant is a CLASS school, there is very little evidence of the CLASS principles in terms of classroom management. Teachers may refer to a lifelong guideline when dealing with student behavior, but the principles are not evident in the day-to-day interactions with students and their behavior.

Procedures and Routines

Procedures and routines are an important part of the classroom structure at Grant. These procedures and routines appear to be primarily classroom focused, as opposed to school wide;
each classroom has its own set of procedures and routines that students follow. The most common procedure or routine across classrooms has to do with the assignment notebook. Students are expected to note assignments in their book, have parents sign and respond to certain things in the book, and return it each day for a “stamp” or approval from the teacher. Most teachers have a specific way that things get entered in these assignment books.

Classrooms also use daily agendas and opening activities with students. Often, the daily agenda will be posted alongside morning procedures. These morning procedures include things like Daily Oral Language work, specific info on the “specials” class for the day, and the Student of the Week responsibilities.

Teachers using Saxon math also use a very specific routine that they take students through. These include calendar, temperature, and pattern activities that students repeat each day.

**Peer Support**

Peer support is encouraged at Grant. Often, when a student requires assistance with an assignment, the teacher will encourage the student to first check with peers before requesting help from the teacher. One example was observed in an exchange between the teacher and a student:

Teacher: Patrick, did you need help with something?
Patrick: Yeah.
Teacher: Did you ask your neighbor for help?
Patrick: No.
Teacher: Well, that’s what you’re supposed to do. If that neighbor can’t help you, ask the neighbor on the other side.

Students are encouraged to not simply “tell” the answer when help is requested, but to help the student to “begin to think for themselves” (teacher interview). Learning from each other, and supporting the learning of peers is viewed as a positive benefit of having students with disabilities in the classroom.

Cooperative learning groups and “study buddies” are used to encourage working together and helping one another. Study buddies are carefully selected by the teacher and stay together all year. Cooperative learning groups are flexible; certain groups are formed for different activities and assignments. Additionally, teachers are often purposeful about their seating arrangements in the classroom to ensure that students who struggle in different content areas have students nearby to ask for help or to keep certain students apart who do not work well together.
Role of Adults

The general education teachers at Grant who have students with disabilities in their classrooms believe that they have the responsibility to teach all students. Likewise, when the special educator is co-teaching in the general education classroom, special and general educators believe they have joint responsibility for their students. Most of the teachers share assessment, checking of assignment books, modifications, and adaptation responsibilities, although a couple of special educators felt solely responsible for overseeing modifications and adaptations.

At Grant, special educators are referred to as special education teachers or “inclusion teachers.” Additionally, the specific classrooms where students with disabilities are placed are referred to as the “inclusion rooms.”

General educators believe that special educators have specific roles in dealing with IEP, conferences, and legal issues for which general educators don’t share responsibility. Additionally, when small groups are formed or students are grouped by ability, it tends to be the responsibility of the special educator to teach the group of struggling students, who are usually students with IEP’s. When the general educator and special educator are co-teaching, they appear to share the various roles in the classroom: leading the instruction, circulating, assisting individual students etc.

The teacher assistants in the classrooms view their primary role as working with students with IEP’s. They assist the teacher in helping individual students, and some of the assistants take small groups of students (usually students with IEP’s) for instruction.

In general, most teacher survey respondents at Grant indicate that collaboration between special education and general education teachers is desirable and working well, and special education and general education teachers share responsibilities for instructing and assisting all students. Specifically, almost every respondent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the special education teacher only provides assistance to students with disabilities. Interestingly, 28% of respondents disagreed that special educators provide help to all students in need of support, while many respondents agreed that this is the case.

It appears that there is a predominate perception that general education teachers help all students, but some believe that special educators only help students within special education. Upon closer inspection, it appears that educators identifying themselves as General Educators (distinguished from Inclusive General Educators) frequently disagreed that special educators
assist other students. In considering who has firsthand knowledge of practice, it can be asserted that special education teachers are thought to be helping others in that school, at least by those who have experienced inclusion.

Most respondents disagreed that general education teachers have primary responsibility for the education of students with disabilities in their classroom, yet a fair number do feel that is the case. This pattern is not found at the other schools. With respect to collaboration and team teaching, a large percentage (78%) of the respondents agreed that general education teachers are comfortable team teaching. While most respondents did not feel that bringing special education services into general education classrooms creates difficulties regarding who is in charge, some respondents did agree, and a few either did not respond or expressed neutrality. Twenty-two out of twenty-five respondents agreed that general and special education teachers should collaborate on all students’ learning problems, and no one disagreed with the statement. Finally, many respondents (57%) from Grant disagreed that general education teachers receive little help in making modifications, although many respondents agreed (35%) or were neutral (9%) on whether general educators receive little help.

**Home School Connection**

At Grant, the assignment book is the primary mode of communication between home and school. These assignment books are used to send permission slips back and forth, to communicate homework assignments, to send individual notes to parents, and to communicate specifics about student behavior. The assignment books have a place for parent comments as well, and parents are expected to sign the assignment book each night.

How well they (assignment books) work depends on how important the teacher thinks they are. But I think that it has become pretty school wide. It becomes a great communication tool with parents in terms of jotting a note about behavior, jotting what needs to be completed, the parent writing the note back. We don’t have real good access to phones in our building, so the assignment notebooks have been a great tool to improve communication (teacher interview).

It is easier to write notes to parents in the assignment books, and then you have documentation. Like if you have a parent who says they weren’t notified of something, it is in the assignment book and you can refer back to it. And vice versa. If you don’t remember telling a parent something about a bus or whatever, they can refer you back, too (teacher interview).
Teachers at Grant are also willing to spend before and after school time meeting with parents. These parent conferences take place for a variety of reasons, and usually are scheduled at a time convenient for the parent.

At Grant, eleven parent surveys were returned. The survey included eight questions that related to the degree to which parents feel welcome at their children’s schools; the type of communication that occurs between parents and teachers; parental satisfaction regarding said communication; the degree of success that parents perceive their children to be enjoying; and the practices linked to such success. Analysis focused upon parent perceptions of parent/teacher communication and parent perceptions of successful teaching strategies.

One parent chose “dissatisfied” regarding the types of communication offered by teachers. This parent listed the assignment book as the only way that communication occurs between home and school. Three parents chose “somewhat satisfied” to describe their levels of satisfaction with types of communication, including letters, meetings, assignment book, notes, and through the child herself. Five parents chose “satisfied” to describe their levels of satisfaction with types of communication, including notes, phone calls, parent/teacher conferences, letters, and assignment notebooks. Two parents chose “very satisfied” to describe their levels of satisfaction with types of communication, including conferences, email, assignment books, newsletters, telephone, daily contact, in person contact, and notes. Again, parents that are most satisfied with communication are parents that experience various types of communication, frequent communication, and communication that is initiated by teachers as well as parents.

In general, parents that responded to the survey report favorable outcomes regarding their children’s education. When asked, “How much is your child learning this year in school?” no parents chose “very little.” Four parents responded by choosing “some” to describe how much their children are learning this year in school. An open-ended question regarding what is helping or not helping their children to be successful in school followed. The four parents mentioned above gave varied responses, mentioning one-on-one help, consistency, companionship, music, and art as helping and lack of clear instructions and large group settings as not helping.

Three parents chose “a lot” to describe the amount of learning their children experienced this year. Only two of these parents responded to the open-ended question. One parent wrote, “Still have trouble with speech—he is sometimes teased about the way he talks by other
children.” The other parent responded, “Orderly and quiet room…four teachers are available to assist, experienced and organized teacher.”

Four parents chose “a great deal” to describe the amount of learning their children experienced this year. Two parents cited a positive attitude at home as one thing that is helping their children to be successful. Another parent mentioned programs at the Boys and Girls Club as helping. One parent cited “classmates bothering her during schoolwork time” as not helping their child’s success.

**Social Skills**

The social skills curriculum at Grant is primarily the lifeskills and lifelong guidelines program. The lifelong guidelines are truth, trust, active listening, no put downs, and personal best. Lifeskills are integrity, courage, initiative, flexibility, perseverance, organization, sense of humor, effort, common sense, problem solving, responsibility, patience, friendship, curiosity, cooperation, caring, and pride. These are posted in some classrooms, and some teachers send them home at the beginning of the year.

While teachers can be heard making reference to one of the lifeskills or lifelong guidelines, these are not purposefully used to help children problem solve or reflect on their behavior,

**Summary**

The following is a list of structures and practices that support inclusion at Grant Elementary:

- Co-teaching between general educators and special educators
- Integrated social studies and science (no pullout)
- Homework and assessments are modified for SWD
- Assignment notebooks facilitate communication with parents, modification of assignments for SWD
- Saxon math publishes accommodations for LD students
- Saxon math involves a lot of repetition
- Collaborative planning time (which they had in past years)
- Multiple opportunities to engage in mathematical problem solving: math meeting, weather graph, oral math
- Emphasis on procedures
• Classroom assistants
• Accelerated Reading books and software
• D.E.A.R.
• Daily agendas
• Some use of student grouping that allows for student mentorship ("learning partners," study buddies)

**Discussion**

The original intent for this study was to spend a year in three elementary schools that defined themselves as inclusive and showed positive academic progress in order to better understand the structures and practices that make inclusive schools work well (see Waldron & Cole, 2000). However, early into the study, our anxiety level increased, as we began to realize several things:

1. the schools for years one and two of this study were self selected by the districts, with the setting for instruction being the primary criterion for selection.
2. the defined measure of successful inclusion was an achievement measure only
3. there was a large time gap between the first year of the study, from which the schools for this portion of the study were chosen, and the beginning of data collection for this portion of the study. During this time, some changes had taken place in the schools.

We began to question a definition of inclusion that primarily focuses on setting, or the place in which students receive instruction. Therefore, in order to clarify analysis, the team decided to develop a working definition of inclusion, one that recognizes that inclusion is more than simply physically placing students together in the same classroom. Thus, the analysis and conclusions ultimately focus on practices in the three schools that 1) develop and sustain classrooms that are responsive to diverse social/emotional needs, 2) develop and sustain classrooms that are responsive to diverse academic needs and 3) empower all educators to take responsibility for teaching all students. We also acknowledge that isolated classrooms featuring inclusive practices do not make an inclusive school and that an inclusive school is a culture in which everyone in the school community honors diversity and shares the responsibility for teaching all students.

Through this study, we have come to understand that two of the biggest challenges for inclusive schools are the ability to sustain inclusive practices and ensure that systems are adaptable to new and complex challenges.

**School Structure and Climate**
The service delivery model for special education at Washington and Lincoln is more of a consultative approach with direct service; they vary the roles of assistants and special education teachers, depending on the needs of the students. Additionally, students with disabilities are assigned across classrooms. No single classroom has a disproportionate number of students with disabilities in any one room. Consequently, classrooms in these two buildings are not referred to as the “inclusion classroom.” All teachers in these two schools share the responsibility for teaching students with disabilities. While some might argue that not allowing teachers to volunteer to participate in inclusion causes resentment and fear among staff, in these two buildings, the result is a more collaborative approach to problem solving and a more unified system of education that supports not only students with disabilities but all students in the building.

At Grant, the model is primarily a co-teaching model in which students with disabilities are clustered into certain classrooms to facilitate co-teaching. Because students with disabilities are clustered into a single classroom at each grade level, there often are a high number of students with disabilities in a single classroom. This results in classrooms being labeled as “inclusion classrooms.” It also has developed into a service delivery system in which a few teachers who “volunteer” are expected to share in the education of students with disabilities. While clustering students with disabilities into classrooms in order to facilitate co-teaching is not a bad practice, it becomes problematic when only a few teachers at grade levels choose to participate and when the numbers of students with disabilities becomes so large in a classroom that the benefits of heterogeneity are undermined. This service delivery model also becomes problematic when structures for problem solving and planning are either non-existent or eroded.

According to Vaughn, Schuum & Hughes (1998), social outcomes for students with learning disabilities and for normally achieving students educated in consultation/collaboration settings (where numbers of students with disabilities are moderate) are very positive. When compared to co-teaching settings (which include large numbers of students with learning disabilities) students with learning disabilities in collaboration/consultation settings fair much better socially. The extent to which the smaller number of students placed in the collaboration/consultation setting impact the difference is unknown, but the authors hypothesize that large numbers of students with disabilities (more than 25%) placed in the same class creates
an imbalance that significantly interferes with heterogeneous grouping practices and academic and social success.

Lincoln and Washington have much more flexibility with their service delivery model. For example, they are able to shift schedules if new students enroll, they are able to provide direct service to an individual child or small group depending on the activity, and they are able to do some co-teaching in individual classrooms. Grant has little of this flexibility with their co-teaching model. This lack of flexibility and adaptability is most evident at Grant in the loss of their common planning time. Because they no longer have a formal planning time with general educators, special education teachers have begun to feel more like aides, and they have resorted to more “pull out” for students with disabilities as a way to meet student needs.

All three schools provide additional support to students in reading and math, either by pulling out or by using flexible grouping within the classrooms. This direct instruction or intensive support, particularly in reading, is not an uncommon need at the elementary level. However, how this support is provided is important in terms of our definition of inclusion. The support should not replace reading and math instruction in the general education classroom, which is sometimes the case at Grant. At Grant, the support is often in place of the general education instruction, and it is most often the same group of students that receive support. At Lincoln and Washington, the students who receive more intense instruction vary, depending on decisions the team makes about individual student assessments at any point in time, and this instruction is most often provided to support instruction in the general education classroom. This support appears more seamless at Washington and Lincoln because there is less whole group instruction, more integration of curriculum, and a large amount of flexible group work.

At Washington, a culture of collaboration and collegiality is structurally supported through the organization of students and teachers into communities. Teachers share the physical space of the commons, and their close proximity and integrated thematic teaching promotes frequent and ongoing collaboration. Teachers view themselves and others as members of a team that work together to specifically support all students. Faculty and staff develop mutual respect through several structural practices operating within the school. The materials file in the teacher workroom allows for frequent exchange of ideas and promotes collaboration. The quality circles and sharing time during faculty meetings offer the faculty and staff an opportunity to learn
together, to critically examine their own practices, and to creatively address their own needs as a school.

While structurally different, faculty and staff at Lincoln have achieved a level of collaboration, particularly between the special and general education staff. Mutual respect and trust have developed between the special education teacher and her colleagues in general education. The manner in which they have embraced the consultative model respects the decision-making power of teachers to examine student needs in light of activities, as opposed to set schedules for areas of content. This flexibility within the structure of Lincoln allows the staff to adapt and make changes in the schedules according to student need.

In contrast, teachers at Grant work autonomously, and, due the lack of common planning time, even teaching partners have only limited opportunities to engage in sustained learning and sharing together in a way that promotes collegiality. Even though teachers at Grant are voluntarily participating in the inclusion of students with disabilities, there seems to be no shared understanding or shared philosophy about what inclusion means. The commitment is to maintain an inclusion classroom at each grade, level rather than to develop an inclusive school. Teachers “do their own thing” because there are not structures in place to foster conversations related to examination of current practice and exploration of alternative practices. There is limited understanding among the faculty and staff about instructional practices that are responsive to the diversity of need among all students, in part because collaboration and collegiality are not fostered.

The multi-age structure and balanced calendar (year-round calendar) at Washington strongly supports inclusive practices. The multi-age structure diminishes the emphasis on “being at grade level” and increases the focus on continual progress toward individual student goals. Because of the multiple ages in a single classroom, curriculum and instruction is more student-centered, and students have more opportunities for project-based learning. The balanced calendar affords students opportunities for remediation or enrichment during intersession, and, because of shorter breaks throughout the year, students do not have long periods of time away from the learning environment.

Because the CLASS program is directly connected to the development of brain compatible classrooms, schools that understand and adopt the principles of CLASS are more likely to have a shared understanding of inclusion. At Washington, students, parents and staff
embrace the philosophy and principles of the CLASS system. It is evident in all aspects of the school day. This system supports a strong sense of community in schools and classroom and helps students of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging.

While Grant is also a CLASS school and has gone through the training to understand and implement the CLASS principles, there is very little evidence of the principles in practice in the school. Lifelong guidelines and lifeskills are posted and sometimes referred to, but many of the principles are not evident in classroom practice.

It is clear from the literature that the building principal is critical to sustaining successful inclusive schools. Leadership has taken different forms in the three schools. Washington has a very involved, visible principal who has strong beliefs about building an inclusive community of learners. She has the opportunity that many principals long for; she has been able to open an inclusive school and choose the staff. She nurtures the staff and empowers them to be leaders in their own right. She has developed and sustained the necessary structures for collaboration and professional development, and she has kept inclusion as a high priority.

Lincoln has just brought on a new principal after having a strong involved principal for several years prior to this study. The transition appears to be going smoothly. The new principal clearly supports inclusion and appears to be taking time in the beginning to learn about the school, the staff, and the students. The former principal left a strong legacy, and, like the principal at Washington, kept inclusion as a high priority and ensured that the structures and supports were in place to sustain the effort. This is no small accomplishment, as Lincoln has sustained their inclusive practices longer than any of the three schools in this study. It has been through several changes over the years, and with the strong leadership, has been able to adapt the system to the needs of students and teachers.

Grant’s principal was a key person in the early stages of program development. As the program has evolved over the years, she has become less involved in the effort. She verbally commits to inclusion, but holds some reservations “for some students.” She believes in her staff and their ability to make it work. Her past leadership is the reason that Grant has moved toward being an inclusive school and the primary reason that inclusion has been sustained as long as it has. While there has been a lack of active leadership during recent years, this principal also recognizes the need to review the overall vision and direction of inclusion in her building and
plans to become more actively engaged in ensuring that the necessary changes be made at Grant for an improved program.

Beliefs and Attitudes

At Washington, there is a tremendous concurrence between beliefs and practices. Educators at Washington appear to be more unified in their beliefs and to more consistently engage in practices that support those shared beliefs than the staff at the other two schools. Without doubt, the realities that Washington was initially created to be an inclusive learning community and that the faculty elected to teach in such an environment has greatly contributed to this faculty seeming to be “of one mind.” Before the school even opened, the staff engaged in discussions regarding teaching philosophy, important student outcomes, and practices that support the achievement of such outcomes. The faculty at Washington continues to collaborate, sharing attitudes, ideas, and beliefs, as well as effective strategies and new lesson plans. The nature of the adult relationships in the building fosters the development and adherence to a shared vision.

The faculty survey suggests that educators at Washington perceive inclusion to result in desirable outcomes for students. The educators at Lincoln, though not as like-minded as educators at Washington, also believe that inclusion has positive outcomes for all students. Educators at Grant are the most divergent in their views related to outcomes. Although many express the belief that students are experiencing desirable and positive outcomes, a fair number of educators do not express such beliefs. Because beliefs are undoubtedly shaped by experience, we can assume that more educators at Washington have experienced inclusion as having favorable outcomes for more students than have the educators at Grant and, to a certain extent, those at Lincoln. If we also assume that outcomes are related to effective practice, we may conclude that Washington is doing a better job at meeting the needs of all students, at least in the minds of the staff.

Although some educators at Grant feel that the general education classroom can meet the needs of students with disabilities, many educators claim that the capacity is inadequate, given the intensity of student needs. Survey results from Lincoln are similar to those at Grant, although analysis shows that more educators at Lincoln feel that students with disabilities have more behavior problems than their general education peers. Educators at Lincoln express very similar
concerns to those expressed by the Grant staff, with many asserting that the general education classroom cannot adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities.

To summarize a portion of the survey, educators at Washington believe that, while some differences exist in terms of student behavior and work habits, the range of student diversity can be met by general education. These beliefs are aligned with the mission statement of the school and provide evidence that the faculty at Washington strongly supports the mission of the school and has been able to enact their mission statement.

Of course, the relationship between beliefs and experience is reciprocal. Firmly held convictions about meeting the needs of all students foster the development of structural supports and practices that are responsive to diverse student needs. Firmly held convictions generate critical examination and reflection of educational practices to assure that practices and structures are aligned with beliefs. Such examination and reflection results in improved responsive practices, and improved practices encourage successful outcomes, in a reciprocal fashion. Given that Washington has purposefully planned to create a responsive school environment since its origination, it is not surprising that the school is doing it well.

Commitment

The staff surveys also provide information about perceptions regarding the schools’ commitment to inclusion. Not surprising, given their purposeful intention to create and sustain an inclusive school, a large majority of educators at Washington perceive commitment to inclusion from parents, teachers, and the administration. While many educators at Lincoln and Grant share perceptions that indicate commitments to inclusion, many shared perceptions also call into question the strength of commitment at these schools. At each of the schools, an overwhelming percentage of educators feel that teacher resistance is not threatening the inclusion effort, although the percentage was significantly higher at Washington than at the other two schools. Interestingly, while resistance is not perceived as strong at any of the schools, many educators at Grant and Lincoln indicate that teachers prefer students with disabilities to be pulled out of general education classes, versus receiving support in the general education classrooms. Again, educators portray their building faculty as not sharing a vision of creating environments that are responsive to the diverse needs of all students.

Perceptions regarding the possibility of inadequate resources, lack of adequate preparation, lack of parental support and teacher preference for pull-out services indicate that the
commitment to inclusion is strongest at Washington, weakest at Grant, and struggling at Lincoln. Interestingly, most educators at each of the schools agree that students with disabilities have a basic right to be educated within the general education classroom, although the percentage is significantly higher at Washington.

**Instructional Content**

At Washington, instructional content is tied directly to state academic standards through the use of ICAN software. This software, which was designed by Washington staff, assists teachers in creating classroom projects that incorporate academic standards from multiple subject areas and grade levels. The software also allows teachers to track individual students’ progress toward meeting the standards. The use of ICAN as an assessment tool is explored in more detail above, but it should be noted that the software has been central to the development of highly integrated curriculum, instruction, and assessment at Washington. In all, the use of ICAN supports inclusion at Washington by offering teachers a tool for creating classroom projects that are interdisciplinary, differentiated, and multi-leveled.

School wide themes are a central feature of the Washington curriculum. Grade level themes can be found at Lincoln. Thematic instruction is not evident to any significant degree at Grant. Thematic instruction supports inclusion in that activities and materials can be differentiated according to readiness, interest, and/or learning profile while maintaining a common focus within the classroom upon the larger theme. In addition, when students are pulled out for additional support in curricular areas such as math or language arts, themes offer a way for special educators to design supporting activities that reinforce students’ connections to the general education curriculum without the need for additional common planning time with general education teachers. Finally, thematic instruction at Washington seems to allow for greater student collaboration.

At both Grant and Lincoln, the mathematics curriculum is driven entirely by the materials developed by the Saxon company. The Saxon mathematics method is positive in the sense that it provides daily practice in a variety of mathematical computations. While judicious review benefits all students to some degree, it is clear that the system is not geared toward meeting individual student needs. In addition, it is apparent that the Saxon system, or the way the system is being implemented at these two schools, does not allow for deviation from the scripted lesson of the day. Though the Saxon system does incorporate a certain amount of repetition of previous
content, the inflexibility of the system makes it difficult to re-teach concepts to students who are having difficulty in specific areas. In addition, the scripted nature of the Saxon system makes it difficult to integrate pullout or additional support sessions into the general education curriculum.

Use of the Saxon system is one example of the fact that curriculum and instruction at Grant is completely textbook driven. Teachers appear not to base their instructional decisions upon either state academic standards or the individual needs of students. In addition, it can be argued that students’ intellectual capacity is actually gauged according to their ability to keep pace with the lessons and units presented in the textbook.

Instructional Activities

Both standards-based and thematic curricula lend themselves to the development of interdisciplinary activities. At Washington, it is not unusual to observe students engaging in classroom projects that incorporate academic standards from multiple subject areas. For example, students read a series of books that incorporate knowledge of the physiology and function of the brain, and several writing and art activities further develop this knowledge. These activities fall under the school wide theme of systems and the trimester theme, body systems. Interdisciplinary instruction supports inclusion in that classroom activities are more easily connected to students’ academic strengths and interests.

Instructional activities at Washington often include either project-based and/or individual activities. For example, each student has an individualized mathematics curriculum in addition to the Math Meeting, a group activity held every morning. In contrast, as noted above, Grant features the Saxon system, which emphasizes whole group repetition and individual practice of a common set of activities for the entire class. Obviously, the individualized mathematics curriculum at Washington supports inclusion to a greater degree.

It is quite common at Washington—and to some degree at Lincoln—to see students engaged in multiple activities within the classroom. In other words, students have much greater control over their own academic activity at these two schools than at Grant. By contrast, students with disabilities at Grant often find themselves isolated from the main group or pulled out entirely when it is thought that they aren’t “keeping up” with the main activity. Again, teachers at Grant seem to use the ability to keep up with group activities as a measure of individual students’ intellectual capacity.
Instructional Strategies

Teachers at each of the three schools use multiple methods of instruction to present information. However, as is implied above, teachers at Grant engage students largely in whole class, direct instruction. In this way, the concept of student “ability” is directly linked to the capacity of individual students to sit still, pay attention, and follow instructions. Students who have difficulty with such activities are most often isolated from the main group or pulled out of class entirely.

At Washington and Lincoln, it is not unusual to see various student groupings within class. Such groupings are not based on labels. In fact, teachers often create groups that are intentionally diverse in terms of academic strengths and weaknesses. In addition, grouping decisions are based upon social and emotional needs. Clearly, such decisions are more aligned with the view of inclusion developed in the present study.

Accommodations for students with disabilities are made at all schools. At Washington and Lincoln, accommodations are viewed as a way of supporting students’ learning and are based upon helping students to understand difficult concepts. In fact, there is evidence that teachers at each of the two schools regularly make accommodations for both students with and without disabilities. Such is not the case at Grant, where accommodations most often take the form of shortening or lessoning work for students with disabilities. For example, while most of the class might have a spelling list of twenty-five words, students with disabilities might be given a list of ten words. Such an approach reveals the attitude that students with special needs “just can’t do as much” as other students, whereas the former approach recognizes that students with special needs may have difficulty grasping certain concepts.

Homework

Homework is used as an instructional strategy at Grant. In other words, students are often expected to learn new concepts and/or reconcile difficult concepts through homework. For example, in one classroom, students who are having trouble with their multiplication tables are assigned to make flashcards and practice the multiplication tables at home. No further class time is to be devoted to practicing multiplication tables.

In addition, at Grant the outcome for not doing homework is most often punishment. Students are penalized if a parent does not sign their homework. Students are routinely required to give up recess in order to complete homework and/or miss enrichment activities, such as
sharing class projects or story time. Students with disabilities are most often among those punished in this way. Thus, the homework policies at Grant actively work against inclusion.

Teachers at Washington, on the other hand, place little emphasis on homework. Homework is either viewed as additional practice or as a family activity. At no time have we witnessed Washington students being punished for failing to complete homework.

Teachers at Lincoln regularly used homework as data toward designing instructional activities. Teachers often make adjustments to instruction based on homework. Thus, homework helps teachers in making accommodations for all students, including those with special needs. However, it should be noted that teachers at Lincoln regularly take away recess for students who do not complete their work and replace recess with “study hall.” Students who complete their work in study hall are able to go to recess for the remaining time, if any.

Assessment

As stated earlier, instructional activities, instructional content, and assessment are integrated at Washington through the use of the ICAN software. Teachers rate student progress toward meeting state academic standards by recording one of four levels of mastery in the ICAN database: introduced, developing, demonstrated, or applied. For any given project, students may demonstrate a number of different levels of mastery of several different standards. Grade reporting at Washington is also tied to standards. Traditional grades are not given. Rather, the ICAN produces a report that lists the academic standards that were covered in a given semester and the individual student’s level of mastery for each standard. Thus, rather than receiving a letter grade in a broad subject area, students and parents are given a detailed summary of students’ strengths and weaknesses regarding specific academic skills and concepts. In this way, assessment at Washington is not based on ranking or hierarchy, and there is no need to identify whether a student has received curricular accommodations.

At Grant, an asterisk is placed on a student’s report card if s/he has received accommodations or modifications to the curriculum. Thus, while two students may have both received an A in language arts, for example, the asterisk on one student’s report card is a tacit signal to parents and the wider community that said student has not performed at the same “level” as the other students. The asterisk does not reveal the extent to which curriculum has been modified, nor does it communicate the student’s strengths and weaknesses. It amounts to a “subtle wink,” tacitly informing others that the student with disabilities is lower in the hierarchy.
Ranking and hierarchy underlie much of the educational philosophy at Grant, to the point that one might conclude that teachers at Grant view education as the process by which we are all made the same.

At Lincoln, grades are reported using a traditional $A$ through $F$ system with the addition of $I$, which signified that a student is improving. Teachers at Lincoln also engage in frequent and ongoing formative assessment, including the aforementioned practices regarding homework. The results of such assessment are communicated with support personnel and help to keep student grouping at Lincoln flexible, as opposed to being based on student labels. Flexible grouping is more closely aligned with the definition of inclusion outlined above.

**Classroom Environment and Discipline**

Classrooms at Washington celebrate collaboration and cooperation, and competition is not encouraged or used as a motivational tool. In their language use, in their daily activities, and in the physical arrangement, students and staff at Washington appear as a “community of learners.” Students and staff speak of community, families and clubs. Everyone is a member of the larger community, the classroom family, and a small learning club. In each of the classrooms, students are seated and organized into learning clubs, where students are expected to demonstrate an ongoing responsibility to all members in their club. Consistent with the belief that learning is a socially constructed endeavor, students at Washington spend lots of time working in small groups. Consequently, classrooms at Washington feature many students who appear to be highly engaged in learning activities and in assuming a responsibility to the collective.

Peer support and collaboration are encouraged at Lincoln, though these practices are not as structurally embedded as they are at Washington. Unlike at Washington, where every student belongs to a learning club, at Lincoln, students that are experiencing difficulty are assigned a study buddy—someone in their classroom that they can ask to edit their writing, check their math, confirm directions, or offer other assistance. Students at Lincoln also spend a great deal of time working in small groups, and peer cooperation is frequently encouraged. While students are often encouraged to collaborate and arranged in small groups, there is a fair amount of work that students are expected to do independently, as worksheets and other pencil and paper activities, while not dominant, are frequent at Lincoln.
Student collaboration and peer support are instructional strategies that teachers sometimes use at Grant, although many more instructional activities are designed to be independent pencil and paper activities, or whole-group instruction. Several classrooms are physically arranged for students to sit in clusters or groups, but often students with disabilities or students who appeared to be struggling are not allowed to sit in these clusters and their desks are pulled away from others. Some teachers assign a study buddy to struggling students, and most teachers claim to arrange student seating so that struggling learners have a nearby peer that can offer help. Given the frequency at Grant with which students with disabilities work in homogenous small groups during math and reading instruction, and given that the content for these groups is different, one wonders how these students get help from a study buddy or a more competent peer, since buddies and students with disabilities are most often in separate groups with separate activities and content.

The integrated nature of social and academic competencies is supported by insights from the field of neuropsychology (Perry, 1996). Learning is relational, and social and emotional competencies are critical for the successful development of thinking and learning activities that are traditionally considered academic (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990). Motives and appropriate outcomes for inclusion often pit social and academic development against one another, as if the purposes of school were an either/or proposition. At Washington, educators realize the integrated nature of the social and the academic, and school structures and classroom practices reflect this belief.

Two of the schools in the study, Washington and Grant, are CLASS schools and have adopted the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills that are part of the Integrated Thematic Instruction Model (ITI). These behavior guidelines or principles are posted, and educators make references to them in interviews with research staff and in the context of their daily work with students at both of these schools. What sets these schools apart with respect to these school-wide behavioral guidelines is that educators at Washington actively model the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills and embrace these behavior principles as the foundation of all social and instructional interactions in the building. At Washington, the principles are not separate from academic outcomes, as teachers have masterfully embedded the principles in the instructional and assessment processes. Teachers at Washington use the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills to build social, emotional, and academic competence among students. By actively modeling these
principles they create environments that are safe, nurturing, and fun, and where absence of threat prevails.

Although the principles are posted at Grant, and adults frequently chide a student for not following one of the guidelines or skills, adults at Grant do not attend to principles in the same way that they do at Washington. Teachers at Grant do not always model the behavioral principles. The principles are not embedded in the instructional content and activities of the classrooms, and explicit instruction in the principles rarely occurs. Lifelong guidelines and lifeskills were most often used to label replacement behaviors as teachers redirected student misbehavior.

Beliefs about learning or philosophies of education are embedded in schools when the structures and practices throughout the schools do not violate or ignore these fundamental beliefs. Grant has adopted pieces of the CLASS model, but there is not strong evidence that these beliefs are embedded in the school.

Classroom management looks different in each of the schools. Again, classroom environments at Washington are more alike than they are different, reflecting the unified philosophy among the staff. There are many similarities among the classrooms at Lincoln and the most variation among the classrooms at Grant.

Effective classroom management and discipline approaches include both proactive and reactive strategies, with an emphasis on proactive strategies. Although reactive strategies comprise an important element of any management plan, when teachers and administrators over rely on such strategies, the adults in the school are in some ways absolving themselves (and the school) of responsibility for behavioral problems. Reactive strategies send a clear message that problems reside in students and that the responsibility of adults is to respond or react in such a way as to “convince” the student to change their actions. Proactive approaches instead focus on prevention strategies and building behavioral competencies. Discipline approaches that are proactive involve educators focusing on what to do in between episodes of problem behavior and, as such, require all adults to be involved in creating environments that are responsive to students’ diverse needs. Proactive approaches are supportive of inclusion.

The classroom management approach at Washington most obviously represents a proactive approach. There is a strong emphasis on preventing student misbehavior by making environments predictable and increasing active student engagement in varied activities.
Educators build student capacity to engage in pro-social behaviors by consistently modeling, teaching, and organizing academics around the behavioral principles. At Washington, environments are highly predictable, as teachers establish procedures and routines in both classroom and non-classroom settings. In addition, daily agendas are posted in each of classrooms, and students have the responsibility of recording these agendas in their assignment books. Structural practices of multi-age classrooms promote the development of extended teacher/student relationships, and the emphasis on student collaboration and student mentoring fosters the development of caring and helpful relationships among students. At Washington, students receive daily individual teacher attention, as teachers consistently personally greet every student in the morning as they examine their home/school communication log.

Teachers at Washington respond to student misbehavior by private redirection or engaging students in problem solving. Consistent with the school mission statement, teachers expect and foster the development of self-management and student responsibility by asking students to frequently self-assess and reflect on their daily performance and progress-addressing both academic and behavioral issues. Teacher and administrator imposed consequences for student misbehavior are individualized and respect student dignity. Consequences that are logically connected to misbehavior are preferred over aversive consequences that simply attempt to reduce recurrences.

Classroom and school discipline at Grant emphasize reactive strategies, although some proactive strategies can be observed. Teachers, at times, remind students of the behavior principles—the lifelong guidelines and lifeskills—and many classrooms have visual reminders of these behavior principles, but explicit instruction is not apparent. Peer support appears to be encouraged, though not codified.

Staff and administrators at Grant attempt to control student behavior primarily through rewards and punishments, and most often this is done very publicly. In at least one classroom at Grant, student failures (whether academic or behavioral) are made very public, and seemingly are intended to cause students discomfort in an attempt to motivate them to behave or perform differently. Few teachers regularly reward instances of pro-social behavior. Focusing on problem behaviors, some teachers instruct students to write what they did wrong, and frequent reminders include informing the students that their behavior violates a specific lifeskill. Engaging students in problem solving to consider other choices is not a frequently observed response to problem
behavior. Failure to complete homework or obtain a parent signature in the student assignment book most often results in a loss of recess or “clipping a strip.” Citizenship is solely assessed by the number of or severity of the behavioral infractions.

Effective classroom management entails much more than decreasing the number or severity of behavioral infractions. Effective environments must be created, and this requires that all adults in the school share responsibility for creating environments that are academically and socially responsive to all students.

Parents

Generally, parents in all three schools are satisfied with the extent of communication and the degree to which their students are learning. Parents express the highest level of satisfaction when multiple forms of communication take place and when that communication is reciprocal (initiated by both the school and the parent). The ICAN assessment and reporting tool used at Washington is valued by parents as a form of communication regarding their student’s progress. Details regarding individual student progress provided by ICAN support a less competitive feel and diminish comparison of students. There is much more specificity, which provides more information on a more frequent basis to parents. In addition, the student led conferences at Washington provide another opportunity for communication concerning student progress. All three schools use some type of communication “log” which goes home nightly. Emails and phone calls are also used by some teachers to communicate home.

Conclusions

Using our working definition of inclusion, we are able to make some definitive statements with respect to structures and practices that ensure the academic, social and emotional inclusion of all students in schools.

1. The way in which supports (whether they come from the special education system, from Title 1, from ESL etc) are organized and delivered must be flexible and adaptive. Service delivery systems must be able to adjust as conditions and circumstances in schools change. This also requires that schools review and renew their purposes over time. Systems that are adaptive and flexible have the capacity to change, alter, or shift and the ability to learn from experiences. Thus, they have greater sustainability.

2. Providing more individualized instruction to an individual student or a small group of students is appropriate when it is flexible and does not lead to isolation or segregation. It
is clear that there are times when certain students may need more one-on-one instruction or support.

3. Meeting the needs of diverse groups of students requires intense collaboration. It is clear that no single teacher has all of the tools to teach all of the students. Inclusive schools require structures that provide the time and support for collaboration. This collaborative culture must be nurtured and cultivated between grade levels, content areas, parents, support staff, and administrators.

4. The use of ICAN supports inclusion by offering teachers a tool for creating classroom projects that are interdisciplinary, differentiated, and multi-leveled. ICAN is a valuable tool for inclusive schools because its design is grounded in these beliefs: a) Students learn in different ways and at their own pace; b) A complete education promotes student development in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains; c) There are credible means to accurately measure student learning beyond standardized tests; d) There is value in documenting continuous progress; e) Planning, instruction, and assessment are based on student needs; and f) Instruction can be individualized while referenced to standards. The reporting tool is also useful as it involves parents in their students’ individual growth.

5. Thematic, integrated instruction allows for differentiation while maintaining a common curricular focus. This allows for greater student collaboration, small group instruction and peer support. Themes offer a way for special educators to design supporting activities that reinforce students’ connections to the general education curriculum without the need for additional common planning time with general education teachers.

6. Project-based learning allows students to engage in multiple activities within the classroom. In other words, students had much greater control over their own academic activity.

7. Accommodations and adaptations are an important consideration for all students.

8. Homework should be viewed as a tool to assess where students need extra help and/or to change instruction. Homework should not be overemphasized in the classroom and should not be punitive.

9. Assessment should not be based on ranking or sorting students hierarchically but to identify individual student strengths and weaknesses to the student and to change
instruction to better meet individual needs. Assessments should be meaningful to students and parents.

10. Effective classroom management entails much more than decreasing the number or severity of behavioral infractions. Effective environments must be created, and this requires that all adults in the school share responsibility for creating environments that are academically and socially responsive to all students. Educators must build student capacity to engage in pro-social behaviors by consistently modeling, teaching, and organizing academics around the behavioral principles.

11. Environments that are highly predictable, where teachers establish and teach procedures and routines in both classroom and non-classroom settings is important for all students.

12. Attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and meeting the needs of all students are critical to successful inclusion. It is important that staff engage in discussions regarding teaching philosophy, important student outcomes, and practices that support the achievement of such outcomes. The relationship between beliefs and experience is reciprocal. Firmly held convictions about meeting the needs of all students foster the development of structural supports and practices that are responsive to diverse student needs.

13. Administrative support and leadership is a critical element to building inclusive schools that welcome, include, and support all students. This leadership is also critical in maintaining and sustaining inclusive programs.

14. Parents have the highest level of satisfaction with schools when multiple forms of communication take place and when that communication is reciprocal (initiated by both the school and the parent).

15. The responsibility and commitment for inclusion must rest with the entire school. The commitment must be for the development of practices and structures that include students in all aspects of the school, not simply with a few classrooms at grade levels.

16. Schools that understand and adopt the principles of brain compatible learning are more likely to have a shared understanding of inclusion. These principles help define a philosophy that focuses on students’ gifts and abilities, rather than their deficits.

17. The multi-age structure and balanced calendar (year-round calendar) strongly support inclusive practices. The multi-age structure diminishes the emphasis on “being at grade level” and increases the focus on continual progress toward individual student goals. The
balanced calendar affords students opportunities for remediation or enrichment during intersession, and, because of shorter breaks throughout the year, students do not have long periods of time away from the learning environment.

By using the conceptual framework presented in the introduction section of this document, we can place the three schools in this study within one of the three discourses (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant</th>
<th>Transitional</th>
<th>Emergent</th>
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| EHA/Mainstreaming  
**The Continuum of Services**  
Embodyed in EHA/IDEA  
**Grounding Assumptions:**  
- Disabilities are inherent in children  
- Differential diagnosis is useful  
- Special Education is a rational and coordinated system  
- Diagnosis and identification are necessary to secure resources and services  
Authority: functionalism, bureaucratic professionalism  
Source: (Adapted from Skirtic, 1991) | REI/Inclusion  
**Inclusive Schools**  
Effective schools research, critique of EHA/mainstreaming models  
**Grounding Assumptions:**  
- All children can learn  
- All children should be educated in their neighborhood schools and communities  
- Schools must accommodate to meet the needs of students with disabilities  
- School personnel require ongoing professional renewal  
Authority: critical theory, cultural studies | **Unified Schools**  
Learner Centered Schools  
Complex adaptive systems  
**Grounding Assumptions:**  
- All children have a natural capacity for learning  
- All children construct their own knowledge  
- Schools must become learning centers for all members of the community  
- Increasingly diverse learners require differentiated instructional approaches  
- All students have personal learning plans  
- All student performance is authentic and demonstrable  
Authority: pragmatism, new science, adhocratic collaboration |

**Grant Elementary**  
**Washington Elementary**  
**Lincoln Elementary**

Grant Elementary has attempted to move in the direction of inclusive schools. However, Grant Elementary, in many ways, is still operating as a continuum of services model. A parallel system of education is still in place at Grant: general education teachers rely heavily on special education teachers to support students with disabilities; special education teachers are the primary source for remedial and or specialized instruction; and there continues to be a great deal of labeling of students, teachers and classrooms. While there are good examples of inclusive classrooms at Grant, the philosophy and grounding assumptions of the inclusive school discourse are not accepted throughout the school. It should be noted, however, that Grant is currently engaged in a
school wide review of their beliefs and practices with respect to inclusion, and we believe that through this critical self review, they will continue to evolve toward a more unified system of education.

Lincoln Elementary is a school that falls in the inclusive schools discourse, moving toward a more unified system of education. The school as a whole shares the responsibilities of meeting the needs of all students. Students with disabilities are distributed in their natural proportion throughout classrooms. The majority of support and special education services are provided within the context of the general education program, and school personnel have developed a collaborative, problem solving structure that is flexible and adaptable.

Washington Elementary is the one school from this study that we believe most closely meets our definition of inclusion and aligns with the unified systems discourse. Were we to choose one word to describe Washington, we would choose—at the risk of sounding academic—gestalt. Gestalt: an instance or example of a unified whole. The gestalt of Washington exudes a consistent intention on behalf of faculty, staff, and administration to create an atmosphere of positive energy. This school is inclusive to the core of its being. Children are encouraged to construct their own knowledge and make meaning of new information. Students are respected for their unique styles of learning, and a broad array of curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies are in place to ensure student success. There is a vision and a set of outcomes that unify the school community. The entire school is responsive to the social/emotional needs of all students; their response to the academic needs of their students is extraordinary, and the faculty, staff, parents and administration are empowered to take responsibility for teaching all students. The challenge for Washington will be to continue maintaining the flexibility and adaptability necessary to sustain the current culture.

Finally, it is important to state that nearly two years have passed since the beginning of this study. All three schools continue to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom, though faculty and staff continue to wrestle with the many issues related to equity and excellence for all students. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) state that “a good inclusive program can be no more than a work in progress”. We would agree. And we would add that this is a good thing. Practices and structures that become too fixed, or stagnant may lack the sufficient responsiveness to changes in policy, personnel or student population. Continued attention to our practice, to outcomes, and to our beliefs makes possible creative responses to problems and turns problems into opportunities.
References


