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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MIDDLE  
SCHOOL INCLUSION PROGRAMS

by  
Maria S. McKeown

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
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Approved by  
Professor

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## ABSTRACT

Maria S. McKeown  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF  
MIDDLE SCHOOL INCLUSION PROGRAMS  
2004/2005

Dr. David Moyer  
Master of Arts in School Administration

The purposes of this exploratory investigation were to (a) evaluate the effectiveness and perceptions of inclusion programs at the middle school level; and (b) specifically evaluate the program at Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees, New Jersey, for its effectiveness.

Educational literature was examined. Nine teachers, three administrators, and fifty students were surveyed, interviewed, and observed at Voorhees Middle School. Data were analyzed in a comparative manner. Students and teachers believe that these programs are effective in meeting the needs of the special education students.

The findings from the educational research and the study of the Voorhees Middle School inclusion programs were congruent. Inclusion programs at the middle school level can be a benefit for students socially and academically.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Focus of the study

In special education, the goal is to have the students included in the regular education classes as much as possible. There are federal laws in place to protect the rights of those with disabilities. IDEA (the individuals with disabilities act) was presented in 1975. It stated that students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in a least restricted environment (LRE). Students with disabilities in schools must have an individualized education plan (IEP). IDEA was amended and reauthorized in 1997. Schools must follow all special education laws.

Inclusion has become a trend in special education over the past decade. At Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees, NJ, special education students and teachers are now included in reading, language arts, and math classes as well as science and social studies. In the past, the students were only included in social studies and science classes and pulled out into separate special education classes for reading, language arts, and math because these were areas in which they needed the most remedial help. In the inclusion classes, there are now two certified teachers. These teachers often work together to help both the mainstreamed and special education youngsters. However, the special education teacher's primary responsibility is to the special education students.

The focus of this study was on the effectiveness and perceptions of inclusion programs at the middle school level. Pull-out programs were also examined by the

researcher. Voorhees Middle School was the primary focus. Teacher and student perceptions at the middle school were studied. Student achievement and success was also recorded. On-site observations, surveys, and interviews assisted in this study. Finally, relevant literature was collected and analyzed.

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness and perceptions of inclusion programs at the middle school level. Part of this purpose was to study Voorhees Middle School in particular. The programs at Voorhees Middle School were studied for their effectiveness using action research in the method of surveys, interviews, and observations resulting in a report.

The primary research question addressed was the following one:

Are inclusion programs in middle schools effective in meeting the needs of special education students? The subquestions that were addressed in this study were the following: Is the inclusion program at Voorhees Middle School successful?

How do the included students feel about the program, and how do they perform in the regular education classes? How do the co-teachers involved feel about the program?

How do students in pull-out classes achieve academically? What are the perceptions about the pull-out programs on the part of the teachers and students involved?

### Definitions

In education, the term inclusion varies in regards to the individual states, school districts, and school buildings. For the purposes of this study, the term inclusion refers to

the education of students with special needs in regular education classrooms. “This is accomplished through educational strategies designed for a diverse student population and collaboration between educators so that specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services are provided to all students as needed for effective learning” (Moore, 2000). The special education students have IEP’s (individualized education plans) that are followed by the school district. The regular education classrooms may also be referred to as mainstream classrooms. In these mainstream classrooms, there are two co-teachers. One is a special education teacher, and one is a regular education teacher. Finally, special education students who are taught in classrooms other than the mainstream classrooms are in pull-out classes. Pull-out classes are taught by special education teachers only, sometimes with an instructional associate, and usually include a small group of students. The terminology mentioned in this study is utilized at Voorhees Middle School, the primary focus school.

#### Limitations of the study

One limitation was the small sample size. Students and teachers in one inclusion class per grade level were consulted. These three classes were the primary focus. A pull out class in each grade level was also examined. Therefore, there were a total of six classrooms studied. Another limitation is the time period in which the students were studied. The classrooms had been studied from September 2004 through March 2005. Long-term effectiveness and advantages/disadvantages were not examined. The selection procedure was limited to those classrooms selected by the examiner. Finally, surveying,

interviews, observations, and examination of student grades were the primary techniques for collecting data.

#### Setting of the study

The study was set at Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees, New Jersey. Voorhees is located in Camden County, just fifteen miles outside of Philadelphia, PA. Voorhees is a suburban community that has approximately twenty-eight thousand residents. Close to twenty-six percent of the population is eighteen years of age or younger. Twenty-five percent of the population over 25 years of age holds bachelor's degrees. Nearly fifteen percent have graduate degrees. Voorhees is rated as an "I" in socio-economic grouping according to the New Jersey State Department of Education. The rating scale is from A to J. Voorhees is comparable to other local districts such as Cherry Hill, Medford, and Haddonfield ([www.voorhees.k12.nj.us](http://www.voorhees.k12.nj.us)).

Voorhees Middle School is comprised of nearly 1300 students and one hundred staff members. Also, approximately 11.6 percent of the school students are special education students with IEP's. Voorhees Middle School has many academic and extra-curricular programs available for its students. The school is up-to-date with technology as well.

#### Significance of the study

This study was very important in the analyzing of current practice in middle school inclusion programs and special education in general. The trend in public schools is to include special needs children in the regular classroom as much as possible. The



educational literature provided insights into some of the pros and cons of inclusion. This study examined the effectiveness and perceptions of the inclusion program at Voorhees Middle School and provided those involved with relevant and useful information.

#### Relationship of the study to the ISLLC standards

This study gave the intern a broader understanding of education and school administration in relation to the ISLLC standards and inclusion. This study was connected in many ways to standard one of the ISLLC's. For example, school administrators must have knowledge of planning, research, and have good communication skills. They must stay current on special education laws and research. They must be leaders who plan in accordance with these laws. Also, the school leader must communicate their plans to their teachers. The administrator is committed to educating all students with high expectations while looking for continuous improvement. In inclusion settings, this is very true. Teachers work together in order to best meet the needs of all of their students. Finally, a school leader must have a vision that shapes the school culture. Educating and including students with special needs must be part of their vision. Standard 1a, 2, 4, 5; 1b, 1, 2, 3, 4; 1c, 1.

The second ISLLC standard focuses on promoting the success of all students by providing a school culture and program that promotes student learning and professional development. When executing school inclusion programs, an administrator must provide in-services for their co-teachers as well as providing a structured educational program for all of their students. Standard 2a, 1,2,3,4,5,6; 2b, 1,2,4,5; 2c, 1,3,4,6,10,11,12,13

The third ISLLC standard states that an educational leader must provide a safe and effective learning environment. The inclusion classrooms must be set-up in a way that is safe for all students involved. It must also be an environment in which the students are meeting success in their academic endeavors. Standard 3a, 1, 2,3; 3b, 1,5; 3c, 1,2,3,7, 8.

In the fourth ISLLC standard, the focus is on collaborating with parents and community. The school community must be considered when structuring the educational programs. The parents of the special education children need to be part of the process of planning their educational program. This standard is very much related to inclusion programs. Standard 4a1,2; 4b1, 2; 4c, 4.

Finally, according to standard five, a school leader acts with integrity and fairness by promoting the success of all students. By providing special education students with an appropriate program, including inclusion classes if necessary, the principal is acting in the best interest of the student. Standard 5a, 1,2,3,4; 5b, 1,2,3; 5c, 1,2,3,4,6,7.

#### Organization of the study

The rest of the study was organized in a precise manner. After the relevant educational research was analyzed, Voorhees Middle School became the primary focus for action research. The examiner studied an inclusion class in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. These classes were observed. Students and teachers working in these classrooms were interviewed and/or surveyed in regard to the effectiveness and perceptions of the inclusion classes. Finally, a pull-out class at each grade level was examined. Student

report card grades were analyzed as well. The findings of the study are presented in this paper.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

Middle school is a very important time in a young person's life. It is a time of change, new experiences, and transitions. It can be a very exciting time for some students. However, it can be a stressful time for others. Schools can help make this time a positive learning experience for adolescents.

It is important for an adolescent to feel successful in middle school. This is significant to their self-esteem. For success to be attained, a student must feel comfortable in their environment and feel that they are able to achieve in their classes. This is a challenge for most average adolescents. However, for those students with mild to moderate disabilities, this is an even bigger challenge. These young people are dealing with the normal changes, transitions, and experiences that middle school children go through. However, they are also dealing with their individual challenges, whether it is in the academic, social, or physical realm.

Therefore, the special education program that is set up in a middle school is crucial. The program must meet the needs of the students. Also, it must be structured in a way so that these students are comfortable and are given the chance to learn and succeed in school. Their experiences in their classes are connected to their socialization. Therefore, a successful special education program would benefit the students both academically and socially. "For students with learning disabilities, the middle school

environment may be challenging but not insurmountable if they have the appropriate support” (Ring & Reetz, 2003, pg. 83).

With the move to include special education students in mainstream classes in the forefront of education, educators have the responsibility of providing a structured and successful inclusion program for their students. Inclusion programs at the middle school level must meet the needs of the students. Parents, teachers, and administrators must work to ensure that the program is successful for the designated students. “A federal court case in 1989 (Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education) stated that a school must attempt to meet the special education student’s needs in the general education classroom if the student will benefit from the education either academically or socially. Also, the effects of a particular disabled student on the general education students may be considered. Finally, the general education teacher is not required to devote all or most of her or his time to the child with a disability and the general education program need not be modified beyond recognition” (National Study of Inclusive Education, 1994, pg.9). All of these factors must be considered by schools when designing their inclusion classrooms.

There are many factors to consider in the discussion of inclusion programs. This researcher has explored the following: the components of successful and effective middle school inclusion programs, the roles of teachers in these programs, the perceptions of these programs on the part of teachers and students, and the concept of doing away with pull-out classes.

## Successful inclusion programs

There are many important components necessary for a successful middle school inclusion program. Some factors of a good inclusion program are “smaller class size, collaborative planning teams, continuous staff training, and specialized technology” (Waldron & Van Zandt Allen, 1999, pg. 19). School administrators must be committed to giving these inclusion programs what they need to run well.

Principals can help students with disabilities do well in middle school by “working with teachers, parents, counselors, and students to facilitate a school environment in which they can succeed” (Ring & Reetz, 2003, pg. 83). Special education laws must be adhered to. Both regular and special education teachers must be given the time that they need to work together in planning for their classes. Also, grading policies must be in place that recognizes the achievements of all students, especially those in inclusion classes.

A 2003 study found that inclusive special education “has benefits to staff members and students that outweigh its limitations” ( Delmore, 2003, pg. 35). It was found in this study that special education students have access to higher-quality curricula co-taught by a regular education and special education teacher. These students also feel more connected to the school and have higher self-esteem. There were less behavior referrals and standardized test scores were raised. This study in Madison, Wisconsin, proved that there are many benefits to inclusion at the middle school level (Delmore, 2003).

Finally, the inclusion classroom should focus on a learner-centered approach. Teachers must teach to meet the needs of all students with different learning styles.

Lessons should include collaborative learning as well as other forms of differentiated instruction. Most mainstream classes try to work towards this kind of instruction anyway. In an inclusion classroom, learner centered instruction is critical.

### Co-teaching

Another important component to examine is the importance of the co-teaching partnership in inclusion classrooms at the middle school level. Co-teaching allows teachers to combine their expert skills to teach their students. A co-teaching pairing at the middle school level usually consists of one special education teacher and one regular education teacher with a class of approximately twenty-five students. Students have the advantage of two teachers in their classroom.

“Co-teaching requires a commitment to the evolution of the collaborative process. If both teachers are committed to the process, co-teaching has the potential for increased achievement for students.” (Barnett & Dieker, 1996, p. 7). Co-teachers must work on many things together. Some of these elements are communication skills, behavioral issues, curriculum and lesson planning, lesson presentation and assessment. Teachers must be given planning time in order to work on the previously mentioned issues. With a pairing of good teachers and the time for them to work together, co-teaching can be a great benefit for inclusion students as well as the mainstreamed youngsters.

### Perceptions about inclusion

The perceptions about inclusion have changed in education over the last couple of decades. Society, administrators, teachers, parents, and students all have certain views

about inclusion. Their views are usually based on their definitions of and experiences with inclusion.

In a study of rural fifth and sixth grade inclusion students, it was found that there were five predominant themes evident in relation to parent and student perceptions about inclusion. They were the following: “an increase in self-confidence on the part of the students in the inclusion classes, a feeling of camaraderie, feelings of support from their teachers, a sense of poor self-esteem in special education classes, and higher expectations in the inclusion classes” (Irby, Michel, and Ritter, 1999, pg. 1). These perceptions show the positive light in which some may view inclusion.

Teachers also have many perceptions about inclusion. In the same study, Irby, Michel, and Ritter found positive perceptions on behalf of the teachers. The themes discovered through their analysis on the part of the teachers focused on “increased student confidence, interventions being made to accommodate learning and teaching, and improved academic progress of students with special needs” (Irby et.al, 1999, pg. 2). These perceptions are also very positive in relation to inclusion classrooms.

Overall, students and teachers view inclusion classes in an optimistic way. They feel that these programs can have many benefits. However, one question that seems to be a constant concern in inclusion focuses on the students without disabilities in the mainstream classes. There are some benefits of inclusion for the general education students. Some of the benefits include the following: “a curriculum that is more flexible and responsive to individualized needs, the presence of support services and technology, and the collaboration of additional teaching experts in the classroom, and improved teacher training and teaching techniques. Americans will be more responsible and



understanding of people with disabilities because of their experiences with special education students in the classroom” (Ovington & Walker, 1998, pg. 4).

In fact, there are many educators who feel that the general education students do not get held back because of the special education students in their classrooms. “The fear that inclusion may result in a "watered down" curriculum for students without disabilities, or that less time will be devoted to learning, is not borne out by the research. None of the studies examining outcomes for students without disabilities has found any negative impact for students who are not identified as having disabilities” (Moore, 2000, pg.5).

Alternatively, some teachers and parents feel that these regular education students may be at a disadvantage because the special education students are in their classroom. One issue focuses on whether or not the curriculum and instruction in these classrooms is changed or slowed down. Also, some feel that regular education students in inclusion classrooms are at a disadvantage because of the presence of another teacher and the special education students. “Some researchers have expressed concern that students with special needs require additional attention from the general educator, therefore decreasing the amount of attention and quality of education given to their peers without disabilities” (Prom, 1999, pg. 42). This is a controversial issue that is explored further in this study.

#### Pull-out classes

With all of the research favoring inclusion settings on the part of the special needs students, one must wonder about the state of pull-out classes. There are instances in

which pull-out classes may be the best environment for a student. This, of course, would be based on their IEP and level of disability. Most educators would agree that a student with severe disabilities would probably benefit most from a small group environment where the curriculum and lessons are tailored for that particular student.

However, in this study, students with mild to moderate disabilities are being examined in relation to inclusion. The proponents of inclusion would agree that these special needs students benefit the most from being included in mainstream classes. In these classes, the curriculum may be modified or adapted for them. However, they are still exposed to the same curriculum as the mainstream. "Several studies have found that students with mild disabilities who have been included in general education classrooms make better gains than those in pull-out programs or control schools" (Moore, 2000, pg.6).

Although, some educators still feel that pull-out classes are necessary for these students to work on remediation of skills. These educators believe that the special needs students who are included may miss out on the small group instruction that may help improve their skills. Some parents are concerned that "their children would not receive the specialized instruction needed to address their learning or behavioral needs" (Delmore, 2003, pg.35). This is a challenging point to consider. In most cases, the individual's IEP and child study support team will look at both sides of the issue and place the child in the best environment for their needs.

## Chapter 3

### The Design of the Study

The on-site research for this project was carried out at Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees, New Jersey. One regular education teacher and two special education teachers at grade levels six through eight were surveyed and observed (see Appendix B). Therefore, a total of nine teachers were studied. Three administrators were also interviewed as part of this research process. Finally, students in a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade inclusion and pull-out classroom were anonymously surveyed with parental permission (see Appendix A). The surveys were constructed by the examiner. A total fifty special education students were surveyed. End of marking periods grades for the first marking period were analyzed as well.

The researcher identified the subjects in this research project. The subjects were chosen as a representation of the middle school population. Two vice-principals and the principal were chosen to be interviewed to get their perspectives and impressions about the effectiveness of inclusion programs in general and at the middle school. The teachers in grades six through eight were chosen randomly. The examiner did decide to survey some of her students as well. These were the students in the inclusion section. Therefore, all subjects were chosen because of their relevance and relationship to the project topic.

Data were collected in different forms. Interviews were set up on an availability basis. Teacher surveys were handed out and collected in sealed envelopes. Finally,

parental permission slips were sent home through students. The student surveys were conducted in class.

The content of the interviews and surveys focused on perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusion programs at Voorhees Middle School. A few of the questions were geared towards the differences between inclusion and pull-out programs in special education. The interview questions were open-ended and asked for personal opinions and perceptions. The student surveys included open-ended questions about their opinions on their educational placement, teachers, and program. Their surveys also asked for personal accounts or examples of how their current educational placement has affected them. Finally, the teacher surveys were constructed in an open-end format as well.

These data have been analyzed by the examiner. The opinions and perceptions of inclusion and pull-out special education classes on the part of the administrators, teachers, and students were recorded. Grades from the student sample were recorded as well.

The evidence gathered from these data examined the perceptions of those stakeholders involved in different special education placements in this particular middle school. The academic success of the students based on their grades and statements were also relevant to this study. The information from this study is important because it is a sample of data from one middle school that can be related to educational literature and theory.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Research Findings

During the course of this research, much valuable information was found. Teachers, students, and administrators provided important feedback to the researcher in the area of inclusion. Once the action research was complete, the data had been organized. This chapter explains the data results in sub-sections based upon the groups that were targeted in this study. While this section provides the data collection results, it also answers the research questions that were posed at the beginning of this study. As a result, the findings are presented and analyzed by the researcher.

#### Teachers:

There were nine teachers surveyed and observed in this study. At each of the three grade levels, one regular education teacher, one inclusion (in-class support) teacher, and one pull-out teacher were examined. The researcher found their input to be very helpful.

In observing the inclusion and pull-out classes at each grade level, the researcher found many similarities. The teachers were all very supportive and patient. These educators appear to be skilled professionals who care about their students and enjoy their jobs. There were similarities seen in all three inclusion classes in sixth through eighth grades. These classes moved quickly. The lessons were presented in a variety of formats from lecture to small group work. The inclusion teachers worked not only with the

special education students but also the mainstream (regular education) students as well. The inclusion teacher often took a co-teacher role. This teacher helped check work with the entire class. Often, the two teachers worked simultaneously in the classroom. A casual observer may have difficulty figuring out which teacher was the mainstream teacher and which was the special education teacher. All of the inclusion classes ran very efficiently.

There were also similarities in the three pull-out classes that were observed at each grade level. These three classes ran more slowly than the inclusion classes. The atmosphere was a bit more casual and relaxed. The students called out a bit more. Teachers in these classrooms provided many hands-on activities for their students. The students moved around a little in these classrooms also. The teachers in these classrooms were very supportive and encouraging.

It was interesting to see the similarities between the inclusion classes at all three grades levels. Also interesting to see were the similarities between all three pull-out classes in the different grade levels.

Comparing the differences between the inclusion and pull-out classes at all three levels was also an easy task. The inclusion classes consisted of approximately twenty-five to thirty students. The pull-out classes consisted of anywhere from five to ten students. The inclusion classes moved at a much faster pace. The pull-out classes moved much slower. Lessons that were being taught in the different classes focused on similar topics. However, the teachers' approaches to teaching these lessons were different. The inclusion teachers tended to present in more of a lecture format. The pull-out teachers

used more hands-on and collaborative teaching styles. Whatever the format, the strategies seemed to be effective for the individual classes.

The surveys from these teachers also yielded interesting results. When asked if the inclusion programs at Voorhees Middle School are effective in meeting the needs of the special needs students, two-thirds answered yes and one-third answered no. In regards to the pull-out programs, two-thirds thought that they were effective and one-third did not answer. Over two-thirds of teachers felt that the inclusion programs also helped the regular education students in those classrooms. Also, over two-thirds of the teachers surveyed felt that inclusion programs were more of a benefit than pull-out programs. Interestingly, the majority, seven of the nine teachers surveyed stated that the co-teaching programs at VMS are effective. Eight out of nine teachers stated that the administrators at the school are supportive of the special education students and programs. Finally, seven of the nine teachers feel that the administration provides their staff with adequate training and in-servicing in this area.

Overall, the results of the teachers' surveys were fairly consistent. In general, two-thirds answered positively to the questions posed. One interesting note, the sixth grade teachers answered yes to every question posed about effectiveness of programs.

Some of the teachers responded to the surveys with some written comments. Their common themes focused on how the student's educational program is, obviously, tailored for them in their IEP. Therefore, a pull-out program may be better suited for students with severe disabilities. However, most stated that if a student has mild learning delays, an inclusion program would be better for them.

One sixth grade teacher stated, "In my opinion inclusion programs provide positive role models and a more difficult pace. This works for many of the students." She also felt that two co-teachers help the students in the inclusion classes because "the content is enriched and more creative ideas can be shared" (M. White, personal communication, February 14, 2005). A seventh grade teacher made similar comments. He stated, "Mainstream classes offer an enriched curriculum and positive role models that are often missing in more restrictive settings" (M. Canale, personal communication, February 14, 2005). Finally, an eighth grade teacher stated, "Sometimes a pull-out setting is too slow or comfortable, and these students enter the mainstream lacking some skills. Pull-out students must be introduced to all skills" (P. Connolly, personal communication, February 14, 2005).

Interestingly, a few of the teachers surveyed responded that regular education students often do benefit from two-teachers. However, they stated that sometimes the lessons are slowed down too much in these classes. They felt that this is a disadvantage for the regular education students.

#### Administrators:

Three administrators from Voorhees Middle School were also interviewed about the topic of inclusion at the middle school level. The researcher spoke with the former principal and two vice-principals. All three administrators stated that inclusion at the middle school level can be beneficial for both the special needs and regular education students involved. Also, all of them agreed that each individual student's case is different. Some students need a pull-out or self-contained classroom. However, they all



stated that most special education youngsters benefit from being included in the mainstream at Voorhees Middle School.

The former principal of Voorhees Middle School, Samuel Citron, stated that inclusion at the middle school level “benefits many students socially and academically.” He felt that the academic benefit varies from student to student based on their learning styles and their teachers’ teaching styles. Dr. Citron also stated that “co-teaching in inclusion settings is a viable method of teaching that requires training of staff.” He also felt that smaller class size would benefit this environment even though many of the inclusion classes have numbers close to thirty students.

Dr. Citron stated that society, at least the Voorhees community, did not see the benefits of inclusion classrooms when the programs first became popular over a decade ago. He believes that it must be ‘sold’ correctly to the parents. Parents of both special education and regular education students are now more comfortable with having two teachers in inclusion classrooms. Finally, Dr. Citron added that inclusion classrooms work best when the teachers are in a compatible pairing. The administrator’s role is to support these programs in their schools (Dr. S. Citron, personal communication, September 1, 2004).

The two vice-principals interviewed stated similar views to Dr. Citron. They believe that inclusion classrooms benefit students with mild disabilities in that they are exposed to a rich curriculum, fast pace, and good role models. Their feelings were that students with more severe disabilities may benefit from inclusion classrooms for different reasons. These students may have a primary goal of socialization. They may not be in these classrooms chiefly for the curriculum. Again, it is up to their IEP to lay out

appropriate goals and objectives for them (Mr. D. Jenkins & Mrs. S. Morris, personal communication, February 14, 2005).

None of the administrators surveyed had negative opinions about inclusion in middle schools. All three spoke of the challenges that face inclusion and other programs in education today. The issues of funding, teacher in-servicing, standardized tests, and technology were common themes brought up by all of the administrators interviewed. These issues appear to be common concerns in the area of education in the United States as well.

Students:

A total of fifty students were surveyed in regards to their perceptions and feelings about their middle school educational placement. Twenty of the students were in pull-out classes. The remaining thirty were in inclusion classes. The survey results had some similarities and some differences across the three grade levels, six through eight.

Remarkably, every student that was surveyed responded that they were happy with their classes at Voorhees Middle School and that they felt successful academically. Their answers, of course, varied when asked to provide comments about their classes and teachers. All of the information found by the researcher was fascinating.

Many students commented that they felt successful academically because they received good grades. Most also replied that they are happy with their classes because their teachers are fun and nice. The sixth graders answers were innocent. The seventh and eighth graders answers seemed to be more thought out. There was a difference between the maturities of responses across the grade levels.

Some of the students in inclusion classes with two teachers felt that this was a great benefit. One student responded that “there is more than one teacher to help you out if you don’t understand something” (Student S14, personal communication, February 18, 2005). Another student responded, “If you don’t understand something then one of the teachers can help you while the other talks” (Student S6, personal communication, February 18, 2005). The only concerns about having two teachers are that it is confusing to some students to have two teachers presenting at one time. An eighth grade student declared, “Sometimes two teachers talking at the same time is chaotic and nerve-wracking. Two teachers do not always teach the same and this is confusing” (Student S 14, personal communication, February 18, 2005).

Overall, the results of the student surveys were very positive. None of the students responded that they were unhappy with their classes. The common themes focused on the fact that their classes, whether inclusion or not, made them happy because they did well and liked the teachers. When asked about disadvantages of their educational programs, most students responded about gym or lunch. There were not any comments about disadvantages in their primary academic areas.

In analyzing the students’ first marking period grades, the researcher found many consistencies. All of the students received A’s, B’s, or C’s in all of their primary academic subjects for the first marking period. The teachers had positive comments on the students’ report cards. There seemed to be more A’s and B’s in sixth grade. In seventh and eighth grade, there were more B’s and C’s. Perhaps this difference is due to the more challenging curriculum. It was difficult to assess the effectiveness of the students’ programs based on their grades because each student may or may not have

modifications made to the curriculum. It is obvious, however, that all of the special education students examined were meeting success academically. Their grades were proof of this.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

This research thesis focused on inclusion programs at the middle school level. Primarily, it centered on the middle school inclusion programs at Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees, New Jersey. Are the inclusion programs at this particular school effective in meeting the needs of the special education students? This was the main research question. With the research done in this study, the answer is yes they are effective.

The sub-questions of this study ask if the program at Voorhees Middle School is successful. The program is successful. The majority of the students and teachers in this program agreed that the educational environment is a productive one. Student performance in the inclusion programs was very good. Most of the students studied do well academically. Granted, there may be different modifications made for them in their classes. However, they were learning and were being challenged on a daily basis.

Students and teachers in the pull-out classes also agreed that their educational programs were beneficial. These teachers and students studied seem to be pleased with their particular classes. The modifications made in these classes were much greater than those in the inclusion classrooms. However, the programs were all designed to best meet the needs of the individual students.

Educational research supports the benefits of inclusion programs at the middle school level. The benefits include social and academic gains. Of the research found for

this study, most teachers and students stated that inclusion works well for them. These findings in the educational literature parallel the findings from Voorhees Middle School. If the administrators, parents, teachers, and students involved in inclusion programs support them, the results are positive for the students involved.

The implications of this study were that educators should continue to include students with disabilities in the mainstream classes as much as possible. Again, a child study team and parents will formulate each individual student's IEP. However, the goal should be to include these students in inclusion classes as much as possible. Some students with more severe delays may benefit more from the pull-out or self-contained classrooms. However, students with slight educational delays will greatly benefit educationally and socially from being included in these classes. Each situation is, of course, different based on the individual student. However, inclusion should be the goal.

Voorhees Middle School's organization did not change as a result of this study. The programs were well organized and structured. However, this study did ask the school's administrators and teachers to examine their perceptions on inclusion. This alone was a benefit to the school and students. Also, the students that were studied were also asked to examine their thoughts and feelings about their educational programs. This would have had a positive effect on them as well.

The information found in this study will be shared with school district administrators. It supports the current success of the middle school's special education programs. It is a great benefit to educators to continue to analyze and examine their educational practice. This study has helped in this manner.

To further extend this study, the students of the focus groups should be followed. Their grades and progress for the rest of school year should be looked at. Ideally, all special education students in the middle school could be followed through their three years at the school. In fact, the case manager for each student does this job already. However, for the sake of research, it would be interesting to chart the academic progress of the special education students from grades six through eight. It would also be interesting to continue to compare inclusion vs. pull-out classes in the area of curriculum and socialization. Parents could also play a bigger part in the research discussions. Finally, educational literature should continue to be a source of reference. Administrators and teachers do and would continue to benefit by keeping up-to-date on the current trends and theories in education.

This study did further the leadership growth of the researcher. The study gave the intern a broader understanding of education and school administration in relation to the ISLLC standards and the issue of inclusion.

The first standard focuses on the fact that a school administrator must promote the success of all students. This paper dealt with special education students specifically. However, all students, in inclusion classrooms or not, were considered. The researcher realized that the school administrator's vision must be one that promotes the success of all students by leading and implementing programs that support them in their education. Regular education, special education, basic skills, ESL, and enrichment students should all be treated equally. The educational programs provided for them must be tailored fit to best meet their needs and promote success. If a school administrator has a vision which includes all students, regardless of their labels, he or she will be successful.

According to standard two, a good educational leader promotes the success of all students by maintaining a positive school culture with solid programs. These programs must promote student and teacher growth. This research study has shown the researcher the importance of providing programs that best fit each student and teacher involved. Teacher in-servicing and workshops are very important. This is true especially in the area of special education. Teachers need to have the appropriate amount of time given to them for planning and in-servicing. These types of programs keep teachers fresh and inspired.

The learning environment provided for students must be a safe one, according to the third standard. This is true for all classrooms regardless of the type of classroom. In this day and age, it is the school leader's job to ensure a safe school environment. The learning environment must be effective for its students. This, again, is true in special education classrooms and inclusion classrooms. All students must be considered.

The fourth standard deals with community and parental involvement. In special education, all parties must be involved. The administrator must be sure to have the child study team, parents, teachers, and students involved in the implementation of the student's educational program. Community relations are very important. This researcher learned while doing this study that Voorhees Township is viewed as a well respected district in the area of special education. This reputation has been built by the hard work of many of the districts educators. It is important to be viewed in a positive manner by the community. Voorhees Schools are perceived in a positive way.

Finally, a school leader must be ethical, fair, and have integrity. Standard five mentions these qualities. Again, in dealing with special and regular education, school



administrators must exhibit these qualities. This researcher study found the school leaders in Voorhees to have these qualities. It is a goal that all educators should strive to attain.

This research study examined inclusion programs at the middle school level. Educational research shows that special education students can be very successful in these programs. Voorhees Middle School reflects this also. As in all areas of education, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students must work together. This is the key to academic and social success for our future generations.

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## Appendices

Appendix A

**Student survey**

Grade level \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is your reading teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is your language arts teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who is your math teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who is your science teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Who is your social studies teacher? \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Circle your answer. Add additional comments on the lines provided.

6. Are you happy with your classes at VMS ?                    YES            NO

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you feel successful academically in your classes?   YES            NO

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have any classes that are taught by two teachers working together?  
   YES            NO

If you answered "YES", how do you feel about those classes?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Explain one advantage of your class schedule. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Explain one disadvantage of your class schedule. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix B

**Teacher Survey**

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching position \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade level \_\_\_\_\_  
Years of teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please answer the following questions about your perceptions of the inclusion vs. self-contained special education programs.

Answer each question based on your opinions and experiences. Answer each question below by circling the answer that matches your opinion. Feel free to add comments on the lines provided.

1. I believe that the inclusion programs (includes all in-class support classes) at Voorhees Middle School are effective in meeting the needs of the special education students in those programs.

YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. I believe that the self-contained programs at Voorhees Middle School are effective in meeting the needs of the special education students in those programs.

YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. I believe that the inclusion programs at VMS are helpful to the regular education students in those classrooms also.

YES NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. I believe that special education students, in general, benefit more from an inclusion or in-class support program than from a self-contained program.

YES

NO

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5. I believe that the co-teaching programs at VMS are effective.

YES

NO

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6. I believe that the administration in Voorhees Township is supportive of its special education students.

YES

NO

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7. I believe that the administration in Voorhees Township is supportive of its teachers and provides adequate training and in-servicing as needed.

YES

NO

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