High School Students' Sense of Belonging in Relationship to Inclusive Practices

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Abstract

While literature exists on the sense of belonging for students with disabilities, no studies directly compare how inclusive practices for high school students with disabilities relate to the sense of belonging of all other students in the school. Given this gap in the literature, my research addresses the following question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? I addressed my research question relying on three data sets, including The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from 28 Wisconsin high schools that participated in the 2017 YRBS. In all 28 schools, an administrator completed the Degree of Inclusion survey on the school's behalf. I then rank ordered the Degree of Inclusion Survey scores and selected seven of the highest scoring and seven of the lowest scores and invited these principals for an interview. Ten of the 14 principals I invited agreed to be interviewed as part of my study. Within the ten interviews, I examined the inclusionary practices shared by the principals that promoted a sense of belonging for all students and I discovered the Degree of Inclusion survey was not an accurate measure of the high school's inclusionary practices. In several cases, principals that self-reported their Degree of Inclusion to be lower, the principals provided evidence of inclusion and critically reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities compared to some of the principals who rated their degree of inclusion higher.

Within the interviews some of the principals described the positive impact of including students with disabilities had on students with and without disabilities. From the interviews, I propose a theory of The Impact of Social Desirability of Inclusion and the Negative Impact on all Students, in which I suggest when principals recognize and acknowledge the need for improved inclusive practices that they tend to respond by

providing support, not only for students with disabilities, but all students. The study

offers suggestions for future research to further examine if and how inclusive practices

influence the sense of belonging for all students.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Goodenow (1993), a student's sense of belonging significantly impacts several measures of motivation and on engaged and persistent effort on difficult academic tasks. School engagement encompasses a student's sense of belongingness in school, including thoughtful and willingness to participate in class and to comprehend ideas and master challenging skills. Fredricks & McColskey (2012) explain that school engagement manifests through students' regular participation in the classroom and school related activities and also how a student identifies with the school, which includes belonging, or feeling of being important to school, and valuing an appreciation of success in school related outcomes.

Compulsory attendance laws crafted by each state require students to attend an average of 180 school days per year, and for several children and young adults, this can be a traumatic experience. School officials have a tremendous responsibility to educate all youth and create an environment that is welcoming to all; yet traditional school structures often do not foster a sense of belonging for many. Previous research on the fundamental need for humans to connect with each other has emphasized the importance of positive social relationships (Leary, 1990). Failure to establish such relationships has been implicated in various forms of psychological distress (Leary, 1990), elevated mental health incidences (Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Bernston, 2003) reduced immune system function (House, Landis & Umberson, 1998) and increased mortality rates (House et al., 1988).

Over the past several decades, schools across the United States have made efforts to reassess their school structures and create school environments that are more inclusive

and build a positive sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities. Despite these efforts, several research studies reveal that current general and special educational systems are not effective in meeting student's needs (Albers, Glover & Kratochwill, 2007; Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Capper & Frattura, 2018; Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Inclusion is a term that promotes all students, regardless of their disabilities, should have access to and participate in their natural educational environments with peers without disabilities. Kavale and Fomess (2000) describe inclusion as a "movement seeking to create schools that meet the needs of all students by establishing learning communities for students with and without disabilities, educated together in age-appropriate general education classrooms in neighborhood schools" (p. 1). Several studies have examined the impact of inclusive practices on student achievement, but no studies have examined how inclusive practices help foster a greater sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities at the high school level.

The American Educational Research Association (2016), supports diversity in the classroom, stating that diverse classrooms provide "Improved cognitive skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving, because students' experience with individuals different from themselves, as well as to the novel ideas and situations that such experience brings, challenges their thinking and leads to cognitive growth" (p. 25). This diversity includes students with disabilities. Several studies have attested that including students with disabilities in general education has a positive impact on students without disabilities.

Likewise, Huber, Fiorello & Rosenfeld (2001) describe when students with disabilities are included, the achievement of students that score lower academically but do not have disabilities, tend to increase. In inclusive environments, students without

disabilities also make more social gains, including learning to be more understanding, empathetic, increased sensitivity to differences, heightened self-esteem, and behaviors improve (Cole & Meyer, 1991; Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Shulka & Fryxell, 1997).

Evidence suggests that the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment does not have a negative impact on students without disabilities and in some cases, when students identified with intellectual disabilities are included, the achievement of all students increase (Fishbaugh & Gum, 1994; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994; Kalambouka et al, 2007; Odom, Deklyen, & Jenkins, 1984; Saint-Laurent, Glasson, Royer, Simard, & Pierard, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994; Wang & Birch, 1984).

This study extends the research on the positive impact of inclusive practices for students without disabilities to examine the relationship of the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities in high schools and the sense of belonging of students without disabilities in those schools, including students of color, students labeled ELL, and students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. As such, this study addressed the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging?

Literature Review

To examine belonging and disability in the literature, I relied on the search terms 'belonging and disability,' 'inclusion and belonging,' and 'belonging and disability and inclusion.' I utilized the search engines Educational Research Complete and 'ERIC searching only for empirical, peered reviewed studies and excluding theoretical articles, conceptual papers, book chapter, and dissertations. This search produced 243 articles in

Educational Research Complete, and 128 in ERIC. These 243 articles included studies on belongingness in the community, family, religion, college, work place and schools. Of these studies, only nine addressed belonging specific to students with disabilities that are included in the general education environment with students without disabilities. These nine studies formed the data set to examine the study's research question. I analyzed each of the nine studies based on these questions: 1) How do the authors define inclusion and describe the systems and structures to support inclusion? 2) How do the authors define belonging? 3) How did they measure a student's sense belonging? And 4) Did the students with or without disabilities have a greater sense of belonging in integrated versus segregated environments? I structured my literature review around each of these questions and I end each section with a critique of and a discussion of the studies' limitations.

Before addressing the literature analysis questions, in this section I first review the literature findings on belonging, disability and belonging, and the history of special education law and belonging as a context to this work. Then, from the nine studies, I discuss inclusion, how inclusion is defined, structures to support belonging, how belonging is defined, how belonging is measured and belonging and students with and without disabilities in segregated versus inclusive environments. Figure 'A', located in the appendix provides a detailed overview of the nine studies, including research question(s), participants, racial demographics, disability areas examined, measures, time students with disabilities spent in general education, findings and limitations.

Belonging

Maslow (1962) first considered a sense of belonging as he outlined a framework for basic human need. These needs include physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. He viewed these needs within a hierarchical framework, with those at the bottom being the most basic. He suggested the feeling of belonging needs to be met before any motivations higher on the "Theory of Human Motivation" scale could be satisfied, the desire to learn and acquire new knowledge being one of these higher motivators. Maslow believed that an individual could not move on to the acquisition of knowledge without first feeling as though they were a part of a group. This theory is further supported by Atkinson and Feather (1974), when they proposed that students' motives to achieve in school are the joint function of the expectancies for work and the value that school has for them.

A sense of belonging has long been thought of as an important factor for students to learn and grow, but the construct is a broad one. Belongingness is defined in many different ways, such as relatedness, sense of community, sense of classroom membership, support, and identification (Osterman, 2000). Goodenow (1993) defines a sense of belonging as the feeling of being included, accepted and supported by others in a school social environment. Acceptance and belonging are two closely tied concepts, which can have a symbiotic relationship.

When students feel like they belong, they tend to value their experience at school (Osterman, 2000). Students, who place a greater value on school tasks, who view their work as interesting, relevant and useful, report higher aspirations, display greater

persistence in educational activities and coursework and perform overall better in school (Cole, Bergin, & Whittaker, 2008).

In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley introduced the concept "looking-glass self," a theory that states a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interaction and perception of others (Cooley, 1964). He believed that people shape themselves based on other people's perception, and that we have positive and negative feelings associated with how we feel others think of us. Cooley's theory developed into the notion that a need to belong is a necessity to forming our identities within the world.

Disability and Belonging

In this section I first reviewed the history of special education law and belonging. I then provided an overview of inclusion, highlight the themes that emerged from the analyzed studies when defining inclusion and end with a discussion on the connection between inclusion and belonging from the studies reviewed.

History of Special Education Law and Belonging. The first public use of the term 'special education' was by Graham Bell at a National Education Association presentation in 1884 (Winzer, 1998). The history of special education has taken several different turns, and has been influenced by the changing societal and philosophical beliefs about the extent to which individuals with disabilities should be "feared, segregated, categorized, and educated" (Rotatori, Obiakor, & Bakken, 2011). Before the 1700's people with disabilities were often ignored, or subject to inhumane treatment, ridicule, isolation and at times, put to their death (Winzer, 1993, Rotatori et al., 2011). Winzer (1998) described that in the 1600 and 1700's people's philosophical beliefs about human dignity and treatment of those with special needs began to change. The changes

were lead by the efforts of pioneering special educators, families and advocates who began to experiment with strategies designed on an individual basis to teach people with special needs (Rotatori et al., 2011).

In the early 1800's, physician Dr. Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard played a pivotal role in special education for his work with Victor, a young man referred to as the "wild boy of Aveyron" (Rotatori et al., 2011). Victor was captured in the woods of south France, naked, filthy, unable to speak and quickly labeled by physicians as an "incurable idiot." Dr. Itard developed pedagogy that enhanced Victor's language and cognitive development, proving that individuals previously considered uneducable could in-fact learn (Safford & Safford, 1996). The work of Dr. Itard served as a springboard for educators and scholars across the world to "disseminate their efforts to study and validate a collection of effective special education instructional practices" (p. 5).

For centuries society held several negative stereotypes about people with disabilities, specifically those identified as having cognitive and emotional disabilities, leading to the growth of institutions and asylums for people with disabilities in the mid-nineteenth century (Rotatori et al., 2011). Giordano (2017) explains that several of these institutes were used as ways to provide educational, vocational or religious programs for people with disabilities, while Armstrong (2002) reveals that some of these facilities viewed their role as a way to separate and control people with disabilities.

The success of the teachings by Dr. Itard helped change society's viewpoint on whether people with disabilities were capable of learning and gave rise to specialized schools and classes for people with disabilities (Giordano, 2007). The rise of specialized schools and classrooms lead to supportive legislation, and families and professionals

coming together to advocate for greater inclusion of individuals with special needs in all aspects of society—especially educational opportunities.

For decades, human beings identified as having a disability have been, and continued to be systematically deprived of the kind of environments that nurture the development of belonging in schools and communities even into the twentieth century (Bramston, Pruggerman & Pretty, 2002). Many schools and districts still choose to educate students with disabilities in a separate environment, depriving them from their peers, rich and challenging curriculum, high expectations and other opportunities (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Parents and advocacy groups related to race were also vocal, and in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* changed education forever. The Supreme Court ruled that schools could no longer discriminate on the basis of race, establishing that a separate education is not an equal education. This ruling not only changed the exclusionary educational policies for students of color, it also acted as a catalyst for the movement toward integration and rights of students with disabilities in public schools (Giordano, 2007).

Encouraged by the ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education,* families of children with disabilities organized and continued to put pressure on the courts and the state legislatures in the 1960's and 1970's. The parents demanded access to public schools for their children and began to pursue it as an issue of civil rights for students with disabilities (Tompkins & Deloney, 1995). As Turnbull III (1990) described, "although Brown established the right to an equal educational opportunity based upon the Fourteenth Amendment, it was not until *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children*

(PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and *Mills v. D. C Board of Education* that

Brown became meaningful for handicapped children" (p. 30).

The PARC case was a class-action lawsuit that was lead by parents of children

with disabilities in Commonwealth Pennsylvania. Children were excluded from public

school due to their identified disabilities. The case was settled between the two parties in

1972. PARC sparked confidence for many to take action in their respective states.

Later in 1972, a new case was brought to the US District Court by the family of

Peter Mills and six other students with behavioral disabilities who were excluded from

the District of Columbia Public Schools and denied a publicly supported education (Mills

v. Washington, D.C. Board of Education, 1972). This suit compelled the system to

provide the children with immediate and adequate education and educational facilities in

the public schools or alternative placement at public expense.

It was the perfect storm between Brown vs. Board of Education, PARC v.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Mills v. D. C, and the civil rights movement that helped

pave the way for the first law addressing students with disabilities right to a public

education: Public Law 94-142, known as the Education for All Handicapped Children

Act of 1975 (Tomlinson, 2012). This law outlined two major provisions for students with

disabilities. It stated that students with disabilities must be afforded a Free and

Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). In

the law, free appropriate public education is defined as "special education and related

services, which have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and

direction, and without charge" (Public Law 94-142). The term 'least restrictive

environment' requires districts to educate students with disabilities to the maximum

extent appropriate with their peers who are not identified as having a disability. Before the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, only 20% of students with disabilities were educated in public schools (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001).

In 1990, the law was reauthorized into the Individual Disability Education Act (IDEA), and revised again, in 1997 and 2004, but each reauthorization continued to stress the importance of providing a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities in their least restrict environment. The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997) emphasizes the premise that special education is a service, not a place. The original goal of this law was to provide students with disabilities access to general education curriculum. This greater access to curriculum was achieved by the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education environment.

Inclusion. This history of special education law paved the way for the inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools. Kavale and Forness (2000) explain the concept of inclusion as "a movement seeking to create schools that meet the needs of all students by establishing learning communities for students with and without disabilities, educated together in age-appropriate general education classrooms in neighborhood schools" (p. 279). A large volume of research suggests that students with disabilities have the right to be part of the education system provided for all children and supported by the idea that inclusive education is more effective because students labeled with disabilities make more academic gains in integrated settings (Baker, 1994; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Downing, Spencer, & Cavallaro, 2004; Hall & Wolfe, 2003; Lindsay, 2007; Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Wang & Baker, 1994).

The progress towards integrated education has been positive, according to the National Center of Educational Statistics (2018), 95% of students with IEPs ages 6-21 in fall of 2014 were enrolled in regular schools and the "percentage who spent most of the school day (i.e., 80 percent or more of their time) in general classes in regular schools increased from 33 percent in fall 1990 to 62 percent in fall 2014" (NCES, 2018). This data demonstrates that district's across the country are moving toward a more inclusive service delivery model for students with disabilities. What we do not know from this data however, is if these students are educated in their neighborhood schools as supported by the literature as a key feature of an integrated education, "handicapped students develop most when in physical, social, emotional, and intellectual presence of non-handicapped persons in reasonable approximations to the natural proportions" (Brown, Nisbet, Ford, Sweet, & Shiraga, 1983, p. 17).

Inclusion Defined. I next turn to the 9 studies that were the focus of this review. Within these nine studies many of the studies did not directly define inclusion but used characteristics in describing it as a service delivery model for students with disabilities. Three major themes emerged when defining and describing inclusion: (a) a means to provide access for students with disabilities to the general education curriculum, (b) the link between inclusion and belonging and (c) the physical placement of students with disabilities—often referencing policy or law.

Knesting, Hokanson & Waldron (2008) borrow the National Association of School Psychologists definition to describe inclusion, "students, regardless of the severity of their disability, receive appropriate specialized instruction and related services within an age appropriate general education classroom in the school that they would attend if

they did not have a disability" (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002, p. 1720). Nepia, Facondini, Nucci & Perud, (2013) studied the social position and inherent sense of belonging of 418 Italian students (193 females and 225 males) ages 8-11, 122 of whom being students that receive special education services for cognitive disabilities, sensory disorders, learning disabilities or behavioral disabilities. Italy has required students to be educated with their 'typically developing' peers in an inclusive setting since the end of the 1970s, when Italian legislature stated that children with disabilities have the right to attend regular classes. Italy has a strict interpretation of the law, and students with disabilities have been placed in general education environments across the country. In this study, Nepia and colleagues (2013) define inclusion as "practices that aim to remove barriers to learning and participation for those students who experience difficulties, to different degrees, concerning access to the curriculum and being socially involved" (p. 320).

Within the nine studies, the connection between inclusion and belonging emerged as a second theme when defining inclusion. Frederickson, Simonds, Evans, and Soulsby in 2007 directly linked inclusion to a student's sense of belonging; "inclusion is about engendering a sense of community and belonging and encouraging mainstream and special schools and others to come together to support each other and pupils with special educational needs" (Frederickson et al, 2007, p. 106). The authors describe community and belonging as central characteristics of inclusion arguing that, "a sense of 'community' is not present until members experience a feeling of belonging, trust in others and safety" (p 106). Frederickson et al. (2007) show how belonging has also become a central feature of inclusion, using Warnock's argument that "the concept of

inclusion must embrace the feeling of belonging, since such a feeling appears to be necessary both for successful learning and for more general wellbeing" (Frederickson, 2007, as cited in, Warnock, 2005, p. 15). Booth and Ainscow (2002) reaffirm the importance of building community for students labeled with disabilities, describing it as a foundational aspect to human development, but one that is given too little attention too.

Rose & Shevlin (2017) did not directly define inclusion but considered the relationship "between acceptance and belonging as critical factors" to successful inclusionary practices (Rose & Shevlin, 2017, p. 67). Crouch, Keys & McMahon (2014) describe inclusion as "the social justice principle that all students, including students with disabilities, belong to the school community and are entitled to share in all the social and academic opportunities a school has to offer (p. 20). In sum, within the studies reviewed, the inclusion principles of equal access to curriculum and age appropriate peers, is reflected in federal law, yet varies in interpretation and has a direct and substantial impact on students' sense of belonging.

Structures to Support Belonging

Previously, I reviewed the research on the linkage between the inclusion of students labeled with disabilities and belonging. More specifically, all nine-research articles suggested that structures that support inclusive practices in turn contribute to student's sense of belonging and to the student's overall success. The structures that support belonging include: (a) instructional arrangements, b) support for behavior and instructional practices, and c) staff to student relationship.

One set of the studies revealed instructional arrangements as structures that supported inclusion and belonging. For example, Shogren and colleagues (2015)

examined the experiences of students with and without disabilities being educated in inclusive schools, documenting their perceptions of culture in their school, inclusion, and the practices that were implemented to support all students. These scholars conducted focus groups with 86 students with and without disabilities from six schools that are recognized as exemplars of inclusionary school wide practices. They learned that both students with and without disabilities consistently connected their feeling of sense of belonging directly to the school's inclusionary practices. For example, one student with a disability stated, "this is the school where nobody can get picked on or judged by who they are… we have a variety of nice, different learners, and we're unique and all creative, and determined, and responsible" (p. 248). Another student without a disability described the diverse makeup of people and learning styles she will encounter outside of school and how attending an inclusive school prepares her for this real life experience: Over-all students described "feeling a sense of belonging in their schools and a highly positive school culture" (p. 248). Aspects contributing to this positive culture included "high expectations, feeling supported to meet those expectations, and feeling connected to teachers and peers" (p. 248).

Other instructional elements mentioned by both students with and without disabilities impacting their sense of belonging included "self-determination and student direction; frequent feedback and re-teaching; multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement; and technology" (Shogren, et al., p. 253). High expectations emerged as a theme from students with and without disabilities. A student described his teacher's expectations contributing to her sense of belonging in the

following way, "he just makes it a little bit more challenging, instead of making it like plain old classroom work. So he makes our brains stretch a little bit more" (p. 253).

A second structure that supported belonging centered on positive teacher/student relationships. Shogren et al.'s (2015) research illustrated the importance of teacher/student relationships as a prerequisite for feeling a sense of belonging at school. An overwhelming majority of students with and without disabilities in this study described the relationships with teachers and principals as a key element of what made them feel supported and safe and that contributed to their sense of belonging. Across all schools in this study, both students with and without disabilities used two common words in describing people they had relationships with: "strict" and "nice."

Crouch et al. (2014) echoed the importance of teacher student relationships as a structure that supported belonging and inclusion. In their study they collected data from 133 students with and without disabilities who moved from a school that served primarily students with disabilities into 23 public schools that educated students with and without disabilities. Within the study, 111 school staff members completed a modified 5-item scale based on the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale on all 133 students-- 19 students had more than one survey completed by a staff member, making a total of 152 surveys. Of the 133 students, 115 completed their own 18-question Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale and provided demographic information. The majority of the students completing the survey self-identified as African American (79%), Male (56%), ages 16-18 (61%), grades 10-12 (84%), and with disabilities (83%) (p. 23). The results showed that "school belonging was lower when students perceived

their relationships with teachers and other adults at their school as negative, and higher when teacher–student relationships were perceived as positive" (p. 27).

A third structure in the studies that supported inclusion and contributed to student belonging centered on behavioral supports. Within Shogren and colleagues' (2015) study, students with and without disabilities described a multi-level system of behavioral support across the school, classroom and for individual students. When asked about safety and bullying, students with and without disabilities referred to their experiences at their current inclusive schools as "much better than at previous schools" (p. 253). Several students emphasized supportive and proactive ways that their schools dealt with safety and bullying, which contributed to their sense of belonging, "this is an inclusive school, and I learned here from other kids when they were sticking up for themselves" (p. 249).

Belonging Defined

Belonging is a fundamental human need, and described in the literature as a positive attribute that exist when a student feels accepted, supported, engaged and motivated. Both Rose & Shevlin (2017) and Crouch et al. (2014) borrow Baumeister and Leary's (1995) description of belonging, describing it as "a fundamental human need which when positive assists the individual to function effectively and to feel motivated to be part of a community" (p. 497). The creation of an environment in which children feel that they are accepted is therefore critical to their inclusion and development of a sense of belonging in a specific school context (Rose & Shevlin, 2017, p. 67). Knesting, Hokanson & Waldron (2008) describe both peer and adult relationships as being major factors that contribute to the student's feeling of belonging and Rose Simpson & Ellis

(2016) state that belonging is "related to how one is situated within a peer group or school" (p. 1465).

Nepia and colleagues (2013), Frederickson & Graham, (1999), and Hagborg (2003) did not explicitly define or describe what a sense of belonging means in relation to their studies, but they relied on Goodenow's Psychological Sense of School Membership tool as a measurement, so it is assumed they use Goodenow's description of a sense of belonging. Goodenow (1993) describes the aspects of belonging as being included, accepted and supported by others in a school social environment.

Frederickson and colleagues (2007) draw on other scholar's research when describing the importance of belonging. They speak to McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum's (2002) research as well as Osterman's (2000) findings that show the relationship between measures of school belonging and positive outcomes such as increased academic motivation, increased engagement in learning, reduced violent behavior and reduced substance abuse when a student feels they belong at school. These studies describe a sense of belonging as a construct that is similar to the membership dimension of sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Furthermore, belonging has been linked to school satisfaction, peer support, academic achievement, school attendance, and self-esteem (Anderman, 2002; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). School belonging has also been identified as an especially critical need for marginalized students (Booker, 2006), such as students with disabilities. Hagborg (2003) also does not directly define belonging, but does describe belonging as being "crucial to a child's positive school adjustment and may contribute to their future mental health" (p. 2).

Study Participants

Of the nine studies, Knesting et al. 2008, and Rose et al. 2016 are the only studies reviewed that did not include students with and without disabilities—their studies investigated the level of belonging only with students identified with disabilities. Four of the reviewed studies investigated high school age students, three included middle school age students, and four examined elementary age students.

Four of the nine studies included students identified with intellectual or cognitive disabilities (Crouch et al. 2014; Frederickson et al., 2007; Nepia et al., 2013; Rose et al. 2016). Researchers from the studies relied on different techniques to engage students with significant intellectual disabilities to participate fully in their studies. On some occasions, the student participants relied on augmentative forms of communication (Rose & Shevlin, p. 71, 2017). Others used a trusted adult or peer buddies to assist with rephrasing, rewording and explaining the questions and responses, and on occasion the researchers used prompts in order to elicit responses and ensure that each interviewee was able to respond (Shogren, Gross, Forber-Pratt, Francis, Satter, Blue-Banning, & Hill, 2015). Some students with disabilities utilized their specific supports from their IEP or special education teachers (Nepia et al., 2013).

Belonging Measured

The studies I reviewed measure belonging through the use of surveys, interviews, and observations. Researchers adopted widely used surveys to assess peer group inclusion and belonging. Seven of the nine studies included variations of Goodenow's Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (1993). One study surveyed teachers (Crouch et al. 2014), seven studies surveyed students (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson,

2007; Hagborg, 1998; Hagborg, 2003; Nepia et al., 2013; Rose et al. 2016; Rose & Shevlin, 2017), and zero surveyed family members or administrators. Six of the studies reviewed were quantitative (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson, 2007; Hagborg, 1998, Hagborg, 2003; Nepia, 2013; Rose et al. 2016), relying on surveys as their primary use of data collection, two were qualitative (Knesting, 2008; Shogren, 2015), utilizing interviews or observations and one relied on a mixed-method approach (Rose & Shevlin, 2017), utilizing a combination of surveys and interviews to gather data. Rose and Shevlin (2017) conducted the only longitudinal study, lasting four years, interviewing each student two times with two years between. Table A in the appendix provides a visual of the nine studies reviewed and the method relied on by the authors to measure K-12 students with and without disabilities' sense of belonging in inclusive environments.

   Measuring Belonging Via Surveys. Seven of the nine studies reviewed relied on various forms of Goodenow's Psychological Sense of Membership Scale (1993). Frederickson et al. (2007), Nepia's (2013), and Hagborg (2003) relied on an abbreviated version of Goodenow's Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (1993) to measure belonging and Nepia and colleagues used the Italian abbreviated version of the instrument. In studies conducted by Crouch et al. (2014) and Rose, Simpson, and Ellis, (2015) students completed the full Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993), and teachers completed a modified 5-item scale, based on the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (p. 24). Goodenow's original instrument included 18 sentences and asks the student to rate how true each is for them, from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true). Those that relied on the abbreviated versions followed Frederickson's (2007) suggestions and presented students with a list of

only 12 statements and had them rate them using a three-point likert scale (completely true, do not know, not at all true). Frederickson and colleagues (2007) made these adjustments to simplify the survey so students as young as eight could participate. For example, students were asked: "It is hard for people like me to be accepted here," they answer 'no not true', 'not sure' or 'yes true.'

The teacher-abbreviated version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale that Crouch & colleagues (2014) relied on is comprised of selected items for the teachers' scale for their relevance to student needs and inclusion practices. The questions on the teacher's scale included "1) This student feels like a real part of this school, 2) Most teachers at this school are interested in this student, 3) This student is included in lots of activities at this school, 4) This student is treated with as much respect as other students, 5) This student has good friends here at school" (p. 24). Rose et al. (2017) reviewed their own abbreviated version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale, asking the students with and without disabilities just four of the 18 questions as determined by the authors (p. 1468).

Aside from Goodenow's Psychological Sense of School Membership, the studies relied on several other surveys to assess levels of belonging. Nepia and colleagues (2013) studied the social position and inherent sense of belonging of 418 students, ages 8-11, 122 of whom, received special education services for cognitive, sensory, learning or behavioral disabilities in an inclusive setting. Nepia and colleagues (2013) also relied on two other instruments including the Psychological Sense of School Membership, and 'Like to Work' and 'Like to Play,' both taken from The Social Inclusion Survey developed by Frederickson, et al. 2007. The Social Inclusion Survey is a means to

identify the classmates with whom pupils would most like to associate in 'study' and in 'play' with. The students are given a list of their classmates with the options to choose a smiling face, a straight-mouthed and sad face for each peer. Students went through each tool marking a smiling face to express acceptance of that peer, a sad face to express rejection and the straight face to indicate a neutral feeling.

Frederickson and colleagues (2007) set out to describe measures of peer group inclusion, social behavior, bullying and feelings of belonging at school and to "report how they have been used in evaluating the social and affective outcomes of an innovative inclusion program" (p. 107). A total of 397 students between eight and 11 years old participated in the study from 14 different classes in 11 different mainstream schools (Frederickson et al., p. 108, 2007). Each one of the classrooms contained one student with special needs that formerly attended Foxwood special school, but now was fully included with students without disabilities accounting for 14 total students of varying disabilities. The study also included 89 students identified as having special educational needs, but already attending schools with their typically developing peers. These 89 students previously attended segregated environments, but have now been fully included for several years. The breakdown of the various disabilities is as follows: "cognition and learning, 63% (56); behavior, emotional and social, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, 24 % (21); language and communication, including ASD, 9% (8); and physical and sensory, 4% (4)" (Frederickson et al., p. 108, 2007). The remaining 294 students in the study are not identified with having a disability and are referred to as 'typically developing' throughout the study. By the start of the study, students have been

receiving special education support in a mainstreamed school for at least 18 months, with the average length of time of 28.75 months (Frederickson et al., 2007).

Like Nepia and his colleagues (2013), Frederickson et al. (2007) gave all students with and without disabilities three different surveys to assess their own and their classmate's levels of belonging. In their study the 397 participating students were given the Social Inclusion Survey (Frederickson & Graham, 1999), which evaluated the willingness of students to "play with" or "study with" their classmates by presenting them with a list of classmates names, asking them to pick either a smiling face, neutral face, sad face or in this study—slightly different from Nepia's (2013), students also had an option to pick a question mark if they did not know the student.

The third questionnaire given by Frederickson and colleagues (2007) was the 'Guess Who' Social Behavior, Bullying and Victim Measures (Frederickson & Graham, 1999). In this assessment students categorize their peers and themselves into one of the following behavioral descriptors: 'co-operates', 'disrupts', 'shy', 'seeks' 'help' and 'leader'. The authors also followed the recommendations by Nabuzoka and Smith (1993) and added "the items 'bully' and 'bullying victim'" (Frederickson et al., 2007, p. 109). The results revealed no significant differences of perceived belonging between students with and without disabilities. The correlations across the whole sample between the self-report Belonging Scale (Psychological Sense of School Membership) and the other measures that rely on peer report (Social Inclusion Survey and 'Guess Who' Social Behaviors, Bullying and Victim Measures) show a "coherent set of significant but modest relationships" (p. 113).

Hagborg (2003) contributed to the research on disability and belonging by completing a study investigating the sources of perceived social support, self-perception and its relationship to school belonging for students with and without a learning disability. The study included 52 middle school students identified as having a learning disability by a single school psychologist using consecutive assessments over a three-year period. The amount the students participate in the general education classroom is not reported in this study. Each student was matched with a student not identified as having a learning disability from the same school, same grade and same gender, resulting in a sample size of 104 students. The study investigated the relationship between sources of social support as measured by the abbreviated version of Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership, Harter's Social Support Scale, and the Self-Perception Profile for Children. The Social Support Scale for Children (SSS) is a 24-item measure developed by Harter (1985a) to assess the perceived support and regard accorded by four different sources of support: parents, classmates, teachers, and close friends. The Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) is a 36-item measure developed by Harter (1985b) to assess student perceptions of five major personal domains. The authors of this study only relied on the 'Scholastic Competence' and 'Global Self-Worth' (Harter, 1985b).

Aside from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership Crouch et al. (2014) also had teachers and students with and without disabilities complete the School Stressors and School Resources subscales from the LISRES—A Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory developed by Moos & Moos, (2014). Students completed all 10 items and teachers completed a modified 6-item scale based on expert

selection of relevance, with a 5-point Likert-type scale. This study examined students with and without disabilities who moved from a school that primarily educated students with disabilities into 23 inclusive public schools in a large urban school district in the Midwest.

Measuring Belonging Via Interviews. In addition to surveys, three of the nine studies relied on interviews to measure student belonging: Shogren et al., (2015)*,* Rose & Shevlin (2017), and Knesting et al. (2008). One study interviewed teachers (Knesting et al. 2008), three studies interviewed students (Knesting et al. 2008; Rose & Shevlin 2017; Shogren, 2015), one study interviewed family members (Knesting et al. 2008) and zero studies interviewed administrators. One study gathered data through the use of student observations (Knesting et al. 2008).

Rose & Shevlin (2017) and Shogren et al. (2015) conducted student interviews with students with and without disabilities while Knesting et al. (2008) conducted interviews with students with disabilities, their teachers and parents. Across all the studies, the interviews were conducted at school. Rose & Shevlin (2017) completed a four-year longitudinal study and Shogren et al. (2015) and Knesting et al.'s study was completed within one school year, interviewing the participants a single time. All three studies relied on a standard set of interview questions, but on occasion the researchers used prompts in order to elicit responses and ensure that each interviewee was able to respond. The interviews took between 15-60 minutes and transcripts were kept verbatim, without any changes to ensure authenticity to the pupil's voice.

Early in this review I provided details on the study conducted by Shogren and colleagues (2015), in this section I report details on their interview methods. Shogren, et

al., (2015) interviewed 11 focus groups comprised of six students without disabilities and five students with disabilities and two individual interviews with students identified as having severe disabilities with a peer buddy across six schools recognized for their successful implementation of inclusive practices. School personnel informed the research team about any individualized supports students needed to participate in focus groups, and assisted in identifying those whom an individualized interview would be more appropriate. The research team developed an interview protocol to promote comparability across facilitators and focus groups. The facilitators re-worded and re-phrased the questions as necessary to ensure that all participants clearly understood the questions and could respond in meaningful ways.

In a previous section I mentioned the survey method relied on by Rose & Shevlin (2017), in addition to the survey, Rose and Shevlin interviewed students that have been evaluated for special education in their study. Here I provide more details about their study and interview method. Rose & Shevlin (2017) completed a four-year longitudinal study in Ireland, to understand how pupils with special educational needs perceive their level of acceptance and belonging in a "mainstream-learning environment" (p. 67). The researchers draw on data collected through interviews with children with disabilities that learn in inclusive environments and the staff that educate them. The sample size ensured students from urban, rural, a range of socio-economic statues and all categories of disabilities identified by the Department of Education were represented. The study consists of 120 students with disabilities interviewed attending 10 primary schools, 10 post primary schools, (N=10) and special education schools (N=4) from across the Republican of Ireland (Rose & Shevlin, p.70, 2017). The researchers interviewed each

student two times with two years between each interview. A known adult was present for all interviews. On some occasions, the authors relied on forms of augmentative communication so the child could participate fully in the process. Rose & Shevlin (2017) relied on a standard set of interview questions, and on occasion the researchers prompted the students in order to elicit responses and ensure that each interviewee was able to respond. The interviews took between 15-30 minutes and transcripts were kept verbatim, without any changes to ensure authenticity to the pupil's voice.

Knesting et al. (2008) set out to examine the experiences of nine students identified as having a mild disability during their first year in an inclusive middle school in a Midwestern state. The authors gathered data through the use of interviews with students, teachers, and parents—as well as completing classroom observations. The study addressed these three questions: "(a) What are the students' general experiences, instructional practices, and the social interactions in these inclusive middle-level classrooms; (b) How do the experiences of these students influence their initial and ongoing attitudes toward middle school; and (c) How do teachers' and parents' perceptions of the experiences of the students compare with the students' own perceptions of this inclusive middle-level educational setting?" (p. 269).

Through the use of interviews Knesting and colleagues (2008) asked students with disabilities to compare their "primary and a middle school experiences, describe how they felt about receiving special education services, talk about their relationships with teachers, and discuss their coursework expectations and the support they thought they would/did receive" (p. 269). Parents of the nine students with disabilities selected for the study were asked to describe their child's experience "transitioning from the

primary to the middle school and to discuss their concerns and satisfactions with their

child's experiences" (p. 269). Teachers were asked to discuss the students' "strengths

and weaknesses, describe their academic abilities and social interactions, and evaluate

how well the school's special education services met the students' needs" (p. 269).

Interviews were the researchers main source of data collection.

Table 1.0: Measures of Student Belonging for K-12 Students with

Disabilities and Students Without Disabilities in Inclusive Environments

K-12 Study on Students with Disabilities and Belonging in Inclusive Environments	Measures
Crouch, R., Keys, C. B., & McMahon, S. D. (2014). Student–teacher relationships matter for school inclusion: School belonging, disability, and school transitions. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 42*(1), 20-30. doi:10.1080/10852352.2014.855054	• Teachers - Modified 5-item scale, based on the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale • Students - Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale • Teachers & Students - School Stressors and School Resources subscales from the LISRES—A Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory (Students completed all 10 items and teachers completed a modified 6-item scale)
Frederickson, N., Simmonds, E., Evans, L., & Soulsby, C. (2007). Assessing the social and affective outcomes of inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education, 34*(2), 105-115. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8578.2007.00463.x	• Students - Social Inclusion Survey • Students - 'Guess Who' Social Behavior, Bullying and Victim Measures • Students - Abbreviated version of Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership
Hagborg, W. J. (1998). School membership among students with learning disabilities and nondisabled students in a semirural high school. *Psychology in the Schools, 35*(2), 183-188. doi:10.1002/(sici)1520-	• Students - Abbreviated version of Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership • Students - Social Support Scale • Students - Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC)

6807(199804)35:23.0.co;2-8	
Hagborg, W. (2003). Sources of school belonging for students with learning disabilities. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. doi:10.1037/e344582004-001	• Students - Psychological Sense of School Members Scale • Students - Harter's Social Support Scale • Student - Self-Perception Profile for Children
Knesting, K., Hokanson, C., & Waldron, N. (2008). Settling in: Facilitating the transition to an inclusive middle school for students with mild disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 55*(3), 265-276. doi:10.1080/10349120802268644	• Students, Teachers, Parents - Interviews • Classroom observations
Nepia, L. D., Facondini, R., Nucci, F., & Peru, A. (2013). Evidence from full-inclusion model: The social position and sense of belonging of students with special educational needs and their peers in Italian primary school. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 28*(3), 319-332. doi:10.1080/08856257.2013.777530	• Students - Psychological Sense of School Membership • Students - 'Like to Work' and 'Like to Play', subtests from The Social Inclusion Survey
Rose, C. A., Simpson, C. G., & Ellis, S. K. (2016). The relationship between school belonging, sibling aggression and bullying involvement: Implications for students with and without disabilities. *Educational Psychology,36*(8), 1462-1486. doi:10.1080/01443410.2015.1066757	• Students - Psychological Sense of School Members Scale • Students - Six-item sibling aggression scale • Students - University of Illinois Fighting Scale • Students - University of Illinois Bully Scale • Students - University of Illinois Victimization Scale
Rose, R., Shevlin, M., (2017). A sense of belonging: Children's' views of acceptance in "inclusive"	• Students - Abbreviated version of Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale

mainstream schools. *International Journal of Whole Schooling. 13*, (1), 65-80	• Student - Interview
Shogren, K., Gross, J., Forber-Pratt, A., Francis, G., Satter, A., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 40*(4), 243-260. http://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915 583493	• Student- Interview with developed interview protocol

Belonging and Students With and Without Disabilities in Segregated versus Inclusive Environments

Only two of the nine studies compared the sense of belonging of students identified as having a disability and students without disabilities in inclusive versus segregated environments (Frederickson et al. 2007; Hagborg 1998), one study also reported on this finding (Crouch and colleagues, 2014) as part of a larger investigation on teacher to student relationships.

Hagborg (1998) studied 37 students identified with learning disabilities (28 boys and 9 girls), and 37 students without identified disabilities (28 boys and 9 girls) from a high school in upstate New York. Students with disabilities received special education support in a resource room for one or two periods a day, while they obtained all their academic instruction in the general education environment. To measure their sense of belonging students with and without disabilities completed the full Psychological Sense of School Membership developed by Goodenow (1993). Given the low reading level of students with learning disabilities, all questionnaires were read aloud while students

followed along, independently marking their responses (p. 185). The key findings of this study demonstrated that "high school students with LD reported their level of school membership on the PSSM as roughly equivalent to that of ND (non-disabled) students" (p.186). The Psychological Sense of School Membership relies on a 5-point likert scale to respond to each of the 18 statements. Hagborg (1998) reported the average score for students without disabilities as 3.36 and the average score for students with disabilities as 3.55, demonstrating a slightly higher average for students with disabilities. The data reported by Hagborg (1998) is not disaggregated beyond disability status.

In the previous section I provided details on Frederickson's (2007) study, here I report their findings comparing students with and without disabilities. Frederickson (2007) replicated Hagborg's (1998) study examining school membership among students with disabilities (89 students) compared to their classmates without disabilities (308 students) in the United Kingdom by exploring 397 eight to 11 year old students', feelings of belonging within 14 mainstream schools and also found no significant differences between pupils with disabilities compared to pupils without disabilities. The authors looked at a correlation across the entire sample from the self-reporting on the belonging scale and the other measures "which rely on peer report to show a coherent set of significant but modest relationships" (Frederickson, et al., 2007, p. 111). Frederickson and colleagues (2007) explain that acceptance is positively associated with a strong sense of belonging and peer rejection negatively so (p. 111). The students that are rated by their peers to be disruptive, frequently seeking help, a bully and to "a lesser extent, a victim of bullying" all tend to report a lower sense of belonging (Frederickson, et al., 2007, p. 113). On the other hand, those rated, as cooperative by their peers, tend to report

a higher sense of belonging. Although equivalent levels of belonging have been found between pupils with disabilities and students without disabilities within an inclusive setting, this construct is yet to be examined in a way that compares students with disabilities sense of belonging in an inclusive setting, vs. students with disabilities' sense of belonging in a segregated setting.

In a previous section I provided details on the study conducted by Crouch et al., in this section I report the results of their findings related to a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities as they transitioned into an inclusive setting from a school that served primarily student's with disabilities. Crouch and colleagues (2014) completed a study that includes participants who have both student-reported and teacher reported survey data using an abbreviated version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale. Through analyzing the Psychology Sense of Membership Scale data, the authors determined that school belonging was lower when students perceived their relationships with teachers and other adults at their school as negative, and higher when teacher-student relationships were perceived as positive. Additionally, "teachers' ratings of student's level of belonging were consistent with students' ratings" (p. 24). Crouch and colleagues (2014) found that students with more severe disabilities reported higher school belonging than students with less severe or no disabilities.

Previously, I provided details on the study conducted by Knesting & colleagues (2008), in this section I report their findings as it relates to inclusion and belonging. Following the analysis of this study, the authors outlined three themes that exist within the data. The first theme identified relates to the demands of navigating a new environment and how that increased students' anxiety. Knesting et al. (2008) cite

examples of learning different classroom rules, navigation of the halls learning the routine, and accessing lockers. Although the authors only evaluated students with disabilities, they felt theses skills were particularly difficult for students with disabilities and that "several students did not develop a level of comfort until the end of the semester" or by the end of the year (p. 271). How students "satisfied their need for belonging" surfaced as the second theme (p. 271). Students' ability to build friendships and connect to classmates varied, "teachers often provided an important personal connection and a sense of belonging to middle schoolers until peer relationships were more firmly established" (p. 272). Lastly, the third theme was how "students perceptions of school influenced their attitude towards [receiving] help" (p. 271). This finding may stem from the special education service delivery model at this middle school. The school relied on students to seek out assistance when they needed help, "special education teachers provided direct services in some general education classes, while in other classes students could choose to go to the Student Support Centre for assistance" (p. 272).

Limitations and Summary

I identified four limitations of these nine studies. First, the studies reflect great variability on the extent to which students with disabilities receive an education within general education and how the researchers define inclusion. How inclusion was defined or described varied greatly from study to study ranging from students special educational needs being met through universal academic and social-emotional supports as part of the general education curriculum as explained in the study conducted by Shogren and colleagues (2015), to a description of students receiving special education services when pulled into a resource room one to two times per day as described in Hagborg's study

(1998), yet both studies refer to the service delivery model as inclusive. In other studies, the authors did not make clear the extent to which students with disabilities were included (Rose & Shevlin, 2017, Nepia et al., 2013, Frederickson et al., 2007).

A second limitation identified in the nine studies is not representing all disability categories. Rather than addressing students of all disability categories, several of the studies examined particular disability labels, including students identified with learning disabilities (Hagborg, 1998; Hagborg 2003) only students with mild to moderate disabilities, excluding students with significant intellectual disabilities (Knesting, 2008; Knesting, et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2015) and two did not report the disability categories examined (Rose & Shevlin, 2017; Shogren et al. 2015). By excluding some disability areas, it naturally limits the findings of the study.

Of the nine studies examined, none provided data on belonging for students that are typically marginalized in the educational system, including students of color, poverty, disability, linguistically diverse, sexual/gender identity, and their intersections (Capper & Frattura, 2018). We do not know the experiences of other students in the school who are typically marginalized and their level of belongingness given the research that shows that typically marginalized students (e.g., students of color (Capper & Frattura, 2018), students experiencing poverty (Capper & Frattura, 2018) and students on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) spectrum (Robinson & Espelage, 2012) all experience lower levels of belonging in school. Such that though schools may provide more inclusive experiences of students with disabilities, they may in turn be exerting marginalizing experiences on students of color without disabilities or other typically

marginalized students without disabilities (Frattura, personal communication, Oct. 21, 2018).

Given this gap in the literature, this study addressed this research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? In seeking to answer this research question, I relied on a mixed-methodology approach, which I address in next in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the research methods for this study. I detail the research design, participants and data sources, analysis, and pilot study. The chapter ends with ethical considerations.

Design

To address the research question, I relied on a mixed-method design using a survey research method and qualitative interviews. Mixed-method researchers combine qualitative (e.g. interviews) and quantitative data (data sets and surveys). Bogdan & Biklan (2007) borrow Miles and Huberman's explanation about mixed-methods approach stating, "Qualitative data can be used to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same subjects or site" (p. 41). Survey methods collect information from, or about people to describe, compare or explain knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Fink, 2003; Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Wiersma (2000) reports that survey research methodology is frequently used in social sciences, especially in education. The purpose of survey research is to describe characteristics of people, groups or organizations (Berends, 2006). Fink (2003) explains how this is accomplished by asking questions about people's feelings, motivations, plans, beliefs and individual backgrounds.

Qualitative research allows one to explore particular behaviors, experiences and gain an understanding of different perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1994). Cresewell (2003) further explains this method as, qualitative data enables the research to develop a level of detail about the individual and to be highly involved in the actual experiences of

the participants" (p. 181). Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) claim that qualitative research:

> Involves empiricism, knowledge production, systematic implementation of methical tools, production of science-based evidence and coherent articulation of results, and go on to define qualitative research as a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature of phenomenon in a particular context (p. 195).

To address the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? I collected both quantitative and qualitative data.

Participants and Data Sources

Within this study, I relied on survey results from two instruments and interviews with school administrators. Within this section, I describe data source #1 (YRBS data), data source #2, (degree of inclusion survey) and data source #3 (administrator interviews).

Data Source #1: YRBS Survey Data Set

To determine to what extent do all schools in the high school experience a sense of belonging at the school, I analyzed the Wisconsin 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) that includes a belonging score for all students in the high school. I first explain the national development of the YRBS and then I discuss the Wisconsin implementation of the YRBS and how I accessed the data**.**

National YRBS. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey was developed by the Division of Adolescent and School Health, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Division of Adolescent and School Health and representatives from

19 other federal agencies collaborated to develop the YRBS. The survey was designed to monitor priority risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of mortality, morbidity, and social problems prevalent in adolescents and young adults in the United States (McCoy, 2018; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1994).

In 1989, the process began for developing the survey with the help of a steering committee, consisting of representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies known to have expertise in six major categories: 1) behavior leading to unintended (accidental) injury and intentional injuries, 2) alcohol and other drug use, 3) sexual behavior that results in sexually transmitted disease, including HIV, and unintended pregnancy, 4) tobacco use, 5) unhealthy dietary habits and 6) physical inactivity (Kolbe, Kann, & Collins, 1993; McCoy, 2018).

Members from the steering committee identified the highest priority behaviors related to their field of expertise, and then recommended questions to measure those high-risk practices. The survey includes 99-item multiple-choice questionnaire designed to identify behavioral health risks in young people. The questions are based on the leading contributing factors for morbidity and mortality, and are associated with a rationale that correlated to a related health objective from the Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2000 Report. The panel of experts considered the following questions in relation to their area of expertise: 1) what are the most important health outcomes that result from risk behaviors in your categorical area? 2) What national health objectives for the year 2000, presented in Healthy People 2000 are relevant to your categorical area? 3) What are the highest priority health behaviors

established during youth that should be addressed to help reduce the most important health outcomes? 4) What questions should be used to measure each priority behaviors most effectively (Kolbe, Kann, & Collins, p. 4, 1993)?

Each question was designed to monitor the following behaviors; traffic safety, weapons and violence, suicide, tobacco use, alcohol, and other drug use, sexual behavior and diet, nutrition and exercise, and reports various sub-score indicators based off of these categories including mental health, bullying, school safety, sexual and dating violence, and sense of belonging (McCoy, 2018). The national sampling frame for the 2017 YRBS consisted of "regular public (including charter schools), Catholic and other non-public schools with students in at least one of grades 9-12 in the 50 states and the District of Columbia" (US Department of Health & Human Services, p. 3, 2017). The CDC reports that the only schools excluded from the survey were schools operated by the "Department of Defense, Bureau of Indian Education schools, and vocational schools" servicing only special education populations (US Department of Health & Human Services, p. 3, 2018).

Wisconsin's Implementation of the YRBS. Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction has administered the YRBS every two years beginning in 1993. The State's Department of Public Instruction and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) randomly identifies 50 high schools to represent Wisconsin's official YRBS data collection. DPI notifies these 50 high schools directly and encourages them to participate in the survey as part of the national data sample. Other districts and agencies in the state of Wisconsin may choose to independently administer the YRBS, outside of the CDC's

official sample. This study included the 147 high schools that participated in the YRBS survey in 2017, outside of the CDC sample.

Wisconsin high schools rely on the YRBS as a tool to discover differences and examine changes related to youth behaviors. In 2015, a partnership between all 10 public school districts in Marathon County, the Marathon County Health Department and the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point created the first ever Marathon County-wide Youth Risk Behavior Survey aggregate data set (Healthy Marathon County, 2017). In Dane County, Wisconsin a committee of educators, public health professionals, project funders and parent representatives have created their own risk behavior survey for grades 7-12, known as the Dane County Youth Assessment. The survey includes both positive and risk behaviors across contexts of schools, peer, family and community relations. The survey includes items from the CDC's YRBS and other national surveys (Dane County Human Services, 2015). These two Wisconsin counties will use these data to capture youth's opinions; concerns, behaviors, attitudes and experiences on a range of topics and to better inform the local decisions to improve the lives of youth.

In 2017, Wisconsin obtained the sufficient school and student participation to be representative of the entire state within a 95% confidence interval of students in grades 9-12. The State's Department of Public Instruction administers the YRBS every two years since 1993, but in 2015 the survey failed to secure the target response rate, thus making 2013 the most recent dataset prior to the success of the 2017 survey (McCoy, 2018).

Wisconsin 2017 YRBS Findings. In 2017, students from 220 WI high schools completed the survey, 43 of which were part of the CDC national sample, and 30 were private or alterative high schools. After removing schools from the CDC sample (43) and

the private or alterative schools (30), 147 public schools remained. Those 147 public high schools are included in my study.

Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction reports on the 43 high schools that comprise the CDC's sample. According to the WDPI, in the spring of 2017, "2,067 students from the 43 public, charter, or alternative high schools in Wisconsin completed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey" as part of the national sample (McCoy, p. 2, 2018). The Department of Public Instruction reports the "school response rate was 88% (43/50 high schools participated), the student response rate was also 88%, and the overall response rate was 77% (overall response rate = number of participating schools/number of eligible sampled schools x number of usable questionnaires/number of eligible students sampled) (McCoy, p. 2, 2018; US Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). The results are representative of all Wisconsin students in grades 9-12. Students are asked to self-report their age, sex, grade and race. The demographic characterizes of the sample are as follows:

Table 1.1: Demographic Characteristics of Wisconsin and of the 2017 Sample

Race	WI %	YRBS Sample %
Black	9.2	8.6
Hispanic/ Latino	11.8	10.2
White	70.4	73.9
Other Races	8.7	7.3

Grade Level	YRBS Sample %
9th Grade	25.4
10th Grade	25.1
11th Grade	25.1
12th Grade	24.3

Gender	WI %	YRBS WI Sample %
Females	48.5	48.7
Males	51.5	51.3

The survey included students with and without disabilities, but the participation of students with disabilities is not directly monitored. A question on the YRBS survey, allows students to self-report having a physical disability or long-term health problem. The question reads as follows: "Do you have any physical disabilities or long-term health problems? (Long-term means 6 months or more)" (YRBS, 2017). DPI uses this question to analyze the data based on students with "disabilities or illness" (McCoy, 2018). Thus the survey does not distinguish between students with a physical disability or long term health problem or between the 10 disability areas recognized by Wisconsin, including Autism, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Behavioral Disability, Other Health Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Speech and Language Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Orthopedic Impairment and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Within the YRBS, students were directly asked "Do you agree or disagree that you feel like you belong at your school?" (YRBS, 2017). Students may select from the following options; Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. Students that select 'agree' or 'strongly agree' count towards the overall percentage of students having a positive sense of belonging. Overall, 70.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they belong at their school. WDPI also reported that a student's "race gender, and sexual orientation play a big role in whether they belong" (McCoy, 2018, p.4). Thus, the results of the 43 high schools in WI that were part of the CDC 2017 YRBS data set, show indicators of school belonging remained "high and steady," and white straight males reported the highest levels of belonging, while other groups, including "females, students of color, students with disabilities, LGBT students, and

students with D's or F's reported a lower sense of belonging, higher victimization rate and a higher risks of mental health concerns" (McCoy, 2018, p. 4).

Key findings related to student sense of belonging included that "students who report having strong family and teacher support, as well as high levels of school belonging, are less likely to engage in risk behaviors (e.g., physical fights, carrying a weapon, alcohol and drug use, risky sexual behaviors) and more likely to report positive mental health and higher grades" (McCoy, 2018, p. 4). Figure 1.0 depicts the various demographic groups and their level of belonging. WDPI reports that white males report a higher sense of belonging (77.7%) compared to males from other races (64.7%) (See figure 1.0) (McCoy, 2018).

Figure 1.0: Sense of Belonging Results WI YRBS 2017 (McCoy, 2018)
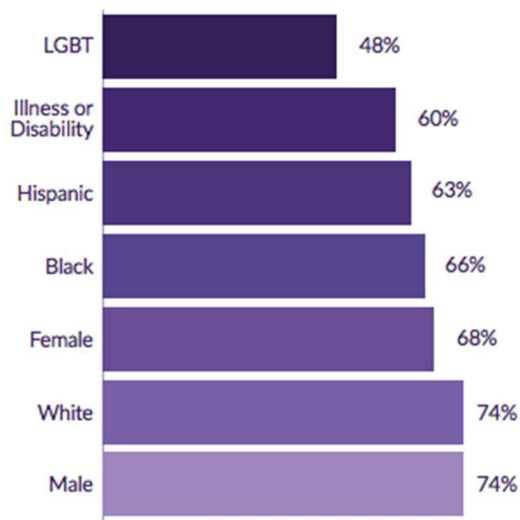
Importantly, I learned in the study that though DPI reports out this disaggregation of belonging data in their annual YRBS summary report, high schools participating in the YRBS do not receive disaggregated data for any aspects of the YRBS, including the belonging score from DPI. That is, at the high school level, principals are not able to discern the degree of belonging for example that African American students or students

from low-income homes experience versus other students. Several of the principal

participants commented on this lack of disaggregated data in the interview findings.

Accessing the WI YRBS Data. I first submitted my University of Wisconsin

IRB application on January 10th, 2019 and received approval from the IRB on February

25th, 2019. After approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of

Wisconsin-Madison, I submitted an application for confidential data to Wisconsin's

Department of Public Instruction. YRBS data is not made available to the public.

Therefore, I completed the confidential data application through DPI. DPI reviewed the

purpose, scope and methods to ensure confidentially of my study.

Within my application to DPI for confidential data, I requested the names of the

schools that participated in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the survey data for each

participant without personal identifiable information and the data from the 43 high

schools that were part of the CDC sample. To learn about DPI's data application process,

I initiated an email with the person who oversees the confidential protocol at DPI.

Through my correspondence, I learned that the sense of belonging data from the 2017

YBRS was available and was encouraged to submit my request seeking all the data,

including the disaggregated data. It was within this correspondence that I learned that the

data collected from the school districts that were part of the CDC sample would be

unavailable due to confidentiality agreements between DPI and the CDC, but the 177

high schools that participated in the YRBS outside of the sample would be available. I

submitted my application to obtain the YRBS data to DPI on December 18, 2018.

On February 21, 2019 the data use agreement was approved by DPI.

I did not receive the YBRS data until March 7, 2019. I then discovered errors in the data, which I further explain in my findings. I received the final corrected data from DPI on April 5, 2019. Within my application, I requested disaggregated l data, but the data received was at the building level and not disaggregated. This prompted me to reach back out to DPI to inquire about my request. At this time, I was informed that they would not make available the disaggregated data for my study. I decided to move forward with the study relying on building level belonging data that was not disaggregated.

As a result of only receiving building level belonging data that was not disaggregated, I changed my interview questions accordingly to ensure I gained an understanding of principal perceptions of belonging for students typically on the margins. Previously, the interview questions required administrators to respond to the level of belonging for each student demographic at their school. For example, if I had had the disaggregated YRBS survey data, I could have asked the following: l "On the YRBS, 30% of students of color agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging in your high school, versus 70% white students. Why do you believe that to be so?" After receiving school level belonging data not disaggregated by student demographic group, I made adjustments to the interview protocol. I added four additional questions to better understand the sense of belonging of students of color, English Language Learners, students from low-income families and students that identify as LGBTQ. The questions required administrators to describe the extent to which these demographic areas perceive themselves as belonging in their school.

The dataset I received from DPI included the YRBS results from177 high schools, 147 public and 30 private high schools. This study focused on the 147 public schools that completed the YRBS in 2017 that were not part of the CDC sample. Relying on each school's website, I located the associate principal(s) and principal's email addresses, accounting for 225 administrators. I then emailed all 225 administrators encouraging them to participate in the degree of inclusion survey. I further discuss the details of the Degree of Inclusion survey in an upcoming section.

YRBS: Trustworthiness, Validity & Assumptions. I made certain assumptions of the YRBS survey. The important assumptions that I made are as follows; (a) students would respond to the survey questions with truthful answers. The Centers for Disease Control researchers found that students, who view the survey as important feel assured they will remain anonymous and know their privacy will be protected, are likely to give reliable data (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1994). Others researching similar topics have supported the validity of self-reported data (Johnson, O'Malley & Bachman, 1994; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1994). Another important assumption (b) is the belief that the Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a valid and reliable instrument that accurately measures students' health risk behaviors. The CDC does not report validity and reliability data for the instrument.

A third assumption suggests that (c) school districts and communities would be supportive of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Several national organizations are in support of the YRBS, including The American Association of School Administrators, American Medical Association, American School Health Association, and the National

Association of the State Boards of Education, National Education Association, and the National PTA. However, not all school districts are supportive of risk behavior surveys. Some may believe that the survey will influence students to initiate or increase high-risk behaviors. Students are exposed to risk behaviors through a variety of avenues including media, school, family and community. Koble, Kann & Collins (1993) argue that a small number of questions on any topic are not likely to cause a significant change in behaviors.

Fourth, the survey assumes that the adolescents who participate in the YRBS understand and can appropriately respond to the questions about health-risk behaviors. The survey is written at a 7th grade reading level and designed in a way that allows students to complete it within one class period. This assumption may have impacted students who struggle to read at grade level, or completely excluded the participation of students with significant intellectual disabilities, or other students with disabilities that were not offered the appropriate support to complete the survey by their local school district.

Of the 225 administrators I invited to complete the Degree of Inclusion survey, 37 principals and associate principals, from 34 different high schools completed my survey. Of those 34 high schools, I discovered errors in five of the high school's YRBS responses and I eliminated them from my study. Within my study, I examined the one question related to student's sense of belonging from the 28 public high schools that participated in the 2017 YRBS and Degree of Inclusion survey. I then compared the YRBS's sense of belonging scores to the Degree of Inclusion survey results and administrator interviews, data set two and three.

Data Source #2: Degree of Inclusion Survey. To address my research question, to determine if the degree to which students with disabilities are included impacts the sense of belonging for all students in the school. I then compared the YRBS sense of belonging survey data from the 28 high schools that completed the Degree of Inclusion survey that I developed from the literature. The Degree of Inclusion survey is a 10 question, multiple-choice survey measuring the degree of inclusion of their high school. The Degree of Inclusion survey required school principals and associate principals to reflect on the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities that exists within each high school (see Appendix B).

As I described above, I sent the survey to 225 administrators from 147 public high schools. I sent two follow-up emails encouraging administrators to participate in the survey. The survey closed after 20 days. Thirty-Seven school administrators from 34 school districts successfully completed the survey. Five of the participating high schools were omitted from the study due to errors found in their data provided by DPI, leaving 28 high schools in my study. As a reminder, the participants and errors are further discussed in the findings chapters.

Developed from the literature, the Degree of Inclusion survey questions examined the degree to which students identified with specific disabilities are proportionally represented in the general education and extracurricular environments at their high schools. Other questions examined the extent to which students labeled with a disability receive special education services in the general education setting.

I assigned a point value to each response to a question, (1. Not at all, 2. Sometimes, 3. Most of the time, 4. Nearly all the time, 5. All the time). I calculated the total and assigned a "degree of inclusion" using the scale below (see table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Degree of Inclusion Scale

Inclusive Scale:	Range
Very Inclusive	45 – 50
Mostly Inclusive	35 – 44
Somewhat Inclusive	25 – 34
Minimally Inclusive	15 – 24
Not Inclusive	0 – 14

At three high schools, both the principal and assistant principals completed the Degree of Inclusion Survey. I averaged the responses of these three high schools, producing a mean score to represent that high school. I placed the high schools in order based on their degree of inclusion mean score. I asked the seven administrators from high schools who reported the highest degree of inclusion and the seven high schools that reported the lowest degree of inclusion if they would participate in an interview to learn more about their inclusive practices. Ten of the 14 invited administrators agreed to be interviewed. I further discuss the interviews in an upcoming section.

Degree of Inclusion: Trustworthiness, Validity & Assumptions. I also made assumptions about the Degree of Inclusion survey. The first (a) assume administrators accurately reported their scores. When completing the Degree of Inclusion survey, the responding administrators may have responded in a socially desirable way and to respond more positively than what students with disabilities actually experience at their school. Social desirability is typically considered a major source of response bias in survey research (Selltiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976).

I also (b) assumed the Degree of Inclusion survey is a valid, reliable measure. Cohen et al. (2007), explain the importance of validity as a way to ensure the study accurately represents events and phenomena and develops explanatory concepts and theories. Following Eisenhart and Howe (1992) recommendations, I took steps to ensure a standard for validity: (a) fit between research questions and data collection and analysis methods, (b) effective application of data collection and analysis techniques, (c) alertness to and coherence of prior knowledge, (d) informative contributions to the field of education and ethical conduct (i.e., external and internal value constraints), and (e) comprehensiveness.

Data Set #3: Administrator Interviews

For the third data set, I interviewed building administrators of 10 Wisconsin high schools that participated in both the YRBS in 2017 and the Degree of Inclusion survey. In this section, I first explain how I determined the participants of the interview and how I administered the interview protocol.

Qualitative Interviews. I interviewed ten high school building administrators that participated in the YRBS in 2017 and the Degree of Inclusion survey to gain a better understanding of the degree of inclusion and sense of belonging that exist for all students at their high school. I designed the interview questions to assess the degree of inclusion and perceived sense of belonging students experience at their high school (See Appendix D).

As I described previously, I asked 14 principals (from the seven schools that scored the highest degree of inclusion and seven that scored the lowest) to participate in an interview to assess how inclusion of students with disabilities impacts the sense of

belonging of all students at their high school. Of the 14 administrators invited, ten agreed

to the interviews (six that scored low on the Degree of Inclusion survey, and four that

scored somewhat higher). Nine of the administrators I interviewed were principals, and

one was an associate principal. I conducted eight of the ten interviews in person at their

high school, at an agreed time. I conducted two interviews through a phone call. I used

an iPhone with a dual microphone system to record the interviews. I relied on a

confidential, human transcription company, 'Rev.com,' to transcribe all audio recordings.

I deleted the recordings d from the phone after being transcribed.

  Qualitative Interviews: Trustworthiness, Validity & Assumptions. Much like

the YRBS sense of belonging score and Degree of Inclusion survey, I made certain

assumptions about the qualitative interviews. The first (a) assumption, social desirability

may also exist in a qualitative format. Within education today, school personnel are

pressured with finding a balance between portraying their school district in a positive

light, yet recognizing and addressing their shortcomings. This thought process may have

lead to social desirability from the principal interviews, to report their school as more

inclusive and that students feel a sense of belonging more than what the students actually

experience.

  The second (b) assumption I made is that it is a valid, reliable measure. To ensure

the validly of the study, the ten interviews reached data saturation. Maxwell, 1998;

Merriam, 1998). I report the data in sufficient detail and completeness, ensuring others

could draw similar interpretations.

Analysis

In this analysis section, I describe considerations and hypothesis, and the correlational analysis I conducted. I explain how I addressed the statistical relationship between datasets and the correlational tests I ran.

Considerations and Hypotheses.

1) The sense of belonging of all students (students with and without disabilities) from high schools with a higher degree of inclusion was compared to those that fall further on the segregation continuum when educating students with disabilities.

   a. **Hypothesis 1.** Schools who score higher on the sense of belonging subtest on the YRBS are schools that are more inclusive of students with disabilities according to the Degree of Inclusion survey

   b. **Hypothesis 2.** Schools who score lower on the YRBS sense of belonging subtest, are schools that are less inclusive according to the Degree of Inclusion survey.

   c. **Hypothesis 3.** Through the interview, administrators identify students attending their high school as having a higher sense of belonging than reflected in the YRBS sense of belonging scores.

   d. **Hypothesis 4.** Through the interview, administrators identify their high school as being somewhat more inclusive than reflected in the data collected from the Degree of Inclusion survey.

Correlational Analysis.

To answer the research question and analyze the data, I relied on a correlational analysis between the Degree of Inclusion survey and YRBS sense of belonging score. This method is recommended by Johnson and Wichern (2002) as an appropriate technique to quantify the associations between two or more sets of variables. Thus, I analyzed the relationship between the Degree of Inclusion survey results and the YRBS sense of belonging scores. These analyses allowed a thorough correlational study between the YRBS sense of belonging score and Degree of Inclusion survey results.

I abstracted the raw data from the YRBS sense of belonging scores from the dataset provided by DPI. I combined the responses from students that agree and strongly agree as having a sense of belonging in their high school and then divided by the total number of respondents to represent the percentage of each high school. I relied on these percentages to run correlational tests against each high school's Degree of Inclusion scores.

The responses to the Degree of Inclusion survey are summed across all ten questions and divided by10 to create an average response for each administrator. Responses could rank from 1 to 5. I then divided the averages by 5 to create a scale for the school administrators that were comparable to the YRBS sense of belonging results of the students. This allowed me to run correlational analysis. Three high schools had multiple administrators (associate principal and principal) complete the Degree of Inclusion survey. In those cases, I averaged their responses together to represent their high school. Further descriptions of the dataset and analysis are discussed in the findings.

Test of Normality Assumptions. Descriptive statistics were derived for the YRBS sense of belonging scores and Degree of Inclusion survey results to ensure

accuracy of coding and measurement. I examined means and standard deviations to check for normality, to determine the distribution of scores fit a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The normality of the data determined the skewness of the results and informed the correlational test I ran.

I examined normality of the data by assessing skewness, followed by an assessment of the Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality. The Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality was relied on to determined if the skewness value was statistically significantly and different from a normal distribution. Any statically significant value indicated evidence that the data was not from a normally distrusted sample. I also examined histogram plots produced by running SPSS graphs to determine if departures exist from normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Correlations. To test the relationship between Degree of Inclusion survey and sense of belonging, I ran a Spearman Rank Order correlation. The Spearman Rank Order (Spearman-Rho) correlation is the most appropriate type of correlation to run given that the variables were *not* normally distributed and I tabulated the data in rank orders (by their degree of inclusion) and the Spearman-Rho is a statistical measurement relied on to correlate rank orders. A Spearman Rank Order correlation was relied on to measure the association of two variables whose distributions were skewed (not normal). Thus, it was appropriate to use this type of correlation to measure the association between degree of inclusion and sense of belonging.

I also performed a one-way ANOVA test on the three high schools with more than one respondent to determine if a correlation existed between their responses. A null hypothesis would be rejected if the analysis results in a p-value significant at the $P < .5$

levels. Thus indicating there is not a statistical significant relationship between the responses of the associate principal and that of the principal. Retaining the null hypotheses would indicate a correlation between the administrator's responses. I report on the results of these tests in m ore detail in my findings, beginning with Chapter 3.

Pilot Study

In February of 2019, I completed a pilot study to test both the Degree of Inclusion survey and the administrator interview protocol. I sent the Degree of Inclusion survey to the principal and associate principal of a high school in Wisconsin that I was familiar with. Surveying two school administrators allowed me to check for inter-rater reliability, which checks for the extent to which the data collected in the study are correct representations of the variables measured (McHugh, 2012).

The high school enrolls about 800 students. I conducted the interview with the building principal as part of the pilot study and later the associate principal as part of my study. Furthermore, I selected this high school because it met the criteria of being a Wisconsin Public High School that completed the YRBS in 2017. Both school administrators were interested in helping me complete my pilot study and their school was easily accessible. Within this section I discuss the Degree of Inclusion pilot survey, survey results, administrator pilot interview, interview results, analysis of interview, YRBS, and Degree of Inclusion survey pilot Data, and changes made to the study as a result of the pilot study.

Degree of Inclusion Pilot Survey. I sent the Degree of Inclusion survey to both administrators through email with a link to the Qualtrics survey. I was present for the completion of both surveys and was able to time the duration of the administrators

reading through the consent and completing the 10-question survey (see table 1.3). The

building principal took time to read through the consent before completing the survey,

while the associate principal gazed over the consent and went straight to the survey. The

building principal took a total of four minutes and 14 seconds to review the consent and

complete the survey and the assistant principal took a total of three minutes and six

seconds. Surveys were given in an administrator's office, during the school day, 8 days

apart from each other with the building principal participating, first. Upon completion of

the survey, the principal immediately moved into the interview portion of the study.

TABLE 1.3: Pilot Survey Questions

Directions: Please complete this survey based on your own high school settings.					
	Not at all	Sometimes	Most of the time	Nearly all the time	All the time
1) Students with disabilities are included in the general education environment.	1	2	3	4	5
2) Students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities are included in the general education classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
3) Students with severe behavioral disabilities are included in the general education classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
4) Related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.) are provided to students in an inclusive environment.	1	2	3	4	5
5) Students with disabilities remain in the general education environment for their academic, behavior, or sensory instructional needs.	1	2	3	4	5
6) Students with disabilities attend their neighborhood school they would attend if they did not have a disability.	1	2	3	4	5

7) The needs of students with disabilities are met within the district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of schools outside of the district.	1	2	3	4	5
8) Students are proportionally represented in all settings. (For example: if the school has 15% of students with disabilities, each class/course has a similar percentage of students with disabilities).	1	2	3	4	5
9) Students with disabilities are proportionally represented in clubs and extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
10) All students are proportionally represented in all spaces (rooms, courses or classes are not set-aside for students with specific needs (e.g. ELL, special education, advanced learners, alternative education, Tier 2 and 3, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5

Pilot Study Results. Between the two principals, within the survey, questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10 were all answered the same. Questions 6 and 8 were answered differently, but the responses were within one choice of each other. Both the mean scores of the principal and associate principal's scores added up to a total score of 24, out of 50 potential points. Using the Degree of Inclusion scale, this high school scores at the upper end of 'minimally inclusive' (15-24). Considering both administrators answered the survey questions with the same building structures, supports and students in mind and they received the same mean score demonstrates the strength of the inter-rater reliability.

McHugh (2012) refers to inter-rater reliability as the accuracy and consistency of two or more independent raters. In order to determine the level of accuracy and consistency between examiners, it is customary to compare scores of two or more examiners. Bellack and Hersen (1988), describe inter-rater reliability as being important

because without reliable scoring between examiners, the remaining kinds of reliability and many other issues of validity cannot be established. Survey results and survey questions are below (see table 1.4), along with the scoring key to demonstrate how scores were rewarded (table 1.5).

Table 1.4: Pilot Study Scores

Admin	Q.1	Q.2	Q3.	Q.4	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Q.8	Q.9	Q.10	Mean
Principal	3	2	3	1	4	4	3	1	2	2	24
AP	3	2	3	1	4	3	3	2	2	2	24

Table 1.5: Pilot Study Score Rubric

Scoring Key	
Possible Responses	Scores
Not at all	1
Sometimes	2
Most of the time	3
All the time	4

As a result of piloting the Degree of Inclusion survey, I did not make any changes to the survey protocol or to the delivery method. However, changes were made as a result of piloting the administrator interview, which I explain in the next section.

Administrator Pilot Interview. Following the completion of the survey, the building principal agreed to participate in the 17-question interview (see appendix D). The interview lasted only 16 minutes, far less than I anticipated the actual interviews to

be. I contribute this to the lack of introductory and background questions needed due to the fact we were already familiar with each other. I also believe the interview was shorter because the principal chose not to elaborate on several questions. Question ten asks "what structures and systems are in place in order to build a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities?" Questions 11-14, asks about the extent to which other students on the margins such as students of color, English Language Learners, students from low income families and students that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender experience belonging at their school and why. The building principal chose not to differentiate between these student groups stating the following:

> "I don't know that my answers will be any different than they were to the above
> questions. I think our students are extraordinarily accepting of students because
> we've had students in each of those categories and I don't know that these students
> are treated any differently than any other student. And having worked in three
> different high schools I don't see that hierarchy here in this building of the
> different classes, like 'oh this group is better, these athletes are better, these fine-
> arts students…,' I see everybody gelling together, which I think is unique to this
> district."

As a result of her response to these four questions, adjustments to the protocol were made which I discuss in an upcoming section.

Analysis of Interview, YRBS, and Inclusion Survey Pilot Data. The pilot high school participated in the YRBS in 2017 and 49.7% of students strongly agree or agree that they feel like they belong at their high school—this is a low score in comparison to the state average of 70.8% (YRBS, 2017). Further, through the Degree of Inclusion

survey, the pilot high school scored minimally inclusive. These two data points are consistent with my hypothesis that schools who score lower on the YRBS sense of belonging subtest are schools that are less inclusive according to the Degree of Inclusion survey. As I stated above, this particular high school scored 'minimally inclusive' on the Degree of Inclusion survey.

Also proven to be true was my third and forth hypothesis. The principal from the pilot study described the sense of belonging in the student body to be far greater than represented in the data collected from YRBS on sense of belonging. She also felt the school was very inclusive for students with disabilities and other students on the margins, but the high school scored 'minimally inclusive' on the Degree of Inclusion survey. When asked what inclusion looks like in her building, she replied students are "scheduled just like every other student. There is no special schedule for students with disabilities; we schedule them the same way, when we create a general schedule." Her responses lacked evidence of strong inclusive practices.

Changes as a Result of the Pilot Study. As a result of the pilot study, I made changes to improve the interview protocol and my own interview delivery style. As a result of the pilot study, a question referencing each school's YRBS sense of belonging score was added to the protocol. The question reads, "Your YRBS data says _X_% of all students agree or strongly agree that they experience belonging at your school. Why is this so?" The question allows the principal to respond to the current state of belonging as recorded by students in their building.

Furthermore, as a result of the plot interview, I adjusted the four questions that ask about typically marginalized populations (students of color, ELL, students from low-

income families and students identifying LGBTQ). Instead of asking, "if they belong?" the question now reads, "to what extent do they perceive themselves belonging at school? Why is that so?" I also eliminated four questions, proven to be redundant through the responses, including; (a) what is something you are doing really well when educating students with disabilities? (b) What does the inclusion of students with disabilities look like at your school? Can you provide specific examples? (c) How do you purposely foster an environment where students with disabilities feel like they have a sense of belonging? (d) What structures and systems are in place in order to build a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities? The final interview protocol is located in 'Appendix D.'

This pilot study provided me insight on my own interview style and use of a semi-formal interview. A semi-formal structure allowed me the flexibility to ask clarifying questions, while at the same time ensuring I addressed the topics covered by my research question. Although I was intending to use this interview style throughout the pilot study, I found myself strictly sticking to the questions, asking for little to no elaboration or clarification. The pilot administrator did not offer any constructive feedback, stating, "it was good, as is." In future interviews, I allowed myself more flexibility to adjust to the interviews as I see fit while remaining within IRB guidelines.

Ethical Consideration

Participation in research can be an intimate and personal experience for individuals, especially when asking to reflect on something as personal as whether or not students experiences belonging. In order to successfully do this, I held myself to a high

moral and ethical standard. Throughout the study, I used a form of coding for all the

school district respondents to ensure I maintained anonymity. I ensured confidentiality

through the use of pseudonyms for the participating districts, schools, cities and people's

names.

Within this study, I relied on three datasets, the YRBS sense of belonging scores

of 147 high schools, the Degree of Inclusion Survey completed by 37 administrators and

interviews of ten administrators (4 that perceived their high school as more inclusive for

students with disabilities and six from high schools self-reported as minimally inclusive

for students with disabilities). In the next chapter, I review the findings of the YRBS

sense of belonging scores, the Degree of Inclusion findings and discuss the correlation

between both.

CHAPTER 3: DEGREE OF INCLUSION AND YRBS FINDINGS

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To address the research question, in this chapter, I present the findings of two of the three datasets that informed this study, the Degree of Inclusion survey and the YRBS sense of belonging scores. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I present the findings from the third dataset that informed this study, the administrator interviews.

Degree of Inclusion Survey Findings

The Degree of Inclusion survey evaluated the level of inclusive practices that exist across high schools in the state of Wisconsin. As a reminder, I determined participants by their high school's participation in the YRBS study in 2017. I sent an e-mail to all 225 principals and associate principals from the 147 high schools that completed the YRBS received inviting them to complete the Degree of Inclusion survey. I then sent two follow-up emails serving as a reminder to complete the survey within a 20-day time-period.

Of the 225 administrators, 37 administrators completed the survey, consisting of 16.4% of the administrators invited. Ten administrators began the survey and did not complete any questions. The first question of the survey prompted the administrators to review the consent form and these ten administrators did not advance from that point of the survey.

Thirty-four of the 147 high schools are represented in this sample size, 25% of the invited high schools. Twenty-three high school principals, 13 associate principals and one interim principal completed the survey (see table 1.6). All 37 participants completed the

survey within the five-minute time frame I estimated in my initial email correspondence. The ease of use and overall short duration needed to complete the survey assisted with my participation, though, the participation was lower than I expected. I discuss the possible reasons for the lower participation rate and its impact on the findings in a later section of this chapter.

Table 1.6: Survey Participants

Position	Total	Percentage
Principal	23	62%
Associate Principal	13	35%
Interim Principal	1	2.7%

In three of the high schools within the dataset, two administrators completed the survey from the same school. The principal and associate principal's scores, standard deviation and mean of these three schools are presented in table 1.7.

Table 1.7: Duplicate Schools Data Set

Schools with 2 samples	Principal	Associate Principal	Standard Deviation	Mean
Clear Lake HS	24	24	0	24
Ottawa HS	26	28	1	27
Glacier Hills HS	32	29	1.5	30.5

Administrators answered ten questions by selecting the answer that best describes their high school's degree of inclusion. Each response was awarded a point value (1. Not at all, 2. Sometimes, 3. Most of the time, 4. Nearly all the time, 5. All the time). I calculated the total and assigned each high school a degree of inclusiveness score using the scale below (see table 1.8). As previously described, three schools had multiple administrators complete the Degree of Inclusion survey, for these three schools I averaged their responses.

Table 1.8: Degree of Inclusion Scale Results

Inclusive Scale	Range	Total Schools	Percentage
Very Inclusive	45-50	0	0%
Mostly Inclusive	35-44	2	5.90%
Somewhat Inclusive	25-34	27	79.40%
Minimally Inclusive	15-24	5	14.70%
Not Inclusive	0-14	0	0%
Total		34	100%

Table 1.9 demonstrates that the majority of the schools (79.4%) fall within the somewhat

inclusive range. Two schools scored within the 'mostly inclusive range,' five schools

scored 'minimally inclusive' and zero schools scored within the 'not inclusive' range. I

further discuss this table in the reliability section in the next section. I also reported the

score range, mean, standard deviation, variance and count (see table 1.9).

Table 1.9: Degree of Inclusion Survey Data

Question	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	3	4	3.14	0.34	0.12	37
2	1	4	2.67	0.71	0.5	37
3	2	4	2.86	0.7	0.5	37
4	1	4	2.22	0.93	0.87	37
5	2	4	2.89	0.61	0.37	37
6	1	4	3.41	0.82	0.67	37
7	2	4	3.14	0.53	0.28	37
8	1	4	2.59	0.75	0.57	37
9	2	4	2.46	0.68	0.46	37
10	1	4	2.57	0.75	0.57	37

Survey Question 1. *Students with disabilities are included in the general*

education environment. Scores ranged from 'most of the time (86.49%)' to 'all of the

time (13.51%)', and a mean of 3.14, variance of 0.12, and standard deviation of 0.34 (see

figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Survey Question 1: Students with disabilities are included in the general education environment.
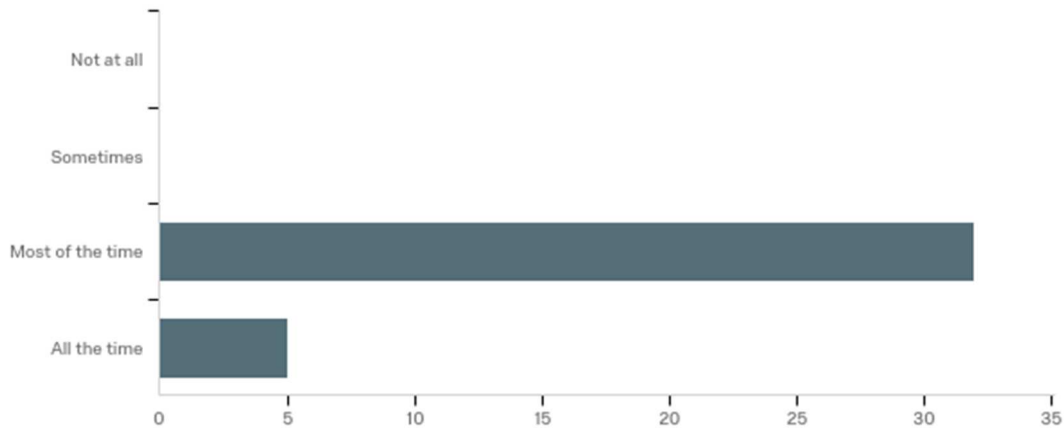
Survey Question 2. *Students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities are*

included in the general education classroom. Scores ranged from 'not at all (2.78%),'

'sometimes (38.89%),' 'most of the time (47.22%),' and 'all the time (11.11%),' and a

mean score of 2.67, variance of 0.5, and standard deviation of 0.71 (see figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Survey Question 2: Students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities are included in the general education classroom
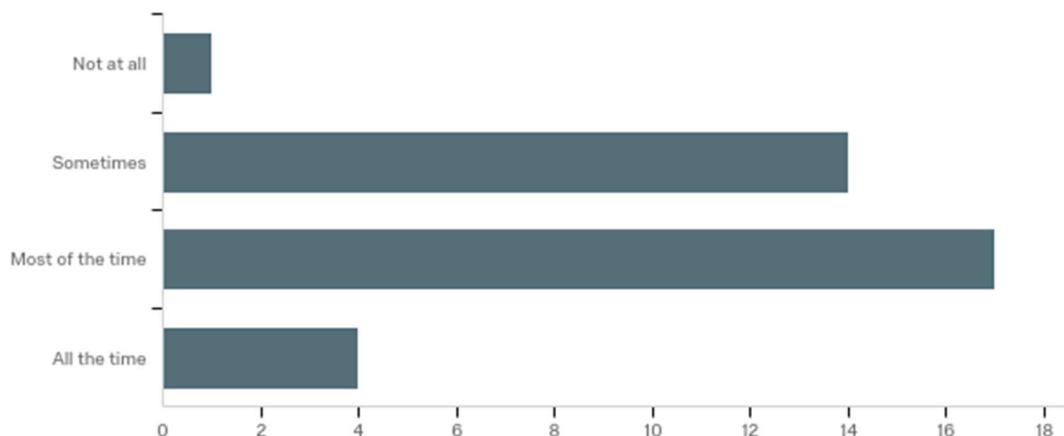
Survey Question 3. *Students with severe behavioral disabilities are included in*

the general education classroom. Scores ranged from 'sometimes (32.43%),' 'most of

the time (48.65%),' and 'all the time (18.92%),' and a mean score of 2.86, variance of

0.5, and standard deviation of 0.71 (see figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Survey Question 3: Students with severe behavioral disabilities are
included in the general education classroom.
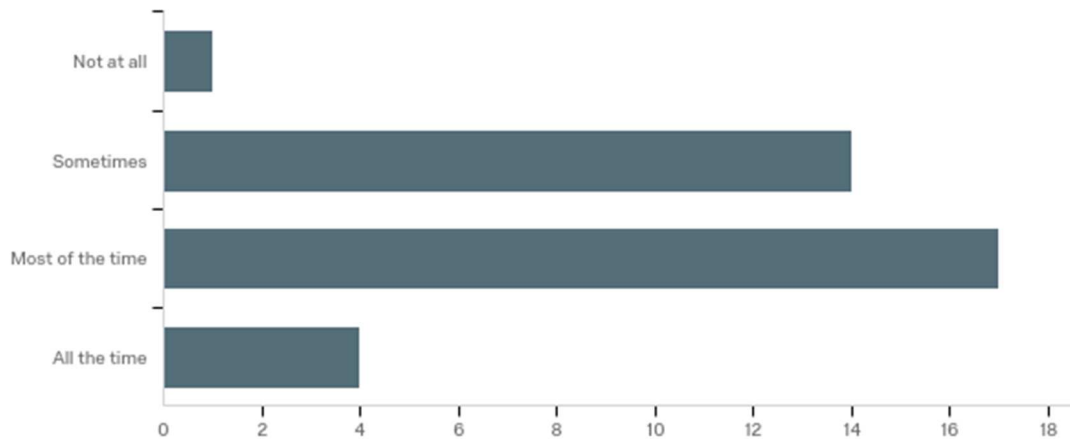
Survey Question 4. *Related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.) are*

provided to students in an inclusive environment. Scores ranged from 'not at all

(21.62%),' 'sometimes (48.65%),' 'most of the time (16.22%),' and 'all the time

(13.51%),' the mean score of 2.22, variance of 0.87, and standard deviation of 0.93 (see

figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Survey Question 4: Related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.)
are provided to students in an inclusive environment.
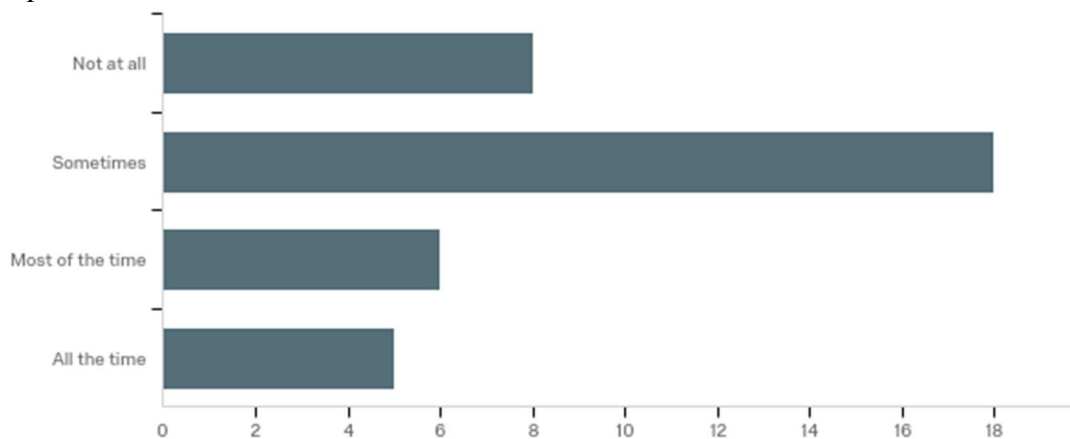
Survey Question 5. *Students with disabilities remain in the general education*

environment for their academic, behavior, or sensory instructional needs. Scores ranged

from 'sometimes (24.32%),' 'most of the time (62.16%),' and 'all the time (13.51%),'

and a mean score of 2.89, variance of 0.37, and standard deviation of 0.61 (see figure

1.5).

Figure 1.5: Survey Question 5: Students with disabilities remain in the general
education environment for their academic, behavior, or sensory instructional needs.
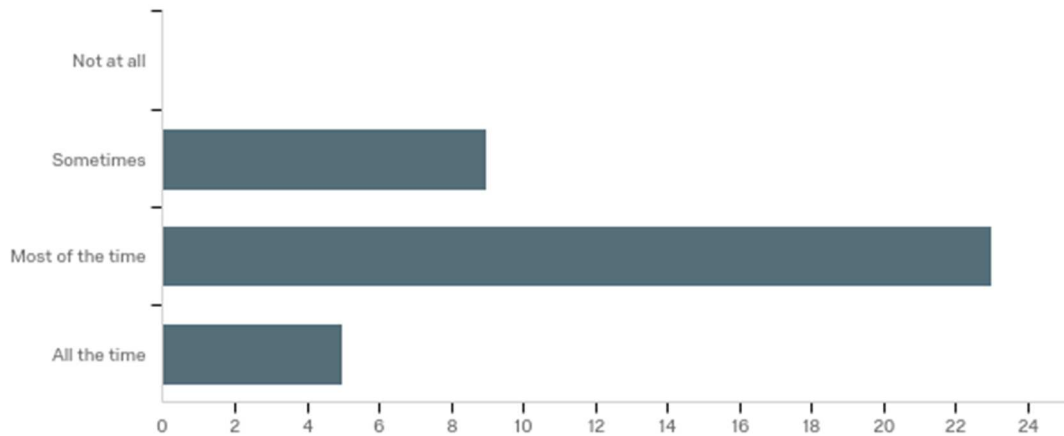
Survey Question 6. *Students with disabilities attend their neighborhood school*

they would attend if they did not have a disability. Scores ranged from 'not at all

(5.41%),' 'sometimes (5.41%),' 'most of the time (32.43%),' and 'all the time (56.76%),'

and a mean score of 3.41, variance of 0.67, and standard deviation of 0.82 (see figure

1.6).

Figure 1.6: Survey Question 6: Students with disabilities attend their neighborhood school they would attend if they did not have a disability.
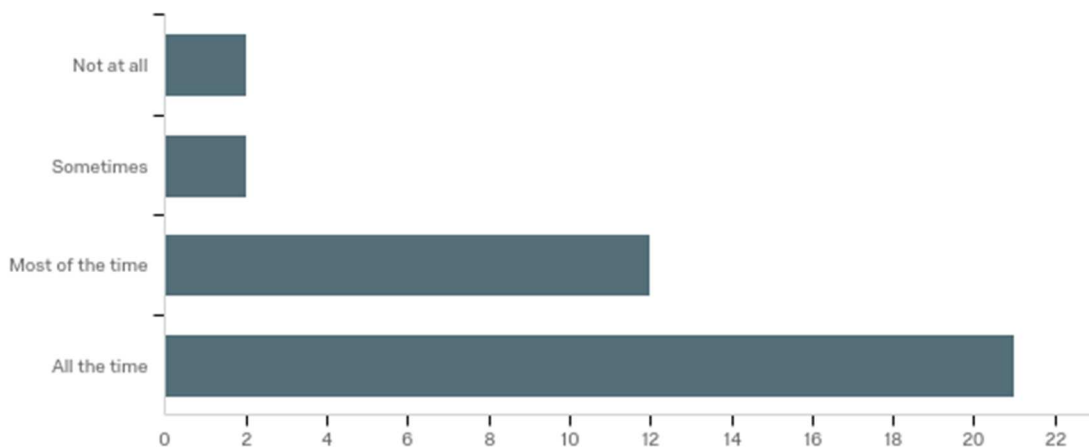
Survey Question 7. *The needs of students with disabilities are met within the*

district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of

schools outside of the district. Scores ranged from 'sometimes (8.11%),' 'most of the

time (70.27%),' and 'all the time (21.62%),' and a mean score of 3.14, variance of 0.28,

and standard deviation of 0.53 (see figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7: Question 7 Survey: The needs of students with disabilities are met within the district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of schools outside of the district.
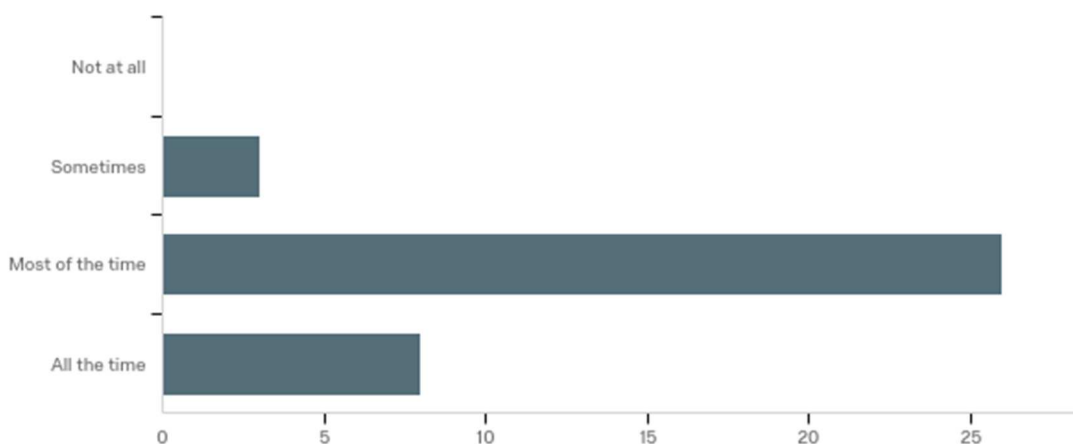
Survey Question 8. *Students are proportionally represented in all settings. (For*

example: if the school has 15% of students with disabilities, each class/course has a

similar percentage of students with disabilities). Scores ranged from 'not at all (5.41%),'

'sometimes (40.54%),' 'most of the time (43.24%),' and 'all the time (10.81%),' and a

mean score of 3.41, variance of 0.67, and standard deviation of 0.82 (see figure 1.8)

Figure 1.8: Survey Question 8: Students are proportionally represented in all settings. (For example: if the school has 15% of students with disabilities, each class/course has a similar percentage of students with disabilities).
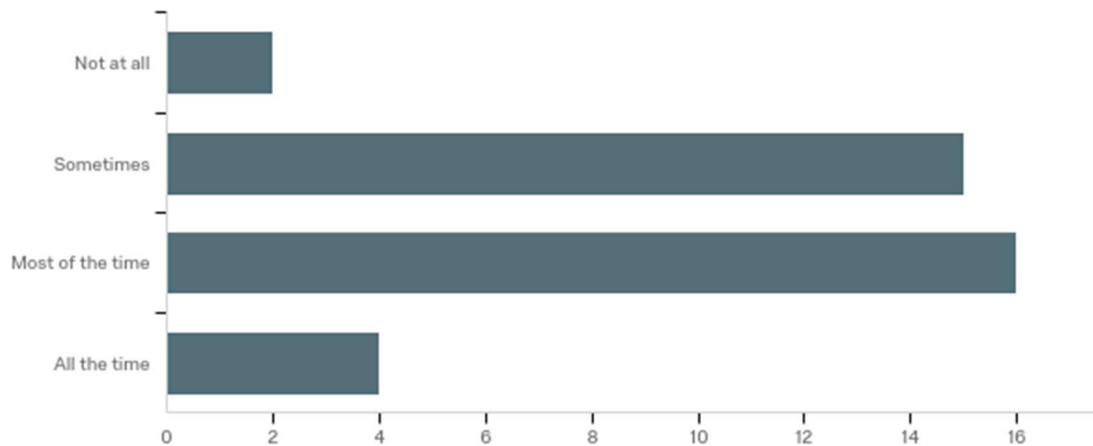
Survey Question 9. *Students with disabilities are proportionally represented in*

clubs and extracurricular activities. Scores ranged from 'sometimes (64.86%),' 'most of

the time (24.32%),' and 'all the time (10.81%),' and a mean score of 2.46, variance of

0.46, and standard deviation of 0.68 (see figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9: Survey Question 9: Students with disabilities are proportionally represented in clubs and extracurricular activities.
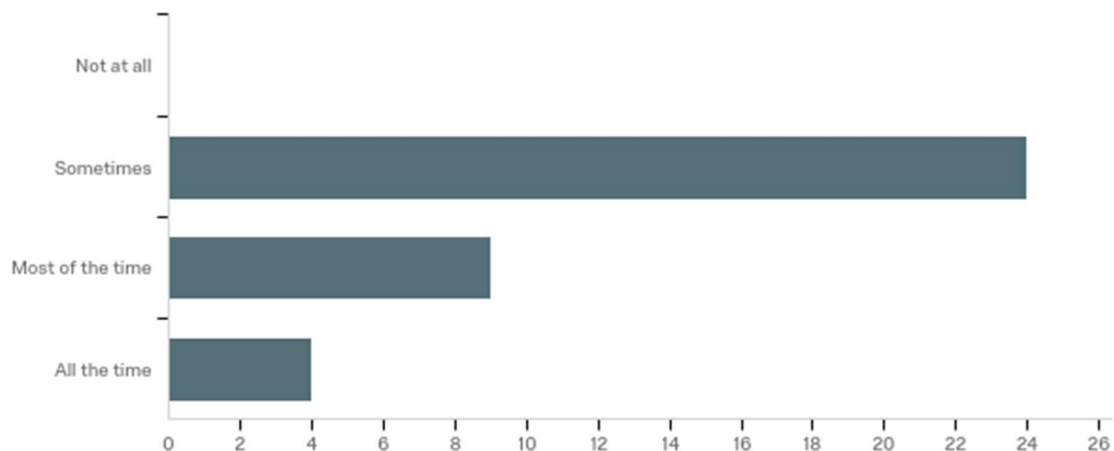
Question 10. *All students are proportionally represented in all spaces (rooms, courses or classes are not set-aside for students with specific needs (e.g. ELL, special education, advanced learners, alternative education, Tier 2 and 3, etc.).* Scores ranged from 'not at all (8.11%),' 'sometimes (35.14%),' 'most of the time (48.65%),' and 'all the time (8.11%),' and a mean score of 2.57, variance of 0.57 and standard deviation of 0.75 (see figure 2.0).

Figure 2.0: Survey Question 10: All students are proportionally represented in all spaces (rooms, courses or classes are not set-aside for students with specific needs (e.g. ELL, special education, advanced learners, alternative education, Tier 2 and 3, etc.).
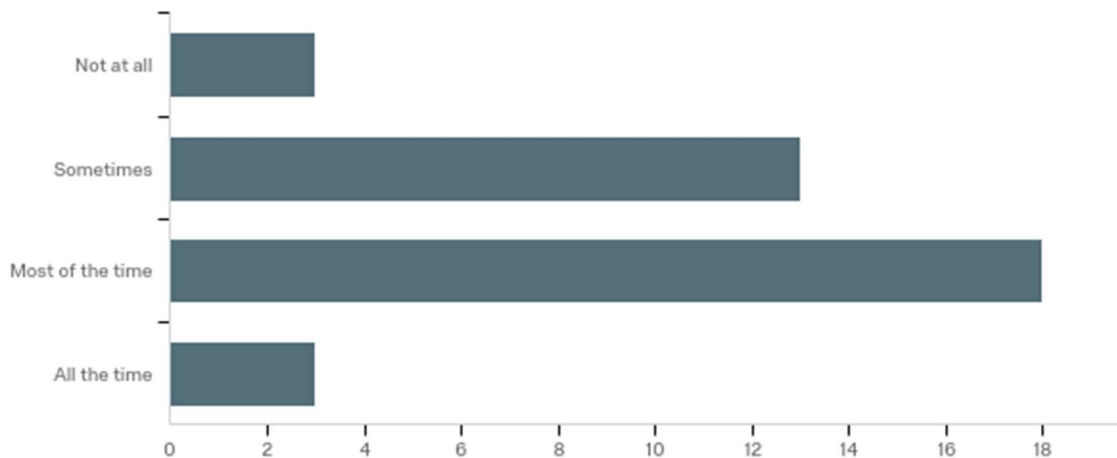
Degree of Inclusion Survey: Validity and Reliability

I developed the Degree of Inclusion survey for administrators to reflect on their high school's existing practices, systems, and structures that support inclusionary practices and to what extent. Within this section, I discuss the survey as a valid and reliable tool.

Validity. The results of the inclusionary scale, as presented in table 1.9, are consistent with my experiences as a high school special education teacher, building and

district level student services administrator, demonstrating face validity. Face validity, or logical validity is defined as "the extent to which an instrument appears to measure what it purports to measure" (Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990, p. 348) and "whether the test 'looks valid' to the examinees who take it, the administrative personnel who decide on its use, and other technically untrained observers" (Anastasi, 1988, p. 144). Mosier (1947) provides an early two-part definition of face validity, "a test is...valid for the prediction of an external criterion if the items...'appear on their face to be a common-sense relationship to the objective of the test" (p. 192). Mosier (1947) further explained that a test should "appear practical, pertinent and related to the purpose of the test... i.e., it should not only be valid but it should also appear valid" (p. 192).

The results of the Degree of Inclusion survey (see table 1.9) align with my knowledge and perspective of the current degree of inclusion that exists in majority of public school settings. This is gathered from my experience of working in over a dozen public education schools, networking with colleagues, graduate-level classmates and earning my administrative licenses for director of pupil services, principal, director of curriculum and instruction and superintendent. The Degree of Inclusion survey demands strong inclusive practices to receive a score as "highly inclusive." No schools fell within this range on the survey, also aligning with my experiences—I have not witnessed a school that meets this standard of inclusion.

In the majority of schools I have observed some inclusive practices in place, aligning with the overwhelming results of the Degree of Inclusion scale. Nearly 80% of high schools scored within the "somewhat inclusive" range on the Degree of Inclusion survey. Furthermore, I have not observed, or worked in a public school system that is not

inclusive at all. No schools scored within this range on the Degree of Inclusion survey scale.

Face validity is also present within the individual questions. Administrators scored the lowest on the survey (mean score of 2.22) when asked if related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.) are provided to students in an inclusive environment. Most of my experiences have consisted of students with disabilities receiving these services in a special education environment.

My experiences and observations also align with the results of the second lowest overall mean score (2.46) "students with disabilities are proportionally represented in clubs and extracurricular activities." From my experiences, when students with disabilities participate in a club or activity, it is often designed for students with disabilities, such as best buddies, Special Olympics, and students with disabilities are grossly underrepresented in clubs and extracurriculars across the school

Furthermore, administrators scored their practices the highest on number one and number seven (3.14), number one reads "students with disabilities are included in the general education environment." From my observations, students with disabilities are typically not segregated, entirely. Often times, students will receive their core academics in a special education environment and electives such as foods, music, and art, in an inclusive classroom. This type of education will eliminate the first option for a response, 'not at all,' thus raising the overall mean score for number one.

Administrators also scored number seven the highest on the Degree of Inclusion survey (3.14), "the needs of students with disabilities are met within the district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of schools outside of

the district." I have experience serving as a student service director in a rural community, where resources were scarce. During my rural experiences, alternative, out-of-district placements were not a likely placement option for students with disabilities as these placements are quite expensive, and the nearest alternative schools were hours away. Several schools that participated in the survey were also from similar rural communities. My experiences working in an urban and suburban school district were far different. Public schools have the option of several alternative schools within the greater metro area and from my observations, are more likely to have students placed out of district.

The Degree of Inclusion survey meets the standard of face validity. As described the survey results align with my own experience and observations of inclusion of students with disabilities in public education.

Reliability. In the previous chapter, the methods chapter, I discussed the inter-rater reliability (McHugh, 2012) that existed in my pilot study. As a reminder, both the principal and associate principal scored a mean of 24, out of 50 potential points. Resulting in a strong inter-rater reliability. Within my study, two additional schools had multiple administrators complete the survey from the same high school. I calculated a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether any statistically significant differences between the means of the same schools. A one-way ANOVA test is an appropriate measurement to demonstrate the statistical significance between the principal and associate principal's survey responses.

I tested the correlation between the principal and associate principal at the 0.5 level of significant using a one-way analysis of variance procedure. The descriptive data

analyses are relative to the overall reliability of the survey (see tables 2.0, 2.2, 2.4). The

ANOVA analysis produced means, standard deviation and standard error from each

individual question (see tables 2.1, 2.3, 2.5).

Table 2.0: Ottawa HS Descriptive Data

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std Error
Principal	10	2.6	0.9661	0.3055
Associate Principal	10	2.8	0.6325	0.2

Table 2.1: Ottawa HS ANOVA Summary

Source	Degree of Freedom DF	Sum of Squares SS	Mean Square MS	F-Stat	P-Value
Between Groups	1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.5906
Within Groups	18	12.0006	0.06667		
Total	19	12.2006			

Table 2.2: Glacier Hill's HS Descriptive Data

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std Error
Principal	10	3.2	0.06325	0.02
Associate Principal	10	2.8	0.6325	0.02

Table 2.3: Glacier Hill's HS ANOVA Summary

Source	Degree of Freedom DF	Sum of Squares SS	Mean Square MS	F-Stat	P-Value
Between Groups	1	0	0.8	1.9997	0.1744
Within Groups	18	7.201	0.4001		
Total	19	8.001			

Table 2.4: Clear Lake HS Descriptive Data

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std Error
Principal	10	2.5	1.0801	0.3416
Associate Principal	10	2.5	0.8498	0.2687

Table 2.5: Clear Lake ANOVA Summary

Source	Degree of Freedom DF	Sum of Squares SS	Mean Square MS	F-Stat	P-Value
Between Groups	1	0	0	0	0
Within Groups	18	16.999	0.9444		
Total	19	16.999			

I calculated the results of the ANOVA test for Clear Lake high school, Ottawa high school and Glacier Hill's high schools to determine the statistical significance of these three schools relative to inter-rater reliability. Calculations of the P-value and a F-statistical value were determined through these calculations (see tables 2.2, 2.4 and 2.6). Clear Lake high school had the exact same responses producing an identical mean resulting in an F-statistic value of zero and a P of 0. The P-value for Glacier Hill's high school (0.1744) and Clear Lake (0) scored below the level of significance (.5), providing strong evidence of inter-rater reliability. Ottawa high school did not score within this range (P=0.5906), however they are on the margins of being significantly correlated.

Surveying the multiple administrators from the same high school allowed me to test the inter-rater reliability of the Degree of Inclusion survey. The one-way ANOVA test demonstrated inter-rater reliability between the principal and associate principal's survey responses of two of the three schools with multiple administrator responses,

signifying the data collected through the use of the survey is a correct representation of the variables measured.

Summary of Degree of Inclusion Survey. Within this section, I provide a summary of the survey questions and reflect on the overall strength of the survey, administration of the tool and I propose changes for future use. Within this section I also share findings from my interviews when principals reflected on self-reporting the degree of inclusion for their high school through my survey. I fully discuss the findings from my interviews in the next chapter.

Table 2.6 outlines the average response for each survey question. The greatest ranges of response were between questions number two, four, six, eight and ten, which ranged from not at all to all the time. Number four, "Related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.), are provided to students in an inclusive environment," was the lowest mean score of 2.22. Number one, "students with disabilities are included in the general education environment," scored the highest mean score of 3.14.

Table 2.6: Degree of Inclusion Average Responses

Question	Not at All	Sometimes	Most of the Times	All the Time
1	0% (0)	0% (0)	86.49% (32)	13.51% (5)
2	2.78% (1)	38.89% (14)	47.22% (17)	11.11% (4)
3	0% (0)	32.43% (12)	48.65% (18)	18.92% (7)
4	21.62% (8)	48.65% (18)	16.22% (6)	13.51% (5)
5	0% (0)	24.32% (9)	62.16% (23)	13.51% (5)
6	5.41% (2)	5.41% (2)	32.43% (12)	56.76% (21)
7	0% (0)	8.11% (3)	70.27% (26)	21.62% (8)
8	5.41% (2)	40.54% (15)	43.24% (16)	10.81% (4)
9	0% (0)	64.86% (24)	24.32% (9)	10.81% (4)
10	8.11% (3)	35.14% (13)	48.65% (18)	8.11% (3)

Initially, I believed the Degree of Inclusion to be an overall strong measure of the degree of inclusion of high schools. As indicated in the above sections, the survey results aligned with my overall perspective of the degree of inclusion that exists in public education. The survey was user friendly and resulted in administrators asking themselves questions about their current degree of inclusion that was operationalized with the questions themselves.

Of the 37 administrators who completed the survey, I interviewed 10 of them as part of my research design. Through the interviews I discovered the more knowledgeable the administrator was about inclusive practices, the lower they tended to score themselves on the Degree of Inclusion survey. Their deeper understanding of the operationalizing of inclusive practices lead them to be more critically self reflective of their practices thus scoring their schools somewhat lower on the Degree of Inclusion survey. These same principals who self reported their high school as in the 'minimally inclusive' range provided concrete, research based responses when describing their inclusive practices. This led me to believe the degree of inclusion of high schools that self-reported their

degree of inclusion to be somewhat lower for students with disabilities, might actually be somewhat higher in practice, when compared to the other high schools in the study.

For example, in a follow-up conversation with a principal who self reported his high school as minimally inclusive (mean score of 25), he stated "I believe I probably ranked our school lower on your survey because I have been to Madison for the ICS [Integrated Comprehensive Systems] training… We [administration team] worked through the equity modules, I know what it can and should look like." Another administrator that self reported their school as minimally inclusive (mean score of 24) admitted she was critical of her high school's practices on the survey. She shared;

> I know I was harsh on your survey. If you believe in something you've got to be critical and want to make changes and you can't be afraid to make the changes but I think the most important thing is for a school district administration to ask themselves the question, what does inclusion look like to us?" She goes on to say "once you can answer that question you need to put the resources in place, you need to make systems in place to make that happen. And I feel if we don't have that, we're not gonna make strides to make it inclusive.

This administrator described the importance of recognizing the areas she and her staff can improve on when including students with disabilities.

Likewise, the opposite trend may exist in some cases. That is, principals that self-reported their high schools to be more inclusive for students with disabilities who are less knowledgeable of inclusive practices and more influenced by social desirability (Selltiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976) may have inflated their inclusion scores compared to actual inclusive practices in their schools. At times, during my interviews, principals that self-

reported their high school as more inclusive described practices that I did not consider inclusive based on the Degree of Inclusion scale that I developed from the literature. These practices included the segregation of students with disabilities by disability categories and disproportional numbers of students with disabilities across courses and school environments.

For these reasons, I question if the current design of the Degree of Inclusion survey can account for the principals that are knowledgeable about inclusionary practices, have made efforts to include students with disabilities, and realize the room for growth when including students with disabilities, and thus score their school lower on the inclusion survey—with the opposite also true as previously explained.

Further, as a reminder, 83% (37/225) of the administrators I sent the survey to did not complete it. Although unknown, I question the reasons school administrators refrained from completing the survey. If a principal believes their high school is not as inclusive for students with disabilities, then they may be uncomfortable in discussing inclusion and segregation of students with disabilities in a building they are responsible for, and thus less likely to complete the survey.

Likewise, the 37 principals who did complete the Degree of Inclusion survey may be more comfortable rating their high school regardless of the degree to which students are included. These principals may believe they are doing a good job of including students with disabilities regardless of the inclusive practices that are actually in place, or even if they know they have work to do on inclusion, see the value in inclusion, understand it, and completed the survey, as did the two administrator I previously referenced.

I hypothesize, those that completed the survey possessed a higher level of comfort in discussing inclusion of students with disabilities, whether under the impression their school was inclusive or understanding the continued efforts needed to create an inclusive setting for students with disabilities. Additionally, prior to reading the questions several administrators may have interpreted their inclusive practices for students with disabilities to be sound. The survey design causes administrators to critically self- reflect on the inclusion of students with disabilities in their high school and proven difficult to self-report practices that do not exist. The mean score of the Degree of Inclusion survey was 27.8 and by relying on the inclusion scale places the average on the lower end of 'somewhat inclusive.' Furthermore the role of a school administrator is demanding and every minute of their day is typically accounted for, administrators may not have found the time to complete the survey.

For these reasons, I determined that the Degree of Inclusion might not accurately reflect the actual degree of inclusion taking place in the ten schools of the principals I interviewed. Nevertheless, as a way to narrow the possible high school principals from 37 to a more manageable number to interview, I rank ordered the Inclusion Survey Scores and selected the top seven highest scoring and top seven lowest scoring and invited these principals for an interview. Ten of the 14 principals I invited agreed to be interviewed as part of my study, six from schools that self-reported their high school to be minimally inclusive for students with disabilities on the Degree of Inclusion survey and four of the principals from high schools that self-reported to be somewhat inclusive on my survey.

In table 2.7, I present all the Degree of Inclusion survey results and the percentage of students that agree or highly agree that they experience a sense of belonging at their school of all 14 schools I invited to participate in my interviews.

Table 2.7: High Schools Invited to be Interviewed

High school	Degree of Inclusion	Scale Score	Sense of Belonging (% that Agree)
Lake Mildred Hi	40	Mostly Inclusive	62%
Rocky Point Hi	37	Mostly Inclusive	57%
Eagle Spring Hi	35	Mostly Inclusive	60%
Brook Hi	32	Somewhat Inclusive	54%
Glacier Hills Hi	32	Somewhat Inclusive	63%
Upper Point Hi	30	Somewhat Inclusive	60%
Musky Bay Hi	29	Somewhat Inclusive	64%
Elk River Hi	26	Somewhat Inclusive	57%
Tree Top Hi	25	Minimally Inclusive	58%
Port Harbor Hi	24	Minimally Inclusive	60%
Clear Lake Hi	24	Minimally Inclusive	49%
Tidal Creek Hi	25	Minimally Inclusive	66%
Grand Beach Hi	24	Minimally Inclusive	58%
Acorn Hi	22	Minimally Inclusive	75%

To account for the fact that the principals self-report of inclusive practices at their high schools on the Degree of Inclusion survey may not fully reflect the actual practices of inclusion in their school, I completed the Degree of Inclusion survey for each school

based on the interview transcripts (see table 2.8). I included my Degree of Inclusion survey results in columns 6 and 7 of table 2.8. Table 2.8 is organized by my Degree of Inclusion results, from most inclusive to least inclusive high schools. Table 2.9 provides a reminder of the scale I used to assign a score to each school's survey results. I answered each question to the best of my ability based on interview data and when I was not sure about a question, I estimated relying on what the principal shared about the high school through my interview transcripts. Overall, my scores aligned closely with that of the principal's Degree of Inclusion scores, other than two outliers, Eagle Spring and Glacier Hill's high school. The data the principal shared in the interviews resulted in my scoring these schools as less inclusive than how the principal completed the Degree of Inclusion survey.

Table 2.8: Self-Reported Degree of Inclusion versus Researcher's Degree of

Inclusion

High school	Name	Position	Degree of Inclusion	Admin Scale Score	Researcher's Degree of Inclusion	Researcher's Scale Score
Musky Bay HS	Tony	Principal	29	Somewhat Inclusive	30	Somewhat Inclusive
Eagle Spring HS	Steve	Principal	35	Mostly Inclusive	29	Somewhat Inclusive
Elk River HS	Kevin	Principal	26	Somewhat Inclusive	27	Somewhat Inclusive
Brook HS	Sean	Principal	32	Somewhat Inclusive	26	Somewhat Inclusive
Clear Lake HS	Alicia	Principal	24	Minimally Inclusive	24	Minimally Inclusive
Clear Lake HS	Ashley	Associate Principal	24	Minimally Inclusive	24	Minimally Inclusive
Glacier Hill's HS	Hank	Principal	30.5	Somewhat Inclusive	24	Minimally Inclusive
Tidal Creek HS	Tom	Principal	25	Minimally Inclusive	22	Minimally Inclusive
Grand Beach HS	Nate	Principal	24	Minimally Inclusive	20	Minimally Inclusive
Port Harbor HS	Andre	Principal	24	Minimally Inclusive	18	Minimally Inclusive

Table 2.9: Degree of Inclusion Scale

Inclusive Scale:	Range
Very Inclusive	45 – 50
Mostly Inclusive	35 – 44
Somewhat Inclusive	25 – 34
Minimally Inclusive	15 – 24
Not Inclusive	0 – 14

My rating of the degree of inclusiveness in the selected high schools compared

similarly to how the principals rated their high schools, except in two cases. One of the

schools Eagle Springs high school fell from mostly to somewhat inclusive after my

rating. No schools exceeded somewhat inclusive in my rating. Thus, I included Eagle spring in the somewhat inclusive group in the qualitative findings.

Likewise, with my own rating of Glacier Hill's high school using the Degree of Inclusion Survey, Glacier Hills, fell from somewhat inclusive to minimally inclusive   I contribute this difference to the practices the principal explained during the interview, which impacted my scoring on the Degree of Inclusion survey. As I present in the qualitative findings, the principal of Glacier Hill's high school described a county operated alternative school for students with disabilities within his community. He explained, that parents of students with significant disabilities open enroll out of Glacier Hills to attend the alternative school and the district is not involved in the decision through the IEP process. Thus, it is possible that the students with disabilities who do attend Glacier Hill's high school are included in the ways indicated on the survey. (It's important to note that if the parents of students with significant disabilities believed their child would be well served at Glacier Hills, they would not opt for the segregated school in the first place). The principal may not have taken this alternative school into considerations while completing the survey, to the same extent as I. I scored this school low on question six, "Students with disabilities attend their neighborhood school they would attend if they did not have a disability," and question seven, "The needs of students with disabilities are met within the district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of schools outside of the district." Thus, I left Glacier Hill's high school in the somewhat more inclusive group of schools that I compare in the next chapter.

The Degree of Inclusion Survey is Not a Valid or Reliable Measure of

Inclusion

Keeping in mind that I am comparing the degree of inclusion in high schools with the degree of belonging that students experience in those same high schools, I turn next to how I determined the degree of belonging in selected high schools. I decided not to use the Degree of Inclusion survey for the remainder of the study. I found the Degree of Inclusion survey did not accurately measure the degree of inclusion in high schools. Further, within my own analysis of the degree of inclusion of each school, I found it was not a reliable tool to measure inclusion. I was going to run a correlational analysis between the Degree of Inclusion survey results and the sense of belonging scores, but decided not to do so because the survey was not a valid or reliable measure.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

The Youth Risk Behavior survey procedures are designed to protect the privacy of students by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. Local parental permission procedures are followed before survey administration (McCoy, 2018). Appointed representatives from each State's Department of Public Instruction reviewed the survey questions. The YRBS was then field tested with students within a focus group. The survey questions were adjusted by the appointed representatives, with the intent to create an accurate, anonymous instrument to measure the incidence of risk behaviors in young adults attending high schools. The disclaimer on the front page of the survey reads as follows, "the questions that ask about your background will be used only to describe the types of students completing this survey. The information will not be used to find out your name. No names will ever be reported" (YRBS, 2017).

YRBS Findings

Within my study, I analyzed scores from the Wisconsin 2017 Youth Risk Behavior (YRBS) survey. In the previous chapter, I detailed how I obtained the data.

The spreadsheet I received from DPI included the 2017 YRBS findings for 177 high schools. Of these 177 schools, 147 (83%) were public high schools, and 30 (17%) were alterative or private high schools. The data query included five excel worksheets titled, "about the data," "responses," "question index," "answer index" and "school list." I explain each excel worksheet within this section.

The "about the data" worksheet provided a general overview of each worksheet and described the options districts had to customize questions. Participating districts were required to administer the standard high school survey for grades 9-12. In addition, districts could opt to add one of the four optional modules; 1) Drug-free communities core measures, 2) youth tobacco survey, 3) adversity and protective factors, and 4) safe and supportive schools. Each module had 10-13 additional questions.

If a district opted to include an extra module, an additional question on belonging may have been added to their survey. This did create a slight variation of the sense of belonging dataset. All 34 high schools within this study answered the standard belonging question, which reads; "Do you agree or disagree that you feel like you belong at *this* school?" [emphasis added].. Three of the 34 high schools within my study asked an additional question on belonging; "Do you agree or disagree that you feel like you belong at *your* school?" [emphasis added] For the purpose of this study, I present the results of both questions. I used the results of the standard questions to run correlations, which I further explain in an upcoming section.

The responses worksheet contained the high school responses to their survey questions. Within this worksheet were six columns, svyID (an ID number associated with the survey configuration), question ID (an ID number associated with each question), answer ID (an ID number associated with each response category), numerator (the number of respondents in the school giving that answer category), and denominator (total number of respondents for that school). Each row of this worksheet represents an answer category from each survey, school, and question combination.

The 'question index' worksheet contained the question ID numbers that were associated with each question. For example, a total of five 'question ID' numbers were associated with the two belonging questions. The standard belonging questions were associated with the following question IDs; 235, 309, 979. The second questions on belonging were associated with question ID numbers 1633 and 1876. This worksheet contained a total of 357 possible question ID numbers.

Similar to the question index worksheet, the answer index worksheet provided context to each answer ID. This worksheet provided the value labels that were unique across all the questions. For example, for the two questions on belonging, an answer ID was given that corresponds to the following responses, strongly agree, agree, not sure/ neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. This worksheet had a total of 2,778 possible answer IDs.

The school list worksheet contained the names of the 177 participating high schools. As a reminder, 147 of these schools were public high schools and were invited to participate in my study. Of these 147 high schools, 34 completed the Degree of Inclusion survey.

Errors in Data. After several weeks of analyzing the data from 34 schools, I discovered errors within the query DPI provided. I discovered the numerator and denominator were identical for nine of the high schools on several questions, including the two questions assessing belonging. This implied these nine schools had identical student responses to the questions on belonging. For example, 433 out of 2,000 students strongly agreed that they had a sense of belonging in their high school from nine different schools. Upon this discovery, I emailed DPI requesting they verify their dataset and bringing their attention to the duplicated numerators and denominators. They later confirmed these errors, stating they will "pursue this on Monday when the YRBS lead gets back into the office and figure out what's going on." This email was sent on Wednesday March 27th, 2019.

On April 5, 2019 I received a new data query from DPI with the corrected data. However, I discovered the new dataset was missing several high schools' data from the original spreadsheet. The total number of high schools went from 177 to 137. Data from 40 schools were missing entirely, including five high schools from my study. I then reached back out to DPI for an explanation. DPI explained, "… the original query of the data mistakenly pulled in schools that shouldn't have been included in the first place." With my advisor's input, I decided to move forward with the data from the 28 schools, eliminating the five missing schools.

Calculating Sense of Belonging. Using the 2017 YRBS dataset, I calculated the sense of belonging scores of the 28 participating high schools (see table 3.0). To calculate this score, I disaggregated the two question ID numbers associated with the belonging questions and their five corresponding answer indexes. Within the answer

indexes are numerators and denominators for each possible response. I then calculated a percentage for each possible response, agree and strongly agree are calculated together, as is disagree and strongly disagree are calculated together (see table 3.0).

As an example, the pilot study high school surveyed students the standard belonging questions, "do you agree or disagree that you feel like you belong at this school?" The results of this question are shown in the following answer indexes; strongly agree (21), agree (67), not sure (56), disagree (15), and strongly disagree (18), with a denominator of 177 students. From this information I combined the total number of students that strongly agreed (21) and the students that agreed (67) for a total of 88 students. Finally, I calculated a percentage using the denominator, or total number of students that participated in that question (177). This calculation indicates a total of 49% of students agree or strongly agree that they have a sense of belonging at their high school. The same formula is relied on by DPI in their YRBS summary report. This calculation was completed for all 28 schools (see table 3.0). Table 3.0 presents the student responses, by percentage from the YRBS sense of belonging question, "Do you agree or disagree that you belonging at your school." Students responded by strongly agreeing, agreeing, unsure or disagree. The students that agree or strongly agree are represented in the second column together.

Table 3.0: Percentage of Belonging and Perceived Degree of Inclusion

School	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree	Unsure	Total
Skyline Hi	51%	15%	34%	100%
Brook Hi	54%	23%	23%	100%
Hilltop Hi	58%	17%	25%	100%
Deerfield Hi	59%	26%	15%	100%
Waterfall Hi	56%	18%	26%	100%
Clear Lake Hi	49%	19%	32%	100%
Rocky Point Hi	57%	13%	30%	100%
Grand Beach Hi	58%	16%	26%	100%
Clement Ave Hi	53%	18%	29%	100%
Brust Hi	65%	16%	19%	100%
Humbolt Park Hi	61%	12%	27%	100%
Blue Valley Hi	56%	14%	30%	100%
Glacier Hills Hi	63%	12%	26%	100%
Eagle Spring	60%	18%	22%	100%
West Lake Hi	79%	5%	17%	100%
Tidal Creek	66%	9%	25%	100%
Elk River Hi	57%	17%	26%	100%
Musky Bay Hi	64%	14%	22%	100%
Ottawa Hi	60%	13%	27%	100%
Acorn Hi	75%	8%	17%	100%
Canyon Hi	60%	6%	34%	100%
Port Harbor Hi	65%	9%	26%	100%
Moraine Hi	55%	14%	31%	100%
Upper Point	60%	16%	24%	100%
West Wood Hi	63%	8%	29%	100%
Tree Top Hi	58%	17%	25%	100%
Francis Hi	62%	13%	25%	100%
Lake Mildred Hi	62%	11%	27%	100%

Summary

Within my study, I relied on three datasets including the results of two surveys—the YRBS sense of belonging scores and the Degree of Inclusion survey. Local school districts administered the YRBS to monitor health risk behaviors in youth, including the sense of belonging students experience at school. I developed the Degree of Inclusion survey for administrators to reflect on their high school's existing practices, systems, and structures that support inclusionary practices and to what extent. During my interviews I discovered this was not a valid or reliable measure of inclusionary practices and dropped

the survey as a tool to determine the degree of inclusionary practices of each high school. Instead, I relied on my qualitative interviews with each principal. Further, as I report in the next chapter, most administrators in the interviews did not realize the degree of sense of belonging for students in their schools and that sense of belonging was much lower than they expected. In the next chapter, I discuss my third dataset administrative interviews to better understand how including students with disabilities impact the sense of belonging of all students.

CHAPTER 4: INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To provide a context for the research question, within this chapter, I present administrator reports of how they describe the inclusionary practices in their high schools for students with disabilities.

I relied on the principal's description of their inclusionary practices to organize the findings into two groups, the group that was critically self-reflective and the group that was less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. I relied on the principal's descriptions and my interpretation of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities to organize each principal into one of the two groups. Principals that critically self-reflected clearly described their inclusionary practices and admitted their inclusive practices could improve. Principals that were less critically self-reflective did not share the same degree of urgency to improve practices for students with disabilities and were less critical of their own inclusive practices.

Within the qualitative findings, I compare the principals that were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students labeled with disabilities (4 principals) to schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities (6 principals). The less critically self-reflective principals were from Eagle Spring high school, Brook high school, Musky Bay high school and Glacier Hill's high school. The critically self-reflective principals were from the following high schools, Elk River high school, Clear Lake high school, Port Harbor high school, Glacier Hill's high school and Tidal Creek high school.

Within this chapter, I first discuss the principal's journey of including students with disabilities, evidence of success and areas identified in need of improvement for including students with disabilities. Finally, I share the barriers the administrators identified when including students with disabilities.

The Journey of Including Students with Disabilities

Principals described their journey of including students with disabilities, detailing the systems and structures supporting inclusion within their high school. I describe first the journey of including students with disabilities from high schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and then compare that to the principal responses from the schools that were critically self-reflective.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities identified the importance of; (a) setting a clear vision for inclusion, (b) collaboration and shared responsibilities, (c) effective instructional practices (d) asset-based, student first language and (e) school involvement and relationships.

Setting a Clear Vision. The principals emphasized the importance of communicating a clear vision of inclusion and to share expectations with their staff of educating all students. The principals held their staff accountable through non-negotiables, evaluations, specifically assessing their ability to meet diverse ability levels and through colleague collaboration.

Tony, principal of Musky Bay described how a team of high school teacher leaders developed non-negotiables that were later adopted by the district. They designed these non-negotiables to intentionally interrupt ineffective practices that traditionally

marginalize students. Tony explained his team worked to "define the standard of inclusion that we'll set and what does it mean to be a student here regardless of your ability, regardless of age, whatever you identify as, like what does it mean to be a student here…" Tony went on to explain that the non-negotiables impacted more than classroom instruction, stating "along the way, we rolled those out to the whole district and then we use those as a standard or benchmark to set conversations around course proposals, IEP goals, offsite placement, and everything else like that."

Through developing a clear vision for including students with disabilities, Tony's district reallocated staff and resources to better meet the needs of diverse ability levels in an inclusive environment. He explained "we also did a significant amount of pulling students away from offsite placements back in to our school… in the range of $600,000 of savings that we then invested into reducing case load sizes." Musky Bay reallocated the savings from off-site placement to hire additional staff, decreasing the student to special education teacher ratio. In Musky Bay, the district renamed the special education teacher position to a learning strategist position as part of their evolution toward more inclusive practices. Tony explained the learning strategist teacher to student ratio went from "1:20… and now we try to keep it about 1:10 to 13 depending on the students that you're serving." With the additional savings, Tony invested in "inclusion coaches" whose role centered on building teacher capacity to effective teach a range of students in heterogeneous classrooms and to support the inclusion of students with disabilities. Tony further explained, "the coach's job is to essentially coach paraprofessionals on the front lines and then to support [the] learning strategist [to] meet [student] needs in the gen ed [setting]."

Steve, principal of Eagle Spring high school affirmed the importance of sharing a clear vision for inclusion with staff. Steve built "look-fors of team-teaching" in his teacher evaluations. He further explained, "in terms of the team teaching concept… Now when I do evaluations in the classroom, I am looking if it's a team teaching concept and evidence of collaboration." Steve described the importance of "a shared ownership of students and teaching responsibilities."

Collaboration and Shared Responsibilities. The second key feature identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices centered on collaboration and shared responsibilities. For example, Sean, Principal of Brook high school described his school as an inclusive atmosphere where students with disabilities have their needs met without drawing attention to their disability. He shared;

> We have a lot of strong supports that are working in the background, whether it's special education teachers, school counselors, administration, your regular ed teachers, your educational assistants, your paraprofessionals, all those people working in the background to make sure that those students are being successful and that their needs are being met, that their IEP goals are being met.

At Brook high school, Sean's staff offers strong universal supports for all students, including those identified with disabilities. Sean explained it would be difficult for "any given person to identify a student with a disability from the general population."

Steve echoed the importance of collaboration in describing how student's needs are met at Eagle Spring high school; "there's a special ed teacher in the classroom with the regular ed teacher…" He further explained, "they share teaching responsibilities that involves them planning out and figuring out who's teaching what, who's covering what.

The special ed teacher is not looked at as an individual to help `those student's-type of thing." Steve explained the shared responsibility being "the biggest hurdle for people to overcome, cause we all like to take ownership of students."

Effective Instructional Practices. The third key feature identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices centered on effective instructional practices and providing all students access to the general education curriculum. For example, Sean, principal of Brook high school explained, "One of our biggest goals is least restrictive environment and providing as many mainstream opportunities as we can for all of our students."

Similarly, Hank, the principal of Glacier Hill's high school described how their students with disabilities have "support from special ed [in the general education environment] to help with the modifications... So I'm a believer, we can put them in a normal class and yeah, they might not be the 'A' student, but they can still grasp the material at whatever level they're going to grasp it at." Hank expressed the importance of students with disabilities experiencing the grade level standards.

Tony, the principal of Musky Bay agreed on the importance of strong instructional practices. He described how his high school "invested a lot in the universal design for learning framework" and provides his staff with an optional "autism institute every summer." He recognized these two professional development opportunities as being key to building the instructional capacity of his staff to meet diverse abilities.

Two principals described the importance of flexibility in their effective instructional practices when servicing students with disabilities in the general education environment. Steve from Eagle Spring explained, through co-planning it may be

determined that team teaching a lesson is not always needed, allowing his special education teachers flexibility in meeting student's needs. He explained, "sometimes the special ed teacher will just check on the students and teacher during a lesson and that is planned ahead of time."

At Glacier Hill's high school, Hank also identified the importance of research-based instructional practices and providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum as a key feature to their inclusive efforts. Hank, principal at Glacier Hills explained how their high school is currently reevaluating their co-teaching model. He stated, "our special ed. department [and] one of my AP's is very involved in this process too and we're evaluating our current model and seeing if there's a way that we can improve that to move these kids…[the achievement] up." He further described his concern with the current co-teaching model and the lack of growth students with IEPs are making. Hank shared,

> "What we're finding is that [co-teaching] might not be the best thing to do, because then it just promotes this atmosphere of status quo in here. There's no push to better yourself and so, we're evaluating that to see if maybe we move to the co-plan and co-serve kind of model."

Hank sees the co-planning to co-serve model as an opportunity to meet the needs of all learners at Glacier Hills high school and as a way to maximize the capacity of his staff.

At Glacier Hill's high school, Hank also relied on student data to inform instructional practices for students with disabilities. Hank admitted that this was the first year his high school has looked at achievement data for students with disabilities in his 18-year tenure. While conducting a data dive, Hank discovered several students'

achievement levels to be stagnant. He explained, "it seems like we kind of get stuck in moving them [students with disabilities] across, but not really moving them up and out [of special education]." Hank further described his considerations of developing a co-plan to co-serve model, starting "with the incoming freshmen group… [or] we've debated whether we just stop and move everyone that way." Hank's description of co-planning to co-serve would build capacity in staff and offer staff more flexibility to meet student's needs.

Asset-Based, Student First Language. The importance of language emerged as a fourth key feature identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices. When describing inclusive practices at their high schools, two principals cited the importance of language as they made their journey of including students with disabilities. In a discussing how Eagle Spring high school successfully included students with disabilities, Steve first cited, " terminology and how they're referred to as" an important consideration. He explained, "one of 'em is, they're students with IEPs, they're not referred to as special ed students." Further more, he explained how he often corrects staff member's language stating, "It's not your students, [or] my students, it's our students." This language promotes shared responsibility in educating all students.

Related to language, principal Tony described how Musky Bay high school has changed the names of special education teachers; "Our special education teachers are called learning strategists and not identified… by that label [special education]." Using the term learning strategist, removes the deficit-based label and credits the individual with the training and expertise they hold.

School Involvement and Relationships. Involving students with disabilities in extracurricular activities emerged as a final key feature of principals that were less critically self-reflective. As an example, principal Sean, of Brook High School expressed the importance of teacher to student relationships and student involvement in extra-curricular activities as key factors of including students with disabilities. He explained;

> All of our clubs, our activities, our sports, all of our extracurricular stuff… Those kids [students with disabilities] are a huge part of everything that we do… So I think if you talk to… students that have went through our special ed program, per se, [they] would say, 'Yeah, it was great. I was still part of everything else that my peers were part of.'

Principal Sean of Brook High school, described students with disabilities as participating in school activities as equal to students without disabilities.

The principals that were less self-reflective of their inclusive practices shared five key features of including students with disabilities: Setting a clear vision for inclusion, collaboration and shared responsibilities, effective instructional practices, asset-based, student first language and school involvement and relationships. These key features emerged as principals shared their journey of including students with disabilities at their high schools.

Critically Self-Reflective. The six principals who were critically self-reflective shared their commonalities and differences along their journey of including students with disabilities. The principals shared three key features of their journey: (a) the urgent need for reform for students with disabilities, (b), their commitment to eliminating lower-level courses and (c) improving instructional practices.

Urgent Need for Reform. When describing their journey of including students with disabilities at their schools, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, shared the urgent need for reform for students with disabilities. As an example, Kevin explained how he transitioned into a building that was identified by the state as a "focus school for special education." The state's education department identified schools with low achievement for students with disabilities and provided support through coaching in professional learning communities (PLC). The coach provided by the state offered professional development every month due to the low achievement of students with disabilities. Kevin explained;

> When I moved to the high school, that was a building that had already been
> working on it [inclusion] for a couple of years, although I would say it was kind
> of in a bit of a stalled state, and we just continued the work. We were a part of the
> state development grants SPEDG [Special Education--Personnel Development]
> and that was certainly helpful for bringing us together."

Kevin described the participating members of his high school SPEDG team as the director of curriculum and instruction, director of student services, the principal, dean of students, the special education department, an English teacher, math teacher and a representative from the middle school.

Kevin expressed the value in the professional development the team received as a result of the grant, but also appreciated the opportunity for all stakeholders to meet in a structured format. He shared;

> As a result of that grant… a lot of the work was done around co-teaching and also
> bringing in consultants had happened as well, kind of running on parallel tracks.

But that grant ... You know, probably more than anything it just brought everyone

together for once a month in a discussion.

This is the first year Elk River high school is without the Special Education--Personnel

Development grant and Kevin and his team have noticed the difference. Kevin shared,

"we've had conversations around just needing to bring everyone together: the special

education teachers, the math teachers, the English teachers... around discussing co-

teaching and really moving more to that co-plan to co-serve kind of a mentality is a work

we're on now, which is pretty remarkable." Kevin further explained "[Elk River high

school] has done a great deal the last three to five years in terms of helping students with

IEPs feel inclusive and be inclusive, but there is still a lot of work to do." Kevin added:

"… it's a continuing journey, there's no arrival. It's just sort of a ongoing forever work."

Similarly, principal Alicia described Clear Lake high school currently in need of

drastic change for students with disabilities. Alicia transitioned into the principalship

from a special education teacher role. Alicia explained, "I saw some things as a teacher

that I wasn't comfortable with… a lot of resource rooms where students weren't included

and what I noticed was that those students weren't growing at all and that those students

weren't able to socialize properly." Additionally, she described "[students with

disabilities] were seeing a lot of negative behaviors in the special education room and a

lot of the students struggled academically."

At Tidal Creek High School, Tom described his first impression of the inclusion

of students with disabilities at his high school as "seeing everything was pretty

stagnant." He further explained how staff had established the courses in ways that

tracked and segregated students:

I come here and we kind of start looking at things and saying we need to do things differently. That included our inclusion practices, because I think when I first got here, we had dozens of… special ed specific [classes]…. We had what we called 'A' level classes, which were US history, world history, English 9 and 10, for… the dumb kids."

Within Tom's first year as principal at Tidal Creek high school, the district experienced staff turnover in key positions that helped to fuel an examination of the inclusive practices. He explained;

The perfect storm of stuff that happen… we had the same student services person for 30 years, had the same superintendent for over 30 years…15 years for the Director of Curriculum… before I came here, they had two high school principals over 35 years... and then they all left…even our board kind of changed.

Tom now in his sixth year as principal expressed the need to continue to improve on the inclusion of students with disabilities. He explained, "we still have bad practices to flush out of our system, before it is embedded systemically."

Ashley, an Associate Principal of Clear Lake high school also described a sense of urgency to improve teaching practices for students with disabilities. She explained Clear Lake high school was "nearly identified as a school in need under ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act], under 1% for sped." In efforts to improve accountability, the federal education law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) identifies schools with low performing student demographics in each state (bottom 5% achievement of students with disabilities in the State) and requires the development and implementation of an

improvement plan under the guidance of the State's education department for at least two years.

Commitment to Eliminating Lower-Level Courses. When describing their journey of including students with disabilities, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, first shared the need for urgent reform for students with disabilities. A second key feature of these schools focused on eliminating low-level classes. As an example, as a new principal Nate questioned the need for "self-contained, alternative curriculums for social studies and science." He explained, "The kids are missing out on the universal curriculum." Nate further elaborated;

> So then when it comes to our ACT scores, well no wonder we suck and we've sucked for such a long time… because they're not receiving the universal curriculum… My first year, I worked with a director of pupil services and collaborated with her and said, 'Hey, come year number two,' which was last year, 'I'm going to do away with all my social studies and all my science self-contains, let's just flat out drop them.' They're [students with disabilities] are not around their same age peers that are gen ed, yet they're fully capable of it… nowhere in their IEP were there any goals related to science or social studies… When I created the master schedule, my first year was to get ready for the second year, it was a tough sell on our special ed teachers. They loved having their own little rooms… I created a heck of a lot more co-taught sections.

Principal Nate further described the self-contained classes at Grand Beach high school. He shared, "… we had a self-contained in every content area, as far as the four main

contents, math, science, social studies, reading. We had self-contained classrooms in all of those." He further added, "[in my] first year, we had eight periods of self-contained English, we had probably six periods of self-contained math, six periods self-contained science and six periods of self-contained social studies." Principal Nate described the urgent need to eliminate the self-contained classes and provide students with disabilities experiences in higher-level courses.

At Clear Lake high school, the majority of the students with disabilities, students that require intervention, ELL services and other typically marginalized students attended low-level courses. Associate principal Ashley explained;

> My first year we had a pre-algebra class…Identifying those students in that class [low level math], a lot of them were either a behavioral issue or a student identified with a disability… those students actually went from class to class to class with each other, so not only did we have a high proportion of special ed students in math, but that class was then going into science classes, that was going into English classes… It was a cohort and that's not appropriate!

Ashley, who is responsible for the Math department at Clear Lake high school made the decision to eliminate low-level classes in math, in turn impacting other content areas. She explained;

> …So that's when we made the decision the following year we eliminated pre-algebra because that allows an opportunity of more class selection for students that we would have more control about the proportionality of what type of students are in each class and that they're not moving from cohort to cohort in all the classes.

By eliminating low-level math classes, students had the option to enroll in a variety of courses, thus creating an environment where students were more proportionally represented across all areas.

When describing their journey of including students with disabilities, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, shared their third key feature as improving instructional practices. As an example, when Alicia began her principalship at Clear Lake high school, students with disabilities were self-contained in a special education setting. Alicia was compelled to not only ensure students with disabilities were included in the general education class, she also ensured students had access to a general education and special education instruction in a co-taught setting. She expressed "I always said that if I was ever in a place [administration role], that I didn't ever want to that happen [segregation of students with disabilities] and I think I played a part of some of those co-teaching pieces changing and becoming more inclusive." She further explained, "when I went in [started as principal]--Well I know for a fact that when I started… special education… was pretty much self-contained." Alicia further described, at clear Lake high school, students with disabilities are now included in the general education environment for several courses.

Ashley also described the need to make large-scale changes to improve her school's inclusive practices at Clear Lake high school. Ashley shared;

> We made a very strong decision that we need a co-plan, co-serve, co-teach model and we need to blow up our existing system and if we want to move forward we're gonna have to make changes… changing a lot of IEP's to make sure the wording was appropriate and the legal standpoint of it and we just made that

decision right then and there that we were gonna do all that back work to make

sure that the next school year it would become a reality.

Ashley explained the changes she and the rest of the Clear Lake high school staff made

in order to ensure students with disabilities had access to the general education

environment.

In the schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive

practices for students with disabilities, principals shared three key features of including

students with disabilities: The urgent need for reform for students with disabilities, their

commitment to eliminating lower-level courses, and improving instructional practices.

Evidence Inclusion is Successful

Principals described the evidence they have that inclusion is working in their high

schools. I first describe the evidence shared by principals of high schools that were less

critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and compared that to principals

responses that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with

disabilities.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically

self-reflective lacked achievement data for students with disabilities. Instead, these

administrators' evidence of successful inclusion included (a) graduation rates and post-

secondary outcomes of students with disabilities, (b) the positive social impact including

students with disabilities had on all students and (c) providing students with disabilities

access to opportunities.

When describing evidence inclusion is working, these principals identified a lack

of achievement data supporting inclusion. For example, Sean, principal of Brook high

school shared, "I don't have a lot of just hard, factual data. It's more observations throughout... But I can see it… I have the privilege… of knowing students that [are]… identified or receiving special education services." Brook high school's data achievement data was not available to the public due to the small sample size. At Brook high school, Sean describes students with disabilities as fully included in the general education environment. He shared, "they [students with disabilities] are in the same classes [as students without disabilities], all the time... doing the same things." He later reaffirmed, "…again, I don't have hard facts [that inclusion is working]."

Similarly, principal Tony confessed, he too has a lack of evidence that supports inclusion of students with disabilities at Musky Bay high school. He shared, "it's hard because the evidence that everybody outside this room will look at is that our ACT scores have dropped over three years by three or four points and then say it's not working, because that's a measure that is very loud." At Musky Bay, students without disabilities scored an average of 22.3 on the ACT and students with disabilities scored an average of 16.9. Tony further explained, "[we have] more students taking it [the ACT], but again no one wants to hear that…" Tony further described, "The same piece of data can get you teacher of the year and it can also get you fired depending on your perspective."

Tony relies on data measuring growth for students with disabilities as opposed to solely relying on achievement data. Examining growth patterns allowed Tony to see the progress students made over time. He shared;

> … we don't rely necessarily on that data [achievement data], but what we do try to
>
> look at it and map how are we are doing with percentile growth as compared to

peers [without disabilities]… In achievement, we're struggling but in growth we are exceeding significantly.

Tony further explained, "We celebrate that because our kids [with disabilities} are growing faster than anybody but they're still not meeting that achievement, but it's also probably responding from decades of institutional issues."

Steve the principal at Eagle Spring high school explained, "sure, we could look at testing, but predominantly you and I both know that students and IEPs don't test well as it is…" He further described, "I mean, testing scores have, over the last couple of years, we've raised their [students with disabilities'] ACT scores about a point and a half to two points, overalls score a year." Eagle Spring's ACT scores were not available to the public due to the sample size.

At Glacier Hill's high school, students without disabilities score an average of 21.4 on the ACT, and students with disabilities average 14.1. Glacier Hills' principal Hank admitted that he did not have any achievement data that inclusive practices was working at his school saying, "I don't know... and I can't really have a lot of evidence to... well, I guess I could pull secondary data but that's even a little bit difficult to try and track down too."

Graduation Rates and Post-Secondary Outcomes. When describing the evidence that inclusion is working at their schools, principals that were less critically self-reflective shared their first key piece of evidence as graduation rates and post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Hank shared, "I feel like we've been moving kids to graduation and preparing them to be college or career ready over the years."

Principal Sean also referred to the graduation rates and post secondary outcomes of students with disabilities as evidence supporting inclusion. Sean described;

When I'm at their IEP meeting or whatever… I'm amazed by how many of these students are, "Yup, I'm going to this technical college," or, "I'm going to this four year college," or, "You know what? I've already got this planned, and I'm going here to work as soon as I graduate. At the end of May, I'm going to do this." Those types of things I think really show the evidence that what we're doing is working, and that these students are included, and that they are receiving the same opportunities as the general education students.

Sean further explained, "I think one thing that would stand out with our students… with disabilities that they are either going onto a two year post-secondary degree, a four year post-secondary degree, or entering the workforce and being successful right out of high school." Principal Steve also hared, "the fact that we are graduating all of our special Ed students" as evidence that inclusion is successful.

Social Impact of Including Students with Disabilities. In addition to graduation rates and post high school opportunities, principals of that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices at their high schools identified positive social interactions between students with and without disabilities as evidence of inclusion success. Steve explained, "the evidence would be the social, I would say the social development of the students."

Similarly, principal Sean of Brook high school described the social interactions and extracurricular involvement of students with disabilities, as evidence inclusion of students with disabilities is successful. Sean shared, "tonight we have donkey basketball

going on with our FFA… I can tell you right now, that I know there's gonna be multiple kids that we know they are diagnosed with disability, but they're gonna be participating in that event." Sean further explained, "I'm at the football game, the softball game, the basketball game, whatever it may be. Those kids are participating. Those kids are included."

At Musky Bay, Tony described students with disabilities as an integral part of the school community. He explained;

[A] student with [an} intellectual disability is on prom court and it's not a pity thing… it's not going to be on the news… he's a part of this community. Like he's the basketball manager, you know what I mean? And the basketball has a representation on court. That's who it is, but it's not because he has that [disability], it's because he's at every game cheering them on front row…

Tony also proudly shared the best buddies program has been very successful. He shared, "Our best buddies program has expanded all the way down to the fifth grade level. We're doing great things there."

Access to Opportunities. In addition to graduation rates and post high school options and positive social interactions, Musky By principal Tony identified removing barriers of access as evidence of successful inclusive practices. He shared;

…we removed all barriers around access to advanced level coursework… we got rid of honors because we just did an equity audit… It just showed our kids in honors were rich and white and then the informal data showed that [students with disabilities] didn't see a pathway to advanced level courses, so we removed all

those barriers. That's great and that's going building wide. Those are just to like the little things that are successes.

In short, in the absence of positive achievement results, the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices offered graduation rates, post high-school outcomes, and positive social interactions as evidence of successful inclusive practices.

Critically Self-Reflective. Similar to the principals that were less critically self-reflective, the principals that critically self-reflected also lacked achievement data supporting inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Instead, these principals discussed (a) data demonstrating growth of students with disabilities (b) students with disabilities receiving accesses to opportunities and (c) student voice and testimony that inclusion is working.

Data Demonstrating Growth. Related to student growth, Grand Beach high school is "exceeding expectations" on the school report card issued by the State's education department. Nate shared;

It's growth. Now, admittedly, on our report card, majority of our state report card is based on growth, not on achievement… what the public doesn't know is not every state report card, when you're comparing building to building to building, it's not comparing apples to apples to apples. Some schools are focused more on their achievement, because they're at that level. They're already functioning at the 90th percentile. Well your growth is going to suck, because to go from 90 to 91, that's a lot of work… Well, we're at the 40th percentile and we jump to the 50th percentile, holy cow, you jumped ten percentage points. We have that room to, so the big sell to our staff is, stop, don't focus on achievement.

Principal Nate explained he wants all students to be successful and to achieve at high

levels, but admits success is different for each student. Nate described how he shared his

goals for growth to staff;

> Our ACT's, do we want our kids to average a 24, 25, 26, 27 on our ACT?
>
> Absolutely. Let's get to an 18, let's get to a 19, let's progressively get there, focus
>
> on our growth. We have so many kids that were functioning at 12, 13, 14 on the
>
> ACT. Let's grow them three points, yeah they're still going to be below the
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> composite, where they need to be, but if you can grow them three points... We're
>
> already so far behind, when they come in here, we have so many kids that were
>
> coming in, over at that building [middle school], we had kids coming in sixth
>
> grade that were reading at a first grade level. They're lexiled at 300, are you
>
> kidding me? You're coming into sixth grade, your lexiled at 300? General ed kids,
>
> holy cow.

At Grand Beach high school, students without disabilities score an average of 18.8 on the

ACT and students with disabilities score 14.6. Nate described focusing on student

growth as the stepping-stone to increasing student achievement for students with

disabilities.

Principal Kevin also described how Elk River high school is closing gaps through

student growth. He explained, "Certainly when we look at our state report card and

looking at our closing gaps and some of those… indicators show we're closing gaps for

students with IEPs, ELL and economically disadvantaged." At Elk River high school,

students without disabilities score an average of 20.4 on the ACT and students with

disabilities score an average of 14.3.

Principal Alicia cited a lack of achievement data supporting inclusion at Clear Lake high school. At Clear Lake high school, students without disabilities score an average of 19.7 on the ACT and students with disabilities score an average of 14.8. She too, described the importance of evaluating student growth of students with disabilities. She shared;

> I think the evidence will be in some of our academic data… we have some data to show that. It's not huge growth but we went from 99 percent of the students not doing well reading [below proficiency] to 93 percent of the students now who have that deficit. So I mean there's some growth there and I think it comes from the 'push-in' (sic) from the teachers, and keeping the students in front of that tier 1 instruction… I think the biggest evidence is in our data—in our instructional data to show that our students are making gains.

The associate principal of Clear Lake high school, Ashley also explained a lack of achievement data supporting inclusion. She shared, "I am in charge of a lot of the data and I can say that… our data has not declined." I asked Ashley if she has seen the achievement data of students with disabilities increase due to inclusion. She responded; "It has... Well... I'm not confident to say that we have overwhelming evidence… We only have two years; one with [inclusion] and one without [inclusion] but I can say it's pretty comparable…"

Principal Tom also described a lack of supporting data that inclusion is working at Tidal Creek. He shared "we don't have a lot of really good data except for grade data… but the kids are doing well in the classes." At Tidal Creek high school, students without disabilities average 22.7 on the ACT and students without disabilities average 15.8. Tom

explained he does not collect data measuring students social development or sense of belonging. He shared; "We don't necessarily have like, survey data where we say, "do you feel welcome in this class? Do you feel challenged… Do you feel that you're being successful?" He further explained, "I just think it's going well."

Access to Opportunities. Similar to the principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices, the principals who were critically self-reflected also identified access to opportunities as evidence of effective inclusive practices. Nate of Grand Beach high school, first discussed what the unintended consequences of limiting access to students with disabilities. He shared;

> …we have sixth through twelfth grade teachers that all they're doing is trying to fill gaps, fill gaps, fill gaps. If we can focus on our ninth grade curriculum as opposed to filling gaps at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade level. If the sixth grade teachers could focus on their sixth grade curriculum as opposed to filling gaps at second, third and fourth grade, we'd be a lot better off.

Nate further described recent changes to ensure students with disabilities are provided access to the general education curriculum. Nate shared;

> So, collectively as a district, we've gone to, let's focus on our curriculum and let's expose every kid to the universal curriculum. So when you're talking about closing those gaps, what is our data, where it's at? Because of our growth. Ninth grade teachers needed to be teaching ninth grade material, stop teaching the sixth grade stuff, teach the ninth grade stuff. Make the accommodations, but we gotta, you can't just keep dummying down and saying, 'Hey, we're going to just give

you sixth grade material in tenth grade, or our freshmen algebra class is going to

be a sixth grade math.' We're never going to get to the achievement side.

Nate discussed the importance of providing students access to the general education

environment through the use of accommodations, without lowering the standards and

expectations for students with disabilities.

Similarly, Andre shared the barriers that exist due to years of segregating students

with disabilities and denying them access to the general education environment at Port

Harbor high school. Andre explained;

I think Port is little bit behind… I'll speak for this high school… We have some

things to catch up. When we look at our discipline referrals and our unexcused

absences and our low achievement and all that, it's pretty obvious that kids aren't

getting equal access early on or what we're doing with them... They're graduating,

but they're not in the high-flying classes when they graduate… Or they're not

reading at the level that they need to read at...

Andre further discussed district officials are considering training staff ensure all students

have access to the general education environment. Andre explained;

We have a ways to go. We are about to embark on, as a district, some major

equity training… We just had an introductory meeting with her [the equity

trainer]… She laid it out. "This isn't a one-year wonder, this isn't touchy-feely…

This is major." This is years. This is gonna take [a] decade to get to where you

wanna be. This is gonna impact everything, from how you budget to how you

schedule kids to how you da-da-da-da-da-da… This is major change, and it's

gonna take a long time.

Principals from high schools that critically self-reflected first shared data demonstrating growth and the importance of providing students with disabilities access to opportunities as evidence inclusion is working. As their third piece of evidence showing inclusion is working, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices discussed student voice and testimony. As an example, Alicia discussed student voice, as an indicator inclusion is successful at Clear Lake high school. She also shared, "socially I know it's working, because our students are very accepting--even our students who are in the spec ed classrooms. They're well respected—[and] they're treated the same [as students without disabilities]."

Principal Kevin also discussed student voice, as evidence inclusion is successful. Before Kevin transitioned to the principalship at Elk River high school, all students at Elk River with IEPs were educated in the basement of the high school. The students with disabilities' lockers, core subject areas and special education resource classrooms were all located in the basement of the high school. Kevin explained;

> "Certainly, we have some qualitative [evidence]... just when you talk to students, especially some of the students who previously had been in all pullout classes for their math and English instruction and the comments that they have made and the excitement they had in being included... and fear of not being included in classrooms that [they were] previously… excluded from… it was through conversations and through IEP meetings, quite a few IEP meetings where students would outright make the comments about their experience.

Furthermore, Kevin provided powerful evidence collected through student voice, as evidence inclusion is successful at Elk River high school. He shared; "The students

comments about coming upstairs, because literally they had been segregated downstairs...

"Don't take me out of this classroom," and things of that sort."

In schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities relied on data demonstrating growth of students with disabilities, and students with disabilities receiving equal access to opportunities and student voice, as evidence inclusion has been successful at their high school.

Conclusion

Principals that were less critically self-reflective and principals that critically self-reflected described their journey of including students with disabilities. The principals also described the evidence inclusion has been successful in their high schools. The two groups of principals shared some similarities and differences in their responses. Both groups discussed the lack of achievement data supporting inclusive practices and the importance of providing access to opportunities for students with disabilities. The principals that were critically self-reflected provided more evidence of intentional practices to include students with disabilities and to interrupt systems that marginalize students than the principals that were less critically self-reflective. In the next chapter, I discuss the areas identified by the principals in need of improvement when including students with disabilities and the barriers to inclusion.

CHAPTER 5: AREAS OF IMPROVMENT AND THE BARRIERS OF

INCLUSION

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To provide a context for the research question, within this chapter, I present administrator reports of the areas they identified in need of improvement when including students with disabilities and the barriers in doing so. I compare the schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students labeled with disabilities (4 principals) to schools that principals were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities (6 principals).

Areas of Improvement

Administrators identified the areas of improvement when including students with disabilities. I describe first the areas in need of improvement as identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective and then compare that to the principal responses from principals that were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities shared (a) a need to raise expectations for students with disabilities and to (b) ensure students with intellectual disabilities are afforded the same opportunities as other students in the school environment. Additionally, principals discussed a need (c) to build capacity in staff to better meet the needs of diverse learning abilities.

Increased Expectations. When describing areas in need of improvement when including students with disabilities, principals identified the need to increase expectations

of students with disabilities. As an example, Hank identified eliminating lower level classes and raising expectations of all students as an area he could improve upon. Hank shared, "getting rid of our intermediate or our… lower level courses, and getting rid of our 'creating algebra course'... there's algebra, honors algebra and AP, that's all we need."

Similarly, Sean explained the need to raise expectations at Brook high school to build independence the students with disabilities. He shared;

I think we still need to work on the independence part of it. That's always that fine line. You want to provide as much room to make mistakes, because we obviously learn from our mistakes, but our own room to grow as well… we need to continue to try to do that, and make sure that we are continuing to challenge all of our kids, but especially our kids that maybe have some type of learning disability… I want all of them, all those students, to believe, "I can do whatever I put my mind to and whatever I want to do. If I want to go be a doctor, if I want to be a teacher, if I want to..." whatever it may be, I want to set that bar high, that's what we're shooting for, for every single student.

Sean described the importance of raising expectations to develop independence in students with disabilities.

Including Students with Significant or Intellectual Disabilities. In addition to increasing expectations, the second key area identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities centered on the need to include students identified with intellectual or severe disabilities. As an example, Steve articulated the need to improve inclusive practices for students identified

with intellectual disabilities at Eagle Spring high school. He explained, "Probably the more severe disabled students. I mean, there's things that we could work on… I mean, sometimes those students tend to not be included as much." Steve further described, "I would like to see them in the classroom more… their academics are out of the classroom." When students with intellectual disabilities are included at Eagle Spring, Steve explained, "it's typically hands-on classes… life skills class, and cooking classes."

Similarly, Tony quickly identified the need to include students with intellectual and significant disabilities more in the general education classrooms at Musky Bay. Tony shared, "probably… around our students with significant disabilities. I'm not quite sure what they're doing in their day and I know it's got to be very fluid and it depends, but some of that would be interesting." Tony further described, "I haven't spent a ton of time in our 18 to 21 program, but watching from a distance and like 'Hmm, that might be an area for growth, some of our vocational Education.'"

Build Capacity to Meet Diverse Needs. Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities identified two areas of improvement: raise expectations for students with disabilities and to include students with intellectual or significant disabilities. The third key area in need of improvement centered on the need to build capacity in staff to meet diverse needs. As an example, Tony identified the need to offer continued professional development opportunities of his support staff. The paraprofessionals (para-educators) are a support to students with disabilities in the inclusive environment at Musky Bay high school. Tony explained;

> We also need to do a better job of our para-educators in valuing them as
>
> professionals rather than managers of kids… we have 30 of them here… they go

in and out and they find new jobs… we treat them like the bag boy at the grocery store. No one's going to be a lifelong bag boy. You don't want that, actually… we want to invest in career growth for them and career growth is not going to happen with five hours a day, four days a week or whatever.

Tony described the opportunity to invest in his support staff to better meet the needs of diverse learners and to demonstrate they are integral part of educating students in an inclusive environment.

When including students with disabilities, principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective identified the areas in need of improvement as raising expectations for students with disabilities, ensuring students with intellectual or significant disabilities are afforded the same opportunities as students without disabilities and the need to build capacity in staff to meet the needs of diverse learners. Although being less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices, these principals recognized some areas in need of improvement when including students with disabilities.

Critically Self-Reflective. Six administrators from high schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities described areas they could improve upon when including students with disabilities. The principals identified (a) the need to eliminate of low-level general education and special education courses, and (b) the need to build capacity in staff to meet the needs of diverse learning abilities.

Eliminating Low-Level Courses. These principals first focused on the elimination of low-level courses that perpetuate inequities in their high schools. As an example, principal Andre of Port Harbor high school discussed the need to eliminate lower level,

tracked classes to provide students with disabilities access to the general education

curriculum. He explained;

> Academically… we're struggling. We need to find a better way to catch kids up
>
> before they get to high school instead of tracking them in classes. We track
>
> because it's easier and we track because we say the kids need to, [or] they're
>
> gonna fail in a regular class. I guess we're well ingrained in that thought. We
>
> think we're really doing really good stuff with that and we justify it, but we're
>
> finding out that that's probably not the best way to go.

Andre further explained how the upcoming equity training would help change existing

practices that oppress, typically marginalized populations. He explained;

> Our equity training, that's how we've gotta change our thought, because we're not
>
> doing it right... When you look at, on the surface, what we say and how we work
>
> with people and how we're inclusive in our ever-changing diversity… But the
>
> output doesn't look like it's inclusive. The evidence is there. From GPAs to plans
>
> after graduation, to where kids end up, it's not showing in our data.

Principal Andre described the need to change their practices at Port Harbor high school

and how their focus on equity will allow for open honest discussions of the inequities that

exist in their school setting.

Nate also identified the areas in need of improvement at Grand Beach high

school, as eliminating his low-level general and special education courses. He shared,

"My goal is to get down to zero self-contains, I would love to get to zero self contains."

Grand Beach school district failed a referendum last year, causing several cuts to teachers

and support staff. Due to these budget cuts, Nate was forced to create study halls with up

to 125 students. He described the environment as not being conducive to learning. He explained;

> I went from having a time in the day where students received the help they need to having teachers checking their emails, doing lesson planning, grading during that time, it drives me nuts. I'd walk in, I'd see kids sitting on top of desks, playing on their phones. Teachers sitting behind their computers, oftentimes nobody would recognize that I even walked in the room and I'd sit there for fourteen minutes, it was just fourteen minutes of chill.

This past spring Grand Beach school district successfully passed a referendum that will allow for Nate to hire staff back and lower his teacher to student rations. He is designing a 'tutor study hall' that will allow teachers to work closely with students in need, focusing on students with disabilities. He explained the creation of these study halls;

> [the study hall will have] Nine kids, eight kids, mostly special ed, if I'm lucky, one or two gen ed [students]… I'd like to get them co-taught, maybe increase the size a little bit, this way I can get about a 50/50 mix of both [students with and without disabilities] and it's specific to those handpicked [students] to be in tutored study hall.

Nate described the passing of the referendum as an opportunity to create study halls focused on providing students with disabilities intervention. Although he described an area of improvement to be the elimination of special education content areas, he will be creating "tutor study halls" comprised of majority of students with disabilities.

Ashley also described the need to eliminate special education classes at Clear Lake high school. She shared "just eliminating the non-inclusive classes such as CCR

(college career readiness), that's a resource room." At Clear Lake high school, students identified with a disability are assigned a class called "College Career Readiness," which provides students with disabilities an opportunity to learn about career pathways and to complete homework with the assistance of a special education teacher.

Build Capacity to Meet Diverse Needs. Similar to the principals at the principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices, these principals saw the need to build staff capacity as well to meet diverse learning needs as areas of improvement. As an example, associate principal Ashley described the need to empower her special education teachers, to teach the rest of her staff how to educate diverse learners. She shared;

> I think we have a very strong special ed staff at my high school and I think we need to tap into those resources more and that would be a big change. I would love to see them lead professional development, because they're willing to work. I'll say that's one huge positive we have at Clear Lake, from being, in multiple school districts I think we have one of the strongest special ed teachers cohort around. They could help the general ed teachers.

Ashley described having teachers right in her building that have expertise in meeting the needs of diverse learners. She described empowering her special education teachers to build capacity in the rest of the staff to educate students in an inclusive environment.

Alicia also described the need to continue to build capacity through co-planning time at Clear Lake high school. When asked the area in need of improvement when including disabilities, she responded;

The co-planning piece, while they are pushing into the regular ed classrooms. I

still think that we have the pieces where the special ed teachers are pushing in but

they're still pulling their students off to the side in special groups because the gen

ed [teacher] doesn't know what to do with them [students with disabilities].

Alicia further explained, "I would like them to just be fully included and supported by the

general ed staff, that means more co-planning pieces."

Principal Kevin also described building capacity in his staff to meet the needs of

struggling learners at Elk River high school. He shared;

I think there's just always the struggle of helping students to learn, that's just a

constant struggle. A student who has reading difficulty is tough at the high school

level and the standards that are being expected, those are challenging. And so it's

an always continually getting better, and then also continuing looking at the

individual student and not just blanketing [services].

Kevin described the difficulties of teaching struggling readers content standards in high

school. He explained the importance of continuing to grow as professionals in order to

meet needs of diverse ability levels.

When including students with disabilities, the principals that were critically self-

reflective identified areas in need of improvement as eliminating low-level courses and

building capacity in staff to meet the needs of diverse learners. Both groups of principals

described the need to build capacity in staff to meet diverse ability levels. The less

critically self-reflective principals recognized the need to include students with

significant or intellectual disabilities to a greater extent. Principals that were critically

self-reflective of their inclusive practices recognized the need to eliminate lower-level

regular and special education courses to allow students with disabilities access to general education instruction.

Barriers to Inclusion

Administrators described the barriers that exist within their school when including students with disabilities. I describe first the barriers identified by the principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and then compare that to the principal responses that were critically self-reflective.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices described (a) the lack of staff capacity to teach students with diverse learning needs, (b) inadvertently lowering expectations for students with disabilities through efforts of including them in the general education environment and (c) the negative perception of inclusion. These principals described these barriers and their efforts to eliminate them.

Lack of Capacity to Meet Diverse Ability Levels. These principals first described a lack of capacity to meet diverse learning needs. As an example, Hank of Glacier Hill's high school described several staff members that were untrained and uncomfortable educating students with disabilities. He shared, "I feel like sometimes teachers may not feel confident enough to handle certain types of students with disabilities in their class. They don't feel like they've been given enough PD or exposure or experience." Hank explained he is always willing to provide support to teachers to educate students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom, although he is fearful staff do not ask for assistance when needed. He explained;

We always send [a special education teacher], to that teacher, we have a great special Ed. Department, that is totally willing to work and explain and help, but I think sometimes, I don't want to say teacher pride, but maybe a teacher doesn't want to expose their weakness potentially, that maybe they aren't as strong when dealing with significant... not even significant, but students with disabilities in general.

Furthermore, through this conversation I learned that families living within the Glacier Hills' School District boundaries have access to a public segregated school for students with disabilities. Hank described this school as free to families and districts for students with severe disabilities. He shared;

We don't necessarily see... the spectrum of kids that have… LD, we have some... we've had downs syndrome student[s], we have one with, oh what's it called ... it's not downs syndrome, but someone would maybe think that it's similar. And then, we have a couple kids with some physical issues. But for the most part, we're not seeing the severe, we don't have anyone severe… When the laws all changed with inclusion, I think anything that was existing was grandfathered in… So we really don't see the significant or severe…

Hank explained, although he identified the need to improve teaching practices for students with disabilities, teachers are not educating a wide range of disabilities.

Ensuring High Expectations. Principals that were less critically self-reflective identified a second barrier to including students with disabilities as ensuring high expectations for students with disabilities. As an example principal Steve shared,

"Although we are including kids [with disabilities], we do have to make sure we are continuing to challenge all of our students."

Similarly, Tony also described his concern of lowering expectations for students with disabilities. He shared;

> … probably unintentionally lowering standards for kids. Cause I've had the benefit of working with some of these kids since fifth grade and I know they can write a paragraph, but that teacher doesn't necessarily know what they produced in eighth grade and so we take maybe three steps backwards. That's a huge issue.

As a former principal of the Middle School of Musky Bay, Tony brings a unique understanding of the capabilities of students attending Musky Bay high school.

Thus far, principals from schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices identified barriers to including students with disabilities as staff lacking capacity to meet diverse ability levels ensuring students are held to high expectations. A third a final barrier these principal identified centered on the negative perception of inclusion of students with disabilities. For example, principal Tony from Musky Bay discussed the outside perception of including students with significant disabilities as a barrier to inclusion. He shared, "the biggest barrier is the moments of crisis and the perception that then parents have." Tony further described;

> General Ed parents can watch a kid play with another kid all day long at recess, but then when that minute she becomes dis-regulated, and he kicks, bites, punches that student, it's all over Facebook that these students shouldn't go to this school… I don't know how you tackle that?

Tony described his struggles with changing the negative perception of including students with disabilities in the community.

In schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, the principals identified barriers of including students with disabilities as a lack of capacity of staff to meet diverse learning needs, inadvertently lowering expectations for students with disabilities through efforts of including them in the general education environment and the negative perception of inclusion. The principals discussed these barriers as interfering with their efforts of including students with disabilities.

Critically Self-Reflective. The six principals who were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices varied in their descriptions of barriers that exist when including students with disabilities. The principals discussed barriers that they anticipated, that never surfaced as a barrier to including students with disabilities. The principals suggested barriers to inclusion as (a) Changing the culture to including students with disabilities, (b) lack of capacity of staff to meet diverse ability levels, (c) lack of resources and competing priorities, and (d) language barriers and mistrust.

At Elk River high school, barriers Kevin anticipated interrupting his efforts of including students with disabilities, never came to fruition. Kevin reflected on his experience moving to an inclusive model and finding support in the school board, staff and community. He shared,

> There hasn't been a lot of pushback. It was funny, last summer I came across my
> notes that I had for transitioning to the elimination of pullout classes and I had
> notes that would have made this year... You know, the plan I had was this year

would be the first year of zero pullout classes. And when we met as a group, the special education teachers were adamant about, "No, I think we can do it now." So we eliminated 90-some percent of our pullout classes and the only concern that the teachers had was the IEP meetings that would have to be done to change IEP's and reluctance from some of the parents.

Kevin further explained the support Elk River high school found in parents of students typically segregated. Kevin shared;

…so I'd agreed at that time, 'Yup, if we take this much more aggressive timeline, I will commit to being at any IEP meeting that you feel is going to be necessary because of potential parent resistance.' And so there were a few that I was asked to be a part of and almost to a 'T,' parents were very open to the idea… There was some concern; there was certainly some fear. We still have fear that comes… And so we certainly do run into parents very reluctant at times, but almost every time whether it be six months, a year in, the parents are very happy with the situation and with their students being in the general ed classroom and feeling like they are getting more than what they would have previously gotten in a pullout situation.

Kevin's own support of his staff was key to addressing any barriers as they made the transition to including students with disabilities. As Kevin reflected on his journey of including students with disabilities, he explained the systems and structures are in place to sustain inclusive practices. Kevin explained, "Honestly… if the group [of staff] that was there now were to leave, I do believe these practices would continue. I don't think

that there would be a push to roll back to a pullout situation. It really has become that embedded point."

Changing the Culture to Include Students with Disabilities. Principals from high schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices identified difficulties changing the culture of their buildings to include students with disabilities. As an example, Tom identifies the culture of Tidal Creek high school as a barrier to meeting the needs of diverse ability levels. Tom explained his efforts to improve inclusive practices at Tidal creek have been met with resistance from veteran staff. He shared;

> …right now the biggest barrier is just that culture change, that every single kid
> has a place in any class that we teach. It's not just about inclusive practices.
> When I first came, there's a number of teachers who wanted, if a kid was going to
> take an AP class, they had to have a recommendation from a teacher… 'It's an AP
> class, we don't give accommodations in AP classes…' 'yeah we do.'

Tom further described, "It is those types of culture changes [that] still need to shift. [I] still have some teachers that have been here a long time that can't quite see doing things differently…" Despite the pushback from staff, Tom is dedicated to changing practices for students with disabilities.

Associate Principal Ashley also identified the high school culture as a barrier to including students with disabilities. Ashley described the need to change culture and expectations of staff educating all students. She shared,

> …having teachers realize that all their kids are theirs and you don't just send out a
> kid with an IEP to the special ed teacher; is that we need to be responsible for all
> the kids in our class. I think that's just a cultural change that needs to be made

and I think it's across whatever school district you have is to get that buy in. I

think that's a big barrier is the buy-in and knowing that we can help all students.

Ashley explained, in order to get teacher 'buy-in,' she must first help them understand the

benefits of inclusionary practices.

Lack of Capacity to Meet Diverse Ability Levels. Similar to the principals that

were less critically self-reflective, principals that critically self-reflected on their

inclusive practices identified a lack of staff capacity as a barrier to inclusive practices.

For example, Kevin explained the resistance to inclusion from general education staff at

Elk River is from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the benefits of inclusion and

how to teach diverse learners. He Explained, "I would also say knowledge, just

knowledge of learning and how students learn. How all humans learn and then how

students with special needs learn and how to best reach students. Those are all barriers."

In discussing how he addressed the lack of knowledge in general education staff, Kevin

responded, "That is an area that is still a barrier... trying to figure [that] out ... We haven't

found any perfect schedule, we haven't found any magic potion yet."

Lack of Resources and Competing Interests. Principals that were critically self-

reflective of their inclusive practices identified a lack of funding and competing interests

as a third barrier to including students with disabilities. For example, principal Nate

explained, "It's hard to find the staffing minutes. We had a failed referendum last year

and I lost thirteen people from this building, eight teachers." He further described the

impact of the budget cuts, he shared, "if you went down to my science rooms, you'd have

a hard time moving around… I have a couple of science classrooms that have 36 kids in

there. That's ridiculous."

Associate principal Ashley described a lack resources and competing interests as barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities at Clear Lake high school. She explained;

> I'd say the big barriers are resources—Resources, time and money… this goes back to my question, what does inclusive classrooms look like. If we want that co-planning, co-serve we're gonna have to remove the barrier of time and staffing. Right now we don't have time available to all of our teachers to work together. We have a barrier of priority. What is our priority? Lets put our money there.

At Clear Lake high school, Ashley described resources allocated to support other priorities as opposed to of lowering teacher to student ratios and providing staff development on inclusive practices.

Principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices identified communication barriers and mistrust as their fourth barrier to including students with disabilities. As an example, Port Harbor high school educates a high number of English Language Learners and transient families. Principal Andre described several students with disabilities are also English Language Learners. He explained communicating with families across identities as a barrier. He explained, "Language can be a big barrier. It's not just Spanish. We got kids from Burmese and kids from Slavic countries that have disabilities... We just can't communicate with them. That's huge. That's a humongous barrier." Andre further described the deeply rooted mistrust between schools and many Port Harbor families as a barrier to inclusion. He shared,

Another one is parent mistrust. And they mistrust educators for good reason. It's their background, it's the country they're coming from, it's government practices that they had on them in their own country, it's our own government practices with moving people... the border thing going on. There's a lot of reasons to not trust authorities, and some of our parents look at principals and teachers and educators as authorities, much like they do a police officer or the President... So the trust is not there, besides the language barrier not being there.

Mistrust and language barriers are described as barriers impeding inclusion of students with disabilities at Port Harbor high school.

In the schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals identified barriers of changing school culture to include students with disabilities, a lack of capacity in staff to meet diverse ability levels, a lack of resources and competing interests, and establishing trusting communication between school and families. Principals also discussed barriers they anticipated that never interfered with including students with disabilities.

Conclusion

The two groups of principals shared some similarities and differences in their responses. Both groups of principals identified the lack of staff capacity to meet diverse ability levels as a barrier to including students with disabilities. The two groups of principals also agreed on the need to raise expectations for students with disabilities. In schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, the principals described how staff inadvertently lower expectations for students with disabilities through efforts of including them in the

general education environment. The principals that critically self-reflected on their

inclusive practices for students with disabilities, explained the importance of establishing

trusting communication between school and families. In the next chapter I discuss how

administrators define and describe belonging for students in their high school. I also

review the impact including students with disabilities has on all students. Finally, I share

principal's impressions of the YRBS sense of belonging scores.

CHAPTER 6: SENSE OF BELONGING IN HIGH SCHOOLS

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To address the research question, within this chapter, I present administrator reports of how these administrators define and describe belonging for the student in their high school. I also discuss the impact inclusion of students with disabilities had on the sense of belonging of all students. Finally, I review the principal's impression to the YRBS sense of belonging scores. I compare the schools that the principals were less self-reflective of their inclusionary practices for students labeled with disabilities (4 principals) to principals responses that critically self-reflected (6 principals) on their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities.

Defining Belonging

The administrators described belonging and discussed what it looks like for their students in their high school. I share first the principals' description of belonging from principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and then compare that to the responses from the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices described belonging as (a) experiencing a sense of community, (b) student involvement in extracurricular activities, and (c) school culture and climate. Several principals assess student's sense of belonging, culture and community through surveys.

Sense of Community. When defining a sense of belonging and describing what it looks like in their students, principals that were less critically self-reflective first described a sense of community. As an example, principal Steve from Eagle Spring high school explained, "Belonging is being part of the school community, whether it is [in the] classroom, whether it be extra curricular, whether it is outside activities." Steve explained the importance of extracurricular activities, as assisting students to expand their social network resulting in increased opportunities after graduation.

At Brook high school, principal Sean described the relationship between belonging and peer group affiliation. Sean explained, "what comes to my mind is your peer relationships and how you feel you're a part of your school's community." Sean described the students at Brook high school that have a strong sense of community are more likely to experience academic success.

Principal Tony from Musky Bay defined belonging as "A sense of community and having some sort of identity within the larger community." Tony described belonging as unique to each student's self-perceptions, yet related to a larger cultural group of members that share similar identities or interests.

Student Involvement in Extracurricular Activities. The principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices first described belonging as a sense of community. The principals also described the importance of involvement in extracurricular activities as a second key feature to belonging. For example, Tony explained "in order for students to belonging, they must experience something bigger than themselves at school." He shared;

A sense of belonging means that when they walk in this door [at school]; they know they're at Musky Bay high school and we just rebranded the whole building this summer… They belong here, but then what's their part here? It's not cliques, but it's okay to say like, 'I'm passionate about theater, and this is where I hang out, this is my spot in this building, but it's cool that I'm passionate about theater and I go to a football game and the football player comes to my show' and it's not seen as this almost tribal alliance. That would be the sense of belonging.

Tony described the students that are more involved experience greater academically success and are socially competent.

Similarly, Steve discussed the importance of participation in sports and extra-curriculum activities at Eagle Spring high school. Steve described, "one of the key things… with a small school… We need every possible student participating in as much as they can, which is a huge part of feeling like you belong to the community and to the school."

Hank described belonging at Glacier Hill's high school from a student perspective, as a "continuum for all." He explained, "I don't think there's a one size fits all, but it is important they are involved in something." Hank Shared;

I think for me, belonging can look very different because you will have some kids that just want to come to school and get educated and move on. They aren't going to want to be in the sports, they aren't going to want to be in clubs and activities. They might be very introverted and intelligent and just want to focus on academics. And then you do have the opposite of that, where you would have

kids that only come to school because they want to be in sports, clubs and activities.

At Glacier Hill's high school, belonging is described to be personal to the student's high school experience and goals.

School Culture and Climate. Principals first described belonging as a sense of community, followed by involvement in extracurricular activities. The third key feature of belonging, described by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices was the importance of a positive culture and climate. For example, Hank made building a strong culture and community a priority area at Glacier Hill's high school this past year. He explained school culture expands into the community and the homes of students, in turn impacting the sense of belonging students experience at school. He surveyed students, staff and families to assess the overall school culture. He explained;

> Well, it's interesting, we're doing a lot of big projects this year and maybe I got too many going on, but one of the things we've been evaluating is school culture here… Culture among the staff, culture among the students and culture among the community. And we've asked those questions with kids, about do you feel welcome at school?... Do you feel pride in your school?... Do you want to come to school and then are you involved in activities, sports, clubs and whatever.

Furthermore, Hank defined belonging as "culture among the staff, culture among the students and culture among the community."

To understand the sense of belonging students experience and the culture at Brook high school, Sean also surveyed his high school students. Sean described a recent focus to improve the culture of his buildings, from students to staff. He shared;

> I actually just did a survey of the students halfway through the year and there was a one through five rating scale. Five being really a strong sense of belonging and our average, I don't have it right in front of me, but I can tell you it was over 4.25. Our students are coming back and saying, 'You know what? This is a great place and I feel very welcome here. I feel like I belong.'

Sean described the importance of an annual survey to assess the school's overall effectiveness and how well his efforts of improving the culture are working.

In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities described belonging as experiencing a sense of community, student involvement in extracurricular activities and a positive culture and climate at their high school. Several principals relied on surveys to assess the sense of belonging.

Critically Self-Reflective. The six principals who critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices described belonging as (a) belonging as a personal experience to each individual student, (b) the importance of school providing a safe and secure place for students to learn and interact with each other.

Belonging as a Personal Experience. The principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities viewed belonging as a personal experience for each individual student. As an example, Kevin explained belonging is personal to the individual and will vary student to student. Kevin shared, "I think

belonging is feeling like you have a place. Feeling like you have a place in the school or the community or whatever the case maybe. I think it's an internalized feeling that you have a place there and that you belong there."

Principal Andre also described belonging as being personal to each student at Port Harbor high school. He explained, "I can't define belonging. Belonging has to be a definition of each individual. To ask somebody whether or not they belong, it has to fit their definition. So I don't know what that is." Andre further explained, "for some students, "I belong because I have a lot of friends here. I belong because I feel that I can talk to a few adults. I belong because I'm not being picked on. I belong because I like the food here…"

Safe and Secure Environments. In addition to belonging being a personal experience for each student, Tom, Alicia and Ashley described the importance of providing a safe and secure place at school, where students feel comfortable to learn and interact with others. Principal Alicia from Clear Lake high school shared, "Belonging [is] when a student feels comfortable and secure, like they would at home, but in the building, they feel safe, they're happy, they want to be here."

Clear Lake high school's associate principal, Ashley explained,

"… it is going to depend on the student, each student will feel connected to their peers and the school differently. To feel belonging, you have to feel like you're wanted and you feel that you play an important role of giving back to the culture of the school in a positive way and that will vary."

Ashley explained the importance of allowing students find their own sense of belonging and not trying to define it for them.

To further explain the importance of providing a safe and secure environment, Tom of Tidal Creek high school explained, "I think we always talk about making a big school feel small and that everybody has a place here, regardless of whether it's academic or extracurricular, that there's a place where they feel that they belong and are safe."

Similarly, at Clear Lake high school, Alicia described student's safety as key to their sense of belonging. She shared; students would often prefer to spend all day and night at school, rather than at home. Alicia added, "I think the evidence of that [belonging in students] is when I have to constantly push students out of things [school events], 'like it's time to go home.' I love the fact that students want to be here... They feel safe here."

In schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals described sense of belonging as being personal to each student. Further, these principals explained feeling safe and secure at school as an important component of sense of belonging.

The Impact of Inclusion of Students with Disabilities on Other Students

Administrators described the impact of including students with disabilities had on other students in their school. Here, I compare the principals that were less critically self-reflective to principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities shared how including students with disabilities created a school that (a) is more empathetic, (b) is accepting and embraces diversity and (c) contributes to improvements in the culture and community of their buildings.

Empathy. The first key feature identified by principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices explained how students have become more empathetic as a result of including students with disabilities. For example, Steve shared, "I think the other students have developed a lot more empathy. I mean, I will have... I will have some regular Ed students come in and say, so and so is saying things like this about so and so. I mean, they're empathetic, they're considerate. They help them [students with disabilities] out." Steve further described, "I mean it [inclusion] developed, kind of, a family-type of atmosphere here at school."

Accepting and Embracing Diversity. In addition to empathy, principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices believed that inclusion helped all students embrace and accept diversity. For example, Hank observed changes in his student body as a result of including students with disabilities at Glacier Hill's high school. He shared, "… my biggest pride factors in our school, is how well our kids act toward each other, especially if there's something going on… they just rock it, and I think its because of sped [students with disabilities] is included… They just accept each other as is."

Hank described students with disabilities are embraced at Glacier Hills high school. A student identified with Downs Syndrome was recently voted onto prom court, which reminded Hank of a student with a similar disability that won King several years ago. He reminisced, "They [the students] carried him out on their shoulders… during the pep rally… everybody was emotional. You could feel the emotion in the gym." Similarly, Hank explained their baseball manager is a student with a physical disability who relies on the use of leg braces for mobility. He shared "they [staff] do a good job of

creating situations for our students too… at a JV game, they had him be a runner and he got to run the bases."

Improved Culture and Community. Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices believed that including students improved the over-all culture and climate of the school and community. As an example, principal Sean from Brook high school shared, "… I think it's including every student, I mean it's just an overall mindset that we are all here together, we're gonna be respectful of each other, we're gonna work with each other." Sean explained,

> I always tell kids, 'You don't have to be best friends with everybody in your
>
> class, but you better be respectful of every classmate in your class.' If you have
>
> that mindset, and you include everybody, and give everybody an opportunity, it
>
> just makes the school run so much better.

Principal Sean explained, at Brook high school including students with disabilities created an environment where students "look out for one another."

Hank contributes the "team-like" atmosphere at Glacier Hill's high school to inclusion of students with disabilities. He further shared, "I see a lot of our kids volunteer to help other kids, whether it's even tutoring or just whatever. People buddying up with kids, they see a kids that's kind of by themselves, they'll go and assert themselves and buddy up with them."

Tony described the impact of including students with disabilities as vast at Musky Bay. Tony provided context to the impact of inclusion through sharing a touching story between a student with and without a disabilities. He shared;

There's a ninth grader who I've had since fifth grade when I was at the intermediate school and he never comes to school, never comes to school… it was always a fight to get him to school and we'd go weeks without seeing him, or he'd finally come in and it was pretty rough. Then in eighth grade he found this love of taking care of Craig, which is a student with Down's Syndrome and found real value and worth and helping Craig and came to school almost every day in eighth grade… Craig was in his class and Craig loved him. He helped Craig, he didn't enabled Craig. Craig did probably more for Justin. It got Justin there. Justin wasn't coming to school. Justin would call him and say, "Hey, come on, come to school," and he'd get there and go from there. Then as we transitioned to the high school, it's harder to have that smaller mindset because Craig wanted to take Spanish but [Justin] wanted to take German. Like it's just not always possible, so we got at least got them in one class together and Justin again then started not coming to school, but he always came for world history block with Craig… Then we finally just said, 'Just throw them in all Craig's classes,' because it's not a dependency thing. They don't necessarily sit next to each other, but it's almost like a trusting thing. That's been cool… It's amazing. And like I say to people, they say, "Well, how's this going to help Justin be dependent, blah blah blah?" Well, at least it gets them in the door, gets him learning something. It's gets him out of his house. It gets him in a safe environment.

In the story Tony shared, the benefits of inclusion were reciprocal. Craig benefited from the natural supports of a peer assisting him in the classroom, while Justin found motivation and his calling to support his classmate with a disability. Principal Tony

emphasized, by "including students like Craig in the general education environment, students like Justin were able to find a place to belonging."

Sean also discussed the impact including students with disabilities had on the culture of the building. Sean described how his staff has strong relationships with all his students as a result of including students with disabilities. He shared;

We see every student every day. I mean it's hard to explain unless you're used to a small school, but our teachers are out in the hallways. Our math teacher in the high school, who may not have the juniors until fifth hour, he will already know what juniors are gone without even looking at the attendance because, that student that walked by me in the hallway this morning, I wasn't able to say good morning to so and so. They're not here today, because that's what we do."

Furthermore, Sean described his staff as "out in the hallway… greeting students everyday. I think that's where you get that personalized connection. I, myself, one of my favorite times of the day is at 7:45, I'm out in the parking lot greeting all of our students as they get off the bus."

In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals described inclusion of students with disabilities impacting the sense of belonging of all student by developing empathy in the student body and embracing student differences. The principals also described improvements in the overall school culture that fostered a sense of belonging for all students.

Critically Self-Reflected. The six principals who critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices described inclusion of students with disabilities as (a) removing the

mystery of special education, (b), reducing behavior infractions, (c), improving

acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities who are typically segregated

and (d), observed negative impacts of including students with disabilities.

Removing the Mystery of Special Education. Including students with disabilities

impacted the entire school in the minimally inclusive schools by removing the mystery of

special education. As an example, Kevin explained how inclusion has provided access to

opportunities for students who were typically marginalized at Elk River high school. He

shared;

> The inclusion has brought down barriers... My experience has been it was almost
>
> mysterious, you go to these classrooms that are, in this case like we said,
>
> downstairs. 'What's going on there? Who are these people who help you? Who
>
> are these teachers? I'm not even sure.' I now know who they are… I think now a
>
> lot of those barriers have been reduced, I don't think you can even say eliminated,
>
> but those barriers have been reduced. Those questions have been significantly
>
> reduced. The special education teachers are recognized by students throughout the
>
> building. It's no longer 'your' teacher. I would say one of the other really
>
> gratifying things, there's not as much of the 'my students,' 'your students,' and
>
> almost none, really, in many ways.

By bringing down barriers and creating transparency, Elk River high school created an

atmosphere of collaboration and shared responsibilities.

Alicia echoed Kevin by sharing the positive impact inclusion of students with

disabilities had on other students at Clear Lake high school. She shared, "I see kids [with

disabilities] in classes and doing things that we never use to… before I didn't even know them."

Decrease in Behavior Infractions. Second, including students with disabilities in the schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices impacted the entire school by decreasing behavioral infractions of all students. As an example, Tom contributes the decrease of behavioral referrals at Tidal Creek high school to inclusion of students with disabilities. He Shared;

I think that it became, 'Oh, we're in the dumb group and so let's act like dummies. You think we're dumb? You think we're idiots? You think we've got behavioral problems? Well, we'll show you how dumb we are.' I mean, none of the co-teaching kind of classes or that... We've got special Ed kids spread out now. Just from a qualitative perspective, it's had to help. I remember the first few years I was here, I mean referral after referral after referral. Oh, where'd it happen? Oh, in an 'A' level class (special education class). Well... Now I think it's so much better than it was three or four years ago.

Tom credited inclusion of students with disabilities across courses to the decrease of behavioral referrals, thus improving the sense of belonging of all students.

Acceptance and Understanding of Students Typically Segregated. Principals that critically self- reflected on their inclusive practices described including students with disabilities contributed to the acceptance and understanding of students without disabilities. Students without disabilities gained more acceptance and understanding of diversity through their interacting with students with disabilities in the hallway or coffee shop. As an example, Ashley shared;

I think Clear Lake is pretty accepting of all students, regardless of race, regardless of disability, regardless of any of that. There's this one kid that is not in   an inclusive environment, he is in [Betty's] room [Intellectual Disability program]. Everybody loves that kid. He goes through the halls, he gives high fives to all the kids, the kids generally care about him, talk to him and that's what I love to see regardless of whatever disability is that inclusion… I think is great because it gets the kids in the I.D. room opportunities to interact with others as well as kids that don't have that disability.

Similarly, students with an intellectual disability at Tidal Creek high school are self-contained in a segregated environment. Tom described the positive impact the students with intellectual disabilities had on other students, even though he admitted the students were segregated nearly the entire day:

I'm hoping that just it's everybody sees everybody as one student body. Even though the majority of our ID population, for instance, is kind of housed down here [the end of a hallway], getting them out in different parts of the building I think has been tremendous. r

At Tidal Creek the interactions between the segregated students with disabilities and those without disabilities as positive.

Similarly, Principal Nate described a senior who is typically segregated and interacts with students in the hallway and during other unstructured times. He explained;

There's a boy in our ID program, he's so much fun… he's ID. Kids see him in the hallway and love him, though; he's full of personality. I hope he's a stand up

comedian someday, he's hysterical. You know he's not the brightest kid, I don't

know what he'll do [after graduation].

Principal Nate explained students without disabilities genuinely enjoy interacting with

students with disabilities.

At Port Harbor school district, students with disabilities do not attend their

neighborhood schools. All students in the district identified with an intellectual or severe

disability, attend Port Harbor high school. Andre described a career path offering for

students without disabilities to care and support students with severe disabilities in the

intellectual disability program at Port Harbor high school. Andre shared;

We're creating a class next year, it's on our career pathways track, of... It's kind of

a human resources career pathway, if our kids wanna be a teacher or a daycare or

social worker. So we're creating a class to have our kids work with our ID

population... the district's ID population is in this building, right here, ground

level. And the kids know, going into it, that they're gonna be working with kids

with some real deficiencies, including bath rooming deficiencies, and they're

gonna get a real taste on what it's like to work with kids with some severe

disabilities…

Andre described the career pathway would benefit both students with and without

disabilities. He explained students without disabilities will learn about different human

needs and students with disabilities will have their needs cared for.

Observed Negative Impacts of Inclusion. Finally, several of the principals that

critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices discussed the negative impacts of

including students with disabilities on the rest of the school. As a result of inclusion,

these principals described safety concerns, distractions for students without disabilities, students with disabilities slowing down the pace of the course and negative parent perspectives of inclusion. As an example, Andre shared;

> Some of our students that still feel like, 'Our class is being slowed down because my teacher has to keep reviewing.' We have a lot of smart kids that aren't gonna blurt it out there and say that. They're very respectful, they're very good. But you know their parents are probably thinking... I mean, that's why some parents send their kids to other schools, other magnet schools, because they don't wanna get slowed down and the public school average is not good anymore. So there's an impact there on how people feel. We have to figure out, in education, how we can get over that barrier. That feeling of... Inclusiveness is not holding people back but it's actually helping people grow.

Port Harbor high school's enrollment has been decreasing as families are choosing to enroll in near by charter schools. Andre described the loss of enrollment might be due to the students with disabilities attending the segregated settings of Port Harbor high school.

Nate also described to negative impacts of inclusion at Glacier Hill's high school. He shared, "There's some negatives and some positives. We have one boy that's autistic, so safety wise there's some kids that have felt threatened when he gets violent." Nate further described, "he threw a fire extinguisher at me… So, safety wise… that's a major piece." Nate explained disruptive behavior is not isolated to the school setting and students will witness disruptions outside of their high school experience. He shared;

> It's going to happen out in the real world. Last week over the holiday break, over spring break I was down in Florida and there was a couple, we were at Sea World

and they were yelling at the person behind the glass that was selling tickets. I

don't know what their issue was, but they're out there screaming, 'We are not

gonna!' I'm like, I don't care if you're special Ed, I don't care if you're gen Ed, I

don't care. You're going to run into that, so if they see it here, okay there's some

people out there that are just going to act differently.

Nate explained that when students witness a student with challenging behaviors it is not

unlike behaviors they will witness outside of school.

Associate principal Ashley of Clear Lake high school, explained inclusion of

students with disabilities should be made on an individual basis and it may not be

appropriate for some students due to the negative impact it has on students without

disabilities. She shared;

If you don't see a negative impact, why not be inclusive? There's no reason to

exclude one group or another if there is not very many negative impacts. But I

also do think there's some individuals who may struggle in that environment.

Like I'm not gonna say the kid that's screaming and yelling is gonna benefit

everybody. I always think there's gonna be outliers to every class…

In determining if inclusion of students with disabilities is appropriate, Ashley explained

the importance of considering others in the classroom. She further described; "I'd

probably say there has been a handful of kids I do not believe [inclusion] has helped them

or the overall classroom environment for other kids."

In schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusionary

practices for students with disabilities, the principals described inclusion of students as

removing the mystery of special education, reducing behavioral related infractions, and

improved acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities who are typically segregated. Several of the principals also discussed the negative impacts including students with disabilities had on other students. These principals shared concerns of students with disabilities causing distractions, concerns of safety, slowing down pace of the class and causing families to open-enroll out of the district.

Impression of YRBS Sense of Belonging Data

I shared the YRBS sense of belonging scores with each administrator associated with their high school students. I then asked for their impression of the percentage of students that agree or highly agree that they belong in their high school according the 2017 YRBS. I describe first the impressions of the principals in high schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices and compare that to the responses from principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices had slightly different reactions to their YRBS sense of belonging results and inferred possible reasons for the low scores. The principals also shared ideas that will improve the sense of belonging of all students in the future.

Three of the four principals that were less reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities described their sense of belonging score as too low. As an example, at Eagle Spring, 50% of students agreed, or strongly agreed that they experienced belonging at their school, resulting in, 50% that were neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. After hearing the scores, principal Steve said "Oooh. That number, I wish was higher." He then explained, "it probably, has to do with being a small school. We have cliquey groups…" Steve also explained, "I mean if you feel like you are in the

minority of that group, or not in that group, I mean, it could be that." He further hypothesized other possibilities for half the population lacking a sense of belonging at school. He shared, "It could be the fact that we have, over the last several years, I've had a lot of open enrollment students come in, which takes a little, bit of time to readjust and to feel like you belong."

Sean had a similar reaction after hearing 55% of students at Brook high school agree, or strongly agree that they belong. Sean responded, "Yeah, well I'd like to see that number be higher." He explained YRBS score does not match the recent sense of belonging survey results collected from his own belonging survey. He shared, "Thankfully, the survey that we did this year showed that either things have changed over those couple of years… or they took this one a little more serious or whatnot. But what I'm showing is that our students strongly believe that they belong and have a good sense of community here." He also thought the sample size might have impacted the score. He explained;

> There's always the other part of surveys, especially when your pool is a small number of students. Of course, us being a very small district, we're gonna have a small sample size. All it takes is either a couple of students that aren't feeling like they belong, or not that I would ever think that any of my students would do this, but you're gonna have those students that are gonna take the survey off and say, 'You know what? I don't really care about the survey. I'm just gonna put down some random stuff.' So you get those outliers there.

Sean explained the small sample size might have lead to inaccurate survey results. The YRBS survey results are not aligned with the findings from the survey Sean issued his students to assess their sense of belonging.

Principal Hank also surveyed the students at Glacier Hill's high school to assess their sense of belonging and he describes the results similar to that of the YRBS. At Glacier Hill's high school, 62% of students agree, or strongly agree that they belong at their high school. Hank responded, "That's interesting, because I was browsing some of the student responses and it's pretty in line with my survey on belonging." He later stated, "so only 40% feel like they don't belong, that is not too bad."

Tony's high school had a similar sense of belonging score, 64% of students agree or strongly agree that they belong at Musky Bay high school, however his reaction was very different. He immediately responded, "I don't know, but I can tell you it's lower than where I would want and I would place it on our teachers not really feeling a sense of belonging here." Tony further explained;

> They [the teachers] haven't [had a sense of belonging], and that's been one of the first things we're trying to address is that they're part of a team and that they're professionals and those things, and I am a firm believer that if a teacher is in a good mood, the class is going to be in a good mood. If the teachers valued, the kids will be treated with value and you act the way you're treated. I was in a meeting yesterday where I got snapped at and I go to the next meeting and I'm snapping at my team… It just is this trickle down effect and we all have bad moments, but that was ingrained in the culture. There wasn't a sense of belonging for staff.

At Musky Bay, Tony explained the low sense of belonging of staff "trickle down to negatively impact the students."

After hearing their sense of belonging score, inferring potential causes, several principals from schools that were less crucially reflective of their inclusive practices shared ideas to improve their score for next year. As an example, both Hank and Tony shared similar ideas to improve this score for next year. They intend on focusing the freshman class. Tony explained, "we're reframing a lot of different things for next year around our advisory period and really focusing on just our freshmen." Similarly, Hank described how a team of staff members is creating a freshman mentor onboarding program ensuring students start the year feeling a sense of belonging.

In schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's impression of the sense of belonging slightly varied. Three principals explained the scores were lower than expected and one principal was satisfied with their score. Principals had varying inferences of why their scores were low. The principals also shared thoughts on how to improve the sense of belonging of all students in the upcoming years.

Critically Self-Reflected. In the schools that the principals critically self-reflected of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's impression to the YRBS sense of belonging scores varied. Principals discussed potential reasons for their scores as (a), teacher to student relationships, (b), involvement of students and families in school activities, and (c), the lack of safety and security experienced by some students. One principal suspects he will see an improvement on the

next YRBS sense of belonging score as a result of their focus on including students with disabilities.

Principals of schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices varied in their reactions and contributed their scores (positive or negative) to a variety of influences. First, some principals discussed the importance of student and staff relationships impacting the sense of belonging of students at their schools. For example, At Tidal Creek high school, 66% of students agree or strongly agree that they belong at their school. Tom contributed this score to his focus on building relationships with students. He shared,

> I think one we've got a really, really good staff. I've talked about this from the
> first day that I came here, is that building relationships with students will always
> be much more important than the content that we teach them. I think people have
> caught on to that. We do things throughout the year to really build relationships.

At Tidal Creek high school, Tom values relationship building as he sees the direct correlation between student's sense of belonging and having a trusted adult to turn to at school.

Second, several principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices described their lack of school involvement from the students and parents as reason to their low sense of belonging among their student body. As an example, Nate, pointed to the lack of extracurricular participation and low parental involvement as the reason 55% of his students feel belonging at Grand Beach high school. Nate described the culture of his student body in need of a change, "half our kids that feel like this is a great place, those are the kids that are involved. The 50% or so that are saying, 'I don't feel like this is

the place for me', they're not involved in anything and their parents most likely aren't involved."

Nate further described;

>We need to improve our culture. If you look at our participation numbers in athletics, in plays, dramas and all the activities that we offer, it's terrible. We don't field three boys' basketball teams; we don't field three girls' basketball teams. We're lucky to have a JV football team, we don't have a freshmen football team. Our participation here is awful… Part of it is due to our socioeconomics. I hate using that as a crutch, we are very poor. 72% of our kids are free or reduced and when I say free or reduced, you can plan on about of the 72%, about 70% being free and 2% being reduced.

Nate further described the social-economic status of families within his community. He shared;

>I could call three people, just randomly pick three names and odds are, all three parents would be home right now, not working. I could just get in touch with them that easily. Single-family households doesn't help us, we have a lot of single-family households, or single parent households.

At Grand Beach high school the lack of family involvement is described by Nate as a result of the low-social economic status of families in the area, thus impacting the sense of belonging of the students at the high school.

I shared with associate principal Ashley that 49% of students at Clear Lake had a positive sense of belonging. She responded, "I'm kinda sad to hear that and I think part of that reason is, I know that we're struggling to get our extra curricular numbers up."

Ashley further explained, "I also think our social media is horrible at our school and…
we have a lot of segregated groups of friends and we need to do a better job of coming
together to add to that sense of belonging."

Tom, who expressed contentment with Tidal Creek high school's score of 66% of
students that agree or strongly agree to experience a sense of belonging at their school,
also contributed his scores to student involvement in extracurricular activities and
renovated facilities. He explained, "Obviously athletics is very important. With our new
PAC [Performing Arts Center] in music, I think we've given more, not that we didn't give
importance to the fine arts before, but with our new areas, I think the kids feel, okay, fine
arts now counts here." Tidal Creek has "30-40 clubs or activities for students to choose
from."

Principals first described relationships and involvement in extracurricular
activities as potential influencers on their student's sense of belonging. Principals
identified a third potential cause the their YRBS sense of belonging score as a lack of
safety and security students experience a school. As an example, at Port Harbor high
school, 65% of students agree or strongly agree that they belonging at their high school.
Principal Andre quickly responded, "First of all, it's not high enough, that's my
opinion… We would hope that it would be 100 percent and if that's not possible, that it
would be, certainly, more than 65 percent." Andre went on to say;

> Clearly, 35 percent [of students], don't feel they belong here because of some sort
> of threat that they perceive as violating that sense of belonging, whether it's a
> safety issue, or they don't feel successful here academically, or they don't feel they
> have a go-to adult, or ... there's all sorts of reasons. So there's the why.

Andre explained the lack of belonging at Port Harbor high school is related to the lack of safety and security the study body experiences at school.

Kevin, of Elk Lake high school anticipates an improvement in the upcoming YRBS scores. I shared that 57% of students have a positive sense of belonging at Elk River high school with Kevin. He responded, "I'm intrigued and want to look at it to see if we have changed the swing there… I mean 57% is too low." This data was collected in the spring of 2017 and Kevin is interested to see if his recent focus on inclusion has improved the sense of belonging of students at Elk River high school. He shared, "I imagine it will only go up after being very purposeful to include students with disabilities in all things." The 2019 YRBS will be administered within the next two months of this interview.

In schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the reactions to their YRBS sense of belonging scores varied. These principal discussed potential reasons for their scores as teacher to student relationships, involvement of students and families in school activities, and the lack of safety and security experienced by some students. One principal anticipates an increase in their sense of belonging score on the upcoming YRBS as a result of their efforts of including students with disabilities.

Conclusion

The principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices and those that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities described and defined belonging within their high schools. These principals also discussed the impact including students with disabilities had on all

students' sense of belonging at their high school. The explanations varied from principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices. Some described observing negative impacts of including students with disabilities, as principals that were less critically self-reflective did not share any negative impacts. Finally, both groups of principals shared their reaction to the sense of belonging scores of students attending their high school as recorded by the YRBS in 2017. Majority of the principals from both groups shared the scores were much lower than anticipated and hypothesized potential causes of the low sense of belonging.

In the next chapter, I discuss the sense of belonging of students of color and English Language Learners. I compare the results between principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, to the responses from principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 7: BELONGING OF STUDENTS OF COLOR AND ENGLISH

LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To address the research question, within this chapter, I present administrator reports of the sense of belonging for student at their school for typically marginalized students who are not labeled for special education. These students include students of color and students who are receiving English Language services. In the next chapter, I examine principal perception of students from low-income families, and students who identify as LGBTQ. In doing so, I recognize that students with these demographics represent a range of intersectional identities. At the same time, these are the demographics included on the YRBS survey. I compare the principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students labeled with disabilities (4 principals) to the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities (6 principals). I also provide the demographics of each school represented by the principals to provide a context the their perceptions of student belonging at their schools. In the last chapter, I report the next steps the principals identified to ensure all students have a sense of belonging.

The Sense of Belonging of Students of Color

Administrators described the extent to which students of color perceive themselves as belonging in their school. Similar to that of the Department of Public Instruction, throughout this chapter and next, I refer to students of color as those that identify as African American, American Indian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian, or two or more races. I describe first the principals' perceived sense of belonging for students of

color in high schools that the principals was less critically self-reflective of their inclusionary practices and then compare that to the principal responses from the schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices shared (a) the sense of belonging of students of color needed to be improved, and at the same time students are generally accepting of one-another, and (b) ran into barriers and are unsure how to impact the sense of belonging of students of color.

Principals that were less critically self-reflective generally described the sense of belonging of students of color attending their schools to be positive. As an example, Steve, the principal of Eagle Spring high school with 11.1% students of color (American Indian: .9% Asian: 1.9%, Hispanic: 6.5, Pacific Islander: .9, two or more: .9%), described "for the most part, the students of color, the Spanish speaking students perceive themselves as belonging, just because again, with it being a small school, everyone knows everyone." Steve contributed the perceived sense of belong of students of color at his high school to his teachers building relationships with students. He shared, "We have teachers that are great at developing relationship with kids and pulling some of those kids that are less vocal into different activities, so that they can feel that sense of belonging."

Similarly, Sean, a principal of Brook high school consisting of 8.1% students of color (American Indian: 1.2% Asian: 5.3%, Two or more: 1.6%), described his high school as "very non-diverse." He shared, "I would believe that [the students of color] see themselves belonging just like every other student, I mean we are very non-diverse."

Hank, principal of Glacier Hill's high school with 25.9% students of color (Asian: 1.5%, Black: 1.4, Hispanic: 21.1, Two or more: 1.9%), also described students of color in his school as perceiving themselves as belonging in his school. He explained, "It's just a real accepting population here. I think these kids have grown up in this area with diversity, that it's just the norm for them." Aside from the accepting student body, he described a staff and student group related to race: He shared, "When we talk about race or ethnicity, we started a [staff and student] group called combining cultures… it's 10 or so years now."

Principals identified barriers impeding the sense of belonging students of students of color as racism and lack of understating of diverse cultures. As an example, principal Tony perceives students of color as a marginalized population at Musky Bay high school that does not experience belonging at their school. Musky Bay high school includes 10.7% students of color (American Indian: .3% Asian: 1.5%, Black: 6%, Two or more: 2.9%). Musky Bay's principal admitted, the belonging of students of color at his high school was "a huge area of concern," bringing up a recent incident that was in the news involving hateful use of the "N-word" across his building. Tony shared, "Obviously that [incident] marginalized our students of color. It's actually our third subgroup (sic), so it's not even like it's a large minority population, like it's very small. And yeah, so they're marginalized and I don't know how to fix it."

At Musky Bay high school, students participated in lessons and activities on white privilege and cultural sensitivity. The learning opportunity first took place during a student lead assembly, followed by breakout sessions focused on equity. During one breakout session, students filled out and discussed a "privilege aptitude" test. Created by

the National Civil Rights Museum, the test illustrates the ways in which some groups experience advantages that others do not. The community and school board erupted in outrage of this event. Principal Tony explained;

> … last year we did some work around Martin Luther King Day and privilege and all that and we got beat up [from the school board and community] for that. We have PTSD from that, so we don't know what we can say, we don't know what to do, we don't have any training around cultural sensitivity… We don't know how to start it, because we don't know if we even have support from our board to start it.

Tony described the recent steps the districts taken to support students of color. Efforts included community and school listening sessions, and a commitment from the school board to volunteer their time at a community free clinic. Tony shared, Musky Bay high school is "in a tough spot, we're we are not sure what is safe to do." He further explained;

> We just went through these diversity listening sessions, which the whole community was invited and they were facilitated by [Tori Shaw and Drew Grandal]. Then from there, the board was supposed to set a direction for cultural inclusion and awareness and how we're going to address that as a district… I know one thing was that the board was going to volunteer at the free clinic. Another thing was there would be listening sessions at the high school for kids to come talk to me, which was condescending. Like [a] kid doesn't need to know that they can come talk to me on February 4th from 10:30 to 11:30 to tell me how they feel. I hold listening sessions all the time, my door's like ... you know what I

mean? Like, but so we had to do that. Then I think some other things were around

some training around cultural sensitivity and social justice. "Okay. That's what

came out of it?"

Tony further described how some district and high school staff believes that they should

take risks and plow forward with racial identity development training. While others are

of the belief that discussing race is not the responsibility of school officials and such

training would only further upset the school board and community. Tony shared "people

are a year away from retirement that are like, 'Yeah, let's just go... Let's go out with

everything [making changes to support students of color].' Yet, Tony is just completing

his 10th year as an educator, and his second year as a high school principal. He identified

with newer staff when he explained: "And there's some of us with 33 years left, that are

like, "Yeah, just bought a new house."

In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their

inclusive practices for students with disabilities the principal's perceptions of the sense of

belonging for students of color varied. Many principals perceived the sense of belonging

of students of color as positive, contributing their sense of belonging to their

"welcoming," "accepting" school community, or the fact that "everyone knows

everyone" in their school. Other principals ran into barriers and are unsure how to impact

the sense of belonging of students of color, due to d racism and a lack of understanding of

diverse cultures.

Critically Self-Reflected. The six principals who critically self-reflected on their

inclusive practices for students with disabilities also varied in their perceptions of the

extent to which students of color experience a sense of belonging in their school. The

principals discussed barriers that interfere with the belonging of students of color as (a) barriers of communicating with linguistically diverse families, (b) understanding diverse cultures and (c) the racism students of color experience at their high school.

The principals identified first, the barrier of communicating across diverse cultures and languages. As an example, principal Nate of Grand Beach high school, a building with 52% students of color (Asian: 1.2%, Black: 1.4%, Hispanic: 48.8%, Two or more races: .4%), felt confident that the sense of belonging of students of color in his building is similar to white students. He shared, "Yep, they belong—just like our white kids. So, we're about 50% Hispanic… I think I have three kids that are African American, I have one Asian. So we're not diverse. But those kids like it here." However, he spoke to barriers of welcoming and communicating with racially diverse families. He shared;

> For the half of the Caucasian [student population] and the half of the Hispanics that don't feel like they belong, it's extreme animosity. Meaning, we have 50% of our Caucasian families pissed at us because we send things out in Spanish and we have a dual language immersion program. "How dare us? We're in the United States, they should speak English…" And then, we have the 25% of the Hispanic families that are not citizens, they're worried about ICE coming through and how dare you white people, and you guys are a government institution so governments all out to get us. So you won't ever see me. Yeah, my kid will come to school because otherwise you'll give me a citation and I want my kid to get educated. However, you're not ever going to see me because you're out to get me because you're a government institution.

Thus, at Grand Beach high school Nate recognizes the sense of belonging of students of color can be impacted by external factors including parental involvement at school, feeling welcome in their community and having a greater sense of belonging in society.

In addition to the barrier of communication across cultures and languages, the principals also identified a lack of understanding of diverse cultures as a second barrier. As an example principal Kevin critically self-reflected about the need to improve the experience of students of color at Elk River high school and to better understand their experiences. At Elk River, students of color consist of 18.6% the student population (African American: .9%, Hispanic: 9.9%, Native American: 4.2%, Asian: .9%, Two or more races: 2.7%) . When asked if students of color feel a sense of belonging at Elk River, Kevin shared "I don't think to the degree that we would want. I mean, quite honestly, I think that's an area of growth for us. And trying to figure out how to help students in different groups and different communities." Kevin added;

> For multiple years... but this year I've really been trying to think of ways to find
> out what is the experience like for our students who are Hispanic or for our
> students who are Native American. And so we've been entering into more
> conversations around that, those topics around… So what does the experience
> look like for a student who is African-American?

Kevin further discussed the families of Hispanic and Native American students and how the district has purposely built relationships and recognizes there is still work to do. He shared;

> The students who are Native American that's a group of people that we've been
> working with. On the tribal level we've been working with the Ho-Chunk Nation

a fair amount, but... and have made strides, certainly we've made strides, but not all of our Native American students are Ho-Chunk either. And so even that's an area for people to... an awakening, if you will, is realizing that not every Native American student is of the same tribe. Or for that matter students who are Hispanic. There's a dramatic difference between Central American... people who come from Central American countries, Cuba, Mexico.

Thus, at Elk River high school, principal Kevin assessed that the lack of belonging for students with disabilities extended to the lack of a sense of belonging for students of color.

Similar to Kevin's high school, Port Harbor high school students are described as having a low sense of belonging. Within this study, Port Harbor enrolled the third highest percent of students of color at 42.5% (American Indian: .3%, Asian: 16.6%, Black: 3.4%, Hispanic 18.4%, Two or more races: 3.8%). Principal Andre reflected how some races at his school might feel a greater sense of belonging than other races. He, explained;

Yeah, broken down, I would say our Hmong population probably has a better feeling about a sense of belonging than, maybe, our next two groups… Hispanics and black kids. I think they have a better sense of belonging because they were really the first culture to move in the area, and I think this school district, working with the community, has really done a great job of helping families feel a sense of belonging and providing support in school with ample interpreters. And it just hasn't had a chance to work yet for our other subgroups (sic) of students… I guess we're probably struggling with supports for our other subgroups (sic) of kids.

What support do they need? What exactly do they need in the community? I'm
guessing that... Within the school, we're trying to figure that out, but certainly as a
community we're trying to figure that out, as well.

At Port Harbor, Principal Andre also assessed the lack of belonging for students with
disabilities extending to students of color.

Ashley, an administrator at a school with 81% students of color (American
Indian: 1.0%, Asian: 10.6%, Black: 55.5%, Hispanic: 6.8%, Two or more races: 6.6%)
astutely reflected that as white women she might not fully understand the experiences of
students of color at her high school. She, wished the State's education department shared
YRBS belonging data disaggregated by race to help her better understand the experiences
of students of color at her school. I learned in this study that though DPI collects this
data, they do not share it with the school districts. Ashley explained;

If we had the data, that would be a better way to know and I feel like as me, I am
a white woman so my perception and where I see, could be very different than an
African American woman or an African American male or a white male so I think
that's really hard for me to identify. I can tell you overall I have a very good
relationship with a lot of our students regardless of their color and we talk about
just healthy belonging habits, what makes you feel good about yourself, what
makes you feel a sense of security, your friend group. That's a really hard
question to answer.

Ashley further explained how she is "hopeful that [students of color] feel belonged (sic)"
and recognizes issues of race amongst her student body and staff.

In addition to the barrier of communicating across cultures and languages, and the barrier of understanding diverse cultures, the principals that critically self-reflected identified racism at school as a third key barrier to ensuring students of color experience belonging at their high school. Principal Ashley discussed the student's shared perception of the racism they experience from teaching staff at Clear Lake high school. She shared;

> I know that kids have come up to me saying 'I feel that this teacher's racist towards me.' It's happened more than I'd like because I think one time is too many and I try to listen and the fact that an African American male feels comfortable talking to me about that, I feel is a sense of belonging right there because they don't feel I'm gonna hold it against them or I'm supportive and I support all of our students… Can I say they feel that belonging relationship with every staff member? No. But when I hear kids, a lot of them, make comments like, 'Teachers don't like me," or "Nobody's there for me…'

Thus, at Clear Lake high school, Ashley sees the direct correlation between staff to student relationships contributing and racism students experience contributing to the lack of belonging for students of color at her high school.

In the schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's perceptions of the sense of belonging for students of color varied. However, the principals identified the barriers to ensuring students of color experience a sense of belonging as the inability to communicate and understand diverse cultures and racism students of color experience at their high school.

The Sense of Belonging of English Language Learners

Administrators described the extent to which English Language Learners perceive themselves as belonging in their school. I describe first the principals' perceived sense of belonging for English Language Learners in high schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and then compare that to the responses from principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities varied in their perception of the sense of belonging experienced by English Language Learners at their high schools. The principals recognized the need for additional support of this population of students and described English Language Learners as a transient student population.

Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices identified the existing supports in place for English Language Learners and discussed the need to provide additional supports for these students. As an example, at Eagle Spring high school, English Language Learners consist of 5% of the student population and principal Steve shared;

> I think they [ELL students] do [have a strong sense of belonging]. Some of the things we do is… We usually set them up with either a Chrome book or a laptop for depending on where they are on the spectrum, in terms of speaking English. That'll do conversions for 'em, language conversions, so that they can understand the material."

Steve described the influx of ELL students and his response. He explained "I'm in the process of trying to get my staff some professional development in regards to, how to

approach dealing with English language learners in your classroom and different tools you can use that'll help them benefit and help them feel like they belong."

Sean explained his high school does not have any English language learners, but that could change and he may have to respond accordingly. He shared, "Currently we have zero ELL, but that changes because we are a farming community. That transient population change for us, but right now, we really don't have an ELL population. He added, "If they showed up tomorrow I'd have to do something quick."

Hank, principal of Glacier Hill's high school consisting of 4% ELL, described the ELL population at his school and the efforts they have taken to ensure a sense of belonging exists for that population through providing the students supports. He also explained the need to provide greater support for this population. When asked if this student population perceives themselves as belonging, he shared;

I guess it depends on where they are at when they come into this school. If they are newcomers, within a year or two, I think their perception is probably very different than the ones who have maybe been here for four year or five years or longer. I know that our ELL folks do a lot to expose them to the different things in our building to help them feel welcome.

Hank recognizes the need to ensure a system is in place to onboard new students that receive ELL services. He regularly seeks feedback from this population of families through surveys and parent nights so he can be responsive to their needs.

Hank demonstrated his responsiveness to feedback he has received from ELL parents, requesting documentation in Spanish and to display more evidence of their culture throughout the building. He explained, "Our ELL folks have asked if we could

create more symbolism that they can culturally identify with." To be responsive to the request for translated documentation, Glacier Hill's high school recently hired a part-time Spanish translator. He further explained;

> We've been doing a lot in the last few years, and translating major documentation. We have ELL nights, where we bring them in and we do presentations. One of the last ones that I was at, we showed them our fab lab, we just got a fab lab this year. And explained the opportunities in there and you could see the parents talking with the kids about... you could tell they were saying, hey you should come in here and make me this and make me... and so, just trying to get them in and share our school with them as well, because I feel like often times they feel like there's some barriers there, whether they feel it's communication or otherwise. And so, we try to do our best to welcome them in. And so, we really want that inclusive nature. We want them to feel a part of our community and so we're working on doing as much as we can. But the big portions of the handbook have been translated now. Things like that. But it's just keeping on top of because anytime we update a regular document, you got to remember, oh, this is in Spanish too, we got to update that document. So it is, sometimes logistically, a challenge, but I've kind of said it needs to be a priority, because this is less than of our school is this population, we need to make sure we're accessible to all them too.

As I walked into the Glacier Hill's high school to interview Hank, I noticed the abundance of signage in Spanish, including school spirit signs recognizing the Spanish speaking culture within the community.

At Musky Bay, just 2% of the students are ELL. Tony described the fluidity of the English Language Leaner population in his high school and the lack of belonging he suspects this population experiences. He shared;

> The population is growing and I don't know if they see themselves as belonging, because quite honestly it's so transient. Students will move in and I'll feel like I'll just start to get to know them and would maybe be able to get them connected, and they leave, but then they come back.

Tony shared his concern with the district's lack of response to English Language Learners in a systematic way. He explained;

> I'll say we've done really nothing systemic among tier one around that issue. We do have a support person, but the person that previously had the job was so burnt out traveling from eight buildings. She was essentially an ambulance, because the family would come in and move in and be standing at the office and no one could speak with them. We'd be like, 'Okay, we need you over here quick.'

Tony further described his concerns with the current ELL services and how the district supports families that are English Language Learners. Although the majority of the ELL students at Musky Bay high school are Spanish speaking, Tony expressed concerns how the district would respond to families that speak languages other than English or Spanish.

> My concern is… our largest population of ELL, is Spanish, but we do have other languages and we've invested a lot of resources. Like, we have a Spanish translator. We have every resource we could want for Spanish support, but if a family that spoke Hmong walked in here today, there's not a person in the 400 person staff that could do a single thing with them. That would be embarrassing.

Tony explained the need to improve ELL services as a district to better support the English language learners, their families, and their overall sense of belonging.

In high schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's perceptions of the sense of belonging for English Language Learners varied. The principals discussed the existing supports that exist for ELL students and recognized the need to offer more support to improve their sense of belonging students of English Language Learners experience at their high school.

Critically Self-Reflected. The six administrators that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities varied on their perception of the extent to which English Language Learners experience a sense of belonging at their school. Similar to the principals in that were less critically self-reflective, the principals that critically self-reflected recognized the need to provider greater supports for ELL students and families to improve their sense of belonging.

When describing the sense of belonging of ELL students, some principals described the population as experiencing a high sense of belonging with the supports they have in place. As an example, at Clear Lake high school 6.4% of the student population is ELL, principal Alicia does not see a difference in the sense of belonging amongst ELL student or others. She explained, "I don't see a difference between the different demographics of African-American students with disabilities and or English language learners." Alicia contributes this to student lead programs that allow students to have a voice in the school community. She further explained, "…our work with character education and our mentoring program and a lot of the supports we have around the

student leadership help to keep all students included or help them to feel like they belong."

At Grand Beach high school 12.2% of the student population are English Language Learners. Principal Nate described the sense of belonging of this population to be high as a result of the existing supports offered to this population of students. He explained;

> Our ELL's are probably all in [experience a high sense of belonging], because if it wasn't for this place, if it wasn't for the school, they'd be struggling in life. We have two ELL teachers, they're phenomenal, phenomenal! My God if they ever told me that they were going to go somewhere else I'd be so sad.

Nate further explained Grand Beach's Dual immersion program as a course pathway offered to Spanish speaking and English speaking students. He described the program as highly attractive to students and families in the area. Families move to the community to participate in the program or they open enroll into Gran Beach School District from neighboring districts. Nate shared;

> Our dual language immersion program, it started seven years ago, so next year it'll be up to seventh grade I think. And it'll stop at eighth grade, so you can choose, if you're in the elementary school or middle school, you can choose to have your child in the model courses or in a dual lingual class. If they're in the dual lingual program, in math, math is 90 minutes at the middle school level, 45 minutes of instruction will be in English, 45 minutes of instruction will be in Spanish. If they're in social studies, 45 minutes English, so social studies is 45 minutes. But 20 minutes will be English, 20 minutes will be Spanish. And as this program was

coming up, the middle school teachers were all nervous like, "If I don't speak

Spanish", don't worry. When we lose a teacher, when a teacher moves, whatever,

we're going to be hiring, we will never fire anybody because you don't speak

Spanish. It's just then we hire, we will be hiring bilingual, just be aware of that.

When they come up here, all instruction will be in English because at this point,

you're getting ready for college courses. You're going to have enough Spanish

instruction behind you. If you choose to continue on with Spanish, we have

Spanish one, two, three, four, AP Spanish five. You can continue through that.

 Nate described a recent graduate from the dual immersion program and how the

program assisted her in finding a career path. Nate shared;

We just had a girl hired over at O'Reilly Autos, they're paying her $26 an hour.

She knows nothing about autos. You and I as Caucasians, we take our vehicles

into the dealership and we say, "Hey fix it". The Hispanic population, they keep

their vehicles, they fix their own vehicles, that's what they do. So O'Reilly Auto

Parts has figured out, they have so many Spanish people coming in, but they don't

know what part they're talking about. So the guys come in, $26 an hour, high

school student, just because she's bilingual.

The dual emersion program offered through Grand Beach's school district fosters

bilingualism, bi-literacy, and enhanced awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Much like Grand Beach high school, Andre perceived his ELL population has a

higher sense of belonging in comparison to others in his building as a result of their

efforts to support this population. Nearly 8% of Port Harbor's student population is ELL.

He explained;

I would say higher than the 65 percent average [belonging of all students reported by YRBS]. And why? Because we have them connected with adults. They're plugged in. Their counselors know, their EL teacher knows where they're at, their administrators, the teachers are all aware of, maybe, some of the language barriers and really work with them because they know that. They can see that…. So those kids get a lot of attention… when you get that attention, you're gonna have that sense of belonging. So I would say... Again, we haven't taken a survey on kids with a different language on how they compare with their sense of belonging versus kids that speak English, but I would really be willing to put strong, real money on kids having a better sense of belonging because of the wrap around for them and because of the attention that they get from adults.

Thus, many of the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, expressed great enthusiasm about the innovative supports they provided their Spanish-speaking students who were ELL's, which they believed contributed to the sense of belonging for these students.

At the same time, when describing the sense of belonging of ELL students, some of these same principals recognized the need to improve ELL support to improve their sense of belonging. As an example, Tom, whose ELL population is less than 1% of his general population of students, explained how he perceives the extent to which they experience belonging. Tom explained Tidal Creek high school has "very, very few ELL students." He added, a "little part of the ELL students are always going to think, 'I'm totally different from the majority of kids here.'" Tom further explained;

"I think for most of our minority populations, I think they feel like they belong…

but we do our best to reach out and include them—we could do better and that

would help their belonging. In fact, our counseling office this year, as part of

kind of their SLO [student learning objective] stuff, is trying to get more

underrepresented groups into AP classes for next year and really reaching out to

kids and saying, 'Hey, you should be in this AP class,' or, 'Why don't you try this

AP class?' We're trying to do some things within our policies. If we push a kid

into AP and halfway through the school year they want to drop, well the policy

says, well if you drop it after this date, it's an F. Well, we will be flexible with

those policies.

Tom sees the removal of barriers to access opportunities as a key component of a high

sense of belonging for his ELL students and other marginalized populations.

Principal Kevin of Elk River high school reiterated the sense of belonging is

going to "vary individual to individual." At Elk River high school, 3.1% of the students

are English Language Learners. He further described ELL students and their families in

Elk River, sharing;

We don't have a large number of migrant families that come through. We've had

at different points in time but… It's quite sporadic that we have migrant families

in the district. And so when looking at our students who are English Language

Learners often they've been in the school district from elementary to high school.

But we haven't done justice to ELL… You go back five years ago, six years ago,

and that role was by a woman who was non-Spanish speaking. Our ELL

population is at this point 100% Spanish speaking. And it is a... like you alluded,

it's a small population, but still a group that a lot of the students who eventually test out and are no longer identified as ELL, still have parents at home who one or both parents are not English speaking, and so trying to maintain that connection to the families.

Kevin recognizes when a student is dismissed from ELL services, the need to communicate with their family still exists.

In the schools that principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, principal's perception of the sense of belonging for English Language Learners varied. Principals recognized the connection between a positive sense of belonging of English Language Learners and the supports offered by their high schools. Several principals discussed the need to increase supports at their school to increase sense of belonging in their English Language Learners.

Conclusion

Principals described their perception of the sense of belonging of students of color and English Language Learners attending their schools. I compared the responses of principals that were less self-reflective of their inclusive for students with disabilities, to the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Principals from both groups recognized the need to provide more supports for English Language Learners and generally perceived the sense of belonging of students of color to be high.

In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities the principals perceived the sense of belonging of students of color as positive, contributing their sense of belonging to their

"welcoming," "accepting" school community, or the fact that "everyone knows everyone" in their school. In the schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals identified barriers to ensuring students of color experience a sense of belonging as the inability to communicate and understand diverse cultures and racism students of color experience at their high school.

In high schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals discussed the existing supports that exist for ELL students and recognized the need to offer more support to improve their sense of belonging students of English Language Learners experience at their high school. In the schools that principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, principals recognized the connection between a positive sense of belonging of English Language Learners and the supports offered by their high schools. Several principals discussed the need to increase supports at their school to increase sense of belonging in their English Language Learners.

In the next chapter, I share the principal's perception of students from low-income families and students that identify as LGBTQ. I compare the responses from principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, to that of principals that critically self-reflected on their practices of including students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 8: BELONGING OF STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

AND STUDENTS THAT IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ

In this study, I examined the research question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? To address the research question, within this chapter, I continue my examination of the perceived sense of belonging of students who are typically marginalized. In this chapter, I present administrator reports of the sense of belonging for student at their school for students from low-income families and students who identify as LGBTQ. In doing so, I recognize that students with these demographics represent a range of intersectional identities. At the same time, these are the demographics included on the YRBS survey. I compare the schools that principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students labeled with disabilities (4 principals) to schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities (6 principals). I also provide the demographics of each school represented by the principals to provide a context for their perceptions of student belonging at their schools. In the last chapter, I report the next steps the principals identified to ensure all students have a sense of belonging.

The Sense of Belonging of Students from Low-Income Families

Administrators described the extent to which students from low-income families perceive themselves as belonging in their school. I describe first the principals' perceived sense of belonging for students from low-income families in high schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices and then compare that to the principal responses from the schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices.

Less Critically Self-Reflective. The less critically self-reflective principals, described students from low-income families experiencing a high sense of belonging. These administrators discussed their efforts to remove barriers to access opportunities for this population of students and attributed the positive sense of belonging of students from low-income families to the hardworking mentality within the community.

Removal of Financial Barriers. When describing the perceived sense of belonging for students from low-income families, principals recognized the need to remove financial barriers. As an example, at Eagle Spring high school 33.3% of students are from low-income families. Principal Steve shared, "We've always had a high percentage of low income families in the area. Again, that relates back to the fact that it is a rural community. There's not a lot of opportunities around here, job wise for them." Steve described the participation in extracurricular activities of students from low-income families as high. He explained, "I mean, the students on free and reduced lunch are some of our most active students… I think that is, cause it gives them a sense of belonging. It makes them feel as if they have a purpose."

Steve further explained how he has removed barriers to access sports and activities, stating, "we don't charge for athletics or activities." He further described;

> Some of the activities charge, but if the families come to me, we usually will waive that cost. And then, we do… The eighth graders do a DC trip every year. If there's families that can't afford that, the Lions Clubs sponsors a couple kids to go. The district sponsors a couple kids to go, just to make sure that everyone has that opportunity to have that experience.

Similarly, At Glacier Hills high school, 36% of students are from low-income families. Hank too, explained the importance of removing barriers for his students. He shared;

Again, we don't try to put too many barriers in front of a kid, especially if it's financial and I always... I use this saying and I don't want it to be taken out of context, but I say, I don't want to punish a kid for the sins of the parents.

Hank does not want a child to miss out on an opportunity due to the families' financial status. He further explained, "I'm saying it's a sin, because if a parent isn't able to provide, I don't want a kid to not have access." Hank further explained the efforts the school has taken to remove barriers. He shared;

We do a variety of different things to make things accessible, the no fees thing. If something does become a cost variable, we'll look at ways in how we can either get them some scholarship money or something to help be able to do it. A lot of times our teachers are very good about digging in their pockets and making things happen for kids. I talk about the ELL [teacher], she's gone on the weekends, where she has paid for the kids and their family members and has gone with them to Chicago to look at colleges and things like that. That's some of the things our people do here. So I think that's helped our low-income folks.

Hank further described the efforts he and his staff take to remove barriers to access. He added:

We try to do a good job at any parent meeting events that we have, talking about costs for this, costs for that, get involved, don't let that be a barrier for you as well. Obviously school fees, we charge, I think $85 a year. Families that are like no

way, no how, we work with that. We can set them up on a payment plan, we
could say can you just us as much as you can give us. If it's $5, it's $5; I want to
make sure the kid can have dinner and some shoes on their feet and things like
that.

Glacier Hill's high school also holds a backpack drive, supplying their families
with backpacks full of supplies and essentials. Hank also shared, "We do things for
families in need… We'll create care packages and send them home with the kids… Our
school social worker's phenomenal working with our little socio-economic populations
and getting them the resources that they need."

At Musky Bay High School 13.6% of students are from low-income families.
Prior to describing the sense of belonging of students from low-income families attending
Musky Bay high school, Tony astutely stated, "You know, maybe it's my own privilege
coming out…" He further explained students from low-income families experience a
positive sense of belonging at Musky Bay. He shared, "I think our students from low-
income families connect to the school but they don't connect to the larger community."
He explained, "We've done so much around making sure that barriers are removed for
families." Tony shared his passion for this population and admits he may be biased as he
wrote his own Master's thesis on the changing demographics in this community. He
explained his thesis and findings of his study;

It was lake kids versus farm kids and it was the rural Musky Bay versus the
emerging suburban Musky Bay, and the 13 municipalities we serve in the three
counties, what's the clash of culture that's happening here? The study showed that
for the most part, our 1800 kids identify as what I called lake kids, regardless of

where I live, I could live in low income housing right here, but I'm a lake kid, and so I'm going to dress preppy. I'm going to do all that. Or I identify as a farm kid, but I live in Musky Bay with the second richest zip code in the state. There's this sense of identity and a lot of times it's going to be covering up really where you are, but they feel belonging, like they belong. This is where they're able to be something that they identify as.

Through Tony's findings, he reiterated that students from low-income families are able to experience belonging at Musky Bay.

Hard-Working Mentality. In addition to contributing the sense of belonging of students from low-income families to removing barriers, other principals attributed the positive sense of belonging of this population to the hard working community. Sean described his students from low-income families as having a strong sense of belonging at Brook high school. Of his high school, 23.4% of his students are from families of low-income. He described their sense of belonging to be a reflection of their hard working community. Sean shared:

I think we're just a blue-collar community that works hard and our parents our community, and our students, they just grow up with that mindset. There's not the haves and the have nots that I've seen in other communities. It's just kind of like, 'You know what? We're all here. We're all working together. We help each other out. You know, this person works their tail off, but you know, maybe they don't make the living that some other people are making, but it doesn't matter.' I think our students just grow up around that…

Sean described the sense of belonging of students from low-income families to be high as a result of hard working mentality that exists within his community.

In schools that the principal were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's perceptions of the sense of belonging for students from families of low-income were unanimously positive. These principals contributed the strong sense of belonging of this population by reason of the conscious effort to remove barriers to access opportunities. All the principals discussed waiving fees, providing the students school supplies, and supporting the families in creative ways to ensure their needs were met outside of the school walls.

Critically Self-Reflected. Six administrators from high schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities reflected on the extent to which students from low-income families experience a sense of belonging at their school. These principals suggested that students from low-income families' sense of belonging varied as a result of (a) their ability to blend in with others without bringing attention to their financial status, (b), lack of parental support, (c) and financial barriers.

Not Drawing Attention to Financial Status. Principals that were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, varied in their perception of the sense of belonging of students from low-income families. Some administrators described the sense of belonging of students from low-income families as positive as a result of their ability to blend in with others, without drawing attention to their financial status. As an example, at Clear Lake high school 49.5% of students are from families of low-income. Associate principal Ashley identifies the shear numbers as a reason the population experiences belonging in her building. She shared, "Overall,

considering when you have half the population low income, half not, you're already kind of in that majority, you're not alone." Furthermore, Ashley described her experiences of working in schools that had a lower percentage of students from low-income families, and explained "the division of students from low income families and students that were not, were much more obvious than ours [at Clear Lake high school]."

Similarly, at Tidal Creek high school, 12.2% of the student population is from families of low-income. Principal Tom does not see a difference in the sense of belonging of these students compared to the rest of the student population. He shared, "I think for the most these students belong… if I didn't have the names, I would have no idea who they were..." Tom contributes this to the ability of students from low-income families to assimilate with their peers.

Principal Kevin of Elk River also explained how students from families of low-income blend in with others, although he suspects their sense of belonging to be low. At Elk River high school, 33.5% of the students are from low-income families, although Kevin suspects the numbers of students from low-income families at his high school are likely much higher. He explained;

At the high school level it's always a tricky situation. Students who are economically disadvantaged try very hard to hide. I think that it's... On the whole it's very difficult to figure out who the students are. The school's culture... the school and the community doesn't necessarily… you don't see a lot of overt, obvious division and at the high school level it's even I think less so simply because, like I said, adolescents are trying to just blend in. But I still think there

is definitely a degree of shaming or shame that I do worry about. It's another

group. I mean, I worry about every group and their sense of belonging.

Although concerned with the sense of belonging of students from low-income families,

Kevin explains on the surface he does not notice a difference between the populations.

Lack of Parent Involvement. In addition to student ability to blend in within the

school community, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices also

described the sense of belonging students from families of low-income to be low as a

result of a lack of parent involvement in school. As an example at Port Harbor high

school, 43.4% of the students are from families of low-income. Andre passionately

described the students from low-income families as not experiencing a sense of belonging

in his school. He shared;

> [Students from low-income families experience belonging] Less than our 65
>
> percent average [as recorded by the YRBS]. That's pretty evident. Those are the
>
> parents that we really have a hard time... They're either working or it's a single
>
> parent working family that's in that low socioeconomic placeholder. So those are
>
> the parents that we have a really hard time bringing in or communicating with... a
>
> lot of truancy. That's pretty evident. We know that that's a struggle. There's no
>
> way those kids feel a sense of belonging when their parents don't know the adults
>
> [staff] and when the kids aren't even in school and their parents don't care whether
>
> or not they're in school. Nine times out of ten it's kids of struggling families, kids
>
> that are on full free and reduced, we know that.

Principal Andre described the lack of belonging of students from low-income families as

a reflection of the community and a lack of parent involvement.

Financial Barriers. Principals identified the ability of students from low-income families to blend in without bringing attention to financial status and a lack of parental involvement in school. Principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, also identified financial barriers as a third influence on the sense of belonging of students from low-income families. As an example, principal Nate perceives this student population to experience a low-sense of belonging at Grand Beach high school as a result of his reflectance to waive school fees. Grand Beach high school has a high number of students from families of low-income, 56.5% of the total population. Nate described his stance;

> So, knowing that about half our population, over half our population is low income, if I really think through this one, I think we have less people from the low socioeconomic pathway that probably feel like they belong. And the reason I state that is we have athletic fees, school fees, our school fees are cheap, our athletic fee is $25 for the year, whether you play one sport or three sports, doesn't matter, $25. Our registration at the high school is $40. We have prom coming up, this all ties in why I'm saying they probably feel less of a sense of belonging.

Nate further explained that he has conducted extensive research on understanding families experiencing low-income. Nate questioned the priorities of these families' expenditures. For this reasons, he does not typically waive school fees. He shared;

> When people that are in a lower socioeconomic class, they see everybody else out there going to restaurants, they see everybody else out there driving nice new vehicles, they see the cell phones. Therefore, they go buy those things, not realizing that those are all 'wants' and not 'needs.' What they don't see is, I don't

go out to restaurants, I drive a nice vehicle, I have nice clothes. But they don't see the things that I forgo. They see what's out there in the public eye. So, they are based on entertainment… Yes, they're based on a lot of wants and they don't realize, "hey you have to make sure your needs are met." So when they talk about school fees, about athletic fees, that's a need. If you want to play, you need to pay. So they have the latest greatest Apple iPhone, but then their kid doesn't participate in school, or participate in sports because they can't pay the $25 sports fee and they want me to waive that sports fee. But then, they're the same parent that when I drive by the nice restaurants downtown, Chili's and whatnot, they're over [there], you can afford to do all this entertainment for you. I see the clothes that you're wearing, you're buying the Nike, the Adidas, you're buying this name brand stuff. They meet their wants, but they don't meet their needs.

At Grand Beach high school, if you owe school fees, you are unable to participate in dances, field trips and course offerings with entrance fees. Nate described these expenses as "wants" and the student fees as "needs." He sees the same students wanting to pay for $30 prom ticket, but their $40 dollar school fee is not paid for." Nate explained the consequences of students that are unable to pay for their "needs," and aspire to attend a field trip or dances (wants). He shared, "I always have kids that will not be able to go… I'll put them in a study hall, plus I won't let them go to prom, because of their fees, if you owe fees, you don't get to go."

I interviewed Nate the week of Grand Beach high school's prom, Nate anticipates families reaching out to share concerns with his decision to not let their child participate in prom. He shared;

… those socioeconomic people that are not paying for what their 'needs' are, I

know they're more frustrated with me. This week, I'll have a lot of phone calls at

3:00, 4:00 and I stay later intentionally, because parents are calling. 'Really?

You're not going to let my kid, my kids a junior, my kids a senior, this is the last

prom…' and you're right, because prom is a 'want,' their school fees are a 'need.'

They broke their Chromebook screen, it wasn't me, they choose to throw their

Chromebook, they chose whatever, something happened. They misplaced this

book… they lost that book, I need that book replaced. Somebody has to pay for

that book.

Although Nate described the sense of belonging of students from low-income families to

be low as a result of the lack of participation in school events, he does not see the need to

remove barriers for this population and explains the importance of holding students

accountable for school fees.

Similar to Grand Beach high school, principal Kevin described how financial

barriers impact student's sense of belonging, but unlike principal Nate, Kevin described

the importance of the high school removing financial barriers for families to ensure they

have equal access to opportunities to enhance the belonging of students. Kevin explained

the creative steps he and his staff have taken to ensure students from low-income are

provided equal opportunities;

We always have financial assistance programs. We've gone to wording it

differently. We do have teachers who maintain an essential closet that they... it's

very non-obtrusive helping students with clothing needs. Right now they're doing

a prom dress drive where anyone could bring in prom dresses and they're giving

the prom dresses away to anyone. I mean, it's not a financial need situation; it's really just anyone that wants one of the prom dresses and wants to save $300, $400, $500.

At Elk River high school, Kevin and his staff remove barriers for all students, not just those that register as free and reduced lunch. As described earlier, Kevin suspects several students that are not identified as from families of low-income could benefit from financial supports.

Kevin described his staff as being incredibly supportive to students with financial needs. Every Friday staff members at Elk River high school can donate money to wear jeans to work. The money raised goes directly to supporting students in the district. Staff members proposed the idea to Kevin in efforts of providing another layer of support to their students. Additionally, the staff at Elk River high school will often pay for students' "field trips, clothing needs or even gifts at Christmas…"

In schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, the principal's perceptions of the sense of belonging for students from families of low-income varied. Some principals discussed the ability of students from low-income families to blend in within the population without drawing attention to their financial status, a lack of parental support and financial barriers as impacting their sense of belonging.

The Sense of Belonging of Students that Identify as LGBTQ

Administrators described the extent to which students that identify LGBTQ perceive themselves as belonging in their school. I describe first the principals' perceived sense of belonging for students that identify LGBTQ in high schools that the

principals were less critically self-reflective and then compare that to the principal responses from the schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices

Less Critically Self-Reflective. Principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities shared the sense of belonging of students that identify LGBTQ needed to improve and that it is believed to be a small percentage of students in their schools. Principals of schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices explained (a) a lack of supports in their school for students that identify as LGBTQ and (b) the barriers that impact the sense of belonging of students that identify LGBTQ. Additionally, (c), Principals from rural communities described a lack of experience of providing supports for students that identify as LGBTQ.

When discussing the sense of belonging of students on the LGBTQ spectrum at high schools that that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, principals discussed a lack of systems and structures that support students that identify LGBTQ. As an example, Hank shared students at Glacier Hill's high school understand what these students are experiencing, more so than the staff. He shared, "I think it's more of a relatively newer concept for us. It might not be so much for a metropolitan area, but we're kind of navigating and negotiating some of those things if they've presented themselves." He shared;

> It's interesting because I think the kids are more accepting of that, because it's…
> their life, they've grown into this, whereas for some of the adults it's kind of taboo
> in a way. But again, our teachers do a good job of keeping their personal opinions

out and just embracing the child in their classroom. They're in my classroom,

they're my kid. Owning their kids. So yeah, I'd say overall I feel the majority feel

welcome and safe in our building. But I think we're trying to do more…

Hank sees this population of students experiencing a positive sense of belonging and

recognizes the need to constantly evolve, ensuring his school fosters a sense of belonging

for students identifying LGBTQ.

In an effort to provide professional development, Glacier Hill's high school staff

and a group of students attended the GSAFE (Gay Straight Advocates For Education)

conference this past year. This leadership conference trains Gay-Straight-Alliance

members to run a more effective and inclusive Gay-Straight-Alliance club at their school.

The principal identifies Glacier Hill's high school as a "G-safe school." Hank explained,

"We have teachers who have signs posted that acknowledges they're a safe place." Hank

also shared he is considering inviting G-Safe to his high school to offer professional

development to his entire staff. Hank shared, he and a team of teacher leaders attended

an equity training to enhance their practices for students typically marginalized at Glacier

Hill's high school. He described the training will improve the sense of belonging of

students identifying LGBTQ.

At Glacier Hill's high school, Hank described himself as open to improving

practices for students identifying as LGBTQ. Hank Reflected, "I try to have a good, open

dialogue with students that are more advocates of that [LGBTQ], because some people

just want to blend into the crowd and not make noise, but then there's others that do want

to make noise, because they want to feel inclusive." Hank described the efforts to support

students identifying as LGBTQ as positive, "but there is still work to do."

Barriers of Supporting Students that Identify LGBTQ. In Musky Bay high school, Tony described several students identify on the LGBTQ spectrum and their sense of belonging varies. At Musky Bay high school, staff set out to develop a Gay-Straight Alliance to support the LGBTQ population and their efforts were met with resistance and ultimately shut down. Tony explained, "the staff tried to start a Gay-Straight Alliance and the superintendent turned it down and the board turned it down because they wanted to watch it [be cautious], right before the referendum… and the politics."

Tony described Musky Bay high school experienced an influx of students that identified as LGBTQ and staff lacked experience in supporting the growing population. As a response, Tony conducted an activity relying on the YRBS sense of belonging data. He shared, "We took YRBS data and we identified subgroups (sic) guessing at which people wouldn't feel belonging, because our concerning score was the amount of kids that couldn't identify one adult to connect with." Tony challenged each staff member at Musky Bay high school to select a typically marginalized population they were interested in supporting or learning more about and develop ways to improve their sense of belonging. The staff chose from students from low-income families, students of color, special education, ELL and students that identify LGBTQ. Staff then separated into teams to develop a plan to support their chosen population of students, including students that identified LGBTQ. Tony explained the group focused on impacting belonging for the LGBTQ student population invited the Gay-Straight Alliances from near-by districts into their building to share their experiences with staff. The school board and superintendent were not informed of this activity. Tony shared their next steps;

> Then… we raised money… and we bought books that have characters struggling
>
> with some of these things and just put notes in there and said, 'If you identify with
>
> one of these characters and you're not sure who to talk to, see this person…' And
>
> we put some in classrooms, and that was awesome.

Tony described the activity as a step in the right direction, although concerned in the lack of impact the activity had across the system. He shared;

> I know for a fact there's one student [that is transgender] that does not and won't
>
> even step foot into this building. I know for a fact there are students that have
>
> such a strong sense of belonging, that this is the only place they can be and will
>
> do anything to be here from 6:15 in the morning till 10 o'clock at night. I think it
>
> all just depends on that experience and the only thing I can control is making sure
>
> it isn't our staff that does something that makes them feel excluded.

At Musky Bay, the sense of belonging of students that identify as LGBTQ varies. Tony explained the ongoing need to improve systems that support this population of students.

Lack of Experience. Principals from schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices described additional supports needed for students that identify as LGBTQ and also identified the barriers in supporting this population of students. Additionally, some principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities and are from rural communities described a lack of experience supporting students that identify as LGBTQ. Principal Steve of Eagle Spring stated, "That [students identifying as LGBTQ], I don't have a lot of experience with… our students that either were transgender, have made that... They've been out of school before that came to fruition, so to speak." Steve further explained, "I

think it's probably a small group. I don't really even know, but my observation of some students who may have identified themselves openly or whatnot, they fit right in." Steve described the universal supports for all students as efficient for supporting this population of students. He shared,

> These students, they don't see themselves, nor should they see themselves as needing it [more supports] or that they're different from any other student. Not really any additional support except for like I said, just knowing that, like every student knows here, that, 'Hey, you have these different outlets. If you need something, you let us know.'

Steve also contributed the low number of students that identify as LGBTQ as a result of the communities' religious values. He shared, "It may be our community atmosphere in terms of it being a very close knit family, Catholics—we live in with the Catholic values."

In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principal's perceptions of the sense of belonging for students identifying LGBTQ varied. Although the perception of belonging of students that identify LGBTQ varied, principals agreed a need exist to provide more support to foster belonging for students identifying as LGBTQ and the barriers to supporting this population of students. Principals of rural communities described a lack of experience in supporting students that identify LGBTQ.

Critically Self-Reflected. Administrators from high schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices described the sense of belonging of students that identify LGBTQ varied. The principals (a) described the need to develop supports for

this population, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance. They also (b) identified the barriers

that exist in providing supports to students that identify LGBTQ.

Supporting Students Identified as LGBTQ. When describing the sense of

belonging of students that identify LGBTQ principals discussed the importance of

providing supports to enhance the student's belonging. As an example, principal Tom of

Tidal Creek high school, described students that identify on the LGBTQ spectrum as

belonging. He contributes their positive sense of belonging to the work of his Gay-

Straight Alliance, who meets on a monthly basis. He shared;

> There's a couple of transgender kids that we have right now, who… kind of came
>
> out early on, so to speak, at the middle school. A lot of the kids, they grew up
>
> with them. They knew that they were going to this bathroom or that bathroom.
>
> Yeah, we've got some, like family bathrooms in our renovation that were kind of
>
> just family bathrooms. They weren't necessarily designated. We talked to the
>
> kids and there hasn't been any issue yet.

Although Tom contributed the school supports to the positive sense of belonging of

students that identify LGBTQ, he anticipates the lack of systems and policies that support

this population of students could be an issue.

Similarly, with great confidence principal Nate of Grand Beach high school

shared his LGBTQ population had a high sense of belonging and shared his amazing

journey of ensuring this population experiences belonging in his building. He shared,

> Three years ago when I came in, we probably had 40 LGBTQ members out of a
>
> school… of 800 kids. 40 that we knew. And we at that time the counselor came to
>
> me and she's like, 'We need to do something, we need to recognize, we need to

create a club.' Like, 'Yup, go for it.' And it took off… that homecoming three

years ago, we actually went gender neutral… It was a gender neutral, and we

actually had two kings. We didn't care if it was king, queen, queen, queen, king,

king. Gender neutral. And it happened!

Nate shared, one King was a member of the "LGBTQ community and one was

heterosexual, but it was no big deal."

For several years the Gay-Straight Alliance at Grand Beach high school focused

on providing a safe and supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender students, as well as their heterosexual allies. Principal Nate also sends

students and staff to a near-by University event focusing on providing supports to the

LGBTQ high school community. Nate explained how critical these efforts are at his high

school, "if we don't provide those resources to those kids, I would suspect that our suicide

rate would increase."

Barriers to Supporting Students that Identify as LGBTQ. In addition to

identifying a Gay-Straight-Alliance as a positive support for students identifying as

LGBTQ, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students

with disabilities described the barriers of providing a sense of belonging for students that

identify as LGBTQ in their schools. As an example, Nate described the 'flack' he

received from the community for breaking strong traditions when he allowed a gender-

neutral prom and the naming of two prom kings. He explained, his response to the

criticism as "I pointed to the changes in society and reiterated it was a student lead

decision to go to a gender neutral prom and it's important [student] voice is heard." Nate

added, "This is our society folks, whether you like it or not. I'm comfortable being

heterosexual, if somebody's comfortable being homosexual, who am I to judge them? Who are they to judge me?"

As principal Tom of Tidal Creek high school described the positive sense of belonging of two students that identify transgender, he brought up barriers that may limit the sense of belonging of these two students or others that identify LGBTQ. He described a lack of community and board support of students that identify LGBTQ. He shared;

> However, our school board is very, very conservative and they are not in... I will say this, I don't know if we necessarily have clear policies in place. The bathroom stuff hasn't been an issue. Our phy ed stuff has not been an issue because the kids have taken... We offered online phy ed.

At Tidal Creek high school, hundreds of students take online physical education every semester. Tom explained, students taking physical education online is common practice, so the two students that identify as transgender taking physical education online is not out of the ordinary.

Tom explained the level of support that he provides students who identify as LGBTQ has been efficient, he admitted at some point it may not be enough. He shared,

> I remember early in the year, Bob (the superintendent), used to call me and just say, 'Hey, have you heard anything from anybody about our trans kids? Is there any?' I said 'no.' 'Okay, because as soon as there is, the board's going to want to know about it.' He's not keeping it from them, but he also doesn't want to bring it up because he knows that there are very strong conservative people that will say no way, a boy is a boy, he needs to be in the boys' room, blah, blah, blah.

Principal Tom reiterated that the students who identify as LGBTQ are accepted and have a sense of belonging at their high school. He explained, "I don't think it's any different than some of our wheelchair kids. They've known the wheelchair kids since they were in middle school and so seeing them up here, it's... Yeah. That one's in a wheelchair. It's no big deal. This one is transgender. Okay. Yup."

Principal Kevin of Elk River high school described in the inability to relate to others and the lack of existing support as barriers to the sense of belonging of students that identify as LGBTQ. Principal Kevin explained, for some students belonging is "looking around and seeing other students who look like me, but that can be a challenge for some students in a small, rural community." Kevin added, "When we look at some of our LGBTQ students, students who are identifying or questioning... I think when students are questioning it can be very hard to look around and be able to identify students who are going through the same things I am, and then that can create a sense of not belonging." Kevin and the rest of Elk River staff are looking into creating a Gay-Straight Alliance to support this population of students. Kevin shared, "we're constantly looking at doing more, and we need to do more, and do better at looking at how are we helping students to feel like they belong."

Associate principal Ashley of Clear Lake high school, described the challenges of coming out in an urban setting. She explained, "I think part of the problem is for a kid to feel comfortable in their skin. They don't really know how to sometimes maybe come out or how their friends are going to perceive them." Students that identify as LGBTQ at Clear Lake high school lack support. Ashley shared, a Gay-Straight Alliance existed

several years ago, and "dissolved after the founding staff member stepped down because she had too much going on."

Principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, varied in their perception of the sense of belonging for students identifying LGBTQ experience. The administrators contributed the sense of belonging of students who identify LGBTQ, to their purposeful efforts of providing supports such as the development of the Gay-Straight Alliance. Others recognized the lack of support offered to students identifying LGBTQ as reason the sense of belonging of these students are likely low.

Conclusion

In this chapter, administrators described their perception of student's sense of belonging for students from families of low-income and students that identify as LGTBTQ. I compared the responses of administrators that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, to that of principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Both groups of principals recognized the need to provide additional supports to students from low-income families and students that identify as LGBTQ. The principals described additional supports that would enhance their sense of belonging of both populations of students.

In schools that the principal were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals contributed the strong sense of belonging of this population by reason of the conscious effort to remove barriers to access opportunities. In schools that the principal critically self-reflected on their

inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, the principals discussed the ability of students from low-income families to blend in within the population without drawing attention to their financial status, a lack of parental support and financial barriers as impacting their sense of belonging.

Principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, contributed the sense of belonging of students who identify LGBTQ, to their purposeful efforts of providing supports such as the development of the Gay-Straight Alliance. Others recognized the lack of support offered to students identifying LGBTQ as reason the sense of belonging of these students are likely low. In the schools that the principals were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals agreed a need exist to provide more support to foster belonging for students identifying as LGBTQ and the barriers to supporting this population of students. Principals of rural communities described a lack of experience in supporting students that identify LGBTQ.

Summary of Belonging Across Marginalized Identities

In addressing the research question, in schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? I collected qualitative interview data about the sense of belonging across specific student identities—similar to the YRBS belonging data collected but not shared with the high schools.

Regardless of whether they were less critically self-reflective or critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, the principals reported some similarities in the sense of belonging for students typically on the margins. At other times, clear differences emerged in ways not predicted by the level of inclusion of

students with disabilities in their schools.   For example, principals from schools that critically self-reflected on their practices, provided stronger evidence of practices that supported the belonging of students typically on the margins than principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Related, at times, the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities were more critically self-reflective of their own beliefs and practices and more clear about what exactly they needed to do to create a sense of belonging for all students, compared to the principals who were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. In only one interview response, did a principal explicitly link the inclusion of students with disabilities to the sense of belonging for students without disabilities at his school. Taken together, these findings reveal the complexities of creating schools where all students experience a sense of belonging across their intersectional identities. A school may be inclusive for one demographic identity and not for others.

In the next chapter, I share the next steps principals identified for ensuring all students experience a sense of belonging at their school. I compare the study findings to the literature, and propose a theory related to student belonging. Finally, I discuss implications, limitations and the significance of my study.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND

SIGNIFICANCE

While studies exists on the sense of belonging for students with disabilities, no studies directly compared the impact of inclusive practices for high students with disabilities on the sense of belonging of all other students in the school. Given this gap in the literature, my research addressed the following question: In schools that are inclusive, do all students have a greater sense of belonging? I addressed my research question relying on three data sets: The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from 28 Wisconsin high schools that participated in the 2017 YRBS. In all 28 schools, an administrator completed the Degree of Inclusion survey on the school's behalf. I then rank ordered the Inclusion Survey scores and selected seven of the highest scoring and seven of the lowest scores and invited these principals for an interview. Ten administrators participated in the interviews. During the interviews I discovered the Degree of Inclusion survey was not a valid measure of inclusive practices for students with disabilities and thus I eliminated the Degree of Inclusion survey from my study. I then organized my findings based on principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusionary practices for students with disabilities versus those that were less critically self-reflective.

Relationship Between Inclusion of Students with Disabilities and the Sense of

Belonging of Other Students in the School

When comparing my findings to the literature, limited prior studies existed that evaluated the sense of belonging of students with and without disabilities in an inclusive setting (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson et al. 2007; Hagborg 1998). Previous studies

indicated relatively equivalent levels of belonging have been found between pupils with disabilities and students without disabilities within an inclusive setting (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson et al. 2007; Hagborg 1998) and one study found when students with disabilities are included in the general education environment they have a slightly higher sense of belonging than students without disabilities (Crouch et al., 2014). However, no studies compared the sense of belonging of all students that attend more inclusive versus less inclusive schools.

Though I was unable to test for a statistical correlation between the Degree of Inclusion and sense of belonging data sets, within the qualitative interviews the principals described the positive impact of including students with disabilities had on students with and without disabilities in the school. Both groups of principals, the principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices and those that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices described how students within their high schools are more accepting and more likely to embrace student differences as a result of including students with disabilities. Further, principals of schools that were less critically self-reflective described students developing empathy as a result of including students with disabilities and that including students with disabilities improved the entire culture of the building.

Principals of schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities also described how including students with disabilities removed the mystery of special education and reduced behavioral infractions of student with and without disabilities. Furthermore and against the supporting research, some principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities

described the negative impact including students with disabilities had on other students in the classroom. These principals described including students with disabilities causing a potential safety risk to students without disabilities, distractions and slowing down the pace of the lesson, negatively impacting others in the classroom. Additionally, the principals identified the negative perspectives of including students with disabilities from parents and families within the community. In contrast, previous studies suggest that the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment does not have a negative impact on students without disabilities and in some cases, when students identified with intellectual disabilities are included, the achievement of all students increase (Fishbaugh & Gum, 1994; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994; Kalambouka et al, 2007; Odom, Deklyen, & Jenkins, 1984; Saint-Laurent, Glasson, Royer, Simard, & Pierard, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994; Wang & Birch, 1984).

Perceived Sense of Belonging

Hypothesis 3: "Through the interview, administrators identify students attending their high school as having a higher sense of belonging than reflected in the YRBS sense of belonging scores." This hypothesis was true.

Within my study, I shared the percentage of students who strongly agree or agree that they experience belonging at the school as reported on the YRBS with principals during my interviews. Although principals had access to the sense of belonging scores since the fall of 2017, no principals from my study appeared to have knowledge of the sense of belonging scores as reported by students attending their high schools. The responses of the principals aligned with my third hypothesis.

The YRBS sense of belonging scores from high schools within my study ranged from 49%-66% of students either agreeing, or strongly agreeing they experience belonging at their school. This is lower than the State reported average of 70% of students reporting a sense of belonging at their high schools (McCoy, 2018). Despite this data, principals generally described the sense of belonging of students attending their high schools as positive, including those who are typically marginalized. The principals that were less critically self-reflective, tended to describe a higher sense of belonging of students typically marginalized, compared to principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

The Degree of Inclusion of Students with Disabilities and the Sense of Belonging of Other Marginalized Students in the School

The previous research compared the sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities in an inclusive setting (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson et al. 2007; Hagborg 1998). However, this research did not disaggregate the sense of belonging of all students in the school. Importantly, the state YRBS data suggests that the sense of belonging of all students varies by student identity (see figure 2.1). Figure 2.1 depicts various student demographics and their level of belonging, but the combination holds true, white males report a higher sense of belonging (77.7%) compared to males from other races (64.7%) (McCoy, 2018).

Figure 2.1: Sense of Belonging Results WI YRBS 2017 (McCoy, 2018)
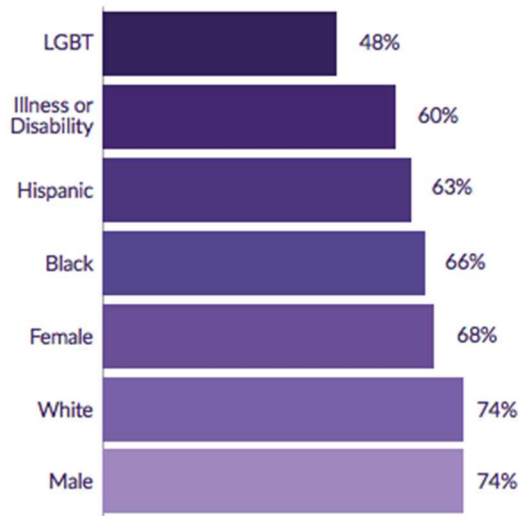
Despite the State having disaggregated demographic data on the sense of belonging students experience at their schools, the state was unwilling to share that information with me through my confidential application request. I also discovered, DPI does not share this information with building principals on their own students attending their schools, nor provided in a way that they can disaggregate on their own. All ten principals from my interviews agreed this disaggregated data would be helpful to them when ensuring all students experience a sense of belonging in their building.

Without the disaggregated belonging data from the YRBS however, the administrators did offer their perception of the degree of belonging of students across the different identities and how inclusive practices impact the sense of belonging of students who are typically marginalized—data that has not been examined in previous research. Students typically marginalized, include students of color, English Language Learners, students from low-income families and students that identify Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ)—all demographics collected on the YRBS. I discuss my findings related to each of these demographic areas next.

Perceived Sense of Belonging of Students of Color. Administrators varied in their description of the sense of belonging that students of color experience at their school. Many principals contributed their positive, accepting school communities to the high sense of belonging of students of color. Several principals did not describe a need to improve the sense of belonging of students of color and few explained the barriers they ran into while supporting the sense of belonging of students of color.

Principals that were less critical of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities described the sense of belonging of students of color needed to improve and at the same time students of color were generally accepted within the school setting. Some principals described the barriers of supporting students of color as the push back the district has received by offering lessons on white privilege and cultural sensitivity form the school board and community. Similarly, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices also recognized the barriers as communicating with linguistically diverse families, understanding diverse cultures and racism.

Although some principals perceived the sense of belonging of students of color to be low, they did not share ideas to enhance belonging for students of color. Additionally, some admitted to be at a loss on how to impact the sense of belonging of students of color.

Perceived Sense of Belonging of English Language Learners.
Administrators within my study also varied in their perception of the sense of belonging English Language Learners experience.   Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices described English language learners as a transient population that lacks supports at school. Principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive

practices also recognized the need for additional supports. Both groups of principals, varied in their perception of belonging of English Language learners. Despite recognizing a lack of support offered to the ELL families and students, a majority of the administrators described the sense of belonging of this population to be high or equal to other students in their high school.

Furthermore, principals from my study also described removing linguistic barriers for English Language Learners and their families. Principals discussed the importance of providing these families with interpreters to allow them to fully participate in school events and activities. Additionally, the principals provided families and students transcribed school documents and assignments allowing them greater access to their education, thus removing the language barrier to allow the student and family access.

Perceived Sense of Belonging of Low-Income Families. The majority of the principals from my study also described the sense of belonging of students from low-income families experiencing a high sense of belonging at their school. Administrators often contributed the positive sense of belonging of students from low-income families to their efforts of removing barriers to access opportunities. Principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities described the sense of belonging of students from low income families to be high as a direct reflection of the communities hard working mentalities and their concerted efforts to remove financial barriers. Principals from schools that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices also described the sense of belonging of students from low income families to be high as a result of removing barriers and their ability to blend in with other students.

Principals discussed enhancing the sense of belonging of students from low-income families by removing barriers. The principals from my study explained the importance of eliminating or reducing activity, sports, class or other school fees. Principals described the direct correlation between student participation in extracurricular activities and their sense of belonging. Even the one principal from my study who explained his reluctance to waive school fees, discussed the sense of belonging of students at his school to be low as a result of the low participation in sports and extracurricular activities, citing school fees as the barrier to participation.

Perceived Sense of Belonging of students identifying LGBTQ.

Perspectives of the sense of belonging of students identifying LGBTQ also varied, but majority of principals recognized the sense of belonging of this population to be low at their high schools. The principals acknowledged the need to provide additional, systematic supports to improve the belonging of students identifying as LGBTQ. The principals from my study discussed the importance of developing a Gay-Straight-Alliance to assist in providing a safe place for students to met, support each other, and discuss issues related to sexual orientation and gender identify expression. Principals from schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities recognized the sense of belonging of students that identified as LGBTQ to be low as a result of a lack of support and existing barriers. The principals from rural communities described a lack of experience supporting student that identify as LGBTQ. Further, principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities, also shared the sense of belonging of students that identify as LGBTQ to

be low. These principals also identified the importance of a Gay-Straight-Alliance to support this population of students.

Within the literature, typically marginalized students e.g., students of color (Deplit, 1999), students experiencing poverty (Gorski, 2013), and students on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) spectrum (Robinson & Espelage, 2012), all experience marginalization and lower levels of belonging at school. The Wisconsin YRBS data reports that race, gender, and sexual orientation play a big role in whether the students experience a sense of belonging at school and that all these identities experience lower levels of belonging (McCoy, 2018).

Hypothesis 4: "Through the interview, administrators identify their high school as being somewhat more inclusive [for students with disabilities] than reflected in the data collected from the Degree of Inclusion survey."

My findings aligned with hypothesis four. In many cases, principals that perceived their high school as somewhat inclusive on the Degree of Inclusion survey, discussed students with disabilities segregated from their peers without disabilities, which did not align with their survey responses.

Ironically, the administrators who reported their schools as having a lower degree of inclusion expressed more understanding of substantive inclusion (Capper & Frattura, 2018), and in some cases had taken more steps to implement inclusive practices than the principals who identified their schools as having a higher degree of inclusion. Administrators that have a better understanding of inclusive practices, recognized meeting the needs of diverse learners as being complex and that the work is ongoing.

Thus, they are more critical about their own practices and see opportunities for improvement.

Enhancing Belonging

Though all the principals in the study tended to inflate the degree of inclusion of student with disabilities at their schools and believed that students in their schools experience more of a sense of belong than indicated on the YRBS results, all the principals admitted they had additional work to do to ensure all students experience a sense of belonging at their schools. Some principals were more critically self-reflective than others.

Principals shared commonalities when identifying their next steps to assure all students at their school have a sense of belonging. The principals described the importance of (a) building strong relationships, (b) communicating a clear vision of inclusion of high expectations for students with disabilities, (c) strengthening the culture and climate of their building, and (d) participation in school activities. The principals of these high schools expressed the importance of focusing on improving student belonging at their high schools.

Building Relationships. Within my study, principals described the importance of staff-to-student, and student-to-student relationships as a critical aspect to the sense of belonging of students in their high schools. Shogren and colleague's (2015) research also described the importance of teacher-to-student relationships as a prerequisite for feeling a sense of belonging at school. Within their study, an overwhelming majority of students with and without disabilities described the relationships with teachers and principals as a

key element of what made them feel supported and safe and that contributed to their sense of belonging.

In my study, when describing their next steps to assure students experience belonging at their high schools, the principals identified the importance of relationship building. As an example, principal Tom of Tidal Creek high school explained, "I think we just do so much to kind of build that camaraderie. This is our first year with an advisory period. Really we spent, and still do in so many of them, time building that sense of a team." At Tidal Creek high school, students remain in their advisory with the same teacher and peers until they graduate. Tom described this as "home base and an opportunity to support one another."

Similarly, in an effort to improve culture, principal Sean explained his plans to complete the "red dot activity" at Eagle Spring high school with students and staff. The "red dot activity" is a relationship mapping activity completed with school staff. The principal places the names, or pictures of students on the wall and any staff member that has a positive relationship with that child places a red dot next to their name or picture. The activity provides a visual for staff of the students that do not have any, or few positive relationships with adults in the building. Following the activity, principal Sean explained the next steps;

> [The staff] Analyzes the results of that, and we try to figure out where are our students connected and who are they connected with and any students that don't have that connection with… with an adult in our building, or if they're only maybe have one or two red dots next to them, it's like, 'Okay, now we've got to hone in on those students and try to figure out what we can do there.'

Sean described the next steps to the activity as invaluable feedback to his staff. He explained;

> I've also basically done the reverse of that. During that student survey, I had the students then, basically put a red dot next to the teachers that they're connected with… It was good data for our teachers to see that, 'Wow, I've got a lot of students that feel they have a connection with me…' or maybe I'm a teacher that, 'I see a lot of students, but there's not a lot of them that are putting down they've got a connection with me. Hmm. What's going on there? What do I need to look at?'

Sean explained, the student version of the "red dot activity" provides staff with unique feedback beyond their classroom instruction.

Although often under valued, principals described the importance of taking time to build relationships with students as a means to enhance belonging. Past studies also stressed the importance of building relationships to foster belonging (Shogren, et al., 2015).

Communicating a Clear Vision of High Expectations. In addition to building relationships the principals of the schools that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices identified communicating a clear vision of inclusion that keeps expectations of students with disabilities high as a next step to assuring all students experiencing a sense of belonging. As an example, Tony described the next steps as defining inclusion for his building, without lowering expectations for students with disabilities. He shared;

I think there's a lot we need to do and there's a lot we need to really be grounded

in our focus on, because I get afraid sometimes that in the name of inclusion we

can lower standards too. And I get afraid that in the name of inclusion, we can

push through things that… I think we have to be open, have a good, honest

conversation around what it means to be an inclusive school and not be afraid to

challenge a decision or [what] a data point says.

Tony further explained, as a building they need to stop making excuses for why a student cannot learn, and find a way to educate him or her. He described a lack of understanding of "why and how a student can benefit from the general education environment." He shared;

I feel like inclusion gets a bad name. 'We're going to put you in Algebra one.'

'Well, they're performing math at a second grade level" and that's all anybody

hears. It is not about what the Algebra one experience is going to be for that

student, or how we're going to adapt, and modify, and support. All they hear is my

kid that can't even do flashcards is going into Algebra one and the teacher's like,

'What am I going to do with them?' And the parent says, 'What's the point of

this?'

Tony described the importance of keeping expectations high for students with disabilities and creating space for open dialogue about meeting the needs of diverse ability levels.

Strengthening the Culture and Community. In addition to building relationships and setting a clear vision for high expectations, principals discussed the need to create a sense of community in their schools. Prior research emphasized the importance of belonging as the feeling of being included, accepted and supported by others within a

community (Goodenow, 1993). The principals from my study defined and described belonging for students attending their high schools as experiencing acceptance within a community and developing their own identity. These principals' descriptions of belonging align closely with prior studies' descriptions of belonging as relatedness, acceptance, community, membership and identification (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000).

Similar to that of the research, the principals discussed the importance of acceptance into a peer group and to focus on improving community as a next step to ensuring belonging. Furthermore, the principals described belonging as their peer relationships within a larger community. Frederickson and colleagues (2007) described acceptance as positively associated with a strong sense of belonging and peer rejection negatively so.

Principal Kevin of Elk River high school described improving his school community by improving the village community. He explained;

> I think a lot of my thoughts have been around community lately and greater community, the community in the traditional place based city/village/regional sense. But then also translating it into, "Well, how do we create a sense of community within the school as well?"

Kevin described his own research lately in the area of creating a sense of community in schools and "really shifting... from school culture per se into more of thinking of it as a school community and how do you create that sense of community."

Principal Andre of Port Harbor high school described his next steps to ensure all students experience belonging as focusing on improving the school culture by developing systems where students feel supported. He shared;

> Continue to plug away at our culture by improving systems... from the simplest of systems of demonstrating what respect is to teaching, what respect is ... respecting yourself, respecting each other. Keeping those systems open. Making sure we don't block opportunities for kids. Making sure that when we create a new class, that all kids have access to it… That we're not handicapping ourselves there.

To improve school culture and the sense of belonging of students at his school, Andre also expressed the importance of improving his partnership with families and improving staffs understanding of cultural differences. He explained;

> That when we communicate with people, that we communicate in Spanish and Hmong... and we're doing that. That we continue to learn about other cultures and empathize their background in order to have them be successful in school. How do we bring parents into the building? What motivates them? What motivates them to be successful with their kids? What do they value?

Principal Andre explained, by improving the culture of the building and strengthening the relationships between school and home, he can impact the sense of belonging of all students at his high school.

Participation in School Activities. Additionally, principals within my study discussed the participation of students in extracurricular activities as a key feature to enhancing their sense of belonging. Principals correlated their high participation in school activities to a sense of belonging in their building. Similarly, when students

shared a lack of belonging at their school, the principals pointed to the lack of participation in school activities.

Principals described supports to enhance the sense of belonging of students at their schools and their next steps to ensure all students experience a sense of belonging at their school. The commonalities between the principals identified supports included, building strong relationships, communicating a clear vision of inclusion and high expectations for students with disabilities, strengthening the culture and climate of the building and participation in extracurricular activities.

Instructional Strategies

The research alludes to instructional arrangements contributing to student's sense of belonging. Prior studies extensively described the significance of strong instructional strategies for students with disabilities in the general education environment (Crouch, Keys & McMahon, 2014; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Nepia et. al, 2013). Nepia and colleagues (2013) described inclusionary strategies for students with disabilities, as practices that aim to remove barriers to learning and participation for students who experience difficulties, to different degrees and concerning access to the curriculum and strong pedagogy.

Shogren and colleagues (2015) examined the experiences of students with and without disabilities being educated in inclusive schools and connected students with and without disabilities' sense of belonging directly to the school's instructional practices. Other instructional elements mentioned by within Shogren and colleagues' (2015) study included self-determination, frequent feedback, re-teaching and multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement.

Principals from my study thoroughly discussed the importance of removing barriers to access opportunities and to develop a sense of belonging. Principals identified the elimination of low-level general and special education courses as a key element to their inclusionary practices (Nepia et. al, 2013). As a result of eliminating low-level classes, students who have been typically marginalized, including students of color, ELL, special education, and students identified for intervention, had access to grade level standards, social interactions with peers and were held to high expectations.

Principals described the need to build capacity within their staff to meet diverse ability levels as an area in need of improvement when including students with disabilities. Further, principals also recognized this lack of capacity as a barrier of inclusion. Some principals described co-planning time for the teachers to collaborate and build capacity in one-another. Building capacity or collaboration to meet diverse ability levels did not explicitly come up in the literature review.

Principals described the importance of instructional strategies as a means to develop a sense of belonging. Within my study, principals explained the importance of students with disabilities experiencing flexible instructional strategies in the general education environment, including universal design for learning, co-teaching, and co-planning to co-serve. They also recognized the need to build capacity in staff to meet diverse ability levels.

Toward a Theory of The Impact of Social Desirability of Inclusion and the Negative Impact on Belonging of All Students

Within my study, I compared findings from principals that were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices compared to principals that critically self-

reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. The principals that critically self-reflected provided stronger evidence of practices that supported the inclusion of students with disabilities and demonstrated a stronger understanding of inclusion. Similarly, these principals were more critically self-reflective of their own beliefs and practices and more clear about what exactly they needed to do to create a sense of belonging for all students, compared to the principals who were less critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Further, through my interviews I discovered principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities were more likely to recognize the additional supports that are needed for students across identities and they provided stronger examples of how they supported students of color, students that are ELL, students from low-income families and students that identify as LGBTQ. Likewise, they tended to recognize students that are typically marginalized are likely to have a lower sense of belonging than other students in their building.

Through my qualitative interviews, I discovered the less critically self-reflective the principals were on their inclusive practices—the fewer evidence of inclusive practices they shared and less clear they were about how they include students with disabilities. From these findings, I conclude principals possess a strong social desire to appear more inclusive for students with disabilities and as a result can have a negative impact on the sense of belonging of all students.

Through the findings, I conclude principals that critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices for students with disabilities were more likely to support students

across identities. I introduce a theory of how social desirability of inclusive practices

negatively impacts the sense of belonging of all students (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Social Desirability and Inclusion

Self-Reflective	Ideological Reasoning	Impact on Belonging
Less Critically Self-Reflective	• Perceives students are included and supported in current system. No action needed.	• Students are marginalized across identities and their sense of belonging suffers
Critically Self-Reflective	• Recognizes and acknowledges barriers exist for some students. Action taken.	• Students of diverse identities are supported, positively impacting belonging

In Figure 2.2, I demonstrate when principals recognize and acknowledge the need

for improved inclusive practices that they tend to respond by providing support, not only

for students with disabilities, but all students. Through recognizing the need for

additional supports for students with disabilities, they then support students across

identities, intentionally and unintentionally.

Figure 2.2: Impact of Social Desirability on Sense of Belonging

Social Desirability & Inclusion: The Impact on Sense of Belonging
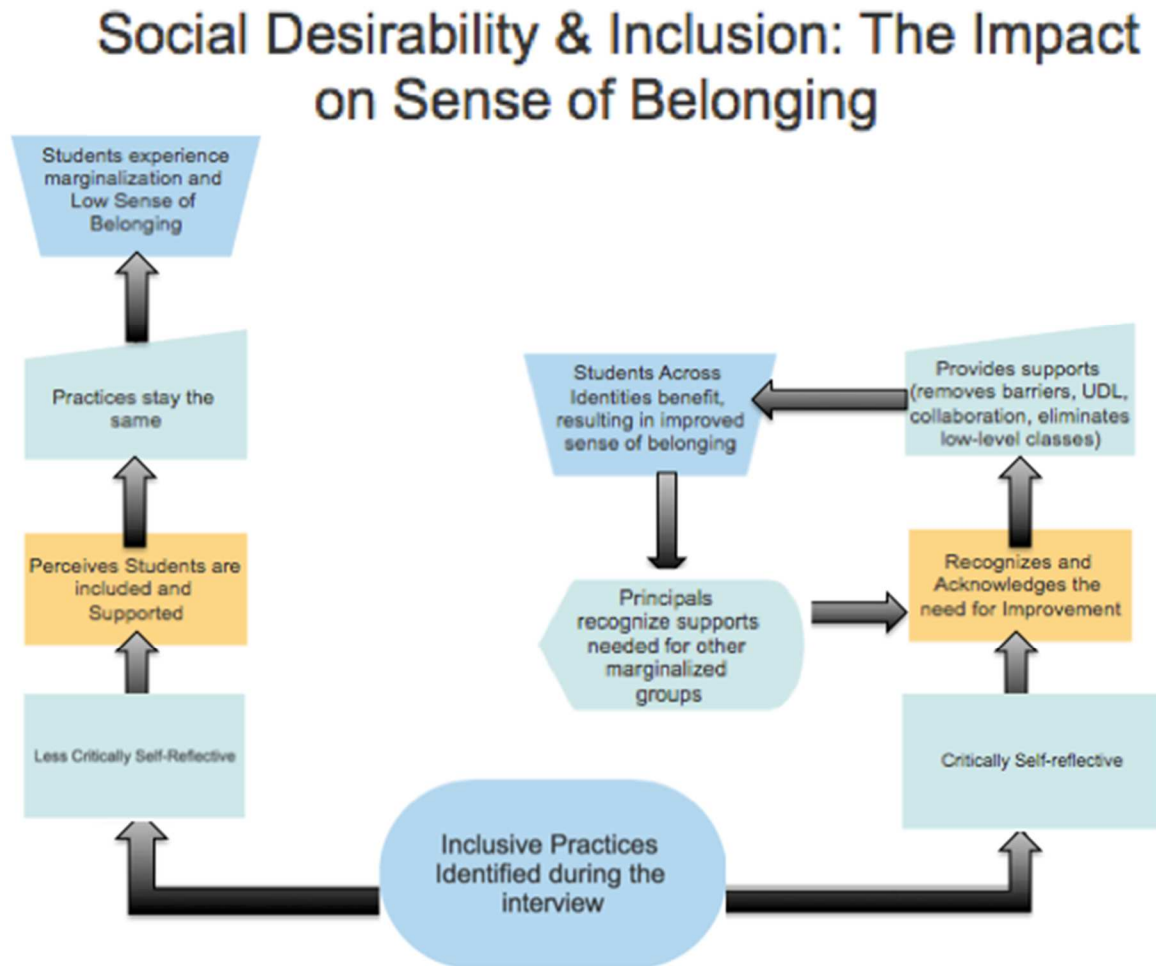
Implications

Implications for administrators' practice emerged from this study as well as opportunities for future research. There is much to do for administrators creating an environment that not only fosters the sense of belonging of students with disabilities, but also enhances that of all students, including those who are typically marginalized. I present here implications for administrators based on the findings for practice, for preparation and for future research. Within my study five themes emerged as the characteristics of creating an environment that enhances the sense of belonging of all students. In table 3.2, I present the study themes and how they relate to implications for

administrators. In some cases, the advice for educational leaders aligned with more than one study theme and is included with both, such as access to opportunities and the impact of inclusion on belonging.

Table 3.2: Implications for Administrator's Practice Based on Study Themes

Study Themes	Implications for Principal's Practice
• Enhancing Belonging	• Relationships • Hold students to high expectations • Provide a safe and secure learning environment • Positive school culture and climate
• Removing Barriers	• Physical placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom • Eliminating low level classes • Removal financial barriers • Flexible teaching strategies
• Instructional practices	• Commit to strong instructional practices • Build Capacity in staff to teach diverse ability levels • Co-planning to co-serve • Universal Design for Learning • Building Capacity to meet diverse ability levels • Build in time to for co-planning • Provide professional development • Create an culture of shared responsibilities
• Perception of Belonging and social-desirability	• Acknowledge the inequities within their building and understand student's sense of belonging is likely going to vary • Recognize that some students experience marginalization and a lower sense of belonging • Interrupt systematic oppression in order to enhance belonging
• Improved culture and community	• Focus on relationships • Set clear vision • Set high expectations for students

Enhancing Belonging. The first implication for administrators and school leaders alike is to intentionally promote healthy relationships between students and staff to enhance the belonging of all students. Within my study, principals intentionally created activities that identified students that lacked positive relationships with staff and created plans to address these students. Studies have shown that strong relationships between school staff and their students can have a substantial impact on academic success and sense of belonging (Shrogren et al., 2015). Within Shogren and colleague's (2015) study, an overwhelming majority of students from described the relationships with teachers and principals as a key element of their sense of belonging. Similarly, the principals I interviewed discussed the positive relationships as a key feature to fostering student's sense of belonging in their high schools. Principals and educational leaders alike should stress the importance of, and provide opportunities to their staff to build positive relationships with students.

To enhance belonging, principals discussed the importance of providing a safe and secure environment at school. Principals can take steps to ensure students feel safe and secure in their building. Safety can range from feeling prepared during an emergency, to providing students with student support plans focused on behavior intervention. Previous studies described multi-level systems of behavioral support across classrooms and for individual students as a proven method to improve safety and belonging (Shogren et al., 2015). The principals from my study explained that when students did not feel safe, their sense of belonging suffered.

Removing Barriers. In addition, principals discussed the importance of removing barriers to access as an important component to sense of belonging. The principals I interviewed described various aspects of removal of barriers, including the physical placement of students with disabilities in the general education environment and the removal of financial barriers.

School leaders may eliminate barriers to accesses by waiving class, sports, activity or other school fees, thus removing the financial barriers for many students and families and allowing them to fully participate in opportunities. The principals within my study explained how they eliminated fees as a means to allow students access to extra-curricular activities, which they explained as having a substantial impact on their student's sense of belonging.

Many principals began their journey of including students with disabilities with eliminating low-level classes, allowing students access to a higher rigor, and social opportunities with students without disabilities. Principals and educational leaders alike can impact the sense of belonging of all students through their concerted efforts of remove the barrier of low-level classes and by physically placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate supports.

Instructional Practices. In additional implication to enhancing belonging and removing barriers, principals discussed providing students access to guaranteed and viable curriculum in the general education classroom through the use of flexible instructional strategies.

Principals from my study described meeting student's diverse ability levels through effective, flexible teaching strategies including co-teaching, or co-planning to co-

serve and universal design for learning, thus raising expectations for all students. Principals and educational leaders alike should create structures that support co-planning to co-serve students, building capacity in their staff to meet diverse ability levels and raising expectations of all students. Cole and colleagues (2008) supported raising expectations of students, describing that students display greater persistence in educational activities, coursework and perform overall better in school when they can place greater value on school tasks and view their work as challenging, interesting, relevant and useful.

Perception of Belonging and Social-Desirability. In addition, principals and educational leaders alike can learn a valuable lesson about the importance of acknowledging, recognizing and acting on inequities that exist within their schools. My study displayed the social desire of administrators to present their school as somewhat inclusive for students with disabilities than what the students experience. Furthermore, principals within my study believed students at their school to experience a higher sense of belonging than the students reported, including the sense of belonging of students who are typically marginalized (students of color, ELL, students of low-income and students that identify LGBTQ).

Within the literature, McCoy (2018) explained that race gender and sexual orientation play a big role in whether the students experience a sense of belonging at school. School leaders must first acknowledge that inequities exist within their school and that some student's high school experience is far different than others due to the marginalization they experience.

Improved Culture and Community. The principals also discussed the importance of focusing on creating a healthy building culture to support the belonging of students in their building. Educational leaders can improve school culture through ensuring staff members work together under the same beliefs, values, assumptions and vision. The principals within my study described how a toxic school culture, trickles down to negatively impact the sense of belonging of students. One principal from my study believed staff lacked belonging at his building, which resulted in the low sense of belonging students experienced in his building.

Limitations

I identified five limitations to my study including a lack of disaggregated data, errors in the data, sample size, generalizability of the findings and social desirability. These limitations impacted my findings and are discussed in this section.

First, the lack of disaggregated YRBS demographic data limited the study findings. Instead, I relied on administrator perceptions of the sense of belonging of these populations of students.

The principals agreed that YRBS desegregated data would be valuable for their decision making. One principal expressed his perspective of the survey by sharing;

> I think so often in the past the YRBS has just been administered and then it's off to researchers who pull it and play with it and manipulate it to see what they can find, but it's never reported back at the school level…. we don't get [disaggregated] data and that's just it. And so that's where the survey really would be helpful.

Making changes to impact specific demographic populations have proven difficult without disaggregated data to drive decision-making.

Second, errors within the YRBS dataset provided by DPI limited my study. Although, DPI corrected the YRBS data they provided me, its possible errors in that data continue to exist. The errors lead to me omitting 5 high schools that completed the Degree of Inclusion survey and YRBS in 2017, thus lowering my overall sample size.

Third, the sample size limited my study. I sent the survey to 225 administrators from 147 high schools; 37 administrators completed the Degree of Inclusion survey from 34 different high schools. I then lowered that sample size to 28 high schools due to the errors found in DPI's dataset. I also interviewed 10 administrators. This small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, but the data does suggest some pattern in the thinking of the participants about the influence including students with disabilities has on the sense of belonging of all students. Further, as discussed in my methods chapter, I did reach analytic saturation with this sample size of interviews.

Fourth, all participants were from high schools in Wisconsin, which may impact the overall generalizability of the findings, particularly across other states, or other regions of the country. Including other geographical regions of the county would strengthen future studies.

Finally, despite having created the Degree of Inclusion survey that requires principals to operationalize inclusion in specific ways, I conclude that due to social-desirability principals tended to score their school higher on the survey. The over-estimation of inclusive practices made my survey an unreliable measure on its own and I could not use it in my study to assess the degree of inclusion that exist within each high school.

Implications for Future Research

These study limitations can inform future research. Future research is also needed to better understand the impact of including students with disabilities on the sense of belonging of all other students. Additional questions arose throughout this study that prompt further research.

 First, future research should study the practices of high schools that have a high degree of inclusion and where students experience a high sense of belonging. Principals and other stakeholders need to understand proven methods to include students with disabilities and the supports that enhance belonging of all students.

To determine the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities, future studies should determine which schools are inclusive through the use of nominations by those in the field. Following nominations, observations with the use of the Degree of Inclusion survey should be considered.

Third, adjustments to the Degree of Inclusion scale may be needed. I created the scale to rank each administrator's scores as highly inclusive (45-50), mostly inclusive (35-44), somewhat inclusive (25-34), minimally inclusive (15-24), or not inclusive (0-14). A high percentage of schools (79.40%) fell within the somewhat range (25-34). Three of these schools scored between 30-34. In the future, I would move the scale to create a greater division between the schools that scored in the mid-twenties and the schools that scored in the lower thirties.

Fourth, future research must include access to disaggregated state data on the YRBS.   Access to disaggregated data on the sense of belonging would have greatly strengthened my study.

Finally, future YRBS surveys must include demographics associated with different categories of disability and accommodations for the students with disabilities to complete the survey. It is ironic, that a national survey includes measures of student belonging in schools, excludes particular students from taking and being counted in the survey results.

Significance

This study contributes to the literature in the field of education and educational leadership regarding the critical importance of creating a school environment where students experience belonging. First, the study examines the relationship of the sense of belonging of all students and the inclusive practices for students with disabilities. It examined commonalities and differences of high schools that principals were less critically self-reflective compared to those that were critically self-reflective of their inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Although three studies in the past examined the sense of belonging of students in an inclusive environment (Crouch et al., 2014; Frederickson et al. 2007; Hagborg 1998), a comparison of students sense of belonging that attend schools from schools that the principals critically self-reflected on their inclusive practices compared to schools that the principals were less reflective of their inclusive practice did not exist.

Second, this study reveals the social desirability that exists when discussing the treatment and education of students with disabilities in a high school environment (Selltiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976). Principal's social desire to self-report their high school as more inclusive than what students experience can prevent the necessary changes needed to improve belonging of students in their high school.

If educational leaders do not recognize and acknowledge the inequities that exist within their school, students are likely trapped in a continuous cycle of marginalization, suppressing their sense of belonging. School leaders must find the courage to combat against hundreds of years of segregation and institutional oppression. Throughout history, as more students did not meet the normed expectations of the average student through assimilation they were placed in separate programs inexplicitly telling them they do not belong, many of which still exist—as evidence within my study. These programs were developed based on deficit practices created and "perpetuated low achievement among students of color, who are linguistically diverse, with disabilities, and among students of poverty, as more children are removed from the core of teaching and learning for remediation or interventions 'someplace else' (Capper & Frattura, 2018)." It is that "someplace else" that can rip the sense of belonging from a child and send the message that they are unlike their peers and do not belong. This should not be a child's burden, as it is a result of a broken system that adults can change. We, as educational leaders can be the difference in a child dreading the 180 days of the year they are required to come to school or we can create an environment that welcomes diversity, is nurturing and loving, yet challenges their thinking and fosters their sense of belonging.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Literature Findings

K-12 Study on Students with Disabilities and Belonging in Inclusive Environments	Research Question(s)	Participants	Racial Demographics	Disability Areas Examined	Measures	Time in General Education	Findings	Limitations
Crouch, R., Keys, C. B., & McMahon, S. D. (2014). Student–teacher relationships matter for school inclusion: School belonging, disability, and school transitions. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 42*(1), 20-30. doi:10.1080/10852352.2014.855054	(1) Are positive interactions with teachers and other school staff are positively associated with student school belonging? (2) Are negative interactions with teachers and other school staff negatively associated with school belonging?	- Data collected from both students with and without disabilities and teachers	- African American 87 (79%) - Latino/a 21 (19%) - White 2 (2%) Asian 1 (1%)	- Moderate Disabilities 64 (58%) - Severe Disabilities 16 (15%) - Mild Disabilities 11 (10%)	-Teachers - Modified 5-item scale, based on the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale - Students - Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale - Teachers & Students - School Stressors and School Resources subscales from the LISRES—A Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory (Students completed all 10 items and teachers completed a modified 6-item scale)	- Not clear. Just referred to as an inclusive setting.	- Student perceptions of positive student–teacher interactions significantly predicted student-reported school belonging. - Student-reported negative interactions with teachers and school staff significantly predicted lower rates of student-reported school belonging	- Unclear on the amount of time students spend in the general education classroom - Lacked admin perspectives - Lacked Mixed Method approach (Interviews and Surveys)
Frederickson, N.,	- Do social and affective	- 397 children with (89 students) and	- White – 379	Cognitive and	- Students - Social	- 100% included in	- The former special school	- Lacked admin

Citation	Research Questions	Sample	Ethnicity	Disability	Measures	Setting	Findings	Limitations
Simmonds, E., Evans, L., & Soulsby, C. (2007). Assessing the social and affective outcomes of inclusion. British Journal of Special Education, 34(2), 105-115. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8578.2007.00463.x	outcomes differ across the following different groups of pupils: included (former special school) pupils; mainstream pupils who have special educational needs; and mainstream pupils who do not have special educational needs? - Do the measures selected to assess acceptance, belonging and community offer a coherently related but sufficiently distinct contribution to the evaluation of the social and affective outcomes of inclusion?	without (308 students) disabilities aged eight to 11 years	students - Asian – 8 students Other – 10 students	learning, 63% (56); behavior, emotional and social, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, 24 % (21); language and communication, including ASD, 9% (8); and physical and sensory, 4% (4).	Inclusion Survey - Students - 'Guess Who' Social Behavior, Bullying and Victim Measures - Students - Abbreviated version of Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership	general education	pupils did not differ in their social acceptance from their typically developing classmates. By contrast, other pupils with special educational needs, who were on the special needs registers of the schools involved, were less accepted and more rejected in both work and social contexts than typically developing classmates. There were no differences between the groups in the extent to which they felt a sense of belonging as members of their schools and classes.	perspectives - Lacked a mixed Method approach
Hagborg, W. J. (1998). School membership among students with learning disabilities and nondisabled	- Do high school students with LD report a lower level of school membership than ND students, consistent with their concomitant weaknesses in the academic and social-	- 37 students with (28 boys and 9 girls) - 37 students without disabilities (28 boys and 9 girls)	- 100% Caucasian	Students identified with learning disabilities	- Students - Abbreviated version of Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership - Students - Social Support Scale - Students - Self-Perception	- The students identified with LD receive academic support within the resource room one or two periods a day	- High school students with LD reported their level of school membership on the PSSM as roughly equivalent to that of ND students	- Students are not fully included in the general education setting - Not all disability areas are represented - Lacked admin perspectives - Relied on a single

students in a semirural high school. *Psychology in the Schools, 35*(2), 183-188. doi:10.1002/(sici)1520-6807(199804)35:23.0.co;2-8	emotional domains?				Profile for Children (SPPC)			measure (survey) - Only included students identified as causation
Hagborg, W. (2003). Sources of school belonging for students with learning disabilities. *PsycEXTRA Dataset.* doi:10.1037/e344582004-001	- What is the relationship between sources of social support as measured by Harter's Social Support Scale for Children and Goodenow's Psychological Sense of School Membership? - Further analysis examined the relationship between school belonging and background variables and self-perception	-52 middle school students identified with a learning disability - 52 students without disability (same male to female ration)	- Not reported	- 52 Students identified with a learning disability	- Students - Psychological Sense of School Members Scale - Students - Harter's Social Support Scale -Student - Self-Perception Profile for Children	- Not reported	The investigation found that both students with and without a LD reported an equivalent level of social support from parents, teachers, classmates, and closed friends. -A correctional of findings suggest that school belonging for students with LD is more closely tied to parental support and peer support than is the case for their NLD classmates. For the NLD students, teacher support more related to school	- Unclear on the amount of time students spend in the general education classroom - Not all disability areas are represented - Lacked admin perspectives - Lacked Mixed Method approach (Interviews and Surveys) - Did not report on racial demographics

							belonging	
Knesting, K., Hokanson, C., & Waldron, N. (2008). Settling In: Facilitating the transition to an inclusive middle school for students with mild disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 55*(3), 265-276. doi:10.1080/10349120802268644	- (a) What are the students' general experiences, instructional practices, and the social interactions in these inclusive middle-level classrooms; (b) How do the experiences of these students influence their initial and ongoing attitudes toward middle school; and (c) How do teachers' and parents' perceptions of the experiences of the students compare with the students' own perceptions of this inclusive middle-level educational setting?	Nine students with disabilities and their parents and teachers	- One student was African-American, two were multiracial, and six were Caucasian	- Eight students were identified with learning disabilities and one with mild intellectual disabilities	-Students, Teachers, Parents - Interviews - Classroom observations	-100% included. The special education teachers and assistants assigned to the inclusion teams worked with all students in the gen ed classroom individually and in small groups, answering questions, providing guidance with difficult assignments, making modifications and accommodations to assignments, and providing behavior supports such as teaching social skills and creating supportive environments.	Three themes were identified: how the demands of navigating a new environment increased students' anxiety; how students satisfied their need for belonging; and how students' perceptions of school influenced their attitude towards help.	- Although the students in this study were fully included, others in the building are educated in the resource room. -Not including all types of disabilities -Not all disability areas are represented - Lacked admin perspectives - Lacked a mixed method approach (Interviews and Surveys)
Nepia, L. D., Facondini, R., Nucci, F., & Peru,	- What are the effects of inclusion on different aspects of social	486 pupils aged from seven to 14 participated (379 students without disabilities, 107 with)	- Refers to the students as Italian	- Learning, -Behavioral -Sensory - Physical - Linguistic - Cognitive	- Students - Psychological Sense of School Membership - Students -	- Full Inclusion	-Students with special educational needs were found to be less accepted	- Lacked admin perspectives - Lacked a mixed method

A. (2013). Evidence from full-inclusion model: The social position and sense of belonging of students with special educational needs and their peers in Italian primary school. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 28*(3), 319-332. doi:10.1080/08856257.2013.777530	participation, ranging from the presence of positive interactions between typically developing students' and their counterparts with special educational needs, to the acceptance of students with special educational needs by their peers, and the development of friendships within the student peer group?				'Like to Work' and 'Like to Play, subtests from The Social Inclusion Survey		and more rejected than typically developing students, in both primary and secondary grades and in both the play and study conditions	approach (Interviews and Surveys)
Rose, C. A., Simpson, C. G., & Ellis, S. K. (2016). The	The study examined the following hypotheses: (a) disability status will predict higher levels of	1183 students with disabilities and 13,325 students without disabilities in grades 6 through 12	- 391 (33.1%) Caucasian, 340 (28.7%) Latino/a, 326 (27.6%)	1183 students with disabilities, with 667 (56.4%) specific learning	- Students - Psychological Sense of School Members Scale - Students -	- The amount of time students are in the general education environme	Findings from the current study suggested that bullying and fighting behaviors increase as	- The amount that students participate in general education is unclear and varies.

relationship between school belonging, sibling aggression and bullying involvement: Implications for students with and without disabilities. *Educational Psychology, 36*(8), 1462-1486. doi:10.1080/01443410.2015.1066757	bullying, victimization and fighting; (b) school belonging and sibling aggression will independently predict bullying, victimization and fighting for students with and without disabilities; (c) school belonging will buffer the effect of sibling aggression for students with and without disabilities; and (d) school belonging will buffer the effect of sibling aggression for students with disabilities above and beyond the effect for students without disabilities.		African-American, 75 (6.3%) other or bi-racial, 23 (1.9%) Native American, 6 (.5%) Asian or Asian American and 22 (1.9%) without a race identifier	disability, 181 (15.3%) other health impairment, 117 (9.9%) intellectual disability, - 91 (7.7%) emotional/behavioral disorder - 66 (5.6%) ASD and 61 (5.2%) sensory related or other disability, including speech or language impairment (n = 18), deafness (n = 16), orthopedic impairment (n = 14), visual impairment (n = 10), and traumatic brain injury (n = 3)	Six-item sibling aggression scale - Students - University of Illinois Fighting Scale - Students - University of Illinois Bully Scale - Students - University of Illinois Victimization Scale	nt is not clear. The authors do make reference that some students that participated completed their surveys in their self-contained special education classrooms.	sibling aggression perpetration increase for students with high and low levels of school belonging	- Lacks admin perspectives -Lacks a mixed method approach
Rose, R., Shevlin, M., (2017). A sense of belonging: Children's' views of acceptance in	- How do how pupils with special educational needs perceived that they were accepted by their peers and others, and the extent to which they felt that they belonged in a mainstream	120 students with disabilities	Not reported	Not reported	- Students - Abbreviated version of Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale - Student - Interview	Students participation level in the general education class varies but is not defined - Resource rooms are available to students with disabilities at the	- We would suggest that children with special educational needs in this study expressed feelings of acceptance as a result of the support with which they are provided which enabled	-Students participation in general education varies and is unclear - Areas of disabilities not reported - Racial demographics not reported - Lacks admin

"inclusive" mainstream schools. *International Journal of Whole Schooling. 13,* (1), 65-80	learning environment?					elementary level and high school students miss full content courses in order to receive help completing assignments in a special ed room	them to participate fully in all aspects of school life. Their sense of belonging was founded upon positive relationships with both their peers and the adults in their school life, and the extent to which they felt they could define and manage the levels of support that they received.	perspectives
Shogren, K., Gross, J., Forber-Pratt, A., Francis, G., Satter, A., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for*	- What are the experiences of students with and without disabilities being educated in inclusive schools, documenting their perceptions of the culture of their school, inclusion, and the practices that were implemented to support all students?	- 86 students participated, 53 without disabilities and 33 with disabilities.	Not reported	Students with disabilities had a range of support needs, but disability area is not reported.	- Student-Interview with developed interview protocol	Students are educated in an inclusive school, it is not clear to what extent.	Three major themes emerged: (a) students' sense of belonging in their school culture, (b) inclusion and its impact on students, and (c) school and classroom practices, such as positive behavior support systems, co-teaching, and instructional practices related to student self-determination and direction, feedback and re-teaching, multiple means of representation and expression, and technology	- Not all disability areas are included - Lacks admin perspectives - Lacks a mixed method approach

Persons with Severe Disabilities, 40(4), 243-260. http://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915583493						utilization	

Appendix B: Degree of Inclusion Survey

Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Degree of Inclusion Survey

Name of High School: _____ Position:

_____

Directions: Please complete this survey based on your own high school settings.					
	Not at all	Sometimes	Most of the time	Nearly all the time	All the time
1) Students with disabilities are included in the general education environment.	1	2	3	4	5
2) Students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities are included in the general education classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
3) Students with severe behavioral disabilities are included in the general education classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
4) Related services (speech therapy, PT, OT, SDPE, etc.) are provided to students in an inclusive environment.	1	2	3	4	5
5) Students with disabilities remain in the general education environment for their academic, behavior, or sensory instructional needs.	1	2	3	4	5
6) Students with disabilities attend their neighborhood school they would attend if they did not have a disability.	1	2	3	4	5
7) The needs of students with disabilities are met within the district, instead of being placed at private, public, alternative schools, or other kinds of schools outside of the district.	1	2	3	4	5
8) Students are proportionally represented in all settings. (For example: if the school has 15% of students with disabilities, each class/course has a similar percentage of students with	1	2	3	4	5

disabilities).					
9) Students with disabilities are proportionally represented in clubs and extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
10) All students are proportionally represented in all spaces (rooms, courses or classes are not set-aside for students with specific needs (e.g. ELL, special education, advanced learners, alternative education, Tier 2 and 3, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C: Administrator Pilot Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for High School Student's Sense of Belonging

Name of High School: _____ Position:
_____Date: _____

Opening Questions

1) Tell me about your journey of including students with disabilities, how did you get here?

2) What does the inclusion of students with disabilities look like at your school? Can you provide specific examples?

Including Students with Disabilities

3) What is something you are doing really well when educating students with disabilities?

4) What evidence do you have that inclusion is working in your school?

5) When it comes to including students with disabilities, what is an area you could improve upon?

6) What are the barriers that exist within your school when including students with disabilities?

Defining Belonging

7) How do you define belonging and what does it look like for your students in your school?

Belonging and Students with Disabilities

8) How do you purposely foster an environment where students with disabilities feel like they have a sense of belonging?

Belonging and All Other Students in School

9) What impact has including students with disabilities had on other students in the school?

10) What structures and systems are in place in order to build a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities?

11) Describe the extent to which other students on the margins, such as students of color, feel a sense of belonging at your school. Why is that so?

12) Describe the extent to which English Language Learners in your school feel a sense of belonging in your school? Why is that so?

13) Describe to the extent to which students from low income families experience belonging at your school. Why is that so?

14) Describe the extent to which students that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender experience belonging at your school. Why is that so?

15) What are your next steps for ensuing all students have a sense of belonging at school?

Closing Questions

16) Is there anything else you want to tell me about the extent to which your school is inclusive for students with disabilities and the sense of belonging for all students at your school?

17) Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix D: Administrator Interview Protocol

Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Interview Protocol for High School Student's Sense of Belonging

Name of High School: _____ Position:
_____Date: _____

Opening Questions

1) Tell me about your journey of including students with disabilities, how did you get here? (Prompting question) What other systems or structures have you put in place as part of your journey in creating an inclusive environment?

Including Students with Disabilities

2) What evidence do you have that inclusion is working in your school?

3) When it comes to including students with disabilities, what is an area you could improve upon?

4) What are the barriers that exist within your school when including students with disabilities?

Defining Belonging

5) How do you define belonging and what does it look like for your students in your school?

Belonging and All Other Students in School

6) What impact has including students with disabilities had on other students in the school? Please give me specific examples.

7) Your YRBS data says ___% of all students agree or strongly agree that they experience belonging at your school. Why is this so?

Desegregated Questions

8) Describe the extent to which other students on the margins, such as students of color, perceive themselves as belonging at your school? Why is that so?

9) Describe the extent to which English Language Learners in your school perceive themselves belonging at your school? Why is that so?

10) Describe the extent to which students from low-income families perceive themselves as belonging in your school? Why is that so?

11) Describe the extent to which students that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender perceive themselves belonging at your school? Why is that so?

12) What are your next steps for ensuing all students have a sense of belonging at school?

Closing Questions

13) Is there anything else you want to tell me about the extent to which your school is inclusive for students with disabilities and how and in what ways this has impacted all students at the school?

14) Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E: Survey Consent

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: High School Students' Sense of Belonging in Segregated Versus Integrated School Settings

Principal Investigator: Dr. Colleen Capper (phone: 608-263-9994) (email: capper@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Charles Wiza (phone: 414-807-8648)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about high school student's sense of belonging in segregated versus integrated school settings.

You have been asked to participate because as a building leader, you are essential in reporting the amount of inclusionary practices occurring in your building.

The purpose of the research is to determine if students attending schools that are more inclusive, have a greater sense of belonging?

This study will include high schools that participated in the Youth Behavior Risk Survey in 2017.

Most of the research will be completed through online surveys, with a select few high schools chosen to participate in follow-up interviews at another time.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to complete a multiple-choice survey on inclusionary practices in your high school. Your school may also be chosen for follow up interviews.

Your participation in the survey will last approximately 5 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

A potential breach of confidentiality is a risk.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

This study will inform the research on the extent to which integrated or segregated settings for students with disabilities impact a sense of belonging for all high school students.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name or your school's name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Colleen Capper at 608-263-9994. You may also call the student researcher, Charles Wiza at 414-807-8648.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

By clicking 'yes, I consent' in the survey, it indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate.

Appendix F: Interview Consent

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: High School Students' Sense of Belonging in Segregated Versus Integrated School Settings

Principal Investigator: Dr. Colleen Capper (phone: 608-263-9994) (email: capper@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Charles Wiza (phone: 414-807-8648)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about high school student's sense of belonging in segregated versus integrated school settings.

You have been asked to participate because as a building leader, you are essential in reporting the amount of inclusionary practices occurring in your building.

The purpose of the research is to determine if students attending schools that are more inclusive, have a greater sense of belonging?

This study will include high schools that participated in the Youth Behavior Risk Survey in 2017.

Survey data has been collected online. Interviews will be conducted on the phone or in-person, at an agreed upon time and location.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to Participate in an interview about inclusion and belonging within your high school.

Your participation will last approximately 40 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

A potential breach of confidentiality is a risk.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

This study will inform the research on the extent to which integrated or segregated settings for students with disabilities impact a sense of belonging for all high school students.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name or your school's name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Colleen Capper at 608-263-9994. You may also call the student researcher, Charles Wiza at 414-807-8648.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

_____ _____

Appendix G: Survey Interview Script

Dear Building Leader,

Please help Wisconsin become a more inclusive place for students with disabilities. I invite you to participate in a UW-Madison Dissertation study to better understand how inclusive practices for students with disabilities impact the sense of belonging for all students.

Please follow the link to participate in a short survey.

(Insert Link)

Charlie Wiza

Appendix H: DPI Data Use Agreement

Data Use Agreement

STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

DATA USE AGREEMENT BETWEEN

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and⬚UW-Madison

This Data Use Agreement is made and entered into on Agreement Date (1/17/2019) by and between the **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)** , hereafter "Holder," and **UW-Madison** , hereafter "Recipient." The Holder and Recipient agree to all of the following terms:

1. Definitions⬚1.1. This agreement sets forth the terms and conditions pursuant to which Holder will ⬚disclose certain protected educational information, hereafter "PEI," in the form of a ⬚Data Set to the Recipient.⬚1.2 "Data Set" shall refer to data received as a result of queries incorporating the Holder data warehouse elements specified in Appendix *A* . ⬚

2. Definitions

.   2.1. Terms used, but not otherwise defined, in this Agreement shall have the meaning given ⬚by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act's implementing regulations, 34 CFR⬚Part 99. ⬚

.   2.2. "Project" means the Recipient's study or project described under Section 3. ⬚

3. Project⬚3.1. The Recipient seeks PEI from the Holder for the following reasons: ⬚This study will inform the research on the extent to which integrated or segregated settings for students with disabilities impact a sense of belonging for all high school students. ⬚3.2. The Project will have the following research benefits:⬚It will assist educational leaders reflect on their service delivery model for

students with disabilities in relation to the importance of a student's sense of belonging.

4. Permitted Uses and Disclosures4.1 Except as otherwise specified herein, Recipient may make all uses and disclosures of the Data Set necessary to conduct the Project.

5. Recipient Responsibilities5.1 The Recipient shall not use or disclose the Data Set for any purpose other than permitted by this Agreement pertaining to the Project, or as required by law. If disclosure of data of any kind is deemed necessary, it shall take place only after prior notification of the Holder.

. 5.2 The Recipient shall use appropriate administrative, physical, and technical safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the Data Set other than as provided for by this Agreement.

. 5.3 The Recipient shall report to the Holder any use or disclosure of the Data Set not provided for by this Agreement. The report shall be made within 24 hours of its discovery by the Recipient.

. 5.4 The Recipient shall ensure that any agent, including a subcontractor, to whom it provides the Data Set, agrees to the same restrictions and conditions that apply through this Agreement to the Recipient with respect to the Data Set.

. 5.5 The Recipient shall not identify the information contained in the Data Set. Any reports or materials developed by the Recipient or its subcontractors that use data provided under this Agreement, shall not contain any personally identifiable information.

. 5.6 The Recipient shall submit to the Holder all reports and materials developed under this agreement to the Holder no later than ten (10) business days prior to release or publishing for Holder's review. The sole purpose for this review shall be to ensure that no personally identifiable information is included in the reports or materials. The Holder shall use, as its basis for review, its internal suppression rules as they exist at the time the report is published or released. The Holder shall make these suppression rules available to the Recipient upon request.

. 5.7 The Recipient may not contact the individuals who are the subject of the PEI contained in the Data Set. □

6. Term, Breaches, and Termination⏃6.1 The terms of this Agreement shall be effective as of Effective Date 1/17/2019 and shall remain in effect until all PEI in the Data Set provided to the Recipient is destroyed or returned to the Holder.

6.2 If the Recipient breaches this Agreement, the Recipient shall do all of the following:

a. Notify the Holder, within 24 hours, of discovering the breach. ⏃

b. Provide the Holder, upon the request, information regarding the breach and ⏃efforts to remedy the breach.

c. Make every effort to resolve breach as soon as possible.⏃If efforts to cure the breach are not successful within five business days of the Recipient discovering the breach, the Holder may, at its sole discretion, terminate this Agreement.

6.3 Both Holder and Recipient shall have the right to terminate this Agreement for any reason by providing sixty days' written notice to the other party.

7. General Provisions

. 7.1 The Recipient and the Holder understand and agree that individuals who are the subject ⏃of PEI contained in the Data Set are not intended to be third party beneficiaries of this Agreement. ⏃

. 7.2 This Agreement shall not be assigned by the Recipient without the prior expressed, written consent of the Holder. ⏃

. 7.3 Each party agrees that it shall be responsible for its own acts and the results thereof to the extent authorized by law and shall not be responsible for the acts of the other party or the results thereof. ⏃

. 7.4 This is the full and complete agreement between the parties. This Agreement supersedes and replaces any prior agreement, whether verbal

or in writing, concerning the subject matter of this Agreement. No amendment may be made to this agreement unless it is in writing and signed by both parties. ⬚

8. Data Confidentiality and Security

. 8.1 The Recipient shall implement and adhere to policies and procedures that restrict access ⬚to the Data Set. The Recipient shall maintain, in writing, a complete list of individuals with access to the Data Set. ⬚

. 8.2 Persons retrieving data or using data from the Data Set may not copy or duplicate any confidential individual-level data for any reason. Examples of copying or duplicating include, but are not limited to, copying data to laptops, desktop computers, flash drives, compact discs, cloud storage, and flash/USB drives. The Recipient may include data from the Data Set outside secured storage if all of the following apply:

a. The data is included in a project report's tables or charts. ⬚

b. The data is not personally identifiable and has been summarized and redacted ⬚based on rules determined by the Holder. ⬚

8.3 All individuals permitted by the Recipient to use or receive the⬚Data Set for purposes of the Project shall read and agree to follow the DPI's pupil data access policy and procedures in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The Recipient shall insure such individuals have data user awareness and understanding of the DPI's Data Policy and Procedures, which are located at: **http://dpi.wi.gov/wise/data-privacy/overview**

8.4 The Recipient shall complete and submit to the Holder the **Electronic DPI Confidential Data Request Application** , located at: **http://dpi.wi.gov/wise/data-requests/confidential-data-application**

9. Transmission of Data⬚9.1The Holder shall send the Data Set and all confidential data to the Recipient via a secure ⬚File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) or other method

selected by the Holder. 9.2 During this transmission, the Data Set shall be secured based upon a method selected by the Holder.

10.   Data Storage 10.1 The Data Set and all confidential data shall be kept, for a period not to exceed the estimated study length, in an encrypted electronic format by the Recipient.

11.   Data Destruction 11.1 The Recipient shall destroy all personally identifiable information connected with the Project when it is no longer needed for the purposes for the Project. The Recipient shall provide the Holder electronic notice of planned destruction of records at least thirty (30) days prior to such destruction by completing the DPI's Electronic Data Destruction Form, which is located at: **http://dpi.wi.gov/wise/data-requests/certificate-data-destruction** 11.2 The Recipient shall permanently erase all confidential information from the Recipient's storage devices upon completion or termination of the project.

12.   Data Elements 12.1 Attached is the data-specific appendix (Appendix A) listing the applicable educational element groupings to be provided by Holder to Recipient for use with the Project. All data remains the property of Holder.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto execute this agreement as follows:

Date: _____

Date: _____

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

125 S. Webster Street Madison, WI 53707-7841

By: _____ Kurt J. Kiefer, Assistant State Superintendent Division for Libraries and Technology

By: _____ Mike Thompson, Deputy State Superintendent

UW Madison

1305 Linden Dr. Madison, WI 53706

By: _____

Robert GratzlAssistant Director of Contracts

[signature]

2/11/2019

Date: _____

Appendix AData Topics Included in Request

☐ ACT☐ ACCESS for ELLs☐ AP☐ WSAS (WKCE & WAA-SwD, Forward, Badger, Aspire, and/or ACT 11) ☐ Attendance☐ Enrollment☐ Retention☐ Mobility☐ High school completion/dropout☐ Postsecondary enrollment☐ Discipline☐ Course enrollment

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

☐ **Public school finance data☐ Youth Risk Behavior Survey data - middle school X Youth Risk Behavior Survey data - high school**

☐ Disability status indicators☐ Socio-economic status indicators☐ Demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, English language learner status, migrant status)☐ Student identifiers (ID number, name, birthdate)

☐☐☐☐☐☐
Extract Details:

In accordance with the identified target population, the data elements specified herein are to be extracted for the 2017 academic year(s). YRBS data should include school-level YRBS results for the 43 high schools that participated in the youth risk behavior survey in 2017 as part of the CDC national sample. The Recipient will be contacted by DPI staff to coordinate data extraction **within 3 weeks of data sharing agreement finalization.**