

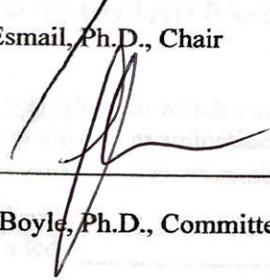
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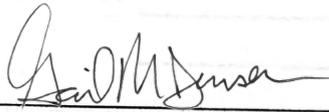
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**An Investigation of the Relationship between Leaders' Knowledge of Special
Education and the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Catholic Secondary
Schools**

By
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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
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Abstract

Examining school leader's self-reported knowledge and opinions and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools, Catholic school principals of high schools in the United States were surveyed. No significant relationship was found between any of the three areas of knowledge identified by Boyle (2016) and the percentage of a school leader's student body with a disability. Significant relationships were found in some of these areas of knowledge and the inclusion of students with a specific disability.

Keywords: Catholic Education, Secondary Education, Special Education, Leadership, Inclusion

Dedication

This manifestation of years of work is dedicated to my parents: Mary Kate and Michael Thompson, who consistently put education first in our lives. To my grandparents: the late Dr. John Duggan and the unparalleled Catherine Duggan, who inspire me every day with the examples they set. It is an honor to continue the family tradition of being educated at a Jesuit school. And to my family: Adam, Katherine, and William, who make everything I do possible. I love you.

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The parents and families who inspire me to do more and better for all students.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE PROBLEM

Introduction and Background

Catholic schools are educational institutions created and continued in that person-centered (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). Catholic Schools in the United States have seen a decline in the number of institutions and in overall enrollment since the 1960s (NCEA, 2018). The research of Boyle et al., in 2017 reported that 86% of their sample of 119 Catholic school principals offer inclusion to students with disabilities in their schools with the highest percentage being students with specific learning disabilities and other health impairments like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Boyle et al., (2017) identified an area of follow-up in identifying “necessary training components for future Catholic School leaders” based on the inclusion levels found (p. 63). This study will examine how school leaders’ knowledge and prevalence of the number of students with diagnosed disabilities may be related. Demographic data on the school and self-reported knowledge of the leader’s background will be compared to information on the self-reported principal inclusion survey (PIS) developed by Praiser (2003). This study hopes to identify trends as they related to the current inclusion of students of disabilities and to create models for future enrollment of students with particular needs.

Statement of the Problem

Little is known about any possible relationships between knowledge of Catholic school leaders in the area of special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools (Lane, 2017; Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Catholic schools are charged with the mission of upholding the teachings of the Catholic church, including the

right to equal opportunity in education for those with disabilities (National Catholic Partnership on Disability, 1998), but many Catholic schools fail to include students with diagnosed learning differences through the selective admissions process (Belo, 2006). Nearly half of all Catholic schools in the United States have closed or consolidated since 1964 (Cooper & Sureau, 2013). With enrollment as a concern, and so many research-backed reasons for inclusions, excluding students seems an odd practice for an institution founded to educate all of God's children.

Lane (2017) recommends more research, both qualitative and quantitative, is necessary for the field of inclusion in Christian schools, specifically recommending research into current practices. Borema (2011) states this lack of research is due to the skepticism of Christian school leaders, especially regarding quantitative research (as cited in Lane (2017)). Additionally, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) identified that "systematic approaches to the study of inclusive practice in Catholic schools are limited" in the body of research right now. Their study identified that more research is needed between school leaders' experience with those with disabilities and their inclusion in the schools the leaders lead, as a strong relationship was identified in the study. Boyle et al. (2016) also identified the need for a framework for principal preparation in Catholic school, separate from the public school preparation most dioceses utilize. Currently, no framework for Catholic school principal preparation exists.

In order to guide what an inclusive Catholic school leader needs to know to lead, a framework, including knowledge areas, had been created. The integrated framework proposed by Boyle (2016) for serving students with disabilities in catholic schools examines how to meet the needs of students with needs in a structured fashion. At the

school level, the mission, leadership, and policies/procedures are the focus (Boyle, 2016), highlighting the power leadership has in schools. This framework has no data to support the relationship between the factors identified and the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Within school mission and leadership, Boyle (2016) identifies three key knowledge areas: (a) knowledge of special education policies and procedures (b) knowledge of disability and (c) knowledge of delivery systems in special education. This study examines how self-reported knowledge of special education in these key areas of school leaders relate to the inclusion of students with diagnosed learning differences and disabilities in their schools. This information can help guide current and future school leaders on the pathway to the most inclusive environment, informed by the Catholic mission of schools, and impacting the enrollment of the schools they lead.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined in Boyle (2016) and the prevalence of the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools. Many disabilities are diagnosed in early childhood, which means that during the high school admissions process, students with disabilities may be identified and can be categorized. Only Catholic secondary (9-12) schools in the United States are included in this study. Variables compared will include knowledge of school leaders and the inclusion of students with disabilities in the student population. The independent variables are the principals' knowledge of special education, and the dependent variables

are the inclusion of students with disabilities, look at the school as a whole, and also specific categories of disability.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

Examining the correlative relationship between leaders' knowledge and inclusion creates data on how all of these are related, Boyle (2018) identified three key areas of knowledge necessary for leaders for inclusive education. The Principal Inclusion Survey (PIS) shares data on the demographics of students with disabilities within a school.

Research Question: Is there is a relationship between these variables of a leader's knowledge of special education and inclusion of students with disabilities, looking specifically if self-reported levels of knowledge have relationships with the inclusion of each disability in Catholic schools? The following hypotheses were investigated in this study:

Hypothesis #1:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of special education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of special education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Hypothesis #2:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Hypothesis #3:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of delivery systems for special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of delivery systems for special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

For all of these hypotheses, the independent variable is the leader's knowledge, and the dependent variable is the inclusion of students with a diagnosed disability. There are three areas of knowledge being surveyed: knowledge of special education, knowledge of disabilities, and knowledge of serve deliver systems of special education, which are the independent variables. The dependent variables include survey questions about the inclusion of students in twelve categories of disability.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to inform and suggest modifications, if appropriate, for leadership formation to impact the inclusion of students with diagnosed special needs in Catholic Schools, with a possible positive impact on enrollment in Catholic schools. Additionally, this study aims to inform leaders of religious orders with schools about how their schools' leadership knowledge and inclusion are related.

Proposed Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined by Boyle (2016), and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools. This is a quantitative correlative study examining how self-reported knowledge of special education of school leaders is related to the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities in schools. The population of this study is school leaders (both principals and presidents) of the Catholic secondary schools in the United States. There are 1,197 Catholic secondary schools in the United States (NCEA, 2018).

Definition of Relevant Term

The following terms were used operationally within this study:

Catholic School: An institution of learning connected to the Catholic Church.

Secondary School: A school that educates students in grades 9-12.

Inclusion: special education students are a part of the school population. Can also be defined as special education students spend most of their time with general education students

Disability: A diagnoses of one of the thirteen categories as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004)

Geographic Regions: Regions of the country, as defined by NCEA as groupings of Catholic schools.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases

This study will be limited by the return rates on the survey. The researcher is a Catholic secondary school educator working to oversee inclusion programs at a

Congregation of the Holy Cross high school. Additionally, the researcher has observed that nationwide and locally, some Catholic secondary schools are embracing inclusion, and some are not. The personal bias of the researcher is that Catholic schools can and should be inclusive of students with diagnosed disabilities. The qualitative questions on the survey will be used to share insights into the quantitative results, but the sharing of these will reflect some personal bias no matter how they are used. The results will be based on quantitative results, so the qualitative information will not influence the outcome of the study, but rather, give possible examples related to the outcomes. This study is limited in its application beyond the United States and could be impacted by the school leaders who reply.

The Role of Leadership in this Study

Catholic school leaders have a calling to create the most inclusive environment for all students in their schools. Pope Benedict XVI stated that “no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation” (Benedict XVI, 2008b). A review of literature would suggest that this call for inclusion has not been answered by all school leaders (Boyle et al., 2017; Belo, 2006).

This lack of inclusion points to a major disconnect between the purpose and calling of Catholic-run schools and the everyday practices of these institutions. There are research-supported barriers to inclusion, such as personnel, expense, and physical building space (Boyle et al., 2017). How leaders address and overcome these barriers impact how fully they fulfill their schools’ missions.

The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools state that “an excellent Catholic school has a qualified

leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). While leadership models vary across Catholic schools, the school leader has the capacity to control the selective admissions process and academic programming of a school and to ensure the mission and vision align with that of the church. Beyond the standards and benchmarks, leaders in Catholic schools must be truly formed, not just in capacity and skills, but in faith-based understanding of practice and structures.

Significance of the Dissertation in Practice Study

Catholic schools have been rapidly declining since peak enrollment in the 1960s (NCEA, 2018). The rise in the percentage of children diagnosed with a developmental disability (Zablotsky et al., 2017), and with over 13% of the national population have some sort of disability (Houtenville & Boege, 2019) shows a need for schools to work to meet the needs of this important group of the population.

Boyle (2018) has identified areas of knowledge necessary for "comprehensive programming" (p. 25) for students with disabilities in Catholic schools. The outcomes of this study will explore the possibilities of relationships between leader's knowledge in these areas is related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools. While school leaders may see inclusion as a boost to dwindling enrollment, church teachings would point to a theological calling as the reason to include students with disabilities in schools. Current leader professional development and future leader preparation could include the development of knowledge in these key areas if a relationship is found.

Summary

Given the calling from church doctrine to be inclusive, schools should be open to including students with disabilities. Catholic school enrollment is declining and school leaders are not always selecting to admit students with disabilities. This study serves to examine the relationships between school leader's self-assessed knowledge of special education and the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities, with hopes of creating a roadmap to better train and guide school leaders to lead inclusive schools. Preparing better leaders for the future of schools, while assisting those already leading will support the sustainability of Catholic schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following literature review will present findings of Catholic schools in America and leadership preparation programs and finally providing an analysis of the current state of inclusive Catholic education. Catholic schools are private schools in the United States and have selective admissions processes. Throughout their history, these schools have responded differently to meet the needs of children in their communities. Research, such as that of Boyle and Bernards (2017), points to leadership, and specifically a leader's knowledge, as a necessity for inclusion of students with disabilities.

Literature about the Professional Practice Field or Topic

Students with Disabilities

According to the Center for Disease Control, a disability is “any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)” (Center for Disease Control, 2019). This means a disability can look very different across the span of disabilities and how a diagnosed disability impacts an individual person. Disabilities occur in all groupings of people, such a race, gender, and socio-economic status (Johnson & Woll, 2003).

Classifications of disabilities The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) identifies thirteen categories of disability that could apply to a student age three to 21:

Autism. Autism is diagnosed in one out of every 59 children and can be diagnosed as young as two years of age (Maenner et al., 2018) which means students who are diagnosed later may have already enrolled in school. Students with autism make up 10% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). The work of Maenner et al. (2018) shows that 44% of children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder have average to above-average intelligence. About 9% of Catholic schools educate students with an autism diagnosis (Belo, 2006). This means the bulk of Catholic schools do not educate students with autism or are unaware that their students have this diagnosis.

Deaf-Blindness. Deafness. Visual Impairment, including Blindness. These are three distinct classifications under IDEA. Disability inclusion in Catholic schools in the United States started with the inclusion of four students who were deaf in 1837 in St. Louis (National Catholic Partnership on Disability, n.d.). Most Catholic schools do not serve students who are deaf and would not admit them (Boyle & Bernards, 2017). There are specific schools in some diocese for students with these disabilities, so students can have access to Catholic education but not inclusive, Catholic education. For example, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has Saint Lucy Day School, where students with visual disabilities that were founded in 1955 and Archbishop Ryan School for the Deaf founded in 1912 (Archbishop Ryan & St. Lucy, n.d.). The schools combined in 2009 (Archbishop Ryan & St. Lucy, n.d.). This means students with multiple different needs attend the same school, so the school is inclusive of different disabilities, but not of students without disabilities.

Developmental Delays. Students with developmental delays make up 7% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019).

Emotional Disturbance. Students with emotional disturbance disabilities make up 5% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019). About 28% of Catholic schools include students with Emotional Disabilities (Belo, 2006).

Hearing Impairment. Students with hearing impairment make up 1% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019).

Intellectual Disability. Students with intellectual disabilities make up 6% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019).

Multiple Disabilities. Students with multiple categories of disability diagnoses make up 2% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019).

Orthopedic Impairment. Students with orthopedic impairment make up 1% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCEA, 2019). Supporting students with orthopedic impairment typically involves specialized training, such as managing physical and health management issues (Heller & Swinehart-Jones, 2003).

Other health impairment. Nation-wide, students with other health impairments are 19% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019). These diagnoses include “heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or

diabetes” (NCEA, 2019). A survey showed that 94% of Catholic schools educate students with learning disabilities or other health impairments (Bello, 2006).

Specific Learning Disability. Students diagnosed with a specific learning disability make up 34% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019). A survey showed that 94% of Catholic schools educate students with learning disabilities or other health impairments (Bello, 2006). This makes specific learning disabilities one of the most prevalent disabilities in both public and catholic schools.

Speech or Language Impairment. Students with speech and language disabilities are 19% of the population of students who are identified with a disability under IDEA (NCES, 2019).

Traumatic Brain Injury. Around 9% of Catholic schools in the United States include students with traumatic brain injuries or TBI (Belo, 2006).

Five percent of the population of school-aged children have a diagnosed learning disability, while another fifteen percent may struggle without being diagnosed (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). This means that not all disabilities are diagnosed, and not all students with needs are a part of the special education numbers. The number of Catholic school students with identified special needs has risen since 2015 from 74,625 to 87,165 students but lags behind in percentage compared to public schools with only 4.6% in the 2016-2017 school year (Boyle & Bernards, 2017). Additionally, in 1998 37% of secondary schools report having students with special needs but not providing accommodations for them, while 32% of secondary Catholic schools report providing accommodations for students with special needs (Boyle & Bernards, 2017). This means

while over half of Catholic secondary schools are inclusive of students with disabilities, only half of those schools are providing the support these students need and would receive in public schools.

Most students serviced under I.D.E.A. finished their educational career with a high school diploma, as opposed to a certificate (NCES, 2019).

Inclusion in Schools

What is Inclusion Inclusive classrooms are those where disabled and non-disabled peers learn side by side (Lampton et al., 2012). Classrooms that include special needs students have positive impacts on all students. Students with special needs that are in an inclusive classroom have higher academic achievement, which can be isolated into categories such as earning higher grades, higher or equal test scores, and have better attendance than peers more isolated special needs program (Rea et al., 2002). Research has also shown negative impacts of inclusion, including lower test score performance over time for non-disable students (Brown, 2015). There are inconclusive findings of research on the best way to educate special education students.

Inclusion Public schools are legally mandated to meet the needs of students, but private schools are not. This means Catholic schools, as private schools, can exclude students during the admissions process. However, church law states that Catholic education should be accessible to all students (Code of Canon Law, 1999; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), but research shows this is not always the case. Additionally, a statement was released in 1978 by the Bishop's Conference affirming the role of all Catholic entities to include people with disabilities, stating "Moreover, in order to ensure the widest possible range of educational opportunities, Catholic facilities should

be encouraged to develop working relationships both among themselves and with private and public agencies serving the same population” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1978). This means it is the calling of Catholic schools to include those with disabilities.

History of Inclusion in Catholic Schools Catholic schools, by definition are called to be inclusive. These schools set “out to be a school for the human person and of human persons” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9). The actions of including of students with disabilities has not been as clear-cut as church teachings.

One debate of ethics in inclusion deals with the need for students to have the right to Catholic education, and the need for students to have special education services that many Catholic schools do not provide (Long & Schuttloffel, 2006). While the percentage of students receiving special education services is rather stable between 13% and 14%, that does mean the raw number of students receiving special education services in public schools has increased over time (NCES, 2018). There has been a response from Catholic Schools to try and serve more students with needs (Weaver & Landers, 2002). Recently, all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia were challenged to be more inclusive (Maraist, 2019) showing that there is support from some clergy to have schools inclusive of students with disabilities and special needs.

In 2016, Boyle published the Integrated Framework for Serving Students with Disabilities in Catholic Schools, a multi-layer approach to formalize the structures and people who support the inclusion of students with disabilities in Catholic schools. This framework includes knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for inclusion at the

classroom, school, diocesan, and national levels (Boyle, 2016), showing the way the system of Catholic schools are connected.

Literature about the Professional Practice Setting

Catholic Schools Overview

Catholic schools are the largest system of faith-based schools in the world (Grace & O’Keefe, 2007). There are 1,197 Catholic secondary schools in the United States (NCEA, 2018). The purpose of Catholic schools is rooted in church teaching. According to the National Standards and Benchmarks, Catholic schools in the United States serve to educate the whole child, rooted in the Gospel (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill), 2012). This can additionally be defined through the core identity of valuing, upholding, and responding “to the individual student and seek practices that include all learners and endorse their ways of being in the world” (Machluso, 2017). This shows that there are numerous reasons for schools to be inclusive of students with many different needs based on documents describing the purposes of Catholic education.

The demographics of Catholic schools have changed in many ways over time. The models used in the United States have changed in some areas since the peak enrollment in 1964, specifically the sponsorship models. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of schools sponsored by a parish dropped ten percent, while the number under private control nearly tripled (McDonald, 2011). This means that schools that were previously under the control of pastors at parishes may be under new leadership models. Recently, the percent of non-white and non-Catholic students enrolled in Catholic schools has also increased (Riodran, 2000). The changing face and leadership of Catholic schools over time has required the structures within many schools to change.

Inclusion as an Educational Practice

Inclusion as a practice in the United States can be tracked by legislative bills that moved to ensure students with disabilities had a place in educational settings. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, requiring any public school that accepted federal funding to provide equal access to education for students with disabilities (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 2019). In 1997, I.D.E.A. was passed as legislation, requiring that students have access to not just education, but the “least restrictive environment” (IDEA, 1997), meaning that it is individually determined what it looks like for the student spend the most time possible in the most inclusive setting.

Today, special education students are included in mainstream schools, and most spend at least half their day in the general classroom setting (Snyder et al., 2016). Inclusive programs, such as service-learning programs, are found to be more successful for students with disabilities when they include connections to life skills and real life (Dymond, et al., 2007). Inclusion has also been shown with research to impact reading achievement of students with intellectual disabilities (Dessemontet et al., 2012).

Inclusion’s Impact on All Students

The inclusion and accommodation of students with special needs have shown to positively impact all students in the classroom (Cunningham, et al.; 2017; Bui, et al., 2010). This means that inclusion as a practice has shown to impact not only students with disabilities but also their non-disabled peers.

Some results have been mixed when it comes to academic impact on non-disabled peers’ academic performance when in an inclusive classroom (Robinson & Babo, 2014)

but researcher find more neutral to positive impacts on non-disabled students. While not identifying benefits or problems with inclusion, works such as Gruner Ghandi (2007) show that being educated in an inclusive classroom does not negatively impact non-disabled students in the area of reading achievement. This sort of “do not harm” argument is another support for inclusion.

Inclusion has a positive impact on non-disabled students beyond academics. A literature review by Peltier (1997) identified five positive, research-supported themes of inclusion: “reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness, growth in social cognition, improvements in self-concept, development of personal principles, and warm and caring friendships.” This highlights the benefits of inclusion for non-disabled students beyond academic impacts.

Civil Rights of Those with Disabilities

The fight for equality for the disabled can be tracked by the legislative history of the United States. The civil rights of people with disabilities is a fight for fair treatment (ADL, 2020). The journey for legal protections for those America’s with disabilities started in the late 1960’s (Percy, 2018).

In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act passed into law, including section 504, which for the first time, banned disability discrimination and gave students with disabilities the rights to accommodations (Rehabilitation Act of 1973). This made it illegal to discriminate, but there was still much work to do in the fight for equality.

In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act required that school systems design programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Percy, 2018). Research done on the impact of this legislation showed issues with the execution of the

bill for students of minority races (MacMillan, 1988). This showed there was work still to do to create equity and justice for students with disabilities.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991). This piece of legislation was designed to prevent discrimination based on disabilities (ADL, 2020). Specific, important parts of this legislation include defining disability, provisions for employees and also public services (such as transportation, services and accommodations), assistance with communication such as TDD for people who are deaf, and ensuring that people with disabilities were protected under civil rights legislation directly (Percy, 2018).

Worldwide, there have been calls and announcements related to disability rights, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

Theological Prospective on Inclusion

The call of Catholic schools to be inclusive is not and should not be rooted in legal obligation like public schools, but in theological, moral and ethical requirements of the faith. The public-policy impact of legislation should be the minimum actions of Catholic schools, given their whole-child approach.

Mary Jo Iozzio characterizes the Catholic school need for inclusion to go beyond the minimalist requirements of public school's legal requirement, and acknowledge that inclusion is a civil rights and human dignity, moral issue (Iozzio, 2017). If the laws of public schools are the minimal expectations, Iozzio (2017) charges Catholic schools to be Christ-like and to bend over backwards to "accommodate people in need of justice and mercy." The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2006) states that the church believes

“every person is precious” (p. 423). It is unclear how excluding students, especially those with disabilities, align with the church teachings.

Leaders of the church over time have release official documents that have supported the inclusion of those with disabilities in the church. The three most recent Popes have all released statements supporting the inclusion of those with disabilities in the Catholic church (John Paul II, 2004; Benedict XVI, 2008a; Francis, 2019), showing unity in the message. Pope Francis has stated that we need to recognize the “the unique contribution to the common good” that people with disabilities bring to our world (2019). Francis also charged his followers to “have the courage to give a voice to those who are discriminated against due to their disability” (2019). This statement shows that discrimination and inequality is still a problem for those with disabilities.

In the United States, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), usually through the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) has made statements calling for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Catholic church. In their affirmation statement, NCPD stated, “persons with disabilities have the proper right to be active participants in the life of the Church. We recognize that the bare assertion and protection of rights can become a sterile exercise whenever it lacks the Christian presumption of our common call to friendship with one another in Christ” (NCPD, 2018). This call for inclusion is paralleled by statements by the bishops, sharing the affirmation is not enough but that we must “actively work to realize” the rights of those with disabilities as part of modern society (USCCB, 1998).

Beyond bold statements, the Catholic church has guiding documents, to show why inclusion of all people is a pillar of the faith. Many of these fall under the category

of social justice. The catechism of the Catholic Church states that social justice is practice, attitude and virtue and is “based on the principle that everyone should look at another person as another self” (Catholic Church, 2006, p. 326).

Including students in Catholic schools who have documented disabilities is faith in action. A failure to include students with disabilities is ignoring not only church teachings, but also the purpose of these schools to begin with.

State of Inclusion in Catholic Schools Today

The call for inclusion in the United States’ Catholic schools is visible in multiple documents. The National Benchmarks and Standards for Catholic Education state that “classroom instruction is designed to engage and motivate all students, addressing the diverse needs and capabilities of each student, and accommodating students with special needs as fully as possible” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). In June of 2020, when the National Catholic Educational Association released a statement proclaiming “Catholic schools always have and always will welcome all,” the statement referenced racial diversity, but did not reference welcome all students with disabilities (NCEA, 2020). Despite these strong statements, research would that both historically and currently, Catholic schools are not welcoming to students with disabilities.

The research of Durrow (2007) and Weaver and Landers (2002) show that Catholic schools are inclusive of many needs, but the research of Burke and Griffin (2016) shows that few schools support students with significant needs. This means the data on exactly what categories of disabilities are more meaningful than strictly determining if a school is inclusive of students with any disability.

Citing the separation of church and state (U.S. Const. amend. I), as non-public schools, Catholic schools are not required to provide services as outlined in IDEA (1997). Exclusion of students could happen if a school does not have the right supports to meet the students' needs, but just the presence of needs would not be enough to exclude a student, as that would be discrimination.

Students with some special needs are reported to be included in some Catholic schools (Belo, 2006), but school leaders have mixed reviews and opinions (Praisner, 2003). Across school types, the experience of the school leader seems to have an impact on the inclusion of students with diagnosed special needs. For example, school leaders with more positive views on inclusion report having more students with diagnosed special needs in their building (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Leaders report understanding that it is the mission of the church to include all students in Catholic schools, but some report not doing so in their school (Durow, 2007). This means that inclusion is known to be important in the mission of schools, but not all schools are inclusive of students with disabilities.

Lived experiences of school leaders impact the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools. School leaders who have had positive experiences with students with diagnosed special needs are more likely to place students in a less restrictive environment (Praisner, 2003), meaning they are more included in the school. Positive views on the inclusion of students with special needs are not related to years of experience (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016), which could mean the skills and experience necessary for inclusion of students with special needs are not necessarily acquired on the job for school leaders over their years of leadership.

Leading inclusive schools may not be a choice for some schools or school leaders. There are current pushes on the diocese level for inclusion in some areas. For example, the Diocese of Arlington how has only high schools that include students with intellectual disabilities (Elliott, 2019). This means that some top-down decision making on inclusion may not involve the principal's own opinions or decisions.

Barriers to Inclusion

There are many reasons that through the selective admissions process, school leaders would not include students with diagnosed learning differences or disabilities. These reasons include a lack of knowledge and previous experiences. Boyle (2018) has identified the knowledge necessary for “comprehensive programming” (p. 25) for students with disabilities in Catholic schools. Leaders with more years of experience have fewer special education credits completed as a part of their training (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016), showing the need for professional development for school leaders in the area of special education. The lack of preparation in the area of special education has been identified by researchers as a problem for both leaders (Praisner, 2003) and teachers (Darrow, 2007), which can be addressed through professional development and leadership preparation programs. Unique to Catholic schools, the certification requirements of teachers and administrators for private schools are state-based and usually have different requirements for church-based schools (United States Department of Education, 2009). This means some school leaders may not have gone through the professional leadership preparation that their public-school counterparts are required to attend.

Experiences or overall leader experience-level can be related to inclusion. School leaders with less positive views of inclusion have fewer students with diagnosed special needs in their building (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). This shows a possible relationship between a school leader's views of inclusion and who they will admit to their school.

Leadership Literature

Catholic School Governance

According to the National Standards and Benchmarks for Catholic Schools, an excellent Catholic school “has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school’s fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality” (Ozar, & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). This wording shows the flexibility in forms that governance, thus decision-making, can take in Catholic schools. For example, parish schools, those operated by a specific church, are the most popular governance model, where the pastor of the church holds the control of the school (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013). Other models include private Catholic schools, where an order controls the school, inter-parish schools, where multiple parishes support a school, Diocesan schools where a diocese supports the school, and Consortium schools, where schools are governed as a small school system, private network schools, where schools function as a group across different dioceses, P-12 schools are geographic clusters of schools working together, and university partnership schools are co-owned by the local diocese, the parish and a supporting institution of higher education (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013). Many of these models have been the result of

consolidation or closures of schools, and the need for new set-ups for sustainability (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013).

Specifically, since their peak in 1964, just under half of the Catholic schools in the United States have closed or consolidated (Cooper & Sureau, 2013). The failures of the historic model have led to innovative approaches to governance in some diocese. Demographics may be a variable in the sustainability of schools. For example, strategic and data-supported models in urban settings have created some sustainable models (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013). The future of Catholic education will depend on the ability to sustain schools through changing governance models.

Catholic School Leadership

There are numerous models of governance in Catholic schools. Ozar and Weitzel-O'Neill (2013) state that “quite simply, an effective Catholic school begins with effective governance and leadership, and an effective school is a successful school.” This shows that governance and leadership are both very important in school success.

Catholic school leaders are critical influencers of Catholic school culture in their schools (Cook, 2015). Organizational culture is a key factor in academic achievement (Van Der Westhuizen et al., 2005). This means that strong leadership has an impact on many areas of schools and their performance. The duties of a Catholic school principal incorporate both the school leadership requirements and the faith-based needs of this unique school setting. Catholic school leaders are “challenged to be transformational leaders who are also cultural and symbolic” (Helm, 1998). This means that a Catholic school principal is in charge of the school, thus a symbolic leader, but also a bonding agent to bring together students, teachers, and other parties in the school.

Leadership formation involves preparation and also ongoing professional development. For preparation, the training and certification necessary to lead a Catholic secondary school are not universal. For example, the Archdiocese of Washington requires chief administrators in their schools to hold a Maryland, District of Columbia, or Virginia state-issued administrator certification within three years of being hired (Archdiocese of Washington, 2017). In contrast, the Archdiocese of New York does not list a state certification as a requirement (Archdiocese of New York, 2019). The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools do not mention anything about leadership qualifications (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). This means leaders running similar schools in different parts of the country may have very different requirements for their schooling and background to be qualified to lead a Catholic school.

Research has identified holes in the leadership preparation of Catholic school principals. Most secondary Catholic school principals report that their formal training failed to prepare them for their faith leadership role in their school (Hunt et al., 2000). The research of Boyle et al., (2016) highlights the lack of Catholic Identity and faith formation in leadership preparation for Catholic school principals. Both of these studies show that the focus on the unique nature of Catholic schools in formal leadership preparation is either no present or not prevalent enough to meet leaders' needs.

Boyle (2016) identifies three key areas for school leaders to have competencies in order to lead inclusive schools. These three areas are the same areas expected from inclusive school leaders in individual classrooms. As it pertains to knowledge, Boyle (2016) has identified key areas of knowledge required by inclusive school leaders,

specifically special education policies and procedures, knowledge of disability, and an understanding of the impact of disability on learning. Additionally, Boyle (2016) states that it is important that Catholic school leaders stay abreast of innovations happening in Special Education in public schools and examine how these innovations can impact instruction in and inclusion in their building. These statements show the framework for inclusive leader's knowledge in order to best serve their students and teachers in an environment inclusive of students with disabilities.

Summary

School leadership, in its many forms, has control over admissions to Catholic schools. This means different schools, under the direction of school leaders, have different approaches and desires when admitting, thus including students with diagnosed learning differences and disabilities. Previous research shows positive outcomes for all students when students with diagnosed learning differences are present in the classroom. With better knowledge of the connections between leaders' knowledge of special education and the enrollment of students with special needs, systemic recommendations to leadership preparation programs can be proposed that could not only have positive impacts on enrollment in schools overall and also student learning.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there was a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined in Boyle's 2016 Integrated Framework, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their school in Catholic secondary schools in the United States. Little is known about any relationship between these variables. This quantitative, non-experimental study utilized online survey data to examine possible relationships between inclusion and leaders' knowledge of special education. The study surveyed Catholic school principals nationwide. The outcomes of this study may guide principal searches moving forward, professional development for current school leaders.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

Little is known about any possible relationships between knowledge of Catholic school leaders in the area of special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools (Lane, 2017; Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Examining the correlative relationship between leaders' knowledge and inclusion creates data on how all of these are related. Boyle (2018) identified three key areas of knowledge necessary for leaders for inclusive education. The Principal Inclusion Survey (PIS) shared data on the demographics of students with disabilities within a school.

The research question for this study asked if there is a relationship between these variables of leader's knowledge and inclusion, looking specifically if self-reported levels of knowledge have relationships with the inclusion of each disability in Catholic schools. The following hypotheses were investigated in this study.

Hypothesis #1:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of special education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of special education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Hypothesis #2:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Hypothesis #3:

Null hypothesis – There is no significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of delivery systems for special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Alternative hypothesis- There is a significant correlation between school leaders’ knowledge of delivery systems for special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

Research Design

The research design is a correlative, quantitative method. Utilizing a correlation means that data was assessed to show where schools were with the inclusion of students with disabilities. A relationship between a leader’s knowledge ratings and inclusion has

not been established yet, and by using a correlative study, the possibility of relationships using multiple data points is possible.

Dependent and Independent Variables, and Descriptions

Each school had its own selective admissions process, so many experimental design set-ups would not work ethically. Additionally, this study format allowed for numerous relationships to be examined, such as the relationship between one specific area of a leader's knowledge and the inclusion of students with one specific disability (Appendix A). Variables assessed include:

Self-assessed knowledge of special education- this Likert scale score for each of three areas allowed leaders to express how knowledgeable they felt about a specific area of special education. These areas served as the independent variables.

Inclusion of students with disabilities- Utilizing the PIS, the percentage of the school population with a diagnosed disability can be determined. These areas will serve as the dependent variables. This is a categorical variable, with participants responding to a multiple choice question.

This study controlled for the grade level of the school (secondary) and the country of the study (United States). Variables such as the presence of vouchers for private education, the geographic region of the country, and the governance model of the school were not collected as a part of this study but could all impact inclusion practices.

Proposed Participants/Data Sources and Recruitment

An online survey was sent to Catholic secondary school principals in the United States via their publicly posted email addresses. The researcher went to each of the school's websites and located the email address for the principal and added it to a self-

created spreadsheet. Once completed, the survey was sent to all principals via their as publicly posted email on each individual school website. This represented the entire population of those eligible for the study. The return rate determined the sample size.

There were 1,197 Catholic secondary schools in the United States (National Catholic Educational Association, 2018). With a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, a representative sample size of 292 would be statistically significant. The sample size did not hit this threshold, so the results cannot be used to generalize all Catholic, secondary schools in the United States.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool for this study was an online survey utilizing the available Qualtrics platform. The basis for this survey was the Principal Inclusion Survey (Praisner, 2003), as modified by Boyle and Hernandez (2016). The survey has five sections with a total of 17 questions. The Principal Inclusion Survey is an appropriate tool to use as it has been utilized in peer-reviewed research to learn more about school leaders' training, experiences and opinions on inclusion. Upon the original creation of this survey tool, Praisner (2003) verified the validity of the tool.

This survey had five sections: demographic information, training and experience, student demographics, a three-question Likert scale on principals' knowledge of special education, and a qualitative section for open responses by the participants.

The demographics section asked questions specifically about the Catholic secondary school where the participant is a leader. There were five questions, including the percentage of the school population that has disabilities and the location of the school. Three of the five questions were used in the Boyle and Hernandez (2016) use of the

Principal Inclusion Survey. The two added questions are on the affiliation of the school with a religious order, a diocese or network of schools, and also what state is the location of the school

The second section was training and experience. Boyle and Hernandez (2016) surveyed elementary principals, so for this survey, the word elementary was deleted. These questions, such as hours of special education credits and also leaders' experiences with students who have different disabilities. There are no open-ended questions in this section.

The third section was where information is collected on what students with disabilities the principal's school currently educates, has educated in the past, or could be willing to offer admittance. This is a table where participants select "all that apply," so, for example, they could currently have a student with ADHD and also be willing to admit students with ADHD in the future, selecting two boxes in that row.

The fourth section was a Likert scale to record self-reporting levels of knowledge of special education categories. These three categories of knowledge are identified by Boyle's framework (2018). The Likert scale was a self-created, 4-point, interval scale used to measure the different areas of special education knowledge. The participants selected if they deem themselves to be not knowledgeable, somewhat knowledgeable, knowledgeable, or very knowledgeable in the areas of special education policies and procedures, knowledge of disabilities, and knowledge of serve deliver systems of special education.

The final section asked two open-ended, qualitative questions. These questions asked about the strengths of the school to include students with disabilities in the general

education classroom and the major obstacles to this type of inclusion. This information was shared in the final report to give possible descriptions or support for the numerical data.

The development of this survey involved changes to the PIS as used by Boyle and Hernandez (2016) to include Likert scales for areas of special education knowledge and removing the sections that are not relevant to the research question. Please see Appendix A for the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

A request to participate was emailed to Catholic secondary principals in the United States. Email addresses were publicly obtained from each school leader's website. Utilizing Qualtrics via Creighton University, there should be no financial impacts in collecting the data. The consent form was attached to the email and also outlined at the start of the survey online. The survey was projected to take principals about 20 minutes to complete. The survey remained open for a month, and principals were sent a reminder two weeks into the survey window. All correspondence was done via email using the researcher's Creighton University email address. Numerical data will be exported from the online survey collection and imported into SPSS for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

While confidentiality is an expectation, it is also an ethical concern. Participants did not share their school's name. Data on specific demographic groups was only be shared if a statistically significant group replies to the survey, allowing for confidentiality. Student individual data was not collected, such as how many students have a specific disability, or their grade, or sex. This protected the student information

within each school. Additionally, confidentiality is increased by removing all identifying information from the publication of the results. Research findings may be presented at professional meetings or publish the results of this research study in relevant journals, but the actual participants from the group will not be known since the survey does not collect name or school.

All information obtain during this study will be kept under lock and key at all times within the confines of the principal investigator's private office. All electronic documents and files securely on SPSS and Dropbox using dual-authentication security measures. Upon completion of this research study, all associated materials will be disposed of in according with Creighton University's research policy and procedure.

The approach, including ethical considerations related to confidentiality, and any other matters identified through the proposal process, were be submitted for IRB approval in summer of 2020. Attached are the consent form (Appendix B) and the Bill of Rights for Research Participants (Appendix C).

Data Analysis Plan

SPSS was used to assess the statistical significance of the possible correlative relationships between principals' self-assessed knowledge and inclusion of students with disabilities. Likert scale data was imported for each participant. The results of the PIS (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016) will also give quantitative data for comparison. Given the hypotheses, the data of leaders' self-report knowledge of each area of special education, and inclusion of students with disabilities will be compared. For all regressions, this study used a .05 significance level.

Hypotheses one was tested by measuring the first area of special education knowledge, special education policies and procedures, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in the leader's schools. There will be an overall score for the entire population that will compare the Likert score for the question on policies and procedures and the percentage of the building with disabilities. These Likert scales are coded as one being high and five being low for knowledge.

The same procedure was followed for the Likert scale score for "leader's knowledge of disabilities" to assess the second hypothesis, and the Likert scale score for "leader's knowledge of delivery systems for special education" to assess the third hypothesis.

Timeline for the Study

First, the proposal for this research was completed and defended in July 2020. The database of school leaders was created after the July 1st change in leadership if schools are changing. The creation of the database involved creating a spreadsheet of Catholic High Schools and the listed principal contact on their websites for the 1,197 possible participant's professional contact information. IRB approval was received on August 10, 2020. The survey was loaded into Qualtrics and was released August 18, 2020. The survey remained open until September 18, 2020.

Reflections of the Researcher

Leadership matters in all fields, but currently in Catholic education, many schools are in a state of crisis with dwindling enrollment (Cooper & Sureau, 2013). As a former principal and now Director of Student Support, I have seen how a school leader's views on inclusion can impact the student population and the Catholic identity of the school.

Last year, my school started a Best Buddies chapter, and the students' working knowledge of disabilities and how to help their peers has already grown. Leaders in Catholic schools are also juggling a great deal, and time needs to be prioritized on the areas where professional growth has the best pay-offs. I hope to share large-scale information on how principals view their knowledge of special education that might relate to their inclusive student populations.

Admittedly, the relationship may be the opposite of the hypotheses, with leaders trained in public school models with more knowledge of special education may be less likely to include students with disabilities. The follow-up from this outcome would be a robust discussion. There could also be no relationship between these variables, which would rule out action steps to make more inclusive schools. Regardless of the statistical outcome, this study is rooted in the belief that a leader's knowledge and opinions matter when it comes to inclusive, Catholic schools.

Summary

By examining the self-reported knowledge of special education by secondary school principals in Catholic schools, relationships may be present to show trends in the knowledge of inclusive and non-inclusive schools for students with disabilities. This information can be useful in training current and future school leaders and understanding what inclusive school leaders may have in common.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined in Boyle's 2016 Integrated Framework, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their school in Catholic secondary schools in the United States. Hypotheses were looking at the possibility of a relationship between school leader's self-assessed knowledge of Special Education and the actual inclusion of students with disabilities in their Catholic, secondary schools. Additional data was also collected around school inclusion as a part of the Principal Inclusion Survey.

An online survey was sent to 1096 Catholic school principals (or other named academic leader) of a Catholic school in the United States. 10 school leaders replied to decline partaking in the survey. Another 91 school leaders or schools were identified as being a part of the population, but the school leader or school leader's email address were not publicly posted. Of the possible 1096 leaders possible for this survey, it was sent to 1074 possible participants with a total of 127 replies in usable form. This reflects a return rate of 11.5%.

Description of Sample

The survey was sent electronically to all principals of Catholic high schools serving grades 9-12 in the United States who had publicly posted email addresses. All questions were optional, and surveys were included in the results if the participant answered at least half of the survey. A total of 127 surveys were used in the results. These participants were from all regions of the country (Table 1). The mode average class size for the school was in the 20-29 student per class range (Table 2) and had an average enrollment

of 494 students ($M = 494$, $sd = 385$). The size of the schools ranged from 48 students to 1785 students enrolled in grades 9-12 for the 2019-2020 school year.

Table 1

Location of schools of the school leaders sampled

NCEA Region	<i>N</i>	Percent
New England	5	3.9%
Mid-East	23	18.1%
Great Lakes	23	18.1%
Plains	20	15.8%
Southeast	16	12.6%
West/Far West	38	29.9%
Did not answer	2	1.6%

Table 2

Average class size of schools of sampled school leaders

Average class size	<i>N</i>	Percent
0-9 students	2	1.6%
10-19 students	44	34.4%
20-29 students	67	52.8%
30-39 students	6	4.7%
40 or more	8	6.3%

Table 3

What percent of your students in grades 9-12 are diagnosed with a disability?

Percent of 9-12 grade students with a diagnosed disability	<i>N</i>	Percent
0%-5%	45	35.4%
6%-10%	50	39.4%
11%-15%	15	11.8%
16%-20%	9	7.1%

21% or more	6	4.7%
Did not answer	2	1.6%

When looking at the school leaders themselves, there was a range of teaching experience, ranging from none to over 21 years (Table 4). There was a similar range in years of experience as a Catholic school principal, but most had been a principal from 1-10 years (Table 5). Very few had any experience leading public school (Table 6).

Table 4

Years of full time regular education teaching experience of sampled school leaders

Years	<i>N</i>	Percent
0 years	3	2.4%
1-5 years	9	7.1%
6-10 years	25	19.7%
11-15 years	22	17.3%
15-20 years	25	19.7%
21+ years	42	33.1%
Did not answer	1	0.8%

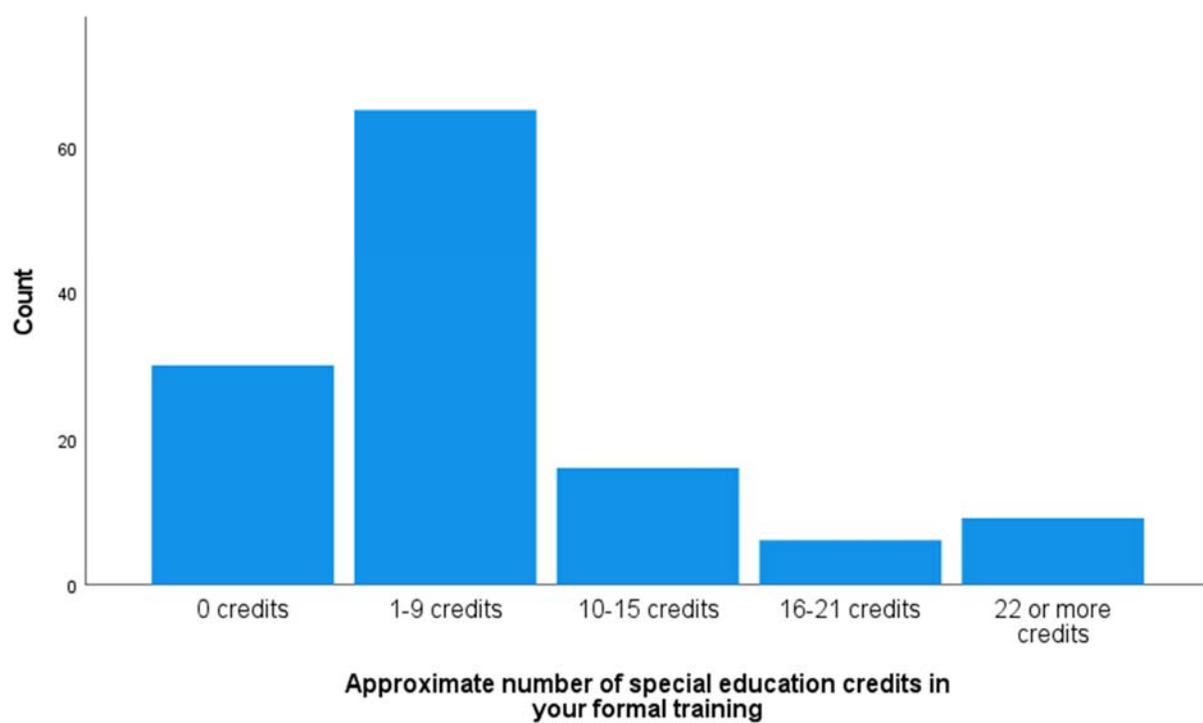
Table 5

Years as a Catholic School Principal (including 2019-2020) of sampled school leaders

Years	<i>N</i>	Percent
0 years	6	4.7%
1-5 years	45	35.4%
6-10 years	32	25.2%
11-15 years	16	12.6%
15-20 years	15	11.8%
21+ years	12	9.4%
Did not answer	1	0.8%

Table 6*Years as a public school principal of sampled school leaders*

Years	<i>N</i>	Percent
0 years	107	84.3%
1-5 years	10	7.9%
6-10 years	4	3.1%
11-15 years	1	0.8%
15-20 years	4	3.1%
21+ years	0	0%
Did not answer	2	0.8%

*Figure 1**Number of Credits in Special Education earned by School Leaders*

Results

Overall Results

School leaders' knowledge of special education was collected on a 4-point Likert scale in three areas, policies/procedures, disabilities, and systems of special education. The research also compiled these three scores into one index score for knowledge.

RQ1: *Is there a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of special education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools?*

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 125 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.03$, $p = .78$.

RQ2: *Is there a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools?*

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge disabilities and the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 123 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of disabilities was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.08$, $p = .37$.

RQ3: *Is there a significant correlation between school leaders' knowledge of systems of special education and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools?*

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge disabilities and the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 123 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of disabilities was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.01$, $p = .94$.

Leader-Assessed Knowledge of Special Education

In all three areas (knowledge of policies and procedures, knowledge of systems of special education, and knowledge of disabilities), the leaders averaged at least being moderately knowledgeable in the areas of special education, according to their self-reported scores.

When asked about their knowledge of special education policies and procedures, 16 principals shared they were extremely knowledgeable, 36 replied they were very knowledgeable, 59 put themselves in the moderately knowledgeable category, 12 shared they were slightly knowledgeable, and 1 reported being not knowledgeable at all. The mean score was a 2.5 on the Likert scale, falling between very knowledgeable and moderately knowledgeable.

When asked about their knowledge of disabilities, 12 principals classified themselves as extremely knowledgeable, 36 were very knowledgeable, 65 were moderately knowledgeable, 10 were lightly knowledgeable and 1 was not knowledgeable

at all. The mean score was a 2.6 on the Likert scale, also falling between very and moderately knowledgeable.

School leaders were also asked about their knowledge of systems of special education. In a similar way, 14 leaders reported being extremely knowledgeable, 32 shared they were very knowledgeable, 54 for moderately knowledgeable, 20 were slightly knowledgeable and 4 had no knowledge at all of systems of special education. The mean score was a 2.7 on the Likert scale, again falling between very and moderately knowledgeable.

Data on the Inclusion of Students as Classified by Disabilities

This survey had school leaders reflect on if they have previously, do currently, or would in the future include students who have been diagnosed with a specific disability. They were also asked to reflect on how positive their experiences have been with students who have a diagnosis. This section of results shares the data around each category, and any correlations between the inclusion of students with this disability and the school leader's knowledge scores.

Inclusion of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 50 leaders reported having a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) previously enrolled, 93 leaders reported having a student with ASD currently enrolled, 53 leaders would enroll a student with ASD and 7 leaders would not enroll a student with ASD. Principals were also asked their experience with students with ASD on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative experience (0%), 3 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (2.3%), 10 leaders reporting a neutral experience (7.8%), 22 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (17.2%),

80 leaders reporting a positive experience (62.5%) and 11 leaders (8.6%) reported having no experience with students with ASD.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Autism currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with Autism in their school, $r(123) = -.183$, $p = .042$. This correlation, due to the variable creation, the more a leader knows the more likely they are to include a student with autism. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, a significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.186$, $p = 0.38$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.154$, $p = .087$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, a significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.188$, $p = .036$. Due to the coding of the knowledge variables, a low score is a high assessment of knowledge, meaning the more a leader knows about special education, the more likely they are to enroll a student with Autism.

Inclusion of Students with ADHD

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 45 leaders reported having a student with ADHD previously enrolled, 118 reported having a student with ADHD currently

enrolled, 53 leaders would enroll a student with ADHD and 0 leaders would not enroll a student with ADHD. Principals were also asked their experience with students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative experience (0%), 2 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (1.6%), 13 leaders reporting a neutral experience (10.2%), 28 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (21.9%), 81 leaders reporting a positive experience (63.3%) and 1 leader (0.8%) reported having no experience with students with ADHD.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with ADHD currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 120 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with ADHD in their school, $r(119) = .06$, $p = .507$.

The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, a no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with ADHD, $r(120) = -.043$, $p = 0.637$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was also not found to be statistically significant, $r(120) = .069$, $p = 0.453$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with ADHD, $r(120) = 0.035$, $p = 0.706$.

Inclusion of Students with Developmental Delays

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 31 leaders reported having a student with developmental delays previously enrolled, 62 leaders reported having a student with developmental delays currently, 45 leaders would enroll a student with developmental delays and 25 leaders would not enroll a student with developmental delays. Principals were also asked their experience with students with developmental delays on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative experience, (0%), 3 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (2.3%), 25 leaders reporting a neutral experience (19.5%), 22 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (17.2%), 52 leaders reporting a positive experience (40.6%) and 24 leaders (18.8%) reported having no experience with students with developmental delays.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with developmental delays currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with developmental delays in their school, $r(123) = -.112$, $p = .215$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.141$, $p = 0.118$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.067$, $p = .461$. When all three areas

of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, there was not a significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with developmental delays, $r(123) = -.113$, $p = .211$.

Inclusion of Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

Of the 126 school leaders surveyed, 3 leaders reported a negative experience, 43 leaders reported having a student with emotional and behavioral disorders previously enrolled, 71 leaders reported having a student with emotional or behavioral disorders currently enrolled, 47 leaders would enroll a student with emotional or behavioral disorders and 22 leaders would not enroll a student with emotional or behavioral disorders. Principals were also asked their experience with students with emotional/behavioral disorders on a Likert scale, with 3 reporting a negative experience (2.3%), 24 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (18.8%), 19 leaders reporting a neutral experience (14.8%), 43 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (22.7%), 29 leaders reporting a positive experience (22.7%) and 8 leaders reported having no experience with students with students with emotional or behavioral disorders (6.3%).

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with emotional or behavioral disorders currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not found to be significant in relation to inclusion of students with emotional/behavioral disorders in their school, $r(123) = -.002$, $p = .987$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school

leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, $r(123) = -.010$, $p = 0.913$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.079$, $p = .384$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.029$, $p = .751$.

Inclusion of Students with Hearing Impairment/Deafness

Of the 126 school leaders surveyed, 52 leaders reported having a student with hearing impairments or deafness previously enrolled, 44 leaders reported having a student with hearing impairments or deafness currently enrolled, 70 leaders would enroll a student with hearing impairments or deafness and 13 leaders would not enroll a student with hearing impairments or deafness. Principals were also asked their experience with students with hearing impairments or deafness on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative (0%), or somewhat negative (0%) experience, and 21 (16.4%) of leaders had no experience with students with hearing impairment or deafness. 13 (10.2%) of leaders reported a neutral experience, 17 (13.3%) reported a somewhat positive and 75 (58.6%) reported a positive experience, generally, with students with hearing impairment or deafness.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Hearing Impairment/Deafness currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was

calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with Hearing Impairment/Deafness in their school, $r(123) = -.036$, $p = .692$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with Hearing Impairment/Deafness, $r(123) = .122$, $p = 0.383$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = .118$, $p = .400$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with Hearing Impairment/Deafness, $r(123) = .133$, $p = .344$.

Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 36 leaders reported having a student with intellectual disabilities previously enrolled, 59 leaders reported having a student with intellectual disabilities currently enrolled, 51 leaders would enroll a student with intellectual disabilities and 32 leaders would not enroll a student with intellectual disabilities. Principals were also asked their experience with students with intellectual disabilities on a Likert scale, with no leader reporting a negative experience (0%), no leader reporting a somewhat negative experience (0%), 28 leaders reporting a neutral experience (21.9%), 20 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (15.6%), 55

leaders reporting a positive experience (43%) and 23 leaders (18%) reported having no experience with students with intellectual disabilities.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Intellectual Disabilities currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with Intellectual Disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.155$, $p = .085$.

Also, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with intellectual disabilities, $r(123) = -.084$, $p = 0.354$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, a negative relationship was found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.180$, $p = .045$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.155$, $p = .086$.

Inclusion of Students with Multiple/Severe Disabilities

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 12 leaders reported having a student with multiple or severe disabilities previously enrolled, 14 leaders reported having a student with multiple or severe disabilities currently enrolled, 21 leaders would enroll a student with multiple or severe disabilities and 87 leaders would not enroll a student with multiple or severe disabilities. Principals were also asked their experience with students with multiple or severe disabilities on a Likert scale, with no leaders (0%) reporting a

negative experience, 4 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (3.1%), 16 leaders reporting a neutral experience (12.5%), 11 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (8.6%), 25 leaders reporting a positive experience (19.5%) and 70 leaders (54.7%) reported having no experience with students with multiple or severe disabilities.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Multiple/Severe Disabilities currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with multiple/severe disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.086$, $p = .344$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with multiple/severe disabilities, $r(123) = -.155$, $p = 0.086$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was also not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.116$, $p = .201$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with multiple or severe disabilities, $r(123) = -.114$, $p = .206$.

Inclusion of Students with Physical Disabilities/Physical Impairment

Of the 125 school leaders surveyed, 50 leaders reported having a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) previously enrolled, 93 leaders reported having a student with ASD currently enrolled, 53 leaders would enroll a student with ASD and 7 leaders

would not enroll a student with ASD. Principals were also asked their experience with students with physical limitations on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative (0%) or somewhat negative (0%) generally with students with this class of disability. 13 leaders reporting a neutral experience (10.2%), 16 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (12.5%), 84 leaders reporting a positive experience (62.5%) and 12 leaders (9.4%) reported having no experience with students with physical disabilities or physical impairments.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Physical Disabilities currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with Physical Disabilities in their school, $r(123) = .034$, $p = .707$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with physical disabilities, $r(123) = 0.062$, $p = 0.494$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, again, no relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = 0.112$, $p = .214$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with physical impairments, $r(123) = 0.077$, $p = 0.392$.

Inclusion of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

Of the 126 school leaders surveyed, 42 leaders reported previously having a student with a specific learning disability, 108 leaders reported having a student with a specific learning disability currently enrolled, 60 leaders would enroll a student with specific learning disability and zero leaders would not enroll a student with a specific learning disability. Principals were also asked their experience with students with specific learning disabilities on a Likert scale, with no leader sharing their experience was generally negative (0%), 1 leader reporting a somewhat negative experience (0.8%), 8 leaders reporting a neutral experience (6.3%), 23 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (18.0%), 90 leaders reporting a positive experience (70.3%) and 4 leaders (3.1%) reported having no experience with students diagnosed with a specific learning disability.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with Specific Learning Disabilities currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with specific learning disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.147$, $p = .104$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, a significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with specific learning disabilities, $r(123) = -.193$, $p = 0.32$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and

inclusion, the relationship was found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.179$, $p = .046$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, a significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with specific learning disabilities, $r(123) = -.188$, $p = .037$.

Inclusion of Students with Speech-Language Disabilities

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 38 leaders reported having a student with speech-language disabilities previously enrolled, 80 leaders reported having a student with speech-language disabilities currently enrolled, 62 leaders would enroll a student with speech-language disabilities and 6 leaders would not enroll a student with speech-language disabilities. Principals were also asked their experience with students with speech-language impairments on a Likert scale, with no leaders reporting a negative experience (0%), 1 leader reporting a somewhat negative experience (0.8%), 13 leaders reporting a neutral experience (10.2%), 34 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (26.6%), 64 leaders reporting a positive experience (50.0%) and 14 leaders (10.9%) reported having no experience with students with speech-language disabilities.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with disabilities impairing speech- language currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with Speech-Language Disabilities in their school, $r(123) = -.062$, $p = .496$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, a significant

relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with speech-language impairments, $r(123) = -.211$, $p = 0.018$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was found to have a statistically significant relationship, $r(123) = -.181$, $p = .045$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with speech-language impairments, $r(123) = -.164$, $p = .069$.

Inclusion of Students with Traumatic Brain Disorder

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 15 leaders reported having a student with traumatic brain disorder previously enrolled, 15 leaders reported having a student with traumatic brain disorder currently enrolled, 40 leaders would enroll a student with traumatic brain disorder and 65 leaders would not enroll a student with traumatic brain disorder. Principals were also asked their experience with students with traumatic brain injury on a Likert scale, with 1 leader reporting a negative experience (0.8%), 3 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (2.3%), 10 leaders reporting a neutral experience (7.8%), 10 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (7.8%), 24 leaders reporting a positive experience (18.8%) and 78 leaders (60.9%) reported having no experience with students with a traumatic brain disorder diagnosis.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with traumatic brain disorder currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies

and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with traumatic brain disorder in their school, $r(123) = -.157, p = .082$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, a significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with traumatic brain disorder, $r(123) = -.284, p = 0.001$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, a significant relationship was not found, $r(123) = -.208, p = .020$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, a significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with traumatic brain disorder, $r(123) = -.233, p = .009$.

Inclusion of Students with Visual Impairment/Blindness

Of the 124 school leaders surveyed, 33 leaders reported having a student with a visual impairment or blindness previously enrolled, 27 leaders reported having a student with a visual impairment or blindness currently enrolled, 72 leaders would enroll a student with a visual impairment or blindness and 26 leaders would not enroll a student with a visual impairment or blindness.

Principals were also asked their experience with students with visual impairment or blindness on a Likert scale, with no leaders having a negative experience, 2 leaders reporting a somewhat negative experience (1.6%), 15 leaders reporting a neutral experience (11.7%), 10 leaders reporting a somewhat positive experience (7.8%), 45 leaders reporting a positive experience (35.2%) and 54 leaders (42.2%) reported having no experience with students with visual impairment or blindness.

To ascertain whether a relationship exists between leaders' knowledge of education policies and procedures and the inclusion of students with visual impairment/blindness currently enrolled in their schools, a Pearson r correlation test was calculated. Of the 124 usable school leader responses, their knowledge of special education policies and procedures was not statistically significant in its relationship to inclusion of students with visual impairment/blindness in their school, $r(123) = -.028$, $p = .757$. The same statistical analysis was run to determine the relationship between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and inclusion. In this regression, no significant relationship was found between school leaders' knowledge of disabilities and their current enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.013$, $p = 0.883$. When looking at the relationship between the school leader's knowledge of systems of special education and inclusion, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant, $r(123) = -.021$, $p = .818$. When all three areas of knowledge were assessed as one index score of knowledge, no significant relationship was found between this index score and the enrollment of students with ASD, $r(123) = -.023$, $p = .802$.

Learning and Knowledge

Thought not a part of the hypotheses, data was collected and analyzed around the relationship between school leaders reported education in the area of special education, and their perceived knowledge level. School leaders were asked questions around their formal training in special education, specifically to quantify categorically how many hours of professional development around special education and credits of special education coursework. These answers were compared to the three knowledge areas, and the knowledge composite score. The knowledge was assessed on a Likert scale for the

three areas outlined by Boyle (2016) (knowledge of special education systems, knowledge of disabilities, knowledge of policies) and were combined for one index score. The Likert scale produced a lot number for a high level of knowledge.

Special Education Credits

For these correlations, formal training is defined as taking coursework as measured in credits in the field of special education. This categorical variable was a part of the demographics section of the survey. When all three areas of knowledge are combined into an index score, there is statistically significant relationship showing a relationship between leaders self-assessed knowledge and the number of credits they have taken of special education coursework $r(123) = -.463, p = .000$.

When looking at the relationship between hours of special education credits and knowledge of special education policies and procedures, a statistically significant relation was also found $r(123) = -.490, p = .000$. Similarly, when looking at the relationship between hours of special education credits and knowledge of disabilities, there was a significant relationship noted $r(123) = -.346, p = .000$. Finally, when looking at the relationship between hours of special education credits and knowledge of systems of special education, a statistically significant correlation was found $r(123) = -.430, p = .000$.

Professional Development Hours

For these correlations, formal training is defined as taking professional development/ in-service training, measured in hours, in field of special education. This categorical variable was a part of the demographics section of the survey. When all three areas of knowledge are combined into an index score, there is statistically significant relationship showing a relationship between leaders self-assessed knowledge and hours of

professional development they have participate in in the field of special education, $r(123) = -.433, p = .000$.

When looking at the relationship between hours of in-service training and knowledge of special education policies and procedures, a statistically significant relation was also found $r(123) = -.392, p = .000$. Similarly, when looking at the relationship between hours of learning and knowledge of disabilities, there was a significant relationship noted $r(123) = -.336, p = .000$. Finally, when looking at the relationship between hours of special education professional development and knowledge of systems of special education, a statistically significant correlation was found $r(123) = -.455, p = .000$.

Qualitative Questions

This survey included two questions that asked participants to identify strengths and barriers to including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Participants responded that their strengths included areas of presence of counseling/resource/special education staff (30), a specific program (22), the disposition of staff/faculty (22) such as caring, open-minded, committed, willing and compassion, small class size (17), the school culture/mission/identity (26) shared in words like mission, community, social justice, caring, family, welcoming, safe, the school size (8), students mentoring/support/disposition (5), professional development (5), facilities/space (5), teacher experience/training (5), systemic structures/relationships (5), flexibility (3), parent/family collaboration (2), public school assistance/funding/resources (2), differentiated instruction (2), admissions policies and practices (2), technology access (1) and leader's knowledge (1).

Leaders were also asked about barriers to inclusion other than funding. The participant's answers included training/PD for teachers (41), additional personnel/staffing (22), facilities/physical school building limitations (19), lack of commitment/buy-in (7), mindset/understanding (6), college preparation/academic rigor (5), training for staff (5), "resources" (4), time (4), teacher experience/qualifications (4), parent perception (2), and more students (1). One leader said their school was "not designed to teach students with severe disabilities."

Discussion

Hypotheses

The results of this study showed little to small relationships between the areas of knowledge of Catholic school leaders as outlined by Boyle (2016) and the actual inclusion of students with disabilities in the leader's school. When looking deeper at the different areas of knowledge and the different student disabilities that are currently included in student populations, there are numerous smaller, significant relations. All of these relationships are relationships between knowledge and inclusion, showing that the more a leader self-assesses knowing the more likely they are to have a student with disabilities enrolled, and the less a leader knows, the less likely they are to have a student with a disability enrolled. There were numerous relationships that were insignificant statistically.

The leaders themselves identified training or professional development for teachers as the biggest non-funding barrier. This shows that leaders, too, feel more knowledge would result in more inclusion. Additional findings showed that there was a positive correlation between leader's professional learning (as measured in professional

development hours and special education credits) and all areas of knowledge of special education.

Generalizations

This study cannot be generalized to represent all Catholic schools, given the sample size. Additionally, the fact this survey was administered during a global pandemic and in planning for opening of or the start of a new school year could have impacted leaders' reporting in all areas. The connector between leadership, specifically leadership training, and running inclusive schools has yet to be clearly identified.

This time and place

This survey was completed during the start of the 2020-2021 school year, a moment where many school leaders were entering uncharted territory with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unclear what, if any, impact this moment in time had on their answers, but is worth noting. Additionally, school leaders were asked to share their enrollment from a school year that started under normal circumstances. The impact of COVID-19 on Catholic schools and their inclusion moving forward is something unknown.

Summary

After surveying Catholic secondary school leaders, there was no relationship found between leaders' knowledge of special education and the inclusion of more students with disabilities in their schools. This applies to all three areas of knowledge outlined in the Boyle (2016) framework. The possible solutions include increasing knowledge in all three areas identified by Boyle (2016) and making inclusion more prevalent in the educational framework through the national benchmarks and standards.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

It should be a goal of Catholic schools to be more inclusive of students with disabilities for both sustainability and mission. For this study, the proposed relationship between school leader's knowledge and inclusion (Boyle, 2016) was examined.

Aim Statement

The aim of this study was to inform and suggest modifications, if appropriate, for leadership formation to impact the inclusion of students with diagnosed special needs in Catholic Schools, with a possible positive impact on enrollment in Catholic schools. Additionally, this study aims to inform leaders of religious orders with schools about how their schools' leadership knowledge and inclusion are related.

Proposed Solution(s)

This study showed that more knowledge of Special Education does not relate to the percent of a student population that has a disability, but knowledge is related in smaller relationships to the inclusion of students in some categories of disabilities. Additionally, this study showed that the more a leader learns, as measured in hours of professional development or credits of formal learning, the more they feel they know about key areas of special education.

The smaller correlative relationships between knowledge and inclusion suggest that knowledge can be powerful but that there is still a great deal of work to do to impact schools overall. Leaders mentioned people and programming as the key strengths of the inclusive programs and mentioned knowledge and staffing as their greatest barriers other than funding. In a time when school leaders are being asked to do so much, making knowledge a part of their school's plan involves a national prioritization of inclusion as a

part of Catholic schools, as seen in an update to the National Benchmarks and Standards of Catholic Schools.

A proposed addition of a section could be added to the National Standards and Benchmarks around inclusion in schools. This document currently only includes mention of the inclusion of students with disabilities under academics, stating that school should “accommodating students with special needs as fully as possible” in Standard 7.6 (Ozar & Weitzel- O’Neill, 2012). There is not mention of inclusion as a part of the mission/identity section. The standard around facilities mentions a more accessible campus. These standards serve to both guide and assess Catholic schools, including high schools, for both effectiveness and sustainability (Ozar & Weitzel- O’Neill, 2012). Clarifying the role of schools in living out the call from school leadership to be inclusive should be at the forefront of leadership formation.

This standard is described as standards to “address Catholic identity and culture as vital to the mission of Catholic schools in the United States” (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012). By not clearly identifying the broader needs or inclusion (race, gender, etc.) and more specifically the inclusion of those with disabilities in Catholic schools as a required part of school mission, the standards currently do not represent all that schools are called to do. From a Catholic perspective, inclusion is a civil rights and human dignity, moral issue (Iozzio, 2017). By adding, clearly, inclusion to these national standards as a part of Mission and Catholic Identity, it will be highlighted that those diagnosed disabilities should be embraced to the best of the school’s ability. This will purposefully put inclusion at the forefront of the school’s mission and identity as a Catholic school. The

execution of this would lead to the more concrete solutions of professional learning in the areas of special education.

Evidence that Supports the Solution

This study has shown that leaders assess themselves to be moderately to very knowledgeable in three major areas of special education. Despite this knowledge, there is not a significant relationship between knowledge of special education and inclusion, but some smaller, significant relationships exist between categories of knowledge and the inclusion of students with certain disabilities. This solution looks to bridge the gap between knowledge and action, linking what Catholic schools are called to do and the knowledge many school leaders possess with the actual inclusion of students with disabilities in their school populations.

Most secondary Catholic school principals report that their formal training failed to prepare them for their faith leadership role in their school (Hunt et al., 2000). The research of Boyle et al. (2016) highlights the lack of Catholic Identity and faith formation in leadership preparation for Catholic school principals. These studies, paired with this research, suggest the need for inclusion to be at the forefront of Catholic Identity for school leaders to assess, evaluate, reflect on, and strive for.

The principal inclusion survey (PIS) has been used historically to examine the inclusion of students with disabilities in Catholic schools. If this proposed solution works, there should be a documented increase in inclusion in schools, specifically that leaders with high levels of knowledge of special education will also have higher percentages of their student population with diagnosed disabilities.

This study shows that the more professional learning a leader does, both in professional development and credit hours, the more they feel they know in the area of special education. This is important as leaders grow in their knowledge and feelings of knowledge in this area, and guide their staffs.

Evidence that Challenges the Solution

This will need national buy-in and structures both at the systems level and the local school level. Having inclusion as a part of professional learning for school leaders is a big ask, given all that school leaders are handling, especially during a pandemic. Finally, there are many reasons schools could become more inclusive, and a raise in inclusion could not be attributed to only partaking in this network. An example of an outside variable could be funding for special education vouchers in a jurisdiction.

Implementation of the Proposed Solution(s)

Proposal to change the National Standards and Benchmarks would also involve requesting this from the National Catholic Educational Association. A meeting to propose this change will be requested in the spring of 2021.

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Implementation of the Solution

The most immediate buy-in is needed in the leadership at NCEA, but for true change to occur, school leaders need a reason to prioritize inclusion and find a reason to champion this cause in their building. Buy-in from individual school leaders is the most important part of making this network work.

This study shows that leaders assess themselves with higher levels of knowledge if they have participated in more professional development around special education. At the diocese/district level, leaders would need to support the growth of knowledge through

professional training. Leaders report understanding that it is the mission of the church to include all students in Catholic schools (Durow, 2007), but this study shows many are leading schools that are not very inclusive. Making inclusion a clear part of the guiding document under mission reaffirming the teachings of the church when it comes to inclusion as a part of the Catholic school's identity and calling.

At the school level, school leaders would need to be a part of implementing the solution. This study showed many concerns around staffing and expertise. Leaders will need to be savvy with budgets to ensure not only are students included, but also educated at a high standard.

Timeline for Implementation of the Solution

Lobbying for an edit to the standards, therefore impacting the bar that all schools measure themselves by, will begin in spring of 2021. The researcher will report findings to and this solution to Kathy Mears, the interim president and CEO of the National Catholic Educational Association.

Evaluating the Outcome of Implementing the Solution

If this solution is successful, schools will become more inclusive or be prepared to become more inclusive, given the power of leaders to impact their schools. Given that the Principal Inclusion Survey has been given multiple times already to Catholic school leaders, a future use of this tool to measure feelings toward and actual inclusion can be used.

Implications

Practical Implications

Even though this research did not show a consistent connection between knowledge and inclusion, it did show the great range of experiences principals bring to the table, specifically highlighting the range of training they receive in Special Education.

Implications for Future Research

Boyle (2016) identifies knowledge, dispositions, and skills at each level of the framework that may be areas with statistically significant relationships to inclusion. This study shows a very slight relationship between leaders' knowledge and inclusion, but other pathways might be needed to be included as variables to show a clear formula for training leaders for inclusive schools.

Many leaders mentioned barriers to inclusion in their open-ended parts of the survey. Barriers included training, personnel needed, the desire to serve students with special needs, college preparatory status, and the physical accessibility of their schools. Future analysis of barriers, other than funding, to inclusion, would be important research.

The study additionally found that there was a statistically significant relationship between leader's self-perceived knowledge, both their number of special education credits, and special education in-service credits. This relationship should be examined in future research.

This study did not examine the effectiveness of inclusion for students with and students without disabilities, but rather the presence of students with disabilities in a given school. Further research on the outcomes of the inclusion of students in secondary Catholic schools could show impacts on many different groups. Scores on standardized

tests such as SATs and AP exams could be compared for students with specific learning disabilities or other health impairments in different school settings (public, charter, Catholic). Examining the reading levels of students academically included who have intellectual disabilities when compared to their isolated peers in public school could show how inclusion leads to life skilled preparedness. Additionally, looking at the admissions rate in college programs for students with intellectual disabilities would be meaningful for school leaders. Strictly having a student enrolled that checks off a demographic box for a disability does not mean that school is doing the best to educate the heart of the mind of that student.

Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice

There is no demonstrated relationship between leader's knowledge in all categories and both professional development hours and Special Education credits earned, but not a relationship between knowledge and the percent of the student population with a disability. The most important leadership takeaway is that knowledge alone is not a change-agent. Much like any form of learning, the book knowledge learned in classes is independent of the use of that knowledge in action professionally. This gap between knowing information and doing it every day is where change can happen for schools through school leaders. Additionally, leaders with more years of experience have fewer special education credits completed as a part of their training (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016), showing the need for professional development for school leaders in the area of special education.

Many leaders in the survey pointed to the need for teacher training and even stating "some are not committed to serving these students." This shows a need for

leaders to educate their staff on the why's of inclusion in Catholic schools. Training for school leaders and teachers must include the implementation of why and how in Catholic schools, not just public school models.

Summary of the Dissertation in Practice

This study examined the possible relationship between a Catholic, secondary school leader's self-reported knowledge of special education and the percent of their student population that has diagnosed disabilities. No clear relationship between these variables was found. Noting that knowledge alone is not the lynchpin to inclusion, the proposed solution involves elevating inclusion in a guiding force for Catholic education. The surveys administered showed that the more school leaders have learned about Special Education, the more they feel they know.

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APPENDIX A Proposed Research Survey

Adapted from Boyle and Hernandez (2016), Adapted from Praisner (2003)

Section I Demographic Information

The following information will be only be used to describe the population being studied.

1. What is your current school enrollment: _____
2. Average class size for all students:
 0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40 or more
3. What percent of students in your building are diagnosed with a disability
 0-5% 6-10% 11-15% 16-20% 21% or more
4. What state is your school in?
5. What affiliations does your school have?

Section II Training and Experience

1. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience:	0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 15-20, 21+
2. Years as a Catholic school principal:	0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 15-20, 21+
3. Years as a public school principal:	0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 15-20, 21+

4. Approximate number of special education credits in your formal training:
 0 1-9 10-15 16-21 22 or more
5. Approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices:
 0 1-9 10-15 16-21 22 or more
6. In general, what has your experience been with the following types of students in the school setting? Mark one level of experience for each disability category.

	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Positive	No Experience
Autism Spectrum Disorder						

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)						
Developmental Delays						
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders						
Hearing impairment/Deafness						
Intellectual Disability						
Multiple/ severe Disabilities						
Physical impairment						
Specific learning disabilities						
Speech-language Impairments						
Traumatic brain injury						
Visual impairment/blindness						

Section III: Student and Service Demographics

1. Which categories of students with special needs (either identified through a psychological assessment or not identified but suspected) has your school enrolled? (Select all that apply.)

	Previously Enrolled	Currently Enrolled	Would Enroll	Would not Enroll
Autism Spectrum Disorder				
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)				
Developmental Delays				
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders				

Hearing impairment/ Deafness				
Intellectual Disability				
Multiple/ severe Disabilities				
Physical impairment				
Specific learning disabilities				
Speech-language Impairments				
Traumatic brain injury				
Visual impairment/ blindness				

Section IV

Self-Assessment of Special Education Knowledge

Please mark your response to each item using the following scale:

	Not knowledgeable about	Somewhat knowledgeable about	Knowledgeable about	Very knowledgeable about
1. My knowledge of special education policies and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My knowledge of disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My knowledge of systems of special education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section V

1. What do you view as the strengths (currently in place) of your school that could facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs in general education classrooms at your school?

-
2. What do you view as major obstacles to including students with special needs in general education classrooms at your school?

APPENDIX B: Participant Information Letter

Protocol Title:

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERS
KNOWLEDGE AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN
CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Protocol Number:

Principal Investigator's Name and Department:

Abigail S. Greer, Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership

Principal Investigator's Address:

2906 Tarragon Lane Bowie, Maryland 20715

Principal Investigator's Email Address:

Asg78547@creighton.edu

Principal Investigator's Telephone Number:

202-550-8571

Introduction:

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined in Boyle's 2016 Integrated Framework, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their school in Catholic secondary schools in the United States. I invited you to participate in this study because you are the leader of a Catholic, Secondary school. I will be available to answer any questions by phone at 202-550-8571 or email at asg78547@creighton.edu

Study Purpose and Procedures:

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if there is a relationship between Catholic school leader's knowledge of special education, as outlined in Boyle's 2016 Integrated Framework, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in their school in Catholic secondary schools in the United States. The study involves completing one online survey.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your standing with Creighton University or with your organization. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, you do not have to respond to any questions that make you uncomfortable.

Benefits of Participating in the Study:

There are four potential benefits you may receive by participating in this study:

- You will have the opportunity to reflect on your knowledge of special education.
- You will have the opportunity to examine the demographic data of students with disabilities in your school and consider your readiness to accept future students.
- Sharing your lived experience will help to provide information that could help guide leadership formation programs.

Risks of Participating in the Study:

- Risks of participating in this research study should not be more than what you experience in everyday life as an educational administrator.
- You may feel uncomfortable discussing your knowledge levels.
- A possible risk involved in this study involves the potential social and psychological risks associated with accidental disclosure of confidential

information from the data collected throughout the study. I have enacted methods of storing and securing data to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality:

- I will do everything I can to keep your records confidential. However, I cannot guarantee confidentiality. I may need to report certain information to agencies as required by law. Others may view records that identify you and this informed consent form signed by you.
- The list of people who may view your research records are:
 - Principal Investigator: Abigail Greer
 - Protocol Sponsor: Dr. Ashraf Esmail
 - Dissertation Committee Member: Dr. Michael Boyle
 - Auditor
 - Transcription Service
 - Creighton University's Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 - Your organization's Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 - Other internal departments that provide support and oversight at Creighton University

I may present the research findings at professional meetings or publish the results of this research study in relevant journals. However, I will always keep your name, address, and other identifying information (department and institutional affiliation) confidential.

All information I obtain during this study will be kept under lock and key at all times within the confines of my (principal investigator) private office. I will store all

electronic documents and files securely on SPSS and Dropbox using dual-authentication security measures. Upon completion of this research study, I will dispose of all associated materials according to Creighton University's research policy and procedure.

Disclosure of Appropriate Alternatives:

There are no alternatives to this study.

Compensation for Participation:

I will not compensate you for participation in this study.

Contact Information:

Abigail S. Greer

Phone: 202-550-8571

Email: asg78547@creighton.edu

Additional Costs to the Subject:

There are no costs to you for participating in this research study.

Consequences of the Subject's Decision to Withdraw:

There are no consequences associated with your decision to withdraw from this research study.

Disclosure Statement:

The Principal investigator (Abigail S. Greer) and the Protocol Sponsor (Dr. Ashraf Esmail) have no conflict of interest associated with this research study.

Appendix C

Bill of Rights for Research Participants

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

- 1) To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
- 2) To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
- 3) To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
- 4) To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
- 5) To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
- 6) To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether the researcher will compensate you for participating in the study.
- 7) To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
- 8) To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.

Appendix D: IRB Approval

Creighton
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost
Research Compliance

DATE:	10-Aug-2020
TO:	Greer, Abigail
FROM:	Social / Behavioral IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERS KNOWLEDGE AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS
REFERENCE #:	2001245
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Initial Application
REVIEW TYPE:	Exempt Category 2
ACTION:	APPROVED

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The following items were reviewed in this submission:

- Creighton University HS eForm
 - Research Protocol Version 1
 - Initial Email
 - Survey
 - Informational Letter
- Mentor Approval for IRB Submission # 2001245

This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2.

All protocol amendments and changes are to be submitted to the IRB and may not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 402-280-2126 or irb@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and number in all correspondence with this Board.