

PUBLIC ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
PRINCIPALS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND AGENCY
WITHIN THE STRUCTURES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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A DISSERTATION

in

Educational and Organizational Leadership

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

2023

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Dedication

To my mom, thank you for your constant support, for reminding me that “you’ll get it done, you always do” and for believing in me, often when I do not always believe in myself.

To my dad, thank you for reminding me that the worst thing anyone can tell me is “no”. Thank you for encouraging me to keep going and to keep learning. Thank you for instilling in me the power of education and for reminding me that no one can take my education away from me.

I love you both very much!

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Dr. Watts, for your support and guidance these last few years and for pushing me to be better. Thank you, Dr. Hickman for your kindness, your positive perspective, and for supporting me along the way. Thank you, Dr. Nabors Oláh, for all your support; for believing in me, for guiding me, for inspiring me, and reminding me that, I am a quantitative person and researcher!

I am so grateful for the many people in my life that support me unconditionally, especially when it comes to furthering my education. To my favorite aunt, my uncles, my brother my friends; thank you for supporting me these last three years during the global pandemic and reminding me that I can still do it anyway. Whether it was phone calls or food, or encouragement, or just a good laugh—I appreciate you all so much. Thank you, Dr. Melissa Pearson, for supporting me in this journey since the first day we met on Zoom and checking in all the way through the end.

I am forever grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the legacy that is the Mid-Career program. Thank you to all my professors and staff for transforming my approach as a leader and educator. In so many ways you've made me become a better person. To C19 Cohort—thank you, for the laughs, for the tears, and the realness that we experienced together, and to Cohort that choose to do this program, in the pandemic, when many people thought “no”, we did it anyway and we did it in our way. To my Penn Sisters- Thank you for being there through it all—for our many conversations, from our memories, from our tears to our laughs—I am grateful for this experience together. Finally, thank you to my mom and to my dad for supporting me in this journey. Words will never be enough to express my profound gratitude I have for you both.

ABSTRACT

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Dr. Caroline L. Watts

Special education in the United States has been historically problematic for several reasons, and limited research has been conducted to examine the close connection between teachers' experiences in the classroom (both general and special education teachers) and principals' leadership. Teacher perceptions have a great impact on the learning of special education students, and how teachers perceive principals' effectiveness in their leadership determines how teachers can help these students learn better. Therefore, I conducted a mixed-methods study to learn more about teachers' perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence (EI) and agency. I administered a survey to Kindergarten through Grade 5 general and special education teachers across 16 suburban public elementary schools to collect quantitative data that allowed participants to then opt in for qualitative individual interviews. The survey yielded a 42.14% response rate, and nine teachers were interviewed. Structure-agency theory and EI competencies informed the analysis of these elementary school teachers' perceptions of principals' EI and perceived agency within the structures of special education. Overall, the teachers in this study had positive perceptions of principals' EI across special education structures. However, teachers perceived principals' EI differently, depending on the structure of special education and EI

competencies. School principals' understanding of how teachers perceived the roles of principals in framing and working within special education contributes to a greater understanding of how principal agency is perceived. Principals can be informed on how to improve their practices as instructional leaders, specifically for students receiving special education services. Thus, this study informs professional learning and strategic planning, and inspires principals to learn more about EI and agency in their current working structures.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract	v
List of Tables	x
List of Illustrations.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale.....	1
Background and Context.....	3
Current Status of District Special Education Department.....	7
Rationale and Significance of Study.....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
History and Structures of Special Education	13
History of Special Education.....	13
Structures of Special Education.....	15
Inclusive Education as an Evolving Term	16
International Policies of Inclusive Education.....	16
Models of Disability in Special Education	20
Persistent Disproportionality in Special Education	21
Teachers’ Perceptions of Special Education Students.....	24
Mindset and Emotional Intelligence	25
Principals’ Emotional Intelligence	27
Structure-Agency Theory.....	27
Teacher and Principal Agency.....	29
Conceptual Framework.....	30
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design	32
Site and Participant Selection	33
Site.....	33
Participants	34
Selection Criteria	35
Description of Study Participants.....	36
Instruments.....	36
Survey.....	36
Survey Description.....	37
Anonymous Survey Respondent Description in Phase One.....	39
Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews in Phase Two.....	39
Description of Semi-structured Critical Incident Interview Participants in Phase Two.....	42
Reflective Memos.....	43
Data Collection Summary	44
Data Analysis Plan	44

Chapter 3 (continued)	
Survey Data Preparation for Descriptive and Inferential Analyses	46
Correlation	47
ANOVA and Tukey’s HSD	47
Simple Regression.....	48
Logistic Regression.....	48
Qualitative Data Semi-structured Critical Incident Interview Analysis.....	48
Issues of Validity	51
Dialogic Engagement and Positionality	52
Chapter 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	54
Quantitative Data Findings.....	55
Positive and Statistically Significant Correlation	
Across EI Scales and Special Education Structures	55
Research Question 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	58
Quantitative Finding 1: Teachers Overall Have Positive	
Perceptions of Principals’ EI Across Three Special Education Structures	58
Quantitative Finding 2: Teachers Perceive Principals’ EI Differently,	
Depending on the Special Education Structure	61
Years of Experience did not Predict EI Scales	66
Quantitative Finding 3: Teacher Perceptions of Principals’ EI are Impacted by	
Teacher Type Across Special Education Structures.....	66
Summary of Quantitative Findings for Research Question 1.....	74
Qualitative Data Findings to Support Research Question 1	75
Qualitative Finding 1: Teachers Overall Have Positive Perceptions of	
Principals’ EI Across Three Special Education Structures	75
Qualitative Finding 2: Teachers Perceive Principals’ EI Differently,	
Depending on the Special Education Structure.....	77
Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings for Research Question 1	82
Research Question 2: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Findings	82
Teachers Impacted by Perceived EI of Special Education Structures.....	82
Quantitative Finding 4: Perceptions of Principals’ EI Did Not Predict	
Teachers Understanding, Attitude, or Role Clarity	83
Qualitative Finding 5: Teachers Perceptions of Principals’ EI Positively Impacts	
Special Education RSP Teachers’ Feelings of Isolation	84
Qualitative Finding 6: Principals’ Self-Management and Principal Agency	
Contribute to Teachers Feeling Valued	85
Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings for Research Question 2	87

Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations	88
Discussion of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings	88
Next Steps and Future Endeavors: Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in School Principals	89
Emotional Intelligence and Structure-Agency: A Reflective Practice Principal Tool for Leader Development	90
IEP Meeting Professional Development for Principals	91
Implications for Practice	92
Implications for Principals	93
Implications for School District Leadership	93
Implications for Principal Training Programs	94
Limitations	95
Recommendations for Future Research	95
 Appendix A: Survey Questions with Corresponding Labels and Information for Analysis	97
Appendix B: Teacher Survey 9/14/2022.....	100
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Critical Incident Interview Protocol Questions.....	112
 Bibliography.....	113

List of Tables

Table 1	Frequency of Teacher Type (General Education, Special Education RSP, Special Education SDC)	41
Table 2	Deductive Codes for Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews	50
Table 3	Inductive Codes for Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews	51
Table 4	Correlations	57
Table 5	Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Competency Scales in Ascending Order.....	64
Table 6	Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Scales in Ascending Order by Special Education Structure.....	65
Table 7	ANOVA for EI Scales Across Teacher Types (General Education, Special Education RSP, Special Education SDC)	71
Table 8	Multiple Comparisons Across Means for IEP Self-Awareness, Family Self-Awareness, and Inclusion Self- Awareness.....	74

List of Illustrations

Figure 1	Conceptual Framework	31
Figure 2	Frequency of Teachers' Years of Experience Teaching	41
Figure 3	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management EI Competency Scales Within the IEP Structure.....	59
Figure 4	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management EI Competency Scales Within the Family Structure	60
Figure 5	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management EI Competency Scales Within the Inclusion Structure	61
Figure 6	Boxplots of IEP EI Scales by Type of Teacher	68
Figure 7	Boxplots of Family EI Scales by Type of Teacher	69
Figure 8	Boxplots of Inclusion EI Scale by Type of Teacher	70

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

As the world, and in particular, the United States, continues to witness and experience the very real impact of hate, oppression, bigotry, sexism, racism, ableism, and abuse of power, our children are in schools, still learning and being taught empathy, compassion, and hope. Coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic that became ubiquitous since 2020, educators more than ever are exhausted, yet doing their best to show up every day for their students. This dichotomy—teaching children to become good humans in a world of hate, uncertainty, and unprecedented health concerns—is daunting. For educators and families, reality can feel impossible. Specifically, when we consider students with disabilities who are in our school systems, the task of principals and teachers can feel even more unmanageable.

Despite the shift to distance learning in 2020 because of COVID-19 and accompanying questions on how to teach and engage students remotely, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) released a statement in March of 2020 outlining states' requirements to continue to serve students with disabilities. The USDOE also outlined a clear statement of responsibility for states to provide special education services, just as states were providing education for students in general education. In neither statement did the USDOE make changes in their requirements from pre-pandemic expectations for students, in either general or special education, despite the complexities of providing services during distance learning and hybrid learning.

While it will be many years before we understand the impact of this pandemic on children, who themselves may grow up to be leaders and educators, it is important that we now attempt to understand more about teachers' perspectives related to principals' emotional intelligence across special education structures. Teachers' perceptions are vital because of their

proximity to students daily; thus, it is important to understand how teachers themselves are impacted by the decisions that principals make and how those decisions are perceived by the teachers, particularly in relation to special education. It is the principals' responsibility to provide structure and supports to staff that, in turn, provide students who have disabilities with equitable access to education. A principal's support of special education is displayed through interactions with teachers, students, and families. In other words, support is demonstrated by principals' communication, behavior, agency, or what might be understood as a principals' emotional intelligence. Because principals' interpersonal relationships with teachers may impact teacher interactions with students, it is important to learn more about how teachers view principals' agency within structures of special education in conjunction with the emotional intelligence of the principals.

Within this context, I learned more about teachers' perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence (EI) and agency, given the current structures of special education. Further, I learned more about how teachers' perceptions of principals' EI impact teachers working specifically with students receiving special education services. I sought to understand how teachers perceive principals, specifically within the context of special education practices, because I believe that if school systems prioritized special education with both teachers and principals to improve instruction for our most vulnerable students (i.e., those receiving special education services), the entire system would benefit.

My experience in public education has taught me that a principal's ability to change educational system structures, including special education practices, hinges on the fact that principals are able to impact teachers who work daily and directly with students, especially with

students receiving special education services. Thus, the working relationship between teachers and principals is imperative to understand as it can be a bridge for connecting classroom instruction and learning experiences of students. From a personal perspective, my family has raised me to be compassionate with everyone I meet and to take time to learn about people who are around me. When I was younger, I participated in the Special Olympics and supported those athletes on a basketball team. Some of my closest friends have siblings with Down syndrome who have experienced challenges, which has made me wonder why some people are more accepting than others. In becoming an administrator, I have faced crucial moments in my career where teachers and families have thanked me for including their children in school activities and being meaningfully included in general education classrooms. Families appreciated my advocacy at the school and district level for students who do not receive equal opportunities as their peers. I feel compelled to continue using my position to advocate for students and families who have been marginalized by their society.

Therefore, through a mixed-methods study, I answered the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence as related to the implementation of the structures of special education?
2. How are teachers impacted by their perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the structures of special education?

Background and Context

This study was conducted on the West Coast of the United States in a public school district with over 9,500 students ranging from Preschool through Grade 8. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the privacy of participants, including the school district and specific local and

state programs. Over the years, this school district has been a desirable location for families and new residents to the West Coast. The school district includes 21 schools, 17 of which are elementary schools. Many of these elementary schools have classrooms specifically designed for students who require more intensive interventions and specialized services based on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These classrooms are called Special Day Classrooms (SDC). When determining a student's service program and specialized academic instruction for special education services, the IEP team needs to consider and provide services based on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), with as much access to and participation with general education peers and curriculum as appropriate and possible (IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 2020).

In 2019, this school district went through a special education audit, as requested by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services at the time, and in response to the school board's concerns over the fiscal impact to district budget of special education programs and services, in addition to several concerns raised by both parents and school staff. As a result of recommendations from this audit, the school district made intentional changes to improve the learning environment and experience for families of students in special education in the district. To make improvements, various stakeholders were involved in this process, including school principals and teachers. For example, one Special Education Leadership team met regularly to discuss topics related to service providers (e.g., Speech, Occupational Therapy, Resource Special Support, etc.). The purpose of this group was to strengthen internal communications around special education services and resources. While this group had formed before the audit, the group increased the frequency and purposes of its meetings to reflect the audit's recommendations. In

addition to the Special Education Leadership team, the district also had a special education Inclusion Cohort made up of district and site representatives who had a vested interest in improving inclusive practices throughout the district. Through the Inclusion Cohort, the district's Inclusion Statement was created in 2019:

In the [West Coast School District], we believe in inclusive practices for all students, staff, family, and community members. Inclusion is the mind-set and practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering, and supporting the diverse academic, social-emotional, language, and communication learning of all students in our community. We believe that all students belong in the school environment to access learning, peers, and the community. (School District Website [pseudonym], 2022).

The School Board of Trustees represents the governing body for the West Coast District (WCD). It is responsible for setting goals, directing, and collaborating with the Superintendent, and taking community input via public comments during board meetings two times per month. Since March of 2020, board meetings have been held in person but with Zoom access for the community. The WCD School Board of Trustees openly supports inclusive practices with special education and continues to request updates at board meetings around special education services and programs. Further, at each board meeting, there has been a request to understand more about monetary settlements to families who have sought compensation for claims of inadequate services and support for their children with disabilities. Monetary compensation resulted in the school district paying over \$800,000 in settlements between July 2021 and December 2021. The total yearly operating budget for special education services is about \$23 million dollars. For comparison, settlements in the year 2021 alone resulted in 3% of the amount of the total budget (West Coast District [pseudonym] Website, 2022). This is another indication of the persistent disconnect between what the school offers in special education services and families' experiences and outcomes for students receiving special education services.

The school board directs the Superintendent, who, in turn, works with staff to meet the board's goals for student achievement and experiences through the Accountability Plan (AP) process. The AP process in the state requires that various stakeholders from the West Coast District give feedback on goals to match student needs. This plan accounts for the collaboration and training of both teachers and paraprofessionals in supporting special education students. The West Coast District's AP includes goals for special education inclusive practices that are submitted to the state and involve all schools within the school district. The AP also supports site principals and specifically addresses inclusion efforts around the district. The AP is designed in 3-year phases, and each year's plans are revised and reviewed. As stated publicly in the district's board meetings, in cohorts and leadership teams, and in the district's AP and individual school site plans (also referred to as Plan for Achievement [PA]). For example, one goal of this school district is to increase the percentage of time students with IEPs spend in their general education classes.

Throughout the AP, special education students are identified as a group that needs additional monitoring and support. This is because their overall academic achievement levels are not showing appropriate growth. For example, on state tests in the 2020-2021 school year, 16.83% of students with disabilities met or exceeded the standard for ELA, and 14.36% of students with disabilities met or exceeded the standard for math (State Testing Website, 2022). School principals are responsible for meeting AP goals for students receiving special education services. Principals lead work at school sites for student achievement, including with special education. Researchers Cook and Odom (2013) suggested that students receiving special education services need access not only to neurotypical peers, but also to rigorous curriculum

and support if they are to continue making progress. Successful implementation of inclusive practices requires intentional efforts from principals and general teachers with educational specialists. This relationship dynamic may positively or negatively impact the experiences of a student with an IEP at school.

Current Status of District Special Education Department

Currently, the school district's Special Education Department is monitored by the local county and state because the school district has not met specific targets set by the state in either academic achievement or LRE metrics. The school district submits a plan to County Special Education (CSE) to demonstrate plans for improving education outcomes for students in the special education program in the WCD. Furthermore, data currently showed that a Latinx student in the WCD is four times more likely to be found eligible for special education services, compared to other demographic groups in the same district. In considering the over-identification of students, the school district reviewed data from various subgroups and determined an overrepresentation of Latinx students receiving special education services, specifically under the Specific Learning Disability category. This over-identification caused WCD to reevaluate its current Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, particularly pertaining to students over-identified in special education.

Within this school district, school principals are responsible for setting the tone around inclusive practices and support at school sites. Therefore, interactions between teachers and principals regarding the support of students receiving special education services in the classroom are of interest as principals make sense of policy and structures at their respective school sites. Further, principal interactions between teachers, impacts teachers' experiences with special

education students and inclusion. For example, a principal that asks questions about teachers' needs when supporting a student with autism may allow the teacher to better prepare their classroom environment with clear routines, visuals, and collaboration with the special education teacher. Additionally, best inclusive practices suggest that a child receiving special education services should not feel like a visitor when in the general education classroom. A student should feel a sense of belonging in their general education classroom environment, regardless of the number of minutes spent in the classroom and from the beginning of the school year. This is a place for a principal to collaborate with general and special education teachers is when classes are created for the next school year. When creating classes for the next school year, students receiving special education services should be included in the classroom placements from the beginning of the year; not placed with a general education teacher after the school year has started. This signals to general education teachers that students receiving special education services are a part of their classroom, regardless of disability, and should be included when planning for the school year.

A child should not feel like an “other” or an “extra” or a student who does not belong—or only “sometimes” belongs (Lalvani & Bacon, 2018). Principals are responsible for creating expectations for how students are treated and taught in the classroom. Principals in this school district interact with teachers so that the foundations of the classroom environment allow for inclusivity. An inclusive classroom may involve crucial steps to prepare students and teachers for an inclusive environment. A principal is responsible for creating this environment across classroom teachers, and teachers need to understand their role as the general education teachers working collaboratively with educational specialists. One of these steps is that a general

education teacher should have a space for a student with special education support, while principals at school sites can work closely with teachers to understand this expectation and provide additional furniture or resources if needed, for example, a desk, a name tag, and inclusion in classroom-home email lists and activities. Further, having an opportunity before school starts to know which child (and family) will be a part of the learning environment allows teachers to be thoughtful in their classrooms. Depending on the needs of the child, it also gives the opportunity for the special education teacher and general education teacher to talk with the class and send out a letter (if appropriate or necessary) about the child who will be part of the classroom (Lalvani & Bacon, 2018; Tindall et al., 2014).

Principals in this school district have agency around special education in their participation as representatives in IEP meetings. Principals may demonstrate their agency for special education in interactions with general and special education teachers before, during, and after IEP meetings. During an IEP meeting, the school principal typically acts as a representative from the school district and is present to support both teachers and families. When the IEP team meets to determine the LRE, it is a consideration and an opportunity for students to be with their other peers in general education. However, a barrier to this practice is that students in a Special Day Classroom (SDC) are not rostered for general education teachers, and this can lead to conflicting messages for the teachers. In other words, if a general education teacher does not have all children on their roster yet has students with special education needs come into the classroom for parts of the day, the practice of not having students on rosters might signal to teachers that the special education student is a “visitor,” not a member of the classroom. This, then, becomes an opportunity for principals to make sense of the policies and site practices, and

demonstrate their agency by supporting teachers for students who receive special education services.

As of July 2021, a new Superintendent, with a background in special education, was hired by the school board. Since his arrival, there have been changes at his cabinet level, including a new Assistant Superintendent of Student Services who oversees special education. The Superintendent has also hired three additional Coordinators of Special Education Services, increasing the role from one to four coordinators; formed a committee to create a new 5-year strategic plan; and received direct reports that pertain to special education cases and services. As of December 2021, the Superintendent has also named a new Director of Special Education and created a new Director of Student Services position. These reorganizational efforts are meant to better support special education staff, in addition to supporting general education teachers and principals.

Rationale and Significance of Study

Special education has been historically underfunded in the United States, despite legislation calling for increased and appropriate funding (Verstegen, 2011). Further, special education in public schools across the United States can be challenging for teachers and principals. Federal laws and regulations, which state students must receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), do not guarantee the application of such laws in a consistent manner across school districts (IDEA, 2004; USDOE, 2020). Federal law does not outline specific support for teachers, nor does it outline principals' responsibilities that are explicit in schools, beyond being a Local Education Agency (LEA) representative at IEP meetings. The challenge exists in the unique way schools are structured, funded, and staffed to

meet the range of needs of students receiving special education services. The WCD is an example of an organization that has lacked the vision and structures to support students in special education appropriately. However, many teachers and principals across the district have strong intentions and positive mindsets to transform current predictable outcomes.

While this study was conducted at only one school district in the United States, the findings may be relevant to school principals and teachers in other public schools across the country. Elementary-school students spend most of their day with one teacher; within this structure, a teacher's perspective of students as well as principals is important. A component of being a teacher is working with principals to support the district's mission and school site vision, including working with students receiving special education services. Further, teachers' perceptions of the principal's agency within the special education structure are of value to leaders' understanding of principal-teacher relationships. A school principal's job is demanding. It requires working with many personalities, both at the school and district level. As a result, a principal's Emotional Intelligence (EI) can positively contribute to the school leader role. Thus, teachers' perceptions of the intersection of a principal's EI and agency within a special education structure can give insight into the experiences of teachers working with some of the country's most vulnerable students.

Because they are responsible for so many critical aspects of a school's success, principals need to be aware of the complex value of interacting with the vital force who works directly with students and families—the classroom teachers. Therefore, it is important to consider how teachers perceive their interactions with principals, and how these interactions do or do not

influence teachers in the classrooms, specifically for students receiving special education services.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study sought to understand teachers' perspectives of principals' EI and agency within the structures of special education because teacher perceptions matter and impact students. Teachers' interactions with students impact learning, and how teachers view them creates varied experiences for learners. This chapter reviews pertinent literature, with a brief examination of the history of special education in the United States to present-day special education laws that hold public school districts accountable for students found eligible for special education services. A component of this history accounts for the persistent disproportionality of students found eligible for special education services, particularly for English Language Learners (ELLs). An understanding of the current models of disability can play a significant role in the interpretation of such laws, especially as they relate to placement concerns, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and inclusive education. Teacher perceptions of special education are an area of importance to this study, as are teacher-principal interactions. Emotional intelligence (EI) competencies framed the lens looking at how principals are perceived by teachers. Finally, I applied structure-agency theory to examine the intersection of the structures of special education with the EI of principals as perceived by teachers.

History and Structures of Special Education

History of Special Education

Special education in the United States has evolved since 1975 with various iterations which were grounded in an attempt for equity and access for students with differences. Before 1975, children with disabilities did not have guaranteed access to public education, and it was reported that "U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities and many states

had laws excluding certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or had an intellectual disability” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2020). In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was later reaffirmed in 1990 and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, commonly referred to as IDEA (USDOE, 2020). IDEA has several key components that ensure students with disabilities have access to Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), including:

1. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE),
2. Appropriate evaluation,
3. Individualized Education Program (IEP),
4. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE),
5. Parent participation, and
6. Procedural safeguards.

These components will be described in the sections that follow. It has not even been 50 years since students with disabilities have had access to public education and services (IDEA, 2022). As of 2019, an estimated 7.5 million children were receiving special education services in the United States (USDOE, 2020). Eligibility for special education services in the United States is determined by both the disability and the effect the disability has on the child in accessing the general curriculum in school environments. To obtain special education services, a student goes through a rigorous assessment process to determine eligibility within the public-school setting. An assessment plan might be requested by parents or through an intervention team at school if there is a suspected disability (Frey, 2019). Further, through Child Find, public schools have an

obligation through IDEA to refer children for special education assessments if there is a suspected disability (IDEA, 2017).

Structures of Special Education

Students receiving special education services are deemed eligible to receive services based on several specific categories defined in the IDEA legislation; these categories include autism, Specific Learning Disability, and Other Health Impairment, to name a few. Disabilities that are supported through IDEA range from neurological differences, including emotional or behavior disorders (Landrum et al., 2003), to physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy, and eligibility is based upon a thorough assessment. Through IDEA, federal education law authorizes U.S. public schools to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for any child who is found eligible for special education services. Once eligibility is determined, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is written that comprehensively describes the nature of the disability and the specific services, accommodations, and type of educational setting that will be provided for the child. IEP goals are created by the educational specialist in collaboration with the IEP team. Placement outside of the general education classroom is determined by the type of services required and the number of specialized academic instruction (SAI) minutes. For example, if a child's goals determine that a significant number of SAI minutes is necessary to meet goals, a recommendation for a smaller setting separate from the general education classroom might be made. Unfortunately, local school districts apply, interpret, and enact this law differently. In conjunction with the IEP, school teams, including families, teachers, school administrators, and at times advocates and lawyers, a yearly plan is developed to meet the educational needs of each student.

Since IDEA (2004), schools have worked to correct compliance issues associated with students' IEPs and often try to rectify concerns with access and placement in the LRE as per federal law. LRE refers to a school district's obligation to provide an educational setting that is as non-restrictive as possible (Underwood, 2018). Depending on the school and a student's IEP, this definition is interpreted differently.

For this study, certain classrooms are called Special Day Classrooms (SDC) and have up to 12 students and at least two classroom aides. If a child is offered an SDC placement, this may be considered more restrictive, depending on the child's eligibility, and compared to a classroom with neurotypical peers and up to 30 students. LRE continues to be a point of contention between families and school districts, as are the definitions of inclusion, access, and opportunity (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). Further, according to Francisco et al (2020), "The broad and vague definition of LRE in IDEA prompted different interpretations and, thus, a child's placement in a school system relies heavily on the deciding body's interpretation of LRE" (p.8).

Inclusive Education as an Evolving Term

Artiles (2003) suggested that a system design approach to inclusive education alludes to the need for education environments to reevaluate their approach to learning environment for all students, not only those who are more easily served in traditional learning spaces. Artiles found that inclusive education encompasses "schoolwide approaches, such as teacher collaboration, enhanced instructional strategies, curriculum accommodations and modification, and additional support in general education settings" (p. 169). This definition of inclusion alludes to the system's complexity of implementation for students with disabilities in school settings.

Furthermore, inclusive classroom environments remain a primary focus of programs aimed at

benefiting students. Research indicates that supporting disability-specific networks, such as autism networks, can improve overall experiences of both adults and students in inclusive environments (Rodríguez, 2012). This suggests that while inclusive environments are complex, providing additional support in the form of disability-specific networks can have positive impact.

As evidenced in the research (Ainscow & César, 2006; Artiles, 2003; Essex et al., 2019), inclusive education means a variety of things, depending on educational context. A common thread in inclusive education exists in the need to determine best support for students with differences and foster a sense of belonging in community spaces within schools. The current research on inclusive education was important to this study, which looked at the experiences of teachers of students receiving special education services. These services might have been received outside of the general education classroom, and various degrees of disability may impact the general education learning environment and experience of the teacher. Furthermore, the degree of inclusive practices might be affected by the principals of the schools, who are charged with setting the culture of the organization. Another factor for consideration is how teachers and principals interact about students receiving special education services.

Research on understanding what inclusion is has varied according to the context in which it is discussed (Essex et al., 2019). Inclusive education has become a commonly used term when discussing special education and a school district's offers of FAPE. If a child does not have access to general education classrooms or neurotypical peers, for example, this can be considered a violation of FAPE. As referred to above, LRE can be a point of contention between families and school districts. Families advocate for their children to be educated along with their general education peers, as much as is appropriate and possible.

International Policies of Inclusive Education

Research on inclusive education has not only been conducted in the United States; also, it has not been limited only to federal laws. As a result, there is an opportunity to learn from other countries about their definitions and support of inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities. In 1994, the Salamanca World Conference on special education brought together representation from over 90 countries to discuss a framework for students with disabilities. While extensive in its call to action for students with disabilities, it highlighted that “education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs” (UNESCO, 1994).

Ten years after the Salamanca World Conference on special education, Ainscow and César (2006) found that countries are moving toward more inclusive learning environments. This thus suggested a shift in consideration for students with disabilities. However, Ainscow and César later acknowledged the lack of a shared definition. In other words, while inclusive learning environments are emerging more often, there is still no common understanding across schools for what inclusion means, regardless of educational setting.

This evolving context of inclusive education suggests a need for learning organizations, and especially schools, to clarify the purposes around inclusive education for students and their families (Liasidou, 2016). The term *inclusion* may also mean inclusion efforts to have greater representation of race and gender; thus, schools should be specific when discussing inclusion as related to students receiving special education services. In a more simplified approach when linked with educational environments, Justice et al.’s (2014) study confirmed that inclusion is a

practice that allows students with disabilities to “be educated alongside their typically developing peers” (p. 1723).

Inclusion can also be categorized as a means of supporting developmental language learning, as found in Justice et al.’s (2014) study of preschool-aged children language learning. This quantitative study found that after controlling for all variables, peer effects were statistically significant predictors of language development for students with IEPs, even after accounting for students’ disabilities ($p = 0.01$). A definition for inclusion should account for the positive results on language and social development for students with disabilities and relate to educational outcomes for all students in classrooms.

Artiles (2003) further referred to inclusive education as a movement on a continuum that has evolved from a focus on students with more significant disabilities to students with “higher incidence disabilities.” The basis of this movement, as Artiles asserted, is that “all children can learn” (p. 169), in addition to focusing on the system structures impacting teachers and students and emphasizing the services provided to support learning. Further, another study found that teachers and administration had positive intentions while working with students with autism, though they were overwhelmed by expectations and how to best support both the child with a disability and the general classroom at the same time (Li et al, 2022). Inclusive learning environments, especially in elementary settings, should account for teachers’ perceptions and beliefs as related to children with differences. Moreover, principals should know about their teachers’ beliefs of students receiving special education services and understand more about how to address these beliefs in either individual or staff meetings.

Models of Disability in Special Education

Research in the field of disabilities often distinguishes between a medical model of a disability and a social model of a disability (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Additionally, research has suggested the importance of defining these differences, in some cases to support legislation, practice, and policies (Baglieri et al., 2010). An important component in models of disability is the delineation of which model teachers and principals use to approach students and if it affects their interactions with students.

As Retief and Letšosa (2018) described, the social model acknowledges that “it is society which disables people with impairments, and therefore any meaningful solution must be directed at societal change rather than individual adjustment and rehabilitation” (p. 3). This suggests that a school’s role is not to “fix” a child with a disability but rather to ensure that the environment in the school is designed to allow students with disabilities to find success. The distinction continues to play out in the way services and programs are designed in schools to meet the needs of children with disabilities and in IEP meetings when teams discuss the best interests of the child. For example, members of the IEP can take an assets-based approach in the accommodations that are made for the child, including flexible seating options; extended time on tests; and assessments for quality, not quantity, of work. In this scenario of meeting the child based on his or her needs and strengths, it is not an attempt to “fix” as a medical model suggests, but rather an effort for the school to adjust itself to meet the needs of the learner. To the contrary, educators may view students with a disability from a medical model perspective. Goering (2015) asserted:

One result of the common medical understanding of disability is that people with disabilities often report feeling excluded, undervalued, pressured to fit a questionable

norm, and/or treated as if they were globally incapacitated. People with disabilities often express frustration when they are met with pitying attitudes or incredulity if they speak about anything positive related to living with their conditions. (p. 134)

Educators may approach students with a disability in an exclusionary manner, and this might suggest how personal views and/or lack of experience and understanding of disabilities lead educators to default to a stance that students should be educated in a different classroom or setting (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). Teachers' reported experiences with students receiving special education services might also be impacted by the teachers' personal views of a child. This suggests that a teacher might feel a child needs to be "fixed" to fit into the norms of the classroom—for example, a teacher expects a student with autism to maintain eye contact and repeatedly corrects this behavior (medical model) versus accepting the student for characteristics that are of a child with autism (social model). This tension also highlights the difference between a medical model for a disability versus a social model in a school setting—and how often these ideas might conflict with each other and with current approaches in the classroom.

Persistent Disproportionality in Special Education

Disproportionality in special education refers to the overidentification of students from different demographic groups as compared to their general population in the district; these subgroups can include students of color, males, and English Language Learners (ELLs). In 2004, Congress's reauthorization of IDEA required school districts to enact preventative measures to address and reduce disproportionate representation of students of color in special education and tied this accountability to funding for states (IDEA, 2022). Further, Artiles (2003) reminded us that "given the historical legacies of discrimination and racism in our society, we cannot afford to ignore the potential mediating effect of bias on overrepresentation" (p. 175) of racial minority

students in special education. Dever et al. (2016) found that males are disproportionately represented in special education in comparison to their female counterparts. Blanchett (2006) also situated the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education by discussing inadequate teacher preparation programs, pedagogy, and curriculum along with insufficient resource allocations. A study in an urban school district between the years of 2006 and 2010 revealed higher risk for disproportionate representation if a student was African American, American Indian, low-income, and male (Bal et al., 2014). Researchers have sought to understand more about the contributing factors to overidentification in special education programs (DeMatthews et al., 2014; Park, 2020; Sullivan, 2011). Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies have been conducted to identify patterns and themes, while also suggesting changes to reduce and eliminate over-identification of students, particularly those from less affluent and non-White backgrounds (Park, 2020). Research has also indicated that ELLs make up a disproportionate number of students eligible for special education services and have done so for decades (Park, 2020; Sullivan, 2011). DeMatthews et al. (2014) asserted that Hispanic students were 1.19 times more likely to be found with a learning disability than White students and be in more restrictive educational settings.

Research studies conducted in urban settings revealed that teacher beliefs around ELLs, in addition to beliefs around special education services, have contributed to the referral process and affected how teachers work with students who are ELLs, thus in turn affecting a referral for services (Park, 2020). Research found that upon analysis of data and from interviews with urban teaching staff, educators believed that they could intuitively tell when an EL had disabilities; as

such, there was no point in waiting to refer such students to special education. Educators who adhered to “the sooner, the better” stance took actions to move ELLs quickly to a special education referral (Park, 2020, p. 15).

DeMatthews et al.’s (2014) analysis at state, district, and school levels also revealed a lack of understanding around ELLs and differentiating between a specific learning disability and being an ELL. Sullivan (2011) used regression analysis to predict the disproportionality of ELLs in special education students in a southwestern state. Findings revealed an overrepresentation of ELL students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities or Speech Language Impairment who spent part of their day outside the general education classroom (Sullivan, 2011). The school district for this study also overrepresented ELLs receiving special education services, with part of the day spent outside general education classrooms. Moreover, Sullivan’s study revealed higher-incidence disabilities in Specific Language Impairment and Specific Learning Disabilities for ELLs. It is important to understand current research around this as teachers’ experiences with students receiving special education services might include ELLs, particularly Latinx male students.

The overrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services is an equity issue that, while complex, should be addressed (Sullivan, 2011). More investigation into staff training and expertise for ELLs combined with learning more about students with disabilities should take place while also addressing current policies and practices at state, district, and school levels (DeMatthews et al., 2014).

Teachers' Perceptions of Special Education Students

Research on teachers' perceptions of students has highlighted the significant impact, both positive and negative, on student achievement and outcomes (Gershenson et al., 2015; Redding, 2019; Weathers, 2019). Research on general education teachers' perspectives of special education students needs more attention to derive a better understanding of this potentially conflicting issue. For example, Bialka's (2016) case study of three preservice general education teachers found that coursework and school culture impacted the participants. The study "revealed that participants' dispositions appeared to be affected more significantly by coursework and fieldwork than by prior experience and that the culture of the school played a critical role in a preservice teacher's dispositional development" (p. 632). In other words, the school environment and people matter to the teachers charged with supporting students with disabilities. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of students play a role in their interactions with students.

Teachers' perceptions of students, especially those in special education, are complex because students' needs can be complex. To effectively support and work with students receiving special education services, accommodations should be explicitly written into IEPs. Teachers and principals in IEP meetings, along with other team members, must collaborate for effective implementation of effective classroom accommodations. The perspectives of teachers impact students because teachers, along with IEP team members, are responsible for implementing IEP accommodations and/or modifications. The daily interactions between teachers and students receiving special education services should be informed by IEP modifications and accommodations to best meet the students' needs. These daily interactions and teachers' perceptions of students impact the students consistently. For example, if a teacher perceives a

student to need accommodation based on activity and need, the student may or may not have more access to the general education classroom. Teachers' perspectives on implementation and support of students receiving special education services, as found in Bray and Russell's (2018) study, influenced implementation of IEPs and the learning experiences of students. In other words, how teachers perceive expected behaviors and actions towards students receiving special education services is vital to the educational experience of those students.

Mindset and Emotional Intelligence

Since 2006, Carol Dweck's work on mindset has influenced educators' perspectives in working with students. Her book *Mindset* (Dweck, 2017) described a growth mindset as "based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience" (p. 7). She further described that "the passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives" (p. 7). Special education is consistently challenging; therefore, a teacher's mindset is an important application to this complex situation.

Individuals with growth mindsets can work through mistakes and struggle to understand that mistakes support learning and growth; errors are "okay" and, according to science, foster greater brain activity (Boaler, 2016). Whether people are aware of their mistakes, neuroscience has confirmed that their brains continue to grow or fire synapses. A growth mindset around mistakes works in favor of brain growth and learning. In other words, students need to be in

classrooms that value making mistakes in a way that validates their growth and learning (Boaler, 2016). Students can also benefit from teachers and principals with a growth mindset who can then better support students receiving special education services. Principals with a growth mindset may be better equipped to support teachers working directly with students receiving special education services. A principal who models a growth mindset may positively influence teachers' and, in turn, students' experience and learning in their classrooms.

In conjunction with mindset, emotional intelligence (EI) in principals may positively impact interactions with teachers and family about students receiving special education services. Daniel Goleman's (2020) four competencies of EI include Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, and Relationship Management. Self-awareness refers to feelings of self and others. Individuals with self-awareness demonstrate this ability in how they discuss their feelings and those of others. Social Awareness is one's ability for empathy and organizational awareness of systems and structures, especially of a team and the culture of an organization. Self-management indicates one's ability to be reflective of one's own performances, adaptable with situations, emotionally self-controlling according to the situation, and positive in outlook with both people and events (Goleman, 2020). When examined through the role of the school principal, each competency suggests that the more effective school principals are, the more likely this is related to their EI. In fact, as McKee and Boyatzis (2005) noted, "emotional intelligence (EI) accounts for 85 to 90 percent of the difference between outstanding principals and their more average peers" (p. 28). Effective principals display EI within various structures of schools. For this study, structures of special education provide a context for teachers from which to

observe principals; therefore, principal EI competencies may be observed by teachers within the context of special education structures.

Principals' Emotional Intelligence

Research on principals has asserted the impact of EI on outstanding and typical principals (Williams, 2008). Moreover, in research on leadership, EI predicts outcomes of team performance, employee creativity, and job performance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Castro et al., 2012; McKee et al., 2008; O'Boyle et al., 2010). Further, there is a correlation between EI and leadership decisions as related to instructional outcomes (Chen & Guo, 2018). Berkovich and Eyal (2016) found the influence of principals' EI on teachers' emotional reframing of difficult situations and further asserted that "principals' ability to identify emotions is linked to their tendency to adopt a supportive approach toward teachers, as [they] found that leaders' emotion recognition ability is positively related to transformational leadership behaviors" (p. 327). In other words, a leader's approach to teachers is important, especially when considering reframing of difficult situations. For the purposes of this study, this finding is applied to students receiving special education services. Thus, further research to understand more about principals' perceived EI, as it relates to teachers working with students receiving special education services, would contribute to the field of research on principals' EI.

Structure-Agency Theory

Structure-agency theory refers to a person's ability to adapt and maintain the current systems in which they reside, while displaying agency of self and belief in the system's process (Giddens, 2016; Yu, 2019). While several fields of study have focused on structures and agency as separate entities, the combined structure-agency theory accounts for the nuanced nature of

human interaction and decision making within organizational structures (Bray & Russell, 2018; Donaldson & Woulfin, 2018; Sewell, 1992; Woulfin et al., 2015). As previously described in Chapter 1, concrete laws provide structure for school districts; however, the agency of the people tasked with enacting those laws can vary. Structure takes into consideration the macro level of an organization, while agency considers the individual. Macro-level structures affect parts of an organization, while the meso and micro structures may be influenced by a participant's use of agency within. Meso structures refer to the structures between the macro and micro levels, for example, at the school level and within the organization. Micro structures refer to individuals, relationship, and smaller group dynamics within the structures. Structure-agency theory considers both macro and micro forces within an organization to account for both the rigidity of an organization and its intersection with the human component. Donaldson and Woulfin's (2018) study of principals' agency for teacher evaluation systems confirmed that principals enacted more agency over tasks with which they felt most comfortable. The researchers also provided implications for the principal serving as a bridge between policies because "it is crucial to consider how principals act as intermediaries between state policy and teachers" (p. 551). In other words, principals' agency matters to the structures and positions which they may influence and, for this study, particularly the structures of special education.

For this study, structure refers to the special education structures of this school district (West Coast District), including IEP meetings, school culture for inclusive special education practices, and discussions of support for families of students receiving special education services at elementary-school sites. While principals work within the confines of district special education structures and school site structures, they also have opportunities to demonstrate their

own agency within special education and school structures. Agency for this study refers to a principal's emotional intelligence as perceived by teachers across the structures of special education.

Teacher and Principal Agency

Teachers are responsible for establishing the culture and climate of their classrooms, and principals are responsible for creating school-wide expectations. Thus, a principal's agency regarding special education structures at schools intersect with the teachers' experiences with teaching special education students. Haegele and Hodge (2016) asserted that the way people talk about students with disabilities influences how they treat and interact with students. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the language educators use when talking about students receiving special education services to understand the model by which adults approach students with disabilities. Teachers and principals may demonstrate agency in interactions about students receiving special education services. For example, a teacher may make suggestions to help a student feel more included in the classroom, for best ways to support the child academically, or to learn more about a child's disability. This thus distinguishes the difference between the social and medical models, allowing for better insight into understanding teacher and principal agency within the structures of special education. An example of principal agency may be in the offer of suggestions to support a student in the general education classroom and providing access to materials. Further, a teacher may demonstrate agency in interactions with families and suggest classroom accommodations to best meet the needs of the child. A principal and teacher may be proactive in their collaborative efforts to support a child based on needs rather than be passive participants in meetings.

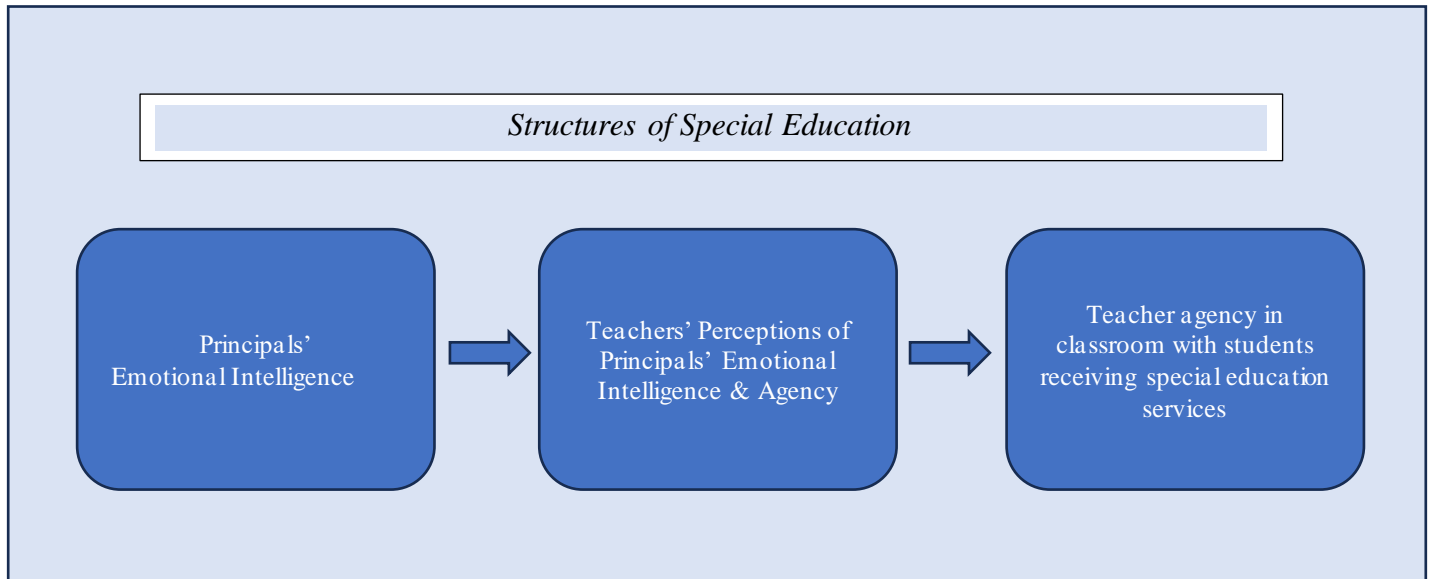
Conceptual Framework

For this study, I drew from structure-agency theory and EI competencies to understand teachers' perceptions of principals, specifically for special education. Teacher perceptions are important to student learning outcomes, and special education students deserve better educational outcomes. Further, principals should want to know how teachers perceive their agency and EI, whether favorable or not, to reflect on their leadership and as an area of growth.

In Figure 1, special education structures frame the research as a point of study. Within the context of structures of special education, teacher perceptions of principals EI are important. Teachers' perceptions may impact student experiences in classrooms. Further, I examined teachers' perceptions of principals' EI and agency across three special education structures.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

This mixed-methods study examined teachers' perspectives of their principals' emotional intelligence (EI) and agency in interactions explicitly about students receiving special education services. This study answered the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence as related to the implementation of the structures of special education?
2. How are teachers impacted by their perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the structures of special education?

One goal of this study was to better understand teachers' perceptions of principals' EI and agency within the structures of special education at the school site level. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, "the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyzes the results and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative research" (p. 15). I selected an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design because I wanted to start with quantitative data and have qualitative data from teacher interviews to build on results from the survey.

I designed this study in two phases. In phase one, quantitative data results from an anonymous survey gave me a lens through which to examine the perceived EI of school principals by teachers across three special education structures. In phase two, participant interviews enhanced the quantitative data regarding teachers' experiences with special education students and teachers' interactions with principals for students receiving special education services. The selection of an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design included a purposeful population sample of teachers, after which semi-structured interviews were conducted with

teachers who opted to participate. To participate in the interview, survey respondents had to complete the survey and meet population sample requirements (e.g., Kindergarten through Grade 5 general or special education teacher, and taught in school district last year).

My conceptual framework intersects EI with structure-agency theory. I studied the potential impact a principal has on teachers in specific interactions regarding students receiving special education services and in classrooms. In interactions specifically for special education students, principals can bring with them both their professional and individual experiences, accompanied by potential skill sets for being a principal. This is important when analyzing teachers' perspectives of their principals, as teacher perceptions of the EI and agency of their school leader may impact their own interactions with students. Teachers, for example, might feel more supported from their principal when working with students receiving special education services and, therefore, might be more inclined to ask for support or want to contribute further to an overall school climate and culture of inclusion.

Site and Participant Selection

Site

The public suburban elementary-school district located on the West Coast of the United States is the largest public school district in its county, with over 9,500 students, 21 schools, and a staff population of over 1,000. Students are in preschool through Grade 8 only, and there are no high schools in this district. Fifteen percent of students in this school district receive special education services. Over the last 7 years as a school principal, I did not receive formal training for students with special education services. Further, as of this writing, there is no system in place to train school principals in an understanding of special education services, nor is there

designated support for principals to learn more about students with IEPs. This school district has experienced special education teacher shortages, as have many districts around the United States (Peyton et al., 2020). The school district is actively recruiting and filling positions year-round.

Participants

I sought to learn about the experiences of teachers and principals with elementary students who are early in their educational experiences and at times may benefit from more intensive interventions and support. Therefore, I chose to examine Kindergarten through Grade 5 general and special education teachers. Elementary-school students in this district are assigned one classroom teacher and do not rotate between class periods as they do in middle school and beyond. Thus, elementary-school teachers have fewer students than middle and high school teachers. In other words, students spend most of their day with one adult. This is an important consideration when examining the experiences of teachers who instruct the same children for multiple hours of the day and are responsible for academic, social, and emotional learning and experiences. This participant selection benefits this study because elementary-school teachers work throughout the day with students receiving special education services; therefore, examining their perceptions would give me as a researcher a targeted lens with which to analyze teacher perceptions and experiences with principals and students receiving special education services.

My experience has also shown me that, at times, the elementary-school years can be both crucial and challenging for students receiving special education services. Elementary-aged children may experience challenges in school related to academic rigor, social-emotional learning, and communicative behaviors. Students with autism, for example, may need support with expected social interactions to engage meaningfully and successfully with other

neurotypical peers (Imasaka et al., 2020). Further, a student with dyslexia or Down syndrome might need significant modifications and support to access curriculum and learning as they progress in elementary school. My experience working with elementary-aged students receiving special education services has shown me that, at times, maladaptive behaviors are correlated with learning difficulties and classroom environments.

In elementary school, a student typically has one general education teacher for an entire day at school. In this school district, students in Kindergarten through Grade 5 have a general education teacher for most of their school day. If a student receives special education services, they will either have a special education Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher, which is typically a pull-out model, or a special education Special Day Class (SDC) teacher, which is a more self-contained classroom. These factors contribute to the complexity of elementary school and reinforce the importance of early education years, especially for students with disabilities.

Selection Criteria

I chose to include all Kindergarten through Grade 5 general education teachers in this school district, except teachers from my school site. I chose to not include teachers from my site of practice in this study, and therefore did not send the survey to teachers at my school site. I did not include teachers from my school because I was a supervising principal in this school district at the largest elementary school with over 30 classroom teachers, and I was concerned that responses would be favorably skewed due to my teachers' wanting to answer in a more favorable manner. Moreover, I was not conducting a school-based case study, but rather an explanatory study of elementary schools across an entire school district; thus, data from my school was not

necessary for this study. Further, I did not include general education intervention specialist, PE teachers, music teachers, nor art teachers because for this study, I focused on general and special education teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 5.

Description of Study Participants

I invited 299 teachers to take part in this anonymous survey via email. The email included a survey link for current general education, special education RSP, and special education SDC teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 5 for the 2022-2023 school year.

For this study, three teacher types were included: general education teacher, special education RSP teacher, and special education SDC teacher. A special education RSP teacher typically sees students for targeted Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) minutes anywhere from one to five times per week/, depending on IEP goals. A special education SDC teacher has a more self-contained environment, and students spend most of their day in this classroom. A special education RSP teacher may have up to 28 students on their case load, while a special education SDC teacher has up to 12 students.

Instruments

Survey

As this is an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), phase one of data collection involved a quantitative survey using Qualtrics software. The anonymous survey population sample targeted approximately 299 teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 5 to better understand their perceptions of principals' EI across three special education structures.

I designed my own survey to evaluate teachers' perception of principals' EI across three structures of special education. I used Goleman's (2020) four EI competencies—Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management—to frame principals' EI. I then crossed the four EI competencies across three different structures of special education including: IEP meetings, discussions of Families of students with IEPs, and discussions about Inclusion for students receiving special education services. The survey also included general demographic information (e.g., grade level, years of experience, teacher type) and asked teachers to respond to closed survey questions to gather data about teachers' perceptions of perceived EI of principals within the structures of special education.

Moreover, the term “disability” is used in the school context of special education services, and eligibility is determined by IDEA. I chose not to focus on only one disability category but rather to refer to students receiving any special education service as students with IEPs in the survey.

Survey Description

Phase one included teachers' responses to closed survey questions regarding their perception of principals' EI within special education structures, followed by an option to participate in phase two (i.e., interviews). In phase one, general and special education teachers—including general education Kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers, special education RSP, and special education SDC teachers—responded to a series of Likert-scale questions that targeted their perceptions of principals' EI, as observed across three structures of special education: IEP meetings, school culture of inclusion, and discussion about families of students with IEPs.

I used Qualtrics to collect and organize my data. In total, there were 54 Likert-scale survey questions that asked teachers to respond with their perceptions of principals' EI crossing across three structures of special education. Each special education structure (e.g., IEP meeting, inclusion, families) section contained 13 questions; Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Social Awareness had three questions each, and Relationship Management had four questions. Appendix A displays a detailed description of question number, special education structure, EI competency, variable type, measure type, and question stem from survey. The survey questions included background information about years of experience, grade level taught, general or special education teacher type, and age range. The survey design crossed EI competencies across three different special education structures, including IEPs, Families, and Inclusion. Questions 12 through 50 were specific to special education structure with EI competency, asking respondents to indicate that they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, or have not observed.

As the survey was anonymous, there are no linking identifiers in the survey, and email addresses were not captured in Qualtrics. The last survey question asked for survey participants to opt in for an interview. The last question sent respondents to an external form for teachers to fill out with their contact information, only if they wished to participate.

Before launching phase one of the data collection, I piloted the survey with a few colleagues who were administrators, teachers, and special education professionals in other school districts as a resource for feedback. Dillman et al. (2014) asserted that “some people are able to look at questions and provide feedback on the content such as whether the appropriate language is used, and the survey actually measure the concepts that the surveyor intends to measure”

(p. 242). Various iterations of the survey were developed based on feedback from colleagues who provided critical perspectives of question stem interpretation. Collegial feedback helped me think about the order of survey questions, reevaluate the concise language, and ensure clear question stems and the timing of responses. EI competencies were crossed onto special education structures and thus, by design, the survey was repetitive. However, feedback before sending out the survey enabled me to incorporate clear delineations between special education structures and responses so that survey respondents understood different sets of survey questions and the purpose of the repetitiveness. In total, the survey had 54 closed questions and, on average, took respondents 10 minutes to complete. Further, the survey did not ask for information on respondents' school sites; thus, there were no data that could be linked to schools or principals.

Anonymous Survey Respondent Description in Phase One

In phase one, teacher survey response data were used to illustrate trends from general and special education teachers' perceptions of principals' EI within specific structures of special education. The anonymous survey responses allowed me to report descriptive statistics, test hypotheses, and quantitative analyses allowed me to answer both research questions. Descriptive statistics allowed me to report teachers' perceptions overall about principals' EI and report on perceived differences across special education structures. Further, quantitative analyses helped answer the second research question around perceived principals' EI and impact on teachers.

Teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 5 received five emails over six weeks to ask for anonymous participation. I received 126 survey responses out of 299 teachers, or a 42.14% survey response rate. The survey questions did not ask for identifying characteristics of school site, gender, or race/ethnicity.

After closing the Qualtrics survey, I cleaned the data for analysis. I exported the data from Qualtrics as an Excel file and then imported the file into IBM SPSS software (Version 29). I removed six survey responses because respondents did not answer any questions. This resulted in a final sample of 120. Table 1 reports the frequencies of respondents based on teacher type (i.e., general education, special education RSP, or special education SDC). A total of 103 general education teachers, 8 special education RSP teachers, and 9 special education SDC teachers responded to this survey. The sample has fewer RSP teachers than would be expected across elementary schools because, as of the data collection phase of this study, the school district had multiple special education RSP openings at several school sites. Figure 2 displays the years of experience of the survey respondents. The most common response was teachers with 6-10 years of experience (n = 25). The second most common response was teachers with 26+ years of experience (n = 23), and the third most common response was teachers with 16-20 years of experience (n = 22). The fewest number of respondents were teachers with 2-5 years of experience (n = 9). The data is like the national average for years of experience, with 37% with 10-20 years of experience, and 26% with more than 20 years' experience (COE, 2023).

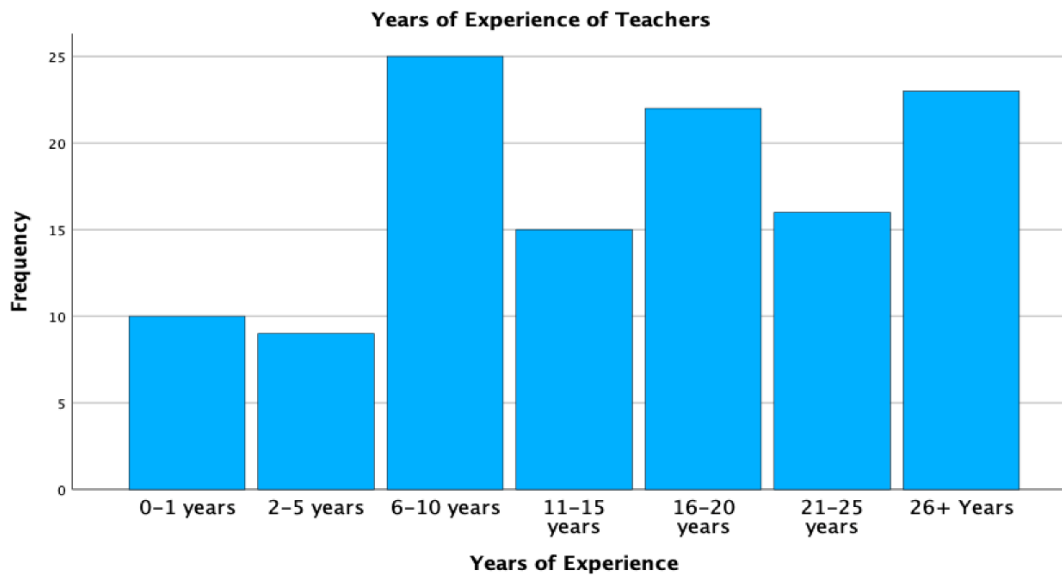
Table 1

Frequency of Teacher Type (General Education, Special Education RSP, Special Education SDC)

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
General Education Teacher	103	85.8	85.8
Special Education RSP Teacher	8	6.7	92.5
Special Education SDC Teacher	9	7.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Figure 2

Frequency of Teachers' Years of Experience Teaching



Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews in Phase Two

Phase two employed a semi-structured critical incident interview technique (Flanagan, 1954) supported the interpretation of the quantitative survey results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222). For this study, interviews provided an opportunity for participants to expand on responses to questions from the closed survey questions. Semi-structured critical incident interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) provided a qualitative lens to better understand the teachers' recollections of their interactions of principals' behavior regarding students receiving special education services and principals' EI. In other words, interview responses allowed me as a researcher to better understand how teachers perceived principals' EI across special education because they gave detailed descriptions of experiences. Teachers also described with clear examples the impact of principals' EI on them as teachers. The critical incident interview technique (Flanagan, 1954) allowed the participants to recall interactions specifically around discussions of students receiving special education services and the perceived support principals gave in those incidents.

In the interview protocol found in Appendix C students with disabilities were referenced as students with IEPs and, in some instances, teachers referred to students with ADHD, autism, and specific learning disability. In conducting my research specifically around teachers' perspectives of principals within the structures of special education, I used language specifically for students receiving special education services, which included a range of disabilities. The semi-structured interview provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their principals' communication and framing complex scenarios with special education students.

After emailing the anonymous survey, 11 teachers expressed interest in being contacted for semi-structured interviews. Of 11 teachers interested, I completed nine teacher interviews. All nine participants consented to being recorded and chose to be interviewed via Zoom. Otter.ai transcribed the interviews. Each semi-structured interview lasted 45-75 minutes in a one-on-one format conducted via Zoom. I recorded all interviews using Otter.ai and did not record video sessions to maintain participant confidentiality and to make participants feel more comfortable being recorded. Appendix C contains the semi-structured critical incident interview questions.

Description of Semi-structured Critical Incident Interview Participants in Phase Two

In phase two, nine participants self-selected into a semi-structured critical incident interview (Flanagan, 1954; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I used purposeful sampling, which allows individuals with a “unique ability to answer a study’s research questions” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) based on the choice to participate. I interviewed three general education teachers in Grade 1, Grade 4, and Grade 4/5, respectively. Additionally, four special education RSP teachers and two special education SDC teachers opted in for semi-structured interviews. Teachers represented nine of 16 different elementary schools from this school district.

Reflective Memos

After each interview, I wrote reflective memos about the interviews and specifically noted the participants’ affect, interest, and vulnerability in discussing individual experiences with teaching students who received special education services and experiences with the principals (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These memos allowed me to engage further in reflection throughout the interview process.

Data Collection Summary

For this study, I collected data in two phases. In phase one, I emailed an anonymous quantitative survey; in phase two, I conducted semi-structured critical incident interviews (Flanagan, 1954; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I also wrote reflective memos throughout the data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Reflective memos supported my meaning making and process between the connection of quantitative and qualitative data.

Data Analysis Plan

The analysis of data collected in this mixed-methods study determined trends, themes, and evidence to address the research questions. I used both quantitative and qualitative data analyses to answer both research questions.

1. How do teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence as related to the implementation of the structures of special education?

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Teacher's years of experience will predict teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence across EI scales such that teachers with more experience will have lower perceptions of their principals' EI. In my experience, the longer that teachers are in the profession, the higher expectations they have for leadership.

Hypothesis 1b: There will be variability within and between general versus special education teachers' responses; specifically, special education teachers will perceive principals' EI less favorably than would general education teachers. Because special education teachers have more expertise in special education than do their principals, their

expectations for principals' behavior would be higher than those of general education teachers.

2. How are teachers impacted by their perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the structures of special education?

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: IEP EI scales will positively predict teachers' responses to understanding the IEP process and services associated with IEPs because principals who are able to demonstrate EI within the IEP structure can support teachers' understanding of the process. (Question 8 from the survey).

Hypothesis 2b: Self-Awareness EI scales will positively predict teacher experience teaching students receiving special education services (Question 6 from the survey) and teacher confidence in support students receiving IEP services (Question 7 from the survey). Principal self-awareness can lead teachers to feel more supported by and trusting of their principals in working with students with IEPs.

Hypothesis 2c: Inclusion EI scales will positively predict teachers' role expectations for working with students receiving special education services because principals' agency with respect to inclusion can lead teachers to have a clear understanding of expectations around working with students with IEPs. (Question 9 from the survey).

To answer the first research question with quantitative analyses, I needed to understand how teachers perceived principals' four EI competencies across three special education structures. After preparing the data, I conducted analyses allowing me to report and to interpret how the teachers perceived the EI of principals across three special education structures. This

allowed me to answer the first research question by first examining descriptive and frequency statistics for all survey questions. Afterwards, I created 12 EI scales across the three special education structures; that is, I created scales for each of the four EI competencies across three EI scales to answer the first research question. The EI scales combined each set of questions for each EI competency for each structure. I produced means for Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Social Awareness, with three questions each and for Relationship Management with four questions. Next, I used the EI scales to run regression analysis, logistic regression models, and answer the second research question.

Survey Data Preparation for Descriptive and Inferential Analyses

Before conducting statistical analyses, I prepared the quantitative survey data by removing invalid responses and double-checking that values were appropriately assigned to responses. I conducted descriptive and inferential analyses “to obtain a more efficient and comprehensive summary of overall results” (Coolidge, 2021, p. 7). To understand more about the population sample, statistical displays gave me an initial understanding of the data collected. Descriptive statistics allowed me as the researcher to “get a good and quick conceptual picture of a large group of numbers” (p. 44) and, therefore, contribute to answering the research questions of this study. These analyses helped answer the first research question and report findings on teachers’ perceptions of principals’ EI across special education structures; this report included frequency tables, bar graphs, and histograms for EI questions 12 through 50. Displays illustrate overall teachers’ perceptions of principals’ EI across three special education structures. The 12 EI scales allowed me as the researcher to run inferential analyses and report findings on special education structure, EI competency, and teacher type.

Correlation

I used Pearson's r to assess the correlation between EI scales because it "measures the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables" (Coolidge, 2021, p. 189). Pearson's r correlation analysis allowed me to determine the strength of relationships between two variables from my quantitative survey. I was able to determine the strength of relationships between EI scales and special education structures and further identify relationships among variables. The findings are discussed in Chapter 4 and presented in detail in Table 4. Further, I used correlation analysis as an initial step in my data analysis processes to enable me to identify preliminary patterns and trends from the survey data.

ANOVA and Tukey's HSD

In addition, I conducted ANOVA tests to examine "whether there are significant differences between two or more groups means" (Coolidge, 2021, p. 288) by teacher type. Teacher type included general education, special education RSP, and special education SDC. I sought to understand the difference in perceived principal EI based on teacher type. ANOVA tested for statistically significant differences across general education, special education RSP, and special education SDC teachers, followed by Tukey's test, which is performed when "ANOVA null has been rejected...and multiple comparison tests help determine the pattern of significant difference across means" (p. 304). I conducted these tests to learn if teacher type made a difference in perceived EI of principals across three special education structures and to determine statistically significant differences across teacher type and EI scales. Results helped answer the first research question of how teachers perceived EI based on the structure of special education and specifically test Hypothesis 1b.

Simple Regression

I employed a simple regression model to determine if years of experience could predict EI scales. The simple regression model is a “statistical procedure where the focus is on the way one variable [y] varies based on how one other variable [x] varies” (Coolidge, 2021, p. 500). To understand more about years of experience as related to the EI scales, I used this procedure to help answer the first research question and whether this variable affected the perception of principals’ EI (see Hypothesis 1a).

Logistic Regression

A logistic regression model helped me answer the three hypotheses for research question two on how perceptions of principals’ EI impacted teachers. To note, there were 103 general education teachers, 8 special education RSP teachers, and 9 special education SDC teachers in my sample.

Qualitative Data Semi-Structured Critical Incident Interview Analyses

I used deductive coding for EI, specifically from Goleman’s (2020) four EI competencies, including Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management, as well as deductive codes for structure and agency (Miles et al., 2020). I identified trends of various experiences of teachers working with principals and reflecting on experiences working with school site principals for students receiving special education services. I also used a priori or deductive coding (Miles et al., 2020) to further understand the experiences of the participants when recalling events related to special education students, families, and interactions with the principal. Deductive codes from my conceptual framework included four EI competencies, structure-agency, and leadership. The deductive codes I used are displayed in

Table 2. I also used inductive coding, which Ravitch and Carl (2021) described as an “approach to coding [that] stays as close to the data as possible. For example, in vivo coding uses the participants’ words to label data segments instead of research-created words or phrases” (p. 265). Deductive codes are included in Table 3.

I stored data in one folder on my secure Google drive, as suggested by Miles et al. (2020). I created categories with the data and analyzed frequencies of words and phrases via Quirkos IS data analysis software. My quantitative analyses helped me better understand qualitative data. In other words, triangulation of data through quantitative and qualitative data collection strengthened the findings to both research questions. The lenses of structure-agency theory and EI competencies helped me understand the data related to teachers’ perceptions of principals’ agency and EI within special education structures.

Table 2*Deductive Codes for Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews*

Deductive Codes	Code (Abbreviation)	Description
Self-Awareness	SA	Describing feelings and actions
Self-Management	SM	Describing demeanor, calmness, positivity, asking questions, responses to changes
Social Awareness	SoA	Asking questions, learning more about others, listening attentively to others
Relationship Management	RM	Validating others' feelings, asking for support, resolving conflict, supportive of others
IEP Meeting Structure	IEP	Discussion of IEP meetings
Family Structure	Fam	Reference to talking about families of students with IEPs
Inclusion Structure	Incl	Reference to structures of inclusion for students with IEPs
Principal Agency	PA	Describing principals' decisions around choices for special education
Teacher Agency	TA	Describing teachers' decisions around choices for special education
COVID-19	Covid	Describing experience teaching during pandemic and coming back to in-person learning

Table 3*Inductive Codes for Semi-structured Critical Incident Interviews*

Inductive Codes	Code (Abbreviation)	Description
Isolation	Iso	Teachers describing working without support of other educational specialists
Feeling: Valued	FV	Teachers describing feeling valued by principal

Issues of Validity

To determine the validity of the research and potential barriers to interpreting the data, I embedded triangulation (Maxwell, 2013) into my collection strategy by using survey data, semi-structured interviews, and reflective memos. Further, I understood my positionality in this organization and acknowledged that my relationship with participants should not be omitted. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated, a researcher's positionality and social identity must be a consideration while conducting and evaluating research.

In this two-part study, participants were first selected for a survey based on their grade level and then opted in to participate in a semi-structured interview. As I conducted interviews, I completed participant validation strategies (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), also known as member checks, of the interviews; while analyzing the data, I confirmed whether my interpretations of the participants' thoughts were accurate. In the critical incident interviews, I sought to understand more about the teachers' experiences with both principals and students receiving special education services; therefore, I wanted participants to have an opportunity to react to their accounts from the interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Dialogic Engagement and Positionality

I conducted research in my school district, and I omitted my site of practice from this study. I also acknowledge that I have worked in this district for the past 10 years. Further, I went to school in this school district as a student, and my family still lives in the community. I wanted to acknowledge my positionality to underscore my connection in this dissertation work. While I had approval from the superintendent to conduct research, I also had a clear delineation of researcher versus role of school principal. For example, I contacted teachers via my University of Pennsylvania email, clearly stated the purpose of my research, and during interviews verbally reviewed participant consent again.

Given my positionality, it was crucial to engage in dialogic engagement frequently with people outside of the study site who could offer differing perspectives, impact my analysis, and challenge my initial interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This included individuals from my doctoral cohort, friends who currently work in special education outside of my school district, and family members who had different views being outside of education. I explicitly explained the goals of my study and the methods I used to collect data, and I continuously engaged in dialogue and analysis with them.

In working in this school district for the past 10 years, I occupied positions in various sites in different capacities. I did not include my school site where I serve as principal in the population sample for the survey and, thus, neither for the interviews. As I analyzed the data, I continued to remind myself of my positionality and how I was situated in relation to my research. I conducted interviews with teachers who worked with my principal colleagues; thus,

before interviews began, I established a clear understanding of speaking with them in my role as a researcher. My dialogical engagement partners helped me understand potential biases and offered me the space to be reflective as a practitioner in this research.

Finally, I recognized my positionality as a principal in this school district, an advocate for special education students and families, and a member of a doctoral program focused on becoming a research-practitioner. My role as principal enables me to advocate for students receiving special education students by implementing systems and structures to support students, staff, and families at my school. Further, my colleagues often reach out for support in working with students with special education services. I often advocate for students receiving special education services during district principal meetings, in interactions with special education leaders, and my supervisors. My position in this school district potentially limited my ability to conduct this research, because as a principal, I have often had challenging interactions with teachers around ability and access to general education settings for students receiving special education services. This was important for me to acknowledge while creating the survey instrument as well as before beginning interviews with teachers.

Chapter 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

This mixed-methods explanatory study used an anonymous survey to learn more about teachers' perspectives on principals' emotional intelligence (EI) as related to three different structures of special education: IEP meetings, school culture of Inclusion, and discussion about Families of students with IEPs. The two-phase mixed-methods survey and interview design allowed me to first use quantitative analyses for descriptive and inferential statistics, applying simple regression models, using logistic regression models, and determining relationships between teacher responses and perceived EI of principals. Second, I used deductive and inductive coding to analyze the data from qualitative semi-structured critical incident interviews to answer both research questions.

This chapter reports findings first from the quantitative data collected from the survey, followed by the findings from the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews. Both sets of findings are used to answer both research questions.

1. How do teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence as related to the implementation of the structures of special education?

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Teacher's years of experience negatively impact teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence across EI scales such that teachers with more experience will have lower perceptions of their principals' EI.

Hypotheses 1b: There will be variability within and between general versus special education teachers' responses; specifically, special education teachers will perceive principals' EI less favorably than would general education teachers.

2. How are teachers impacted by their perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the structures of special education?

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: IEP EI scales will positively predict teachers' responses to understanding the IEP process and services associated with IEPs. (Question 8 from the survey).

Hypothesis 2b: Self-Awareness EI scales will positively predict teacher experience teaching students receiving special education services (Question 6 from the survey) and teacher confidence in support students receiving IEP services (Question 7 from the survey).

Hypothesis 2c: Inclusion EI scales will positively predict teachers' role expectations for working with students receiving special education services. (Question 9 from the survey).

Quantitative Data Findings

Before answering both research questions through quantitative data analysis, I examined correlations across special education structures and EI competencies from the survey I created. I spent substantial time designing the survey, and I wanted to examine the correlations so that I could better understand the results.

Positive and Statistically Significant Correlation Across EI Scales and Special Education Structures

I examined the correlations across newly created EI scales to determine the strength and direction of relationships among EI scales within each of the special education structures. Table 4 displays the correlation coefficients across all scales across the three special education structures. All correlations between EI scales were statistically significant and moderate to

strong; that is, there is a moderate or strong correlation between each EI competency within the special education structures. The strongest correlation is between the Family Relationship Management Scale and Inclusion Relationship Management Scale with $r = .909$. The lowest positive correlation is between Family Self-Management Scale and IEP Self-Awareness Scale with $r = .437$. Positive and strongly correlated EI scales from the survey also indicated patterns across special education structures. For example, correlations within the IEP structure were lower (albeit still positive) than those within the Family and Inclusion structures. In other words, teachers responded slightly differently regarding their perceptions of principal EI across the three structures, and there was a weaker relationship between EI scales within the IEP meeting structure. In other words, responses within the IEP structure were more weakly correlated than those within the Inclusion and Family structure. The descriptive statistics also demonstrated that teachers' perceptions of principals EI are lower within the IEP meeting structure, than within the Family and Inclusion structures, indicating that teachers perceive the EI agency of principals differently, depending on the structure.

Table 4

Correlations

		IEP Self-Awareness Scale	IEP Self-Management Scale	IEP Social Awareness Scale	IEP Relationship Management Scale	Fam Self-Awareness Scale	Fam Self-Management Scale	Fam Social Awareness Scale	Fam Relationship Management Scale	Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	Inclusion Self-Management Scale	Inclusion Social Awareness Scale	Inclusion Relationship Management Scale
IEP Self-Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IEP Self-Management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.511***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	90	102	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IEP Social Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	.514***	.804***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	90	102	103	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IEP Relationship Management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.604***	.819***	.763***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	90	102	103	103	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fam Self-Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	.577***	.773***	.783***	.770***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	83	93	93	93	94	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fam Self-Management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.437***	.829***	.813***	.841***	.859***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	N	86	97	98	98	94	99	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fam Social Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	.469***	.833***	.846***	.780***	.806***	.850***	1	-	-	-	-	-
	N	86	97	98	98	94	99	99	-	-	-	-	-
Fam Relationship Management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.472***	.839***	.754***	.880***	.823***	.895***	.862***	1	-	-	-	-
	N	86	96	97	97	93	98	98	-	-	-	-	-
Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	.511***	.727***	.689***	.737***	.801***	.805***	.744***	.793***	1	-	-	-
	N	76	84	84	84	84	85	85	84	85	-	-	-
Inclusion Self-management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.443***	.805***	.697***	.805***	.841***	.872***	.803***	.880***	.821***	1	-	-
	N	76	85	86	86	83	86	86	85	82	87	-	-
Inclusion Social Awareness Scale	Pearson Correlation	.441***	.795***	.700***	.792***	.788***	.850***	.865***	.881***	.757***	.861***	1	-
	N	74	84	85	85	81	84	84	83	80	83	85	-
Inclusion Relationship Management Scale	Pearson Correlation	.499***	.792***	.728***	.871***	.805***	.852***	.757***	.909***	.781***	.882***	.841***	1
	N	75	84	85	85	81	84	84	83	80	84	83	85

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). ***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

Research Question 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

After correlation analyses, I answered the first research questions with both quantitative and qualitative data for the follow question:

1. How do teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence as related to the implementation of the structures of special education?

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Teacher's years of experience negatively impact teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence across EI scales such that teachers with more experience will have lower perceptions of their principals' EI.

Hypotheses 1b: There will be variability within and between general versus special education teachers' responses; specifically, special education teachers will perceive principals' EI less favorably than will general education teachers, as mentioned in the previous section.

Quantitative Finding 1: Teachers Overall Have Positive Perceptions of Principals' EI Across Three Special Education Structures

Overall, results from the EI competencies indicated positive perceptions of principals' EI across three special education structures; in other words, the data skewed left. Figures 3, 4, and 5, illustrate the distributions of responses for the three special education structures and include each of the four EI competencies within each structure. Positive indicators from survey questions included *somewhat agree* (3) and *strongly agree* (4). Negative indicators from survey questions included *somewhat disagree* (2) and *strongly disagree* (1). Figures 3, 4, and 5 display the median for each EI competency with a solid, horizontal black line within the box of the interquartile range containing responses between the first and third quartiles. For each competency scale, the

median is at 3.0 or above illustrating the mostly positive responses of principals’ perceived EI across three structures and across four competencies.

Figure 3

Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management EI Competency Scales Within the IEP Structure

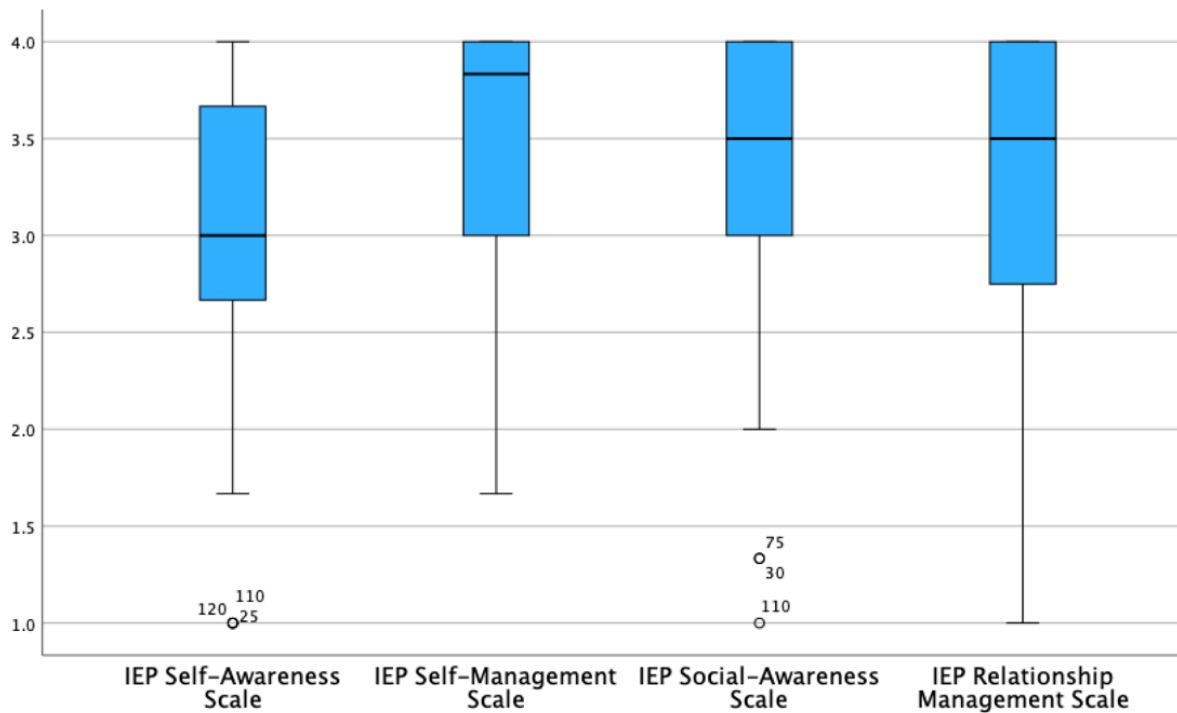


Figure 3 displays the distributions of the EI competencies scales within the IEP special education structure. Of note is the range of responses within the IEP Self-Awareness and IEP Social Awareness EI competencies. Several outliers in the responses contributed to a lower median in the EI scale score for IEP Self-Awareness and IEP Social Awareness. Five teachers reported lower perceptions of principals’ EI in the IEP structure, reporting “strongly disagree” for Self-Awareness and Social Awareness. The teachers who responded “strongly disagree” across all the special education structures had notably negative experiences and negative EI perceptions with their principal(s) for students receiving special education services within the IEP Self-Awareness and IEP Social Awareness Scale.

Figure 4

*Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management
EI Competency Scales Within the Family Structure*

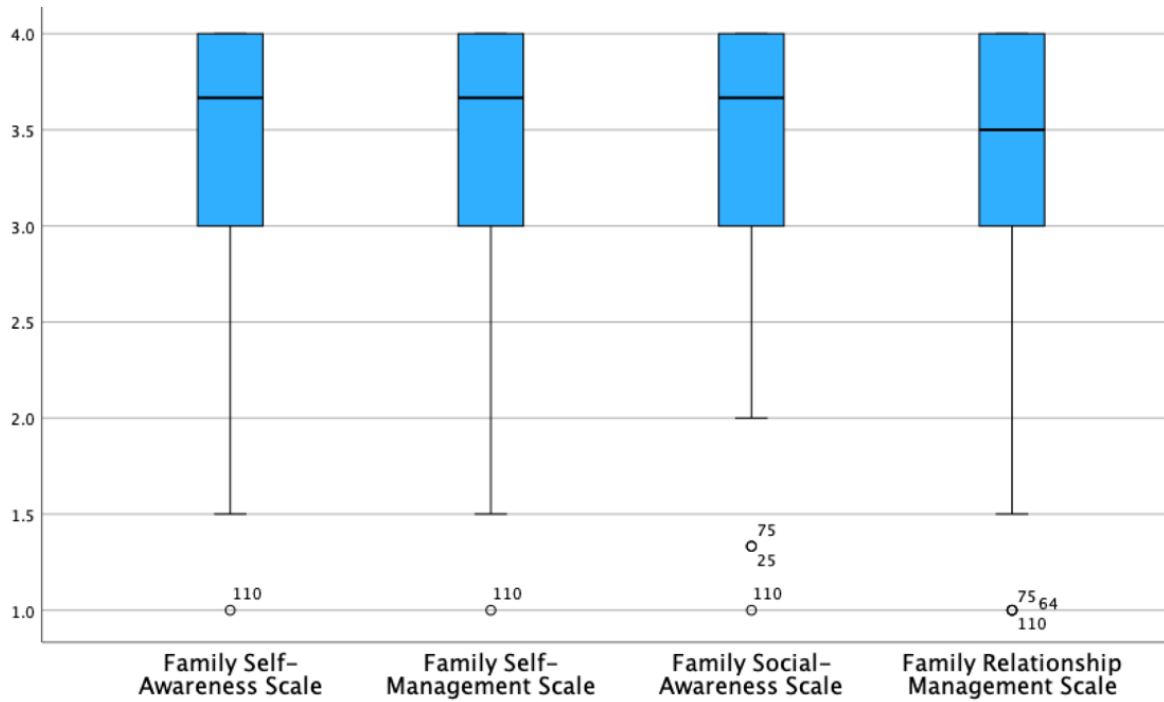


Figure 4 displays EI competency scale scores within the Family special education structure. The median and distributions are similar across the competencies. In other words, teachers report their principals having very high EI in the Family structure on average; however, there is also variation in teacher responses. In each EI competency, one or more teachers reported very low perceptions of principals' EI (i.e., strongly disagree). Without these negative outliers, teachers reported perceptions of principals' EI would have been even higher. Further, one teacher had negative perceptions of principal EI across all structures and EI competencies, suggesting that their experience with their principal was extremely negative regarding students receiving special education services.

Figure 5

Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management EI Competency Scales within the Inclusion Structure

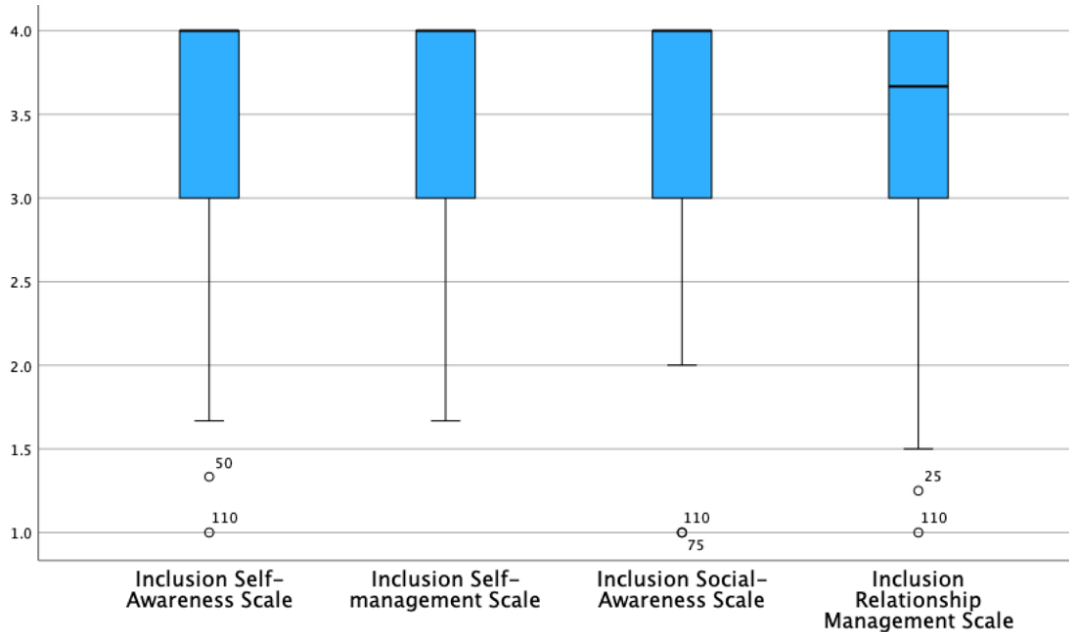


Figure 5 displays EI competency scales within the Inclusion special education structure. The distributions are similar for each EI scale. In the Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management, two teachers had negative perceptions of principals' EI. Again, one teacher reported negatively across three of four EI competencies, suggesting that overall, they had a notably negative experience with their principal regarding special education and inclusion. One teacher from Figure 5 consistently reported negative experiences by being an outlier in three of four EI Inclusion scales.

Quantitative Finding 2: Teachers Perceive Principals' EI Differently, Depending on the Special Education Structure

Descriptive statistics indicated that teachers did not perceive each EI competency as the same, nor did teachers perceive each the same within various structures of special education.

Moreover, findings suggested that within this school district, the teachers' reported observed agency of principals differed depending on the structure and EI competency. Notably, principals' behaviors are perceived different depending on the structure of special education and therefore this is an area of learning for principals to make improvements and professional development targeted support.

Three of the lowest means for EI competencies are within the IEP Structure

Three of four IEP competencies, IEP Self-Awareness ($m = 3.08$), IEP Social Awareness ($m = 3.28$), and IEP Relationship Management ($m = 3.28$), have the lowest means across all 12 scales. The Family Relationship Management Scale ($m = 3.27$) also has one of the lowest means reported. In other words, on average, the principals in this school district displayed the lowest EI competency in the IEP structure, as compared to Family and Inclusion structures. Descriptive statistics for all 12 competencies are presented twice to highlight two trends; Table 5 displays EI competencies in ascending order based on mean. The findings suggest that the IEP meeting structure is an area of improvement for principals' EI.

Teachers perceived IEP Self-Awareness lower than all other EI competencies. When asked to report on principals expressing feelings about participating in the IEP meeting and process, and principals expressing their values about the culture of special education clearly in meetings. Additionally, teachers perceive IEP Social Awareness within the fourth lowest EI competencies and when asked to report on principals' listening attentively, offering support, and asking questions to learn more about the student and family as well as the IEP process. Further, teachers perceived IEP Relationship Management within the fourth lowest EI competencies and when asked to report on principals' asking for support from educational specialists (if needed),

validating teacher feelings, resolving conflict, and being supportive of the special education teachers and team.

The lowest EI competency for Family and Inclusion structures is Relationship Management. Table 6 displays the means of the EI scales by each special education structure and then by ascending order of average response. Self-Awareness competency is the lowest in the IEP structure ($m = 3.08$); however, in Family and Inclusion structures, the lowest perceived EI scale was Relationship Management ($m = 3.27$ and $m = 3.35$, respectively). This implies that principals may need support with relationship management strategies with families and the Inclusion special education structure. Principals may need Relationship Management strategies to include behaviors such as asking for support, validating feelings, resolving conflict, and being supportive of special education teams. Further, principals' Relationship Management competency within Family and Inclusion structures may influence interactions with teachers and be an area of growth. Improving a principal's Relationship Management competency may improve collaboration with teachers, families, and support students receiving special education services in classrooms. A principal with strong Relationship Management EI contributes to a positive school culture and supportive environment for special education structures.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Competency Scales in Ascending Order*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IEP Self-Awareness Scale	90	1	4	3.08	0.787
Fam Relationship Management Scale	98	1	4	3.27	0.808
IEP Social Awareness Scale	103	1	4	3.28	0.746
IEP Relationship Management Scale	103	1	4	3.28	0.726
Fam Social Awareness Scale	99	1	4	3.34	0.763
Fam Self-Awareness Scale	94	1	4	3.35	0.729
Inclusion Relationship Management Scale	85	1	4	3.35	0.788
Fam Self-Management Scale	99	1	4	3.41	0.690
Inclusion Social Awareness Scale	85	1	4	3.43	0.772
Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	85	1	4	3.44	0.742
IEP Self-Management Scale	102	2	4	3.50	0.641
Inclusion Self-management Scale	87	2	4	3.51	0.619

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Scales in Ascending Order by Special Education Structure

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IEP Self-Awareness Scale	90	1	4	3.08	0.787
IEP Relationship Management Scale	103	1	4	3.28	0.726
IEP Social Awareness Scale	103	1	4	3.28	0.746
IEP Self-Management Scale	102	2	4	3.50	0.641
Fam Relationship Management Scale	98	1	4	3.27	0.808
Fam Social Awareness Scale	99	1	4	3.34	0.763
Fam Self-Awareness Scale	94	1	4	3.35	0.729
Fam Self-Management Scale	99	1	4	3.41	0.69
Inclusion Relationship Management Scale	85	1	4	3.35	0.788
Inclusion Social Awareness Scale	85	1	4	3.43	0.772
Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	85	1	4	3.44	0.742
Inclusion Self-Management Scale	87	2	4	3.51	0.619

Self-Management EI competency was highest across all three special education structures. Teachers reported that the Self-Management EI competency was the highest in all structures: IEP, Family, and Inclusion. Mean results from each special education structure (IEP Self-Management, $m = 3.50$; Family Self-Management, $m = 3.41$; Inclusion Self-Management, $m = 3.51$). The findings suggest that principals' have stronger skills for Self-Management including keeping a positive disposition, remaining calm, and responding to changes. Principals' Self-Management strengths may set positive examples for teachers and support an overall supportive school climate for special education.

Based on my experience, I also wanted to understand the relationship, if any, between teachers' years of experience and their perceptions of principals' EI.

Therefore, I also tested the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: Teacher's years of experience negatively impact teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence across EI scales such that teachers with more experience will have lower perceptions of their principals' EI.

Years of Experience did not Predict EI Scales

To address research question 1 and my hypothesis that teachers' years of experience impacted perceptions of principals' EI across special education structures, I used a simple regression analysis. However, teachers' years of experience did not predict EI scales in any of the 12 simple regression models. Therefore, with increased years of teaching experience, there was no predicted change in teachers' perception of principals' EI. The variation in teachers' views of principals' EI is not explained by their years teaching. The findings also suggest that regardless of years of experience, teachers may have similar experiences working with their principals which may also contribute to the overall collaboration and culture around special education at the school sites.

Quantitative Finding 3: Teacher Perceptions of Principals' EI are Impacted by Teacher Type Across Special Education Structures

The second hypothesis to answer research question 1 was:

Hypothesis 1b: There will be variability within and between general versus special education teachers' responses; specifically, special education teachers will perceive principals' EI less favorably than would general education teachers.

Figures 6, 7, and 8 display the distribution of responses by special education structure and type of teacher (i.e., general education, special education RSP, and special education SDC). The boxplots visually represent teachers' perceptions of principals' EI among teacher type and special education structures. Further, the boxplots display outliers, when they exist, and allow for visual comparisons among teacher types by EI scales.

Figure 6 displays the range of perceptions within the IEP structure by type of teacher. As can be seen in the figure, special education SDC teachers displayed the least range of distribution within the IEP Self-Awareness Scale, indicating that special education SDC teachers have similar perceptions of principals' EI. However, an outlier among special education SDC teachers suggest that this person had less than a favorable experience in the areas of IEP Social Awareness and IEP Relationship Management with their principal compared with their peers. Further, a deeper understanding of why special education SDC teachers reported less favorable ratings for IEP Social Awareness and IEP Relationship Management would help in the design of principal training for IEP meetings.

Figure 6

Distribution of IEP EI Scales by Type of Teacher

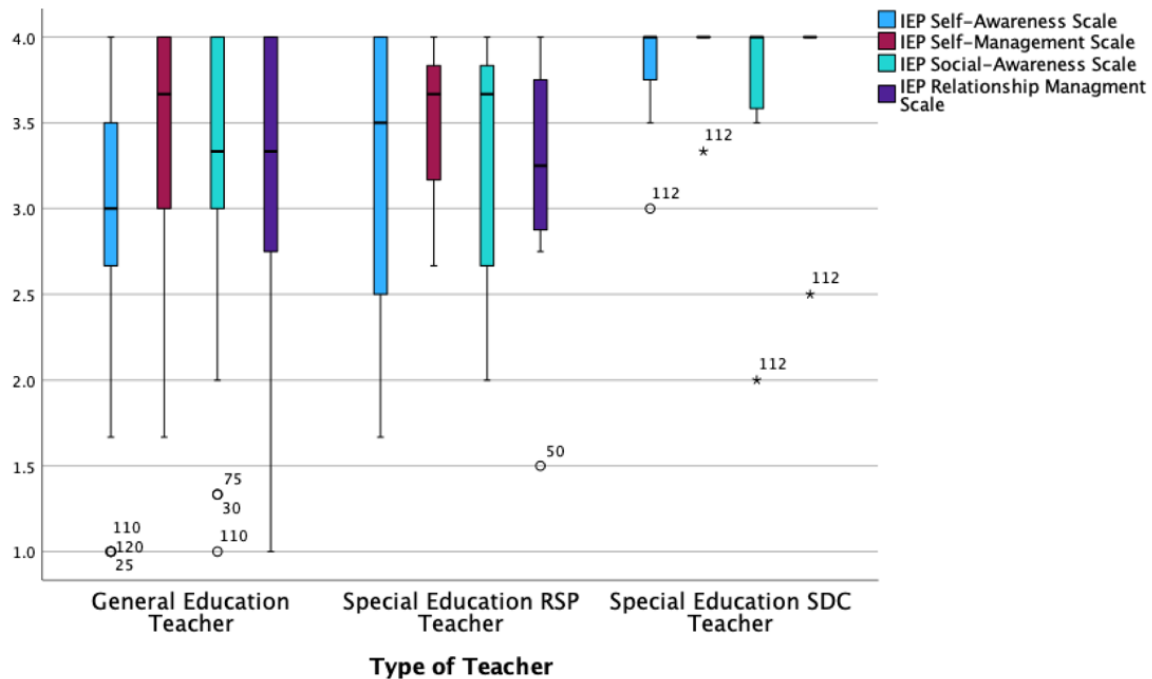


Figure 7 displays the distribution of Family EI scales categorized by type of teacher.

General education teachers had more negative outliers on this set of scales compared to special education RSP and special education SDC teachers. In other words, more general education teachers had extreme negative experiences than did the others. On the other hand, special education RSP teachers had varied perceptions across all four EI competencies, indicating diverse experiences with principals' EI. In contrast, special education SDC teachers had less range in their responses, and overall reported very positive perceptions of principals' EI within the Family structure. There are diverse perspectives of teachers based on their current teaching assignment and further, a deeper understanding of why special education RSP teachers had varied distribution of their perceptions of principals' EI across all four competencies would support principal training. Overall, the findings demonstrate the variation in teacher perspectives based on their teaching assignment within the Family structure.

Figure 7

Distribution of Family EI Scales by Type of Teacher

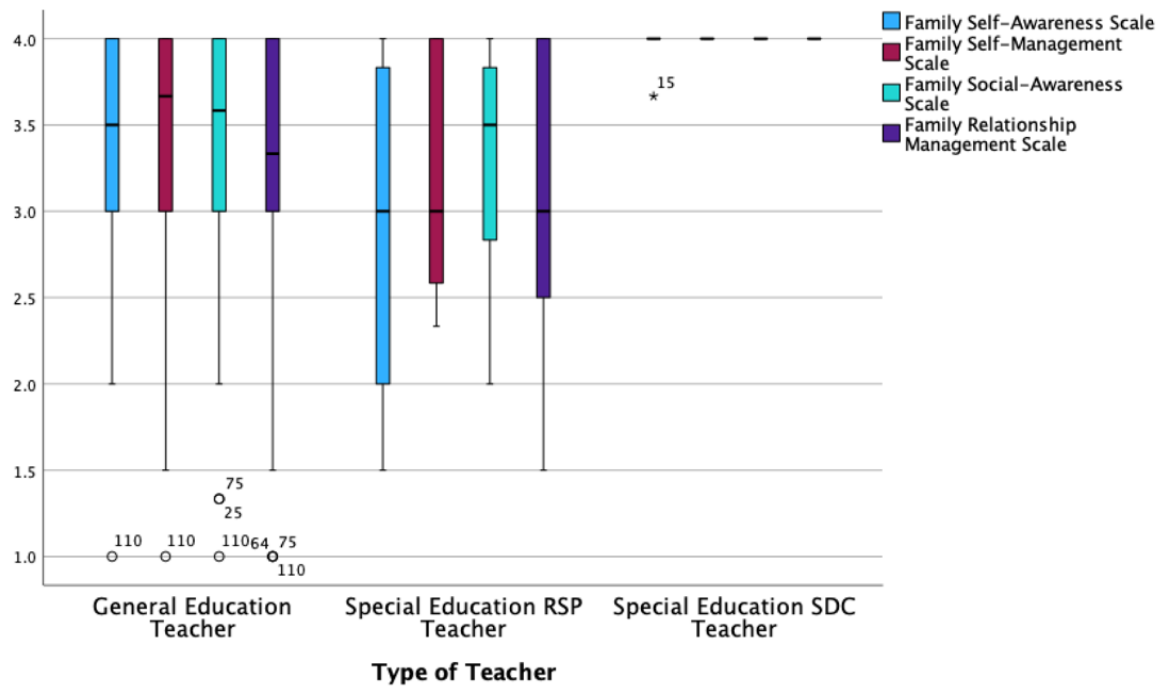


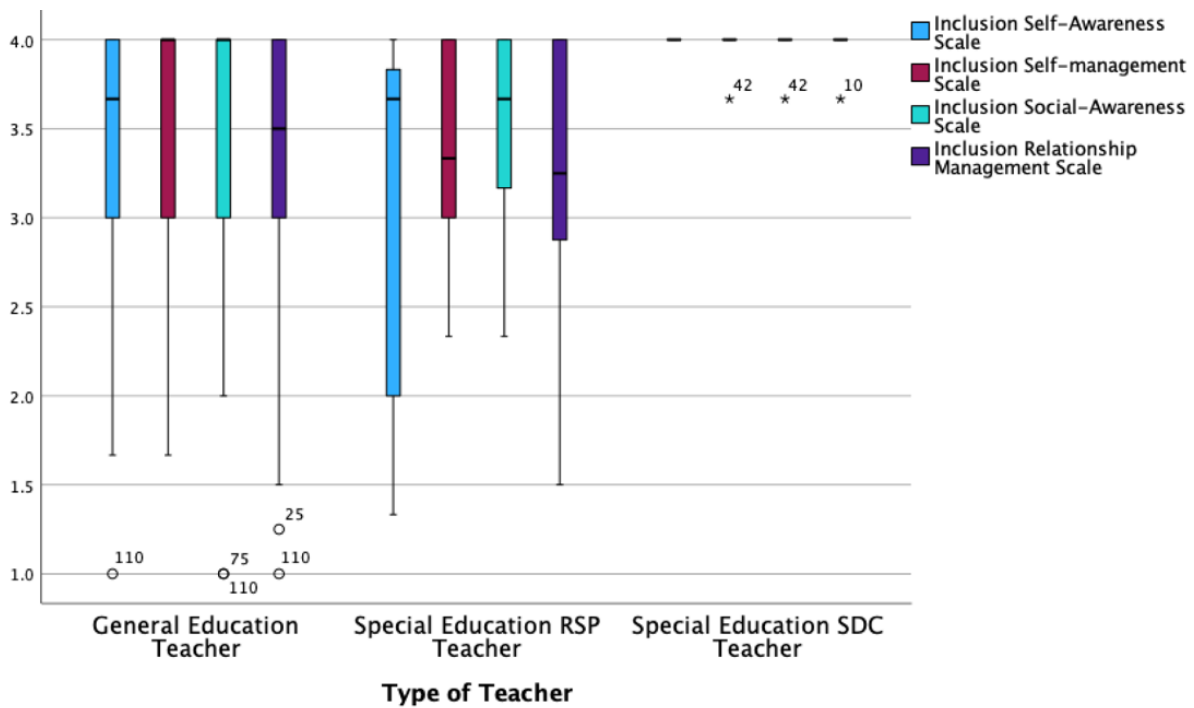
Figure 8 displays the distributions of teacher responses to Inclusion special education structure by type of teacher. Special education RSP teachers had the largest distributions for Inclusion Self-Awareness and Inclusion Relationship Management, indicating more varied perceptions within these areas. There is a larger number of general education teachers that responded to this survey, and noticeably more outliers from this group indicating some general education teachers' very negative perceptions of principals' EI within the Inclusion structure. Again, another participant reported negative perceptions across three of four EI Inclusion structures, reiterating that one general education teacher had very negative experiences with their principal.

Special education SDC teachers' responses had smaller ranges and higher perceptions of principals EI across all four EI scales, suggesting more consistently positive views of their

principals' emotional intelligence. This finding suggests that the continued negative outlier from one of the general education teachers is an area to be addressed among principals and understand more clearly in the relationship between principals and general education teachers. Addressing the relationship between principals and general education staff within the context of special education structures can support school culture and improve principal-teacher interactions. This can be done through staff trainings, setting clear expectations, and proactively building relationships.

Figure 8

Distribution of Inclusion EI Scales by Type of Teacher



A one-way ANOVA was used to test for mean differences in perception of principals' EI across teacher types. Table 7 displays the ANOVA results testing for mean differences in the EI scales across teacher types (i.e., general education, special education RSP, special education SDC).

Table 7

ANOVA Results Testing for Mean Differences in EI Scales Across Teacher Types (i.e., General Education, Special Education RSP), Special Education SDC)

		df	F	P-value
IEP Self-Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	4.312	.016*
	Within Groups	87		
	Total	89		
IEP Self-Management Scale	Between Groups	2	1.836	.165
	Within Groups	99		
	Total	101		
IEP Social Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	1.054	.353
	Within Groups	100		
	Total	102		
IEP Relationship Management Scale	Between Groups	2	2.445	.092
	Within Groups	100		
	Total	102		
Fam Self-Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	4.224	.018*
	Within Groups	91		
	Total	93		
Fam Self-Management Scale	Between Groups	2	1.405	.250
	Within Groups	96		
	Total	98		
Fam Social Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	1.286	.281
	Within Groups	96		
	Total	98		
Fam Relationship Management Scale	Between Groups	2	2.171	.120
	Within Groups	95		
	Total	97		
Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	4.686	.012*
	Within Groups	82		
	Total	84		
Inclusion Self-management Scale	Between Groups	2	1.718	.186
	Within Groups	84		
	Total	86		
Inclusion Social Awareness Scale	Between Groups	2	1.269	.287
	Within Groups	82		
	Total	84		
Inclusion Relationship Management Scale	Between Groups	2	1.731	.183
	Within Groups	82		
	Total	84		

*Statistically significant mean differences between two or more groups at the $p < .05$ level.

My hypothesis that there would be a difference in perceptions of principals' EI across special education structures by teacher type was partially confirmed; however, my hypothesis

about which teacher type would report higher principal EI was incorrect. I hypothesized that general education teachers would report higher perceptions of principals' EI than would special education RSP teachers and special education SDC teachers. I hypothesized this difference because I believed that the greater expertise of special education teachers might contribute to a lower reported EI from special education teachers because principals do not typically have extensive expertise in special education and therefore might not be able to adequately support special education teachers. Table 8 displays multiple comparisons across the means for IEP Self-Awareness, Family Self-Awareness, and Inclusion Self-Awareness.

To further answer research question 1 and given statistically significant differences between some groups' means indicated by the ANOVA results, I used Tukey's HSD to further examine the mean differences across three teacher types. Pairwise comparisons of the means using Tukey's HSD revealed a statistically significant difference between general education teachers and special education SDC teachers with respect to the IEP Self-Awareness structure ($p < .012$). On average, special education SDC teachers reported perceptions of principals' EI within the IEP Self-Awareness Scale .82 scale points higher than general education teachers did. Pairwise comparisons of the means using Tukey's HSD revealed statistically significant differences between special education RSP teachers and special education SDC teachers in the Family Self-Awareness structure ($p < .013$). On average, special education SDC teachers reported perceptions of principals' EI within the Family Self-Awareness Scale 1.057 scale points higher than special education RSP teachers did. Pairwise comparisons of the means using Tukey's HSD revealed statistically significant differences between special education teachers RSP and special education SDC teachers in the Inclusion Self-Awareness structure ($p < .008$). On average, special education SDC teachers reported perceptions of principals' EI within the

Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale of 1.125 scale points higher than special education RSP teachers did. This finding contradicts my hypothesis and shows that special education SDC teachers reported more positive perceived interactions with their principals regarding Inclusion and EI than general and special education RSP teachers. This finding provides valuable insights regarding special education SDC teacher experiences working with their principals. It is important to note that not every school site in this district has SDC classrooms. Therefore, there is a need to focus on understanding principal-teacher interactions between special education SDC teachers and principals in the context of Inclusion in schools.

Table 8

Multiple Comparisons Across Means for IEP Self-Awareness, Family Self-Awareness, and Inclusion Self-Awareness

Tukey HSD						95% Confidence Interval	
Dependent Variable	Teacher Type (a)	Teacher Type (b)	Mean Difference (a-b)	Std. Error	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
IEP Self-Awareness Scale	General Education Teacher	Special Education RSP Teacher	-.178	.300	.824	-.89	.54
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-.824	.282	.012*	-1.50	-.15
	Special Education RSP Teacher	General Education Teacher	.178	.300	.824	-.54	.89
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-.646	.393	.233	-1.58	.29
	Special Education SDC Teacher	General Education Teacher	.824	.282	.012*	.15	1.50
		Special Education RSP Teacher	.646	.393	.233	-.29	1.58
Family Self-Awareness Scale	General Education Teacher	Special Education RSP Teacher	.448	.261	.205	-.17	1.07
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-.608	.278	.078	-1.27	.05
	Special Education RSP Teacher	General Education Teacher	-.448	.261	.205	-1.07	.17
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-1.057	.365	.013*	-1.93	-.19
	Special Education SDC Teacher	General Education Teacher	.608	.278	.078	-.05	1.27
		Special Education RSP Teacher	1.057	.365	.013*	.19	1.93
Inclusion Self-Awareness Scale	General Education Teacher	Special Education RSP Teacher	.568	.266	.089	-.07	1.20
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-.557	.282	.125	-1.23	.12
	Special Education RSP Teacher	General Education Teacher	-.568	.266	.089	-1.20	.07
		Special Education SDC Teacher	-1.125	.368	.008*	-2.00	-.25
	Special Education SDC Teacher	General Education Teacher	.557	.282	.125	-.12	1.23
		Special Education RSP Teacher	1.125	.368	.008*	.25	2.00

*Statistically significant mean differences between two groups at the $p < .05$ level.

Summary of Quantitative Findings for Research Question 1

Through quantitative analyses, I examined teachers' perceptions of principals' EI across three special education structures. Teachers perceive principals' emotional intelligence (EI) to be lower with respect to IEPs compared to other structures of special education. Three of the four

lowest mean scores for EI competencies were within the IEP structure, indicating an area for improvement for principals.

Additionally, perceptions of principals' EI differed by teacher type for IEP self-awareness, Family Self-Awareness, and Inclusion Self-Awareness. Special education SDC teachers overall had higher perceptions of principals' EI in comparison with general and special education RSP teachers. For example, special education SDC teachers had the highest perceptions of principals' EI across Self-Awareness competency and special education structures. These findings indicate the importance of teachers' perceptions of principals' EI across special education structures and suggest areas of growth for principal across structures.

Qualitative Data Findings to Support Research Question 1

Nine semi-structured critical incident interviews analyzed with deductive and inductive coding allowed me to answer both research questions from this study. Moreover, the qualitative findings from teacher interviews supported the quantitative findings in the following areas based on the research questions.

Qualitative Finding 1: Teachers Overall Have Positive Perceptions of Principals' EI Across Three Special Education Structures

Findings support the quantitative analyses that overall teachers have positive perceptions of principals' EI across three special education structures. General education, special education RSP, and special education SDC teachers reinforced quantitative analyses of positive perceptions and gave examples of interactions between principals and teachers. For example, overall teachers recalled positive experiences in working with their principals across special education structures.

A special education RSP teacher shared their experience with their principal:

I don't feel unsupported. So, it's hard to think like okay, what are other ways I feel support because a part of it is just kind of built into the whole community. You know,

when you have this positive strong community, you don't really think about like, oh what's so good about it? (Participant 5, Interview, December 2022)

Similarly, a special education SDC teacher described the positive perceptions of her principal when promoting inclusive practices:

Inclusion for me, if you put special day class kids in [general education], most of them need support and it's not just the [kids] that can benefit from that support, it is also the rest of the class. And [the principal] understood that and so we constantly had to talk and find solutions. [The principal] was really so great... [the principal] was always there, just listening... especially during the pandemic. [Principal would say] text me if you need me. [The principal] is that kind of person. [The principal] would not just interrupt or leave you by yourself [in meetings] (Participant 3, Interview, December 2022)

These examples from special education RSP and special education SDC teachers' experiences highlight consistent and positive support provided by their principals when working with students receiving special education services. Furthermore, a general education teacher emphasized, "That simple act of having the door open and inviting me in when I approached them [to discuss a student with an IEP] also made me feel like I was heard" (Participant 7, Interview, December 2022). On the other hand, it is worth noting that general education teachers shared an area of perceived growth for principals in the types of support needed:

I feel supported and heard, but in the physical moves of teaching [students with IEPs] I don't feel like I have a ton of that...when [principals] go to those larger principal meetings, I don't know what [principals] do, but bring that point up... [say] our teachers are feeling like they need more support in [special education]... (Participant 7, Interview, December 2022)

In contrast to the examples of special education SDC and special education RSP teachers, the general education teacher suggested an area of advocacy by principals at the district level on behalf of teachers. Participant 7 also shared that more concrete support is needed for teachers that extends beyond being an active listener by principals. This suggests that principals may need to work on providing more targeted support to teachers when working with students receiving

special education services. Further, this finding supports that overall, in this school district teachers have positive perceptions of principals across structures of special education.

Qualitative Finding 2: Teachers Perceive Principals' EI Differently, Depending on the Special Education Structure

Findings support the quantitative analyses that three of the lowest means for EI competencies are within the IEP Structure. Principal Self-Management is the highest perceived EI competency in all three structures, and the lowest EI competency for Family and Inclusion structures is Relationship Management.

Teachers recalled principals having distinct roles within IEP meetings. At times, principals were notetakers and facilitators; therefore, teachers perceived principals' EI differently within IEP meetings. For example, an RSP teacher recalled:

So, if [the principal is] facilitating, it's really actually guiding the meeting...because it's all set up as an agenda essentially.... So that helps, I think, with facilitation if [the principal] can look at something and go 'Okay, now we're going to talk about this' because they see it in the notes page. I think it just helps with facilitation, and they're [the principal] usually pretty good about it just going along with things. (Participant 5, Interview, December 2022)

A general education teacher reflected that their "[principal] would chime in a little bit but mostly [the principal] was the notetaker in the beginning" (Participant 9, Interview, November 2022).

Another participant described the principals' role of "naming that [they] are on the computer taking notes...and mostly leading through the agenda" (Participant 7, Interview, December 2022).

In each of these reflections, principals did not lead the IEP meetings but rather allowed the IEP team to lead them while the principal's supported facilitation. Thus, the teachers' lower perceptions of EI scales within IEP meetings may be related to the agency principals displayed in this structure. As this study sought to understand more how teachers perceived principals' EI

across special education structures; in these examples, teachers reported that principals had lower EI based on their assumed role in IEP meetings. In these specific instances, teachers remembered the principals' role as notetaker, which contributed to less verbal participation from the principal. Both general education and special education teachers recounted principals having less agency with EI in IEP meetings specifically.

In another instance, a special education SDC teacher reflected that a principal didn't have meaningful input [in the IEP meeting] to say, which was kind of sad, or I think the one thing was a very positive IEP where the parents were talking about like how wonderful we are and grateful they were for [IEP team] ...and [the principal] cut them off. (Participant 1, Interview, December 2022)

This participant remembered a negative experience associated with their principal during an IEP meeting in an interaction with parents and themselves, and further stated, "It's important to hear parents on their complaints, it's nice to hear them when they want to tell us we're doing a good job" (Participant 1, Interview, December 2022). The participant remembered the interaction as negative, and wondered why the principal would respond in this manner during the IEP meeting.

These stories of principals' behaviors and behaviors within IEP meetings contributed to teachers' perceptions of both agency and EI within the IEP structure. Teachers described distinct differences in the behaviors of principals with lower perceived EI in IEP meetings, for example note taking versus leading the meeting. The variations in teachers' perceptions of principals' behavior during IEP meetings suggest an area of learning for principals. Further, district standardization of expectations and training before, during, and after IEP meetings may support meaningful participation by principals and provide support to the IEP team members. Principals' nuanced understanding of IEP meetings, as well as their observed behaviors, can contribute to more effective support for special education teams.

Qualitative findings also support quantitative analyses that Self-Management was the perceived highest EI competency across all three special education structures. Teachers remembered instances of principals displaying Self-Management EI, as evidenced by being supportive and working collaboratively, adjusting to changes, and remaining calm to be helpful to teachers. Interview participants described principals' Self-Management as "Each principal you can pick up on how they're feeling about SpEd by just their actions and the way they speak to you" (Participant 6, Interview, November 2022). Another participant recalled that "they [principals] work with us. They work with me.... They've [principals] been there when things are going, you know, sideways, and been there to support" (Participant 5, Interview, December 2022). Further, another general education teacher recalled, "[The principal] was definitely a great support and a sounding board. We can problem solve some ideas together. I'm typically a person that is all about problem solving and so, like if I go to somebody else, it's because I'm really stuck" (Participant 9, Interview, November 2022). Teachers within this school district perceived principals' Self-Management as the biggest strength across EI competencies and recalled specific examples of principals displaying Self-Management across special education structures. Teachers' perceptions of principals Self-Management competency across IEP meetings, Family, and Inclusion structures of special education reflect principals' ability to be collaborative and adjust to change. This is a further indicator of principals' strengths and can positively impact principal-teacher interactions when discussing students receiving special education services. Self-Management should be acknowledged as a strength for principals within this school district, with positive feedback given to school leaders, suggesting it is an important strength to build in principals in general.

Qualitative findings additionally supported quantitative analyses that the lowest EI competency for Family and Inclusion structures is Relationship Management. A special education RSP teacher recalled how a principal's ability to understand what occurs outside of IEP meetings, with Inclusion structures, impacted the interactions between the teacher and principal during the IEP meeting. The special education RSP teacher recalled a principal's ability to bring perspectives into meetings, build teacher confidence, and validate teacher feelings. A principals' Relationship Management strength may empower teachers and principal-teacher interactions can improve. The special education RSP teacher shared:

When you see that principal that knows your IEP, even at the surface level, sure they don't need to know every detail, but they know kind of those big pieces and they can reflect on those in a meeting and you're not the only voice. It really does go a long way for supporting your confidence like, yeah, this was a well-written IEP because the principal is looking at these pieces on the playground or in the classroom when they observed. Yeah, I think you just get a sense for it...It's the emotional piece is so hard because you either are able to read emotions well as a person or you aren't, and I think that those basic sorts of things that they teach our friends on the spectrum, like when you see this cue, it means this and seeing those pieces from someone that you're supposed to depend on that gives you more competence and more trust in your own ability....
(Participant 6, Interview, November 2022)

In this instance, the special education RSP teacher recounted how a principal's ability to understand what happens outside of an IEP meeting—for example, with students with inclusion—impacts the relationship with the special education RSP teacher. They further acknowledged that the principals' confidence supported them in their abilities to complete their job working with students with IEPs. In another example, a general education teacher described the connection between the principals' ability to support them with students receiving special education services:

As a general education teacher in a classroom when I have students in there day to day, I actually don't feel super supported. And I don't think it's like the fault of principals, necessarily. I think it's lack of preparation from teachers in general. But also, I mean, I guess there could be a push for, I don't know from principals to advocate a little

stronger.... We have so much PD [Professional Development] around a lot of different things. And I feel like we never have professional development around how to support students with IEPs.... (Participant 7, Interview, December 2022)

This general education teacher's reflection of a lack of principal advocacy contributed to feelings of less support for students with IEPs in her classroom. In other words, the principal's ability for relationship management, specifically within the Inclusion structure, may benefit from reflective practices in relationships with teachers. This example provides another perspective in that the principals' role extends beyond simple tasks of only showing up to the IEP meeting, or only visiting the general education classroom without providing further support.

In another example, a special education SDC teacher reflected on perceived strong relationship management in their interaction with the principal around Inclusion and Family relationships. They reflected, "Maybe we can go back to where we were during the pandemic. Give that [the principal supported] 10 minutes during staff meeting with information about special ed" (Participant 8, Interview, December 2022). This example showed principals' agency was positive with the support of special education teams and teachers on site. The reflection of the special education SDC teacher further reinforces the perceived agency of principals from the perspective of teachers. Teachers see principals as leaders with the ability to choose topics during staff meetings, set the tone for actively engaging with staff, and supporting special education across their school sites. Finally, these qualitative examples provided a view of principals' Relationship Management across structures of special education. Principals can improve their Relationship Management competency in the Family and Inclusive structures of special education. A targeted approach to support principals may improve principal-teacher interactions when discussing students receiving special education services and inclusive structure practices at school.

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings for Research Question 1

Special education SDC and special education RSP teachers perceived interactions with principals as important and impactful to their work with students receiving special education services. The quantitative data revealed that special education RSP teachers, compared to special education SDC teachers, perceived lower EI of principals' Self-Awareness in Family and Inclusion structures. This suggests that principals may benefit from reflection on their interactions with special education RSP teachers in interactions about inclusion.

In each qualitative interview, special education SDC and special education RSP teachers described the impact of a principal's self-awareness within the Inclusion structure of special education. This further indicated that different EI competencies impact confidence and support received by teachers. In this school district, special education SDC teachers reported higher perspectives of principals' self-awareness than special education RSP teachers, and thus principals may benefit from being reflective of their relationship with special education RSP teachers.

Research Question 2: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Findings

Teachers Impacted by Perceived EI of Special Education Structures

The second research question sought to understand how the perceived EI of principals impact teachers across special education structures. To answer this research question, three hypotheses were created to be tested with logistic regression models. Further, qualitative critical incident interview analysis allowed me as the researcher to report findings on the following research question:

- 2. How are teachers impacted by their perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the structures of special education?*

Specifically, I also tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: IEP EI scales will predict teachers' responses to understanding the IEP process and services associated with IEPs (Question 8 from the survey).

Hypothesis 2b: Self-Awareness EI scales will predict teacher experience teaching students receiving special education services (Question 6 from the survey) and teacher confidence in support students receiving IEP services (Question 7 from the survey).

Hypothesis 2c: Inclusion EI scales will predict teacher role expectations for working with students receiving special education services (Question 9 from the survey).

Quantitative Finding 4: Perceptions of Principals' EI Did Not Predict Teachers' Understanding, Attitude, or Role Clarity

The aim was to investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' EI and three key factors: teachers' understanding of IEP processes, teachers' confidence in supporting students receiving special education services, and teachers' understanding of their role in working with students who receive special education services.

I did not find a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' EI in the IEP structure and teachers' reported understanding of the IEP process and service associated with IEPs (Hypothesis 2a). In other words, the strength of principals' EI did not predict teachers' reported understanding of the IEP process. I did not find a statistically significant relationship between perceptions of principals' Self-Awareness and teachers' positivity and confidence about their experiences teaching students who receive special education services and teacher confidence in support students receiving IEP services (Hypothesis 2b). In other words, principals' Self-Awareness did not predict teacher positivity of their experience. Finally, I did not find a statistically significant relationship between principals'

Inclusion EI and teachers' clarity of their own role expectations for working with students receiving special education services (Hypothesis 2c). In other words, principals' EI in the Inclusion structure did not predict teachers' clarity regarding role expectations. In summary, in this study principals' EI did not predict teachers' understanding of IEP processes, teachers' positivity and confidence, nor understanding of teacher roles in working with students receiving special education services. However, critical incident interviews did help me to understand more about teachers' perceptions of principals' EI across special education structures and their impact on general and special education teachers.

Qualitative Finding 5: Teachers Perceptions of Principals' EI Positively Impacts Special Education RSP Teachers' Feelings of Isolation

One highlighted theme from the semi-structured interviews was the repeated isolation special education RSP teachers spoke of in reflecting on their position at school sites. One special education RSP teacher noted that "being an elementary resource teacher, you're really generally isolated. When I went to [another school], there were SDC classes. That was the first time I ever had other SpEd teachers to collaborate with or even just talk with" (Participant 5, Interview, December 2022). Another further described the impact of being the only special education RSP teacher on site:

I'm not sure how to deal with some of these things, so that's been a learning curve for me to figure it this out. So, I don't know, and I know [the principal] doesn't want me to just ask [them] things every day. And that's been an issue.... I don't have other RSP teachers to bounce things off with to get to learn from.... (Participant 4, Interview, November 2022)

RSP teachers often sought principals' support with families, staff, and students. Special education RSP teachers perceived principals as the connection for them with general education teachers and families. Principals within this school system may benefit from understanding the

impact their agency has on special education RSP teachers, and that RSP teachers do seek support, guidance, and affirmation from principals. A special education RSP teacher recalled:

When it's clear you have the support of the principal, it's a lot easier to do your job as a special education teacher in whatever role, SDC or RSP, when people know that you're supported it's easier for them to take you seriously and to trust your knowledge and opinions. Because they know the principal trusts you to do that, therefore you know what you're doing. (Participant 6, Interview, November 2022)

Principals' EI fostered trust between special education teachers and principals. The trust created in turn gives confidence to special education teachers while working with students with special education needs. This is important because school systems need teachers, especially special education teachers, to perform their job in the best interest of meeting students' needs. Principals who exhibit strong emotional intelligence contribute to reducing the feelings of isolation experienced by special education RSP teachers. Principals' EI support empowers special education RSP teachers to navigate their roles with more confidence and effectiveness. It additionally improves principal-teacher interactions and may improve the educational experience for students receiving special education services. The establishment of trust and positive interactions between principals and teachers highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in school principals.

Qualitative Finding 6: Principals' Self-Management and Principal Agency Contribute to Teachers Feeling Valued

In semi-structured critical incident interviews, general education and special education teachers recalled various instances in which they appreciated being able to talk with their principal when needed. Goleman (2020) asserted that "the fine art of relationships...requires the ripeness of two other emotional skills, self-management, and empathy.... These social abilities to allow one to shape an encounter, to mobilize and inspire others, to thrive in intimate relationships, to persuade and influence, to put others at ease" (p. 100). Principals' self-

management allowed teachers to feel valued when principals chose to make time to listen to their needs in an authentic manner. For example, Participant 3 described their principal as follows:

She is very supportive in all things, like well, she's always present. She's always, whenever you need her, whenever you need to talk to her, she's always there. She always listens to you. She always has an idea or a great ideas about how to deal with high maintenance parents, and how to deal with even the district level, you know, because sometimes, like, we need support for this child and she agrees with it, but then when we asked the district, it's no...we have nobody, we cannot give you that support and things like that. And she has this creative way. How about this, like, you know, let's maximize adults. (Participant 3, Interview, December 2023)

This example illustrates principals who exhibit Self-Management behaviors can create an environment where teachers felt heard and valued. Principals actively engaged in problem-solving and advocating for needs of students and staff. The proactive approach fostered a sense of support and collaboration between principals and teachers. Further, special education teachers did not expect principals to answer all their questions, but they did view them as the liaison to listen and advocate at the district level. Teachers viewed principals' Self-Management and agency as a vehicle for support at the site and district level. This directly impacted teachers in their work to serve students with special education needs. Participant 6 further described principals' Self-Management and agency with school district leaders by stating:

[The principal] just checking in on different situations or when we have a really tough behavior kind of kid. Making sure that if I'm reaching out to the district for a higher level of support that it's a follow-through on a district level, because I don't get to see that side of things very often. But the principal sort of has that go-between the school and the district, and it's really valuable to have their voice being heard along with mine. And I guess that kind of goes with that support piece knowing that this principal is backing up that person there must be something really going on. (Participant 6, Interview, November 2022)

In this context, principals' Self-Management and agency served a means for effective communication and validation of teachers' concerns and needs. Teachers perceived the principals' role as an advocate at the district level to ensure concerns and challenges are

addressed. The role of emotional intelligence of principals facilitated positive interactions between principals and teachers, which may positively impact teachers experiences with students receiving special education services.

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings for Research Question 2

While logistic regression models did not predict statistically significant findings, the semi-structured critical incident interviews found that positive perceptions of principals' EI positively impacted special education RSP teachers' feelings of isolation at school sites. Further, principals' Self-Management and principal agency contributed to both general and special education teachers' feelings of validation when working with students with special education needs.

Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations

This mixed-methods study used quantitative and qualitative data analyses to answer two research questions. I first sought to understand how public elementary teachers' perceived principals' emotional intelligence (EI) across three special education structures. I then sought to learn how the perceived EI of principals impacts teachers across special education structures. In this chapter, I discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings as related to past studies and current research. I also share implications for practice, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

This study intersected Goleman's (2020) four EI competencies with structure-agency theory to understand teachers' perceptions of principals' EI within the structures of special education. Past research on leaders has described that effective leaders enact strong EI in their positions that benefit the organization (McKee & Boyatzis, 2008; O'Boyle et al., 2010). Past research has also indicated that EI indicators impact leaders and distinguish average leaders from great leaders (McKee & Boyatzis, 2008). As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, teachers' perceptions matter to the context of schools and learning for students. This study revealed that teachers perceive principals' EI differently based on specific types of EI competency and based on structure. In other words, teachers noticed principals' agency in exercising EI as related to special education structures. This study contributes to research on principal leaders from the perspective of teachers and this study differed from EI research in that EI is often self-reported. This study also centered on teachers' experiences and perceptions because of the known impact that teachers' perceptions have on and for students.

Further, this study allowed teachers to give their perspectives of principals' EI within a challenging structure of schools—special education. Findings from this study confirmed that teachers do perceive the emotional intelligence of leaders (Goleman, 2020; McKee & Boyatzis, 2008) and can distinguish EI based on Goleman's (2020) emotional intelligence competencies (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Management). Findings from this study confirmed that teachers perceive the emotional intelligence of principals differently based on the structures of special education. In other words, teachers perceived principal EI differently based on how principals communicated, or their agency, across three special education structures.

Structure-agency theory asserts the impact of a person's agency within the structure of the organization (Sewell, 1992 & Woulfin et al 2015). This study contributes to research on structure-agency by using the lens of emotional intelligence as one form of agency. Structure-agency theory (Sewell,1992) locates a person within an organization and the ability of said person to enact agency regardless of structure. Findings from this study reveal that teachers perceive the EI of their principals differently based on structure, supporting current research findings for structure-agency (Woulfin et al, 2015 & Yu, 2019). Critical incident interviews shared the experience of teachers in working with their principals. Teachers recalled principal behavior and choices across different special education structures that confirmed principal agency.

Next Steps and Future Endeavors: Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in School Principals

This study provided a unique opportunity for school districts to consider how to improve principal leaders in special education by focusing on emotional intelligence across structures. My customized survey maps emotional intelligence onto three structures of special education,

and therefore provides data that may lead to customized plans for supporting principal growth. In my experience, I have observed and actively participated in various trainings aimed at explaining new district initiatives. However, in each of these trainings the presenters rarely, if ever, address interpersonal relationships between leaders and school staff. It is evident that these efforts to support leaders overlook a critical aspect of leadership. While the significance of trust and clarity within leaders' roles is often acknowledged during training, there is a gap when it comes to providing principals with concrete and actionable strategies, particularly within the context of special education and emotional intelligence. In other words, principals lack opportunities to learn strategies to effectively manage their interactions with teachers and other staff members, particularly within special education. Emotional intelligence is essential to effective leaders in education settings and principals who possess robust EI competencies are uniquely positioned to navigate and successfully address the distinctive challenges within special education. In other words, not only do principals need clear technical understanding of special education structures and services, but also greater understanding of emotional intelligence as leaders.

Emotional Intelligence and Structure-Agency: A Reflective Practice Principal Tool for Leader Development

I designed a survey which crossed Goleman's (2020) four emotional intelligence competencies across three special education structures. This tool gives school districts specific areas of improvement while also acknowledging strengths of principals. The survey gathered teachers' perspectives on principals' EI across three special education structures. The survey provided valuable data to understand how teachers perceive their principals and results can be used for principal professional development. The findings suggest the importance of emotional intelligence in school leaders and the impact on principal-teacher interactions. The tool highlights an area of growth for principals' emotional intelligence within the IEP structure.

Customized professional development in IEP meetings and emotional intelligence can support principals with special education. Emotional intelligence development builds positive interactions between teachers and principals. Principals with strong emotional intelligence are adept at empathizing with others and effectively communicate for strong collaboration among stakeholders, especially during IEP meetings. A principal equipped with strong emotional intelligence has a skill set that contributes to better leadership.

Moreover, this tool may be used as a strategic approach and replicated across various school districts to inform and enhance principal leader practices. By using this tool school districts may gain valuable insights to understand how teachers perceive principals' EI across special education structures. This understanding empowers school districts to target support for principal professional learning. The goal of professional learning initiatives is to increase EI competencies among principals, and therefore potentially leading to increased levels of agency for both principals and teachers, within structures of special education.

Further, quantitative results from this survey can support principal leaders by giving feedback, both positive and areas of growth for leader skills specifically around Goleman's (2020) EI competencies. An area of continued exploration is to use this survey and adjust information not only about principals, but also about other leaders within the organization and across other structures.

IEP Meeting Professional Development for Principals

This study revealed that an area of growth for principal is emotional intelligence within the IEP meeting structure; specifically, how Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management operate in the IEP meeting context. Professional development for school principals can include specific plans that train principals about IEPs and IEP meetings.

Professional development plans can include an overall understanding of Goleman's (2020) emotional intelligence competencies, structure-agency theory, and situate the principals as a vehicle for direct support of special education students. Principals can receive overall results of perceptions of district principal leadership specifically within three special education structures. In the context of this sample school district, targeted professional development for IEP meetings is an area of growth. As an example, I can create targeted professional development meetings with recommended areas of improvement, with examples of what and how principals can engage with teachers from an emotionally intelligent lens.

Further, in these professional development plans, I can give specific suggestions on how to ask questions, contribute positively to the meeting, and prepare principals before attending IEP meetings. Emotional intelligence training specifically within the area of IEP meetings can empower principals with confidence to lead with empathy, and authentically. It can equip principals with knowledge and tools to effectively participate in IEP meetings. Strong participation from school principals in IEP meetings is perceived positively by teachers, which in turn allows teachers to feel supported and valued. Confidence in a principals' ability within IEP meetings to resolve conflicts, answer questions, and support school teams contributes to positive experiences, and allows for clear expectations that may translate into teacher and student experiences.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study revealed teachers' perceptions of principals' EI as related to the structures of special education. Further findings described how perceived principals' EI across special education structures positively impacted teachers of students receiving special education services. Additionally, this study design can be replicated across school district and structures.

Implications for Principals

This study offers a strategy for gathering data around perceived principals' EI across special education structures. The survey design allows districts to gather feedback and is not punitive, and anonymous across the organization. Thus, school principals may feel empowered to improve EI competencies, being reflective leaders and supporting their school sites.

Principals have an opportunity to reflect on teacher perception across special education structures. For example, in this study, the IEP meeting structure of special education had the three of the lowest mean scale scores across all 12 of the EI competencies and three special education structures. These data can provide principals with a unique kind of feedback to reflect on their agency during IEP meetings and discover areas of improvement. By focusing on EI competencies within IEP meetings, principals within this school district can consider ways to increase emotional intelligence competencies. Being a reflective leader supports not only the principal, but also the school sites they lead if positive changes in behavior results from being reflective. Further, principals may ask for district support in IEP meetings with staff and families. The increased awareness of perceived EI across special education structures gives principals data to improve complex interactions with teachers for students receiving special education services.

Implications for School District Leadership

School district leaders may use this information to better address emotional intelligence competencies of school principals across special education structures to become stronger school leaders. By using insights from this study, school districts can work towards nurturing increased emotional intelligence of school principals. Increasing principals' emotional intelligence may address a critical issue of special education staffing and retaining qualified staff. If school

districts understand more about the interactions between principals and teachers, district leaders can create strategies to support teaching staff more effectively. Special education teachers' experiences and perceptions of principals' EI can inform district leaders when addressing principals for supporting staff. This study revealed that special education RSP teachers support from principals is crucial to combating feelings of isolation. With this knowledge, school district leaders can target supports with training and coaching cycles throughout the year to support principals, that also support teachers daily.

Implications for Principal Training Programs

Findings from this study suggest that principal training programs should consider further emphasis on emotional intelligence training into their course work. Emotional intelligence is an essential component of school leadership given the various tasks required to be a leader of a school. Training programs that emphasize principal-teacher interactions to empower both leaders and teachers can positively contribute to supporting students, and particularly students with special education needs. A principal equipped with emotional intelligence competencies may be more responsive to supporting their schools' various needs.

Further, this study also highlights the need for school leaders to better understand special education structures in addition to principal agency within the structures of special education. As special education needs continue to evolve across schools, principals should be equipped to support the complexities that arise in these contexts. A leader with knowledge of special education structures is better able to support students across their school.

Principal leader programs can support aspiring school principals in the areas of emotional intelligence competencies as a focus of leadership along with special education. By increasing

principal development in the areas of emotional intelligence and special education, principals will be stronger leaders with tools to positively impact students with special education needs.

Limitations

This study had four limitations. First, this research was conducted at one school district on the West Coast of the United States. In total, 120 responses from 299 teachers were used for analysis. Because there were only nine semi-structured interviews to enhance qualitative data, teacher representation was small and limited to a medium-sized school district.

Second, this study focused only on elementary school teachers and did not include middle school teachers from this district. In this district, principals by design are the local educational agency (LEA) in IEP meetings, but this might not be the structure in another school district.

The third limitation is that the research design plan collected survey data beginning in September through November. Future research might receive a higher rate of response if given at different time periods of the school year.

The fourth limitation is that I designed my own survey. While overall questions were positive and highly correlated, future revisions of survey stems might improve participant understanding. The survey length was long compared to shorter surveys, and this survey design purposely asked for teacher perceptions of principals' EI. However, principals were not part of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research design focused specifically on special education structures. Given existing research gaps that necessitate exploration, further studies may seek to understand more about principals' EI across other structures of school systems. Additionally, this study was designed to learn about teachers' perceptions of school principals; however, further studies may want to

understand teachers or administrators' perceptions of other leaders' EI across special education structures (e.g., Coordinators of Special Education, District-level Directors, Assistant Superintendents).

As I asserted initially in this study, not enough research has been conducted to support special education systems and structures in the United States. Further research should continue to learn more about special education structures, leaders of special education structures, and supports needed for teachers of special education students. Finally, this study sought to understand principal-teacher interactions specifically for students receiving special education services. Additional research exploring leader dynamics continues to represent possible unexplored avenues to continue to build upon our understanding of the relational impact of leader emotional intelligence on special education structures and student outcomes.

Appendix A

Survey Questions with Corresponding Labels and Information for Analysis

Question Number	Special Education Structure	emotional intelligence Competency	Variable Type	Corresponding Questions and Information	Measure Type
1	NA	NA	Numeric	1: Grade Level	Nominal
2	NA	NA	Numeric	2: Teacher Type (General, Special Education RSP, Special Education SDC)	Nominal
3	NA	NA	Numeric	3: Years of Teaching Experience	Ordinal
4	NA	NA	Numeric	4: Taught student Last year with IEP	Nominal
5	NA	NA	Numeric	5: IEP Service Types	Nominal
6	NA	NA	Numeric	6: Teacher Describe Experience working with students receiving special education services	Ordinal
7	NA	NA	Numeric	7: Teacher Confidence Supporting students receiving special education services	Ordinal
8	NA	NA	Numeric	8: Teacher Understand IEP process and services	Ordinal
9	NA	NA	Numeric	9: Teacher's Clear Expectations about teacher role in working with students receiving special education services	Ordinal
10	NA	NA	Numeric	10: Students receiving special education services are contributing members to teacher's classroom	Ordinal
11	NA	NA	Numeric	11 Teacher Participated IEPs last school year	Nominal
51	COVID 2022	NA	Numeric	51: As a teacher, I feel that it has been more difficult to support students receiving special education services since March 2020	Ordinal
52	IEP COVID 2020	NA	Numeric	52: As a teacher, I feel my students receiving special education services have more access to support since March 2020	Ordinal
53	Age Range	NA	Numeric	53: Age Range	Scale
54	Participate in Interview	NA	String	54: Participate in Qualitative Interview	Nominal

Question Number	Special Education Structure	emotional intelligence Competency	Variable Type	Corresponding Questions and Information	Measure Type
12	IEP	Self-Awareness	Numeric	12: principal expressed feeling about IEP process.	Ordinal
13	IEP	Self-Awareness	Numeric	13: principal expressed feelings about participating in IEP meetings.	Ordinal
14	IEP	Self-Awareness	Numeric	14: principal's values were clear during IEP meeting.	Ordinal
15	IEP	Self-Management	Numeric	15: principal kept positive disposition with team members and overall, IEP meetings and goals	Ordinal
16	IEP	Self-Management	Numeric	16: principal responded to changes in IEP to meet goals for students	Ordinal
17	IEP	Self-Management	Numeric	17: principal remained calm in stressful or contentious moments	Ordinal
18	IEP	Social Awareness	Numeric	18: principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed	Ordinal
19	IEP	Social Awareness	Numeric	19: principal asked questions to learn more about student and IEP team process	Ordinal
20	IEP	Social Awareness	Numeric	20: principal tried to learn more about the family	Ordinal
21	IEP	Relationship Management	Numeric	21: principal asked for support from other educational specialist, if needed	Ordinal
22	IEP	Relationship Management	Numeric	22: principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member	Ordinal
23	IEP	Relationship Management	Numeric	23: principal attempted to resolved conflict, if needed	Ordinal
24	IEP	Relationship Management	Numeric	24: principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team	Ordinal
25	Families	Self-Awareness	Numeric	25: principal positively expressed their feelings about working with families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
26	Families	Self-Awareness	Numeric	26: principal acknowledged their feelings about working with families of students with IEPs in a positive manner	Ordinal
27	Families	Self-Awareness	Numeric	27: principal's positive values of culture of special education at my school were clear to me when discussing families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
28	Families	Self-Management	Numeric	28: principal kept a positive dispositive with team members when discussing families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
29	Families	Self-Management	Numeric	29: principal responded to changes to support the student when discussing families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
30	Families	Self-Management	Numeric	30: principal remained calm during stressful or contentious moments during discussing families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
31	Families	Social Awareness	Numeric	31: principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal

32	Families	Social Awareness	Numeric	32: principal asked questions to learn more about the student during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
33	Families	Social Awareness	Numeric	33: principal sought to learn more about the student and family during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
34	Families	Relationship Management	Numeric	34: principal asked for support from other educational specialists, if needed during discussion about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
35	Families	Relationship Management	Numeric	35: principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
36	Families	Relationship Management	Numeric	36: principal attempted to resolve conflict, if needed during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
37	Families	Relationship Management	Numeric	37: principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team, during discussions about families of students with IEPs	Ordinal
38	Inclusion	Self-Awareness	Numeric	38: principal described their feelings about inclusive culture positively, specifically for students with IEPs at my school	Ordinal
39	Inclusion	Self-Awareness	Numeric	39: principal acknowledged their feelings about the culture of inclusive positively at my school	Ordinal
40	Inclusion	Self-Awareness	Numeric	40: principal's values about the culture of special education and inclusion at my school are positive and clear to me.	Ordinal
41	Inclusion	Self-Management	Numeric	41: principal kept a positive disposition with team members, when talking about the culture of inclusion	Ordinal
42	Inclusion	Self-Management	Numeric	42: principal responded to changes in the IEP to meet goals for students, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
43	Inclusion	Self-Management	Numeric	43: principal remained calm during stressful or contentious moments, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
44	Inclusion	Social Awareness	Numeric	44: principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
45	Inclusion	Social Awareness	Numeric	45: principal asked questions to learn more about the students, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
46	Inclusion	Social Awareness	Numeric	46: principal sought to learn more about the student and family, during discussion about inclusion	Ordinal
47	Inclusion	Relationship Management	Numeric	47: principal asked for support from other educational specialists, if needed, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
48	Inclusion	Relationship Management	Numeric	48: principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
49	Inclusion	Relationship Management	Numeric	49: principal attempted to resolve conflict, if needed, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal
50	Inclusion	Relationship Management	Numeric	50: principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team, during discussions about inclusion	Ordinal

Appendix B

Teacher Survey 9/14/2022

Start of Block: Anonymous Survey for Research with the University of Pennsylvania GSE

Survey Information

You are invited to participate in this survey, because you are a Kindergarten through Grade 5 teacher working in a medium sized Bay Area school district.

This study is conducted by Amanda Goll, a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to understand teachers' perceptions of principals' emotional intelligence and agency within the implementation of special education structures. This study also seeks to learn more about how the perceived emotional intelligence and agency of principals impact the teacher when working with students with special education needs. At the end of this study, the overall themes and recommendations that emerge will be shared with the school district and will be accessible to the public in the form of a published dissertation.

Procedures: In order to participate, you need to complete this online survey. Your participation in this online survey is completely anonymous. No information you share electronically can be traced to you or the device you used. Your participation in the survey indicates you read this consent information and agreed to participate in this anonymous survey. The survey may last anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes.

Risk and Benefits: Your participation will help Amanda Goll complete her study to fulfill the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of Pennsylvania. Data analyzed from this study may better support school districts in understanding the role of principals within the structures of special education and their impact on general and special education teachers. The study is of little risk of harm to study participants. Your responses to this survey will remain completely anonymous. Your responses will not be identified or connected to you personally or professionally in any way. If you wish to withdraw from this study, you may do so at any time.

Compensation: There will be no financial compensation for your participation.

Anonymity: Your participation in this research survey is completely anonymous. The information you share can neither be traced electronically to you nor the device you used, nor can you be traced by any information you provide. No responses will be linked back to school sites. Any data shared cannot be traced back to you as a participant as the data will be analyzed as a whole, not individually. Therefore, information about participation in this study cannot be shared with anyone inside or outside of the school district. Data will be stored in the online survey site database and will only be available to the researcher of this study. No one else besides this study's researcher will use this data, and within three years data will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your school, school district, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. You may withdraw from participation at any time.

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By clicking next, you agree to participate in this study.

Q1 Please indicate which grade level you taught last school year.

1. Kindergarten
2. 1st
3. 2nd
4. 3rd
5. 4th
6. 5th
7. Other

Q2 Please choose which best applied to you last school year.

General Education Teacher

- Special Education RSP Teacher
- Special Education SDC Teacher

Q3 I have taught for:

- 0-1 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26+ Years

Q4 Did you teach students receiving special education services (students with an IEP) last year?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q5 Please indicate which services students in your class who had an IEP received last school year. You may choose more than one answer.

8. APE (Adapted Physical Education)
9. AAC Support + Device (Augmentative or Alternative communication)
10. ERMHS (Educationally Related Mental Health Services)
11. Occupational Therapy (OT)
12. Physical Therapy (PT)
13. RSP
14. SCIA (1-1 Support with paraeducator)
15. Specialized Academic Instruction - in Special Day Classroom (8)
16. Speech Services (9)
17. Unknown (10)

Q6 How would you describe your experience teaching students receiving special education services?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

Q7 How confident are you in supporting students receiving special education services?

- Very Confident
- Confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not confident
- Not at all confident

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

Q8 I understand the IEP process and services associated with IEPs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q9 I have clear expectations about my role in working with students receiving special education services.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q10 Students receiving special education services are contributing members in my classroom.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

The following sections are intended to focus on your experience working with site principals within various structures of special education.

Please think about your experience working in your school district and principal last school year.

The first part focuses on IEP meetings, the second part focuses on discussions about families with students with IEPs, and the third part focuses on conversations about inclusion, specific to special education students.

Please note that some of the questions may seem repetitive.

This is intentional on the part of the researcher, as the questions are asking about specific structures of special education.

Q11 I participated in an IEP meeting last school year.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q12 My principal expressed their feelings about the IEP process.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q13 My principal expressed their feelings about participating in IEP meetings.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not Observed

Q14 During IEP meetings, my principal's values about the culture of special education at my school were clear.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q15 During IEP meetings, my principal kept a positive disposition with the team members and the overall IEP meeting and goals.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not Observed

Q16 During IEP meetings, my principal responded to changes in the IEP to meet goals for students.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q17 During IEP meetings, my principal remained calm in stressful or contentious moments.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q18 During IEP meetings, my principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q19 During IEP meetings, my principal asked questions to learn more about the student and IEP team process.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q20 During IEP meetings, my principal tried to learn more about the family.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q21 During IEP meetings, my principal asked for support from other educational specialists, if needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q22 During IEP meetings, my principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q23 During IEP meetings, my principal attempted to resolve conflict, if needed.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q24 During IEP meetings, my principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

The following questions asks you to think about conversations with your principal about families of students with IEPs last school year.

Q25 My principal positively expressed their feelings about working with families of students with IEPs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q26 My principal acknowledged their feelings about working with families of students with IEPs in a positive manner.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q27 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal's positive values of the culture of special education at my school were clear to me.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q28 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal kept a positive disposition with team members.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q29 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal responded to changes to support the student.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q30 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal remained calm during stressful or contentious moments.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q31 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q32 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal asked questions to learn more about the student.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q33 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal sought to learn more about the student and family.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q34 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal asked for support from other educational specialists, if needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q35 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q36 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal attempted to resolve conflict, if needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q37 During discussions about families of students with IEPs, my principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

The following questions ask you to think about the culture of inclusion specifically related to special education at your school site last year.

Q38 My principal described their feelings about inclusive culture positively, specifically for students with IEPs at my school.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q39 My principal acknowledged their feelings about the culture of inclusion positively at my school.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q40 My principal's values about the culture of special education and inclusion at my school are positive and clear to me.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q41 When talking about the culture of inclusion, my principal kept a positive disposition with team members.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q42 During discussions about inclusion, my principal responded to changes in the IEP to meet goals for students.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q43 During discussions about inclusion, my principal remained calm during stressful or contentious moments.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q44 During discussions about inclusion, my principal listened attentively and offered support and perspective as needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q45 During discussions about inclusion, my principal asked questions to learn more about the students.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q46 During discussions about inclusion, my principal sought to learn more about the student and family.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q47 During discussions about inclusion, my principal asked for support from other educational specialists, if needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q48 During discussions about inclusion, my principal validated my feelings and empowered me as a team member.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q49 During discussions about inclusion, my principal attempted to resolve conflict, if needed.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q50 During discussions about inclusion, my principal was supportive of Special Education teachers and the team.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

The following questions ask about teaching students who received special education services since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown.

Please indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Q51 As a teacher, I feel that it has been more difficult to support students receiving special education services since March 2020.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q52 As a teacher, I feel my students receiving special education services have more access to support since March 2020.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not observed

Q53 Please select your age range:

- 20-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75
- 75+

Q54

Thank you for your participation in this study!

This study also involves interviewing teachers 1-1 with the researcher.

The interview will expand further on questions from this survey, to allow participants to describe and discuss working with principals, families, and students receiving special education services last school year.

The interview will be scheduled at a time of your convenience and may be completed via Zoom, phone, or in person.

Interviews are optional, and may last between 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be kept confidential and a link to participate will appear on the next page.

Are you interested in being interviewed to further help the purposes of this study?

- Yes
- No

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Critical Incident Interview Protocol Questions

Protocol Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your current role in your school district.
2. Tell me about an experience with a student receiving special education services.
 - a. Tell me more about this situation and experience.
 - b. What happened during IEP meetings?
 - c. Conversations with your principal?
 - d. Conversations about inclusion for students with IEPs?
3. How and in what ways have you felt supported in working with students with IEPs?
4. What has the role of your principal been in supporting you and/or your team with students receiving special education services?
5. How has your principal impacted you as teacher?
 - a. Specifically with students receiving special education services
6. How do you think your principal feels about special education? Why?
7. As a teacher teaching students with IEPs, what are some things that you might need?
8. Please discuss more about teaching students during COVID.

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