

Examining teachers' attitudes and practices of special education in Kansas during COVID-19

by

Adele Doris Fugate

B.S. University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1981

M.S. University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1991

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Special Education
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Abstract

Prior to COVID-19, elementary and secondary education teachers worked with an ever-changing education program developed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. COVID-19 created an environment of uncertainty in teaching masked students with special needs in either face to face, or remote learners or a hybrid of the two methodologies. The study measured the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special education teachers toward teaching students with disabilities during COVID-19 in Kansas. Elementary and secondary special education teachers have had a complex and tumultuous professional relationship toward adequate preparation to provide the legally stated goals in an Individual Education Program and inclusion required for the Least Restrictive Environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic also presented special conditions that varied from amongst national leadership, state to state, and the specific local district superintendents and local building principals. Ultimately, this study researched what attitudes and practices towards special education special education teachers in Kansas experienced during COVID-19. The study also addressed what modalities were used to meet IEP goals during COVID-19. Finally, the study quantified the use of the three main methods of instruction for students with special needs during COVID: face-to-face, remote or a hybrid of the two methods.

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Acknowledgements

Sincere acknowledgements are to: Dr. James Teagarden, Dr. Marilyn Kaff, Dr. Warren White, Dr. Susan Yelich Biniecki and Dr. Barbara Mitchell for all of their encouragement, guidance, straight-forward suggestions and understanding. It has indeed been a long road and I would have given up. I remember them all saying “Just finish it! You are so close!”

A special thank you goes out to Idalia Shuman from KNEA. She believed in the study and enabled teachers of students with special needs in Kansas to be able to take the study. Also, thank you to Scott Finkeldei for patiently guiding the formation of a document to present the ETAP findings.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter and son, Claire, and Andrew Fugate. Thank you for believing and encouraging your mother. Thank you for your love and hugs, answering the phone when I was stressed and a special thanks for helping with IT and staying sane. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents. My dad pushed me to finish my masters and use my Spanish. My mom wanted me to finish my doctorate. I am sorry they never saw the day I finished but they are looking down from heaven, still cheering me on. Also, a thank you to my sisters for asking me often if I was close to being finished. They kept me working hard and laughing. Finally, to all my pet dogs that sat beside me when I was spending hours on the computer, thank you for your silent love.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introduction

The general education classroom teacher is no longer the sole, certified staff member in charge of the educational needs of students in the regular education elementary or secondary classroom (Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie, 2007). In a typical pre-COVID-19 classroom, additional specialists, paraprofessionals, and special education teachers worked with the regular classroom teacher and followed the IEP (Individualized Education Program) guideline interventions (Hamilton-Jones and Vail, 2013). An IEP is the list of goals and objectives that a student, who qualifies for special education, received for qualified services. The services may be academic, behavioral, speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy or for other health related impairments (Yell, 2019). Legislation began with the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. It continued with the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 1990, 1997, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) (Yell, 2012,2019).

Regardless of the severity of the disability, students who qualified for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) were guaranteed a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible (Yell, 1995; Yell, 2019). The least restrictive environment is an educational setting, consisted of disabled and nondisabled peers together to the maximum extent possible. (Yell, 2019). All students in the American public school system have a right to free and appropriate school (FAPE). Teachers must be prepared for working with all student needs (IDEA, 2004). Regular education teachers might not be “appropriately trained to work with students with disabilities,

and much of the clamor for full inclusion is based not on empirical evidence but on feelings that it is the right thing to do” (Yell, 1995, p.389).

COVID-19 pandemic changed education in ways that is now finally being researched. Inclusion, the IEP, FAPE and all of the related services on an IEP must still be provided for students with disabilities during COVID. This study, Examining Teachers’ Attitudes and Practices of Special Education in Kansas during COVID-19 (ETAP) surveyed special education elementary and secondary teachers and ascertained attitudes and beliefs during COVID-19 toward students with disabilities.

Repercussions for Kansas Teachers during COVID-19

When did federal mandates specify remote learning and its correlation for students with disabilities? Were there new and different provisions for students with special needs? Who made the determination and final recommendations for COVID-19 guidelines for students with disabilities in relation to the implementation of their current IEP? Answers to these questions varied from state to state to meet the specific needs of each student with disabilities. President Trump directed his Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, to publish a document that addressed some issues regarding special education services for students with disabilities.

Betsy DeVos established a precedent with the initial document and subsequent documents from the U.S. Department of Education regarding Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts (IDEA) and COVID-19. These acts published in 1990, 1997, and 2004 set the guidelines for federal involvement with the education of children in the United States with disabilities. Congress passed these acts to ensure free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students including those with disabilities. There is no charge for public education. (Yell,

2019). Ms. DeVos established a precedent and set the standard for the education of all students in the U.S. to remain as before COVID-19.

The U.S. Department of Education issued a statement, from Ms. DeVos, on March 12, 2020, that remote learning must continue to provide students with and without disabilities educational opportunities, with “equal access to the same opportunities” to the “greatest extent possible” all according to the IEP. If the services are not provided, the IEP team decided what compensatory services might be required to make up for skills lost (Jameson, et al. 2020). At this point in time, all schools were closed due to COVID-19 virus.

As the pandemic continued and school were closed through May 2020, another document from DeVos (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea>), dated April 27, 2020, stated that:

Secretary DeVos is not recommending Congress pass any additional waiver authority concerning the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), reiterating that learning must continue for all students during the COVID-19 national emergency. (p. 1-2)

Until the schools could safely reopen, there would be no face-to-face instruction. Therefore, there would be no inclusion in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with special needs. Continued free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and LRE under IDEA was difficult to maintain for students with disabilities in the U.S.

Teachers, administrators, and school districts for students with special needs were required to still be accountable for the IEP and services in March 2020. A combination of three teaching modalities were available. If face-to-face learning could not be accessed solely in a safe

manner, online learning or a hybrid of the two teaching modalities were practiced in all educational settings.

This study analyzed the attitudes and practices of those teachers who taught students with disabilities from August 2020 through May 2021. The study questions used demographic information and questions regarding attitudes and practices about confidence levels in Kansas for teachers of students with disabilities for this time period. In this time period, August 2020 through May 2021, some public schools began to reopen face-to-face.

Since August 2020, schools reopened for some of the students sporadically, school officials followed mask requirements and six-foot social distancing. Some students with disabilities could not physically attend school due to individual health conditions, inability to wear masks or to comply with the social distancing mandate (CDC, March 2020). Some students with disabilities required paraprofessional assistance, which was limited due to COVID-19 hiring or availability (Krell, 2020, McKenna, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 created a global crisis and country after country experienced school closures. (Petretto, et al., 2020; Sakellariou et al. 2020). A study conducted by Brandenburg et al. (2020) found that:

Globally, over 80% of children have had their education impacted by COVID-19. In the United States 2019 school year, 56.6 million children were enrolled in school with 50.8 million of those in public school. Of the children in public school, approximately 14% were students with a variety of disabilities who receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (p. 426)

Brandenburg represented pediatricians from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a group which strongly advocate[d] that all policy considerations for the coming school year

should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. For students with disabilities, access to in-person education and other resources are particularly important because schools provide therapy services, meals through the free or reduced cost breakfast and lunch programs and inclusive social interactions with peers. (p.428).

Therefore, students with disabilities needed to have precedence in being physically present to enable involvement in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Including these students in the day-to-day activities of lunch, homeroom, and free time before school allowed for socialization. In addition to nonacademic activities, the goals and objectives written by a students' multidisciplinary team specifically set up minutes for inclusion for students with special needs in an academic setting.

IDEA, FAPE, AND THE IEP

This section presented key points regarding LRE, the IEP, and the IDEA as taken from recent policy notices from the National CDC (Center for Disease Control) and State of Kansas Department of Health and Environment. U.S. Secretary, Betsy DeVos, reaffirmed her stated position that individualized education must be provided for all students with disabilities even with the school closures.

Many students with disabilities were especially susceptible to COVID-19, among other infectious diseases, due to vulnerable immune systems and underlying health conditions (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). A document from March 2020 created by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in conjunction with IDEA regulations stated health restrictions for

students with disabilities due to COVID-19. The publication from CDC 3-2020 also recommended that compensatory services and homebound instruction might be needed.

To change an IEP and allow for at-home only education or limited inclusion in-person, an IEP amendment must take place between the parents and the school. Specific amounts of time in school must be stated and followed. If these times could not be met safely, the school arranged an optional plan to provide inclusion with regular education students to the maximum extent possible (LRE). In a recent court case of a student, Shannon Woodsworth, “the child had an IEP but was unable to receive her services because of the COVID-related school closing.” However, “because Woodworth’s child had suffered severe educational loss when receiving only remote special education services, the judge held that the state Department of Education was to order the school district to revise the IEP to include in-person instruction” (Yell and Samudre, 2021, p. 37).

Part B of IDEA as LRE mandated inclusion to the “maximum extent possible”. Remote learning was the only choice for many of the families of children with disabilities. The Kansas State Department of Education Guidance paper issued 8-25-20 and revised 4-1-21, addressed the difficulties students with disabilities had attending school in person. How much inclusion students with disabilities could receive depended on each individual student. Factors must be evaluated in a case-to-case procedure. Factors were evaluated such as the severity of the disability, the services available at the students’ school, the policies adopted for face-to-face school return and the specific goals and objectives of the individual’s IEP. In addition, regressions need to be evaluated since students with disabilities had not been physically able to attend school and receive support service, especially paraprofessional and related services assistance can be limited.

Each state interpreted and created guidelines and mandates to provide special education services during COVID-19. The services were individualized according to each student's need. Many factors were involved such as related service teachers availability in certain schools in physically providing face to face services for students with disabilities (See Educational and Environmental Factors, p. 42).

The first page of the Kansas State Department of Education Guidance (issued 8-25-20 and revised 4-1-21) paper stated, "Please note that the Navigating Change: Kansas' Guide to Learning and School Safety Operations document, released by the Kansas State Department of Education, is simply guidance. When a district creates its own plan for the 2020-21 school year it must balance this guidance with the requirements of special education law". Each district and the IEP created guidelines.

Overall Kansas Teacher Attitudes

This research investigated the many attitudes and practices regarding education for students with special needs (see definition of inclusion under definition of terms, p. 24) during COVID-19 in Kansas. Also, examined were the different modalities of teaching during COVID-19- face to face, remote or a hybrid of the two. Teachers across Kansas in the Facebook group "Kansas Educators", KNEA or K-State webmail took a survey to ascertain the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special education teachers of students with disabilities from August 2020 through May 2021.

Regular education teachers continued working with special education teachers on inclusion during COVID-19 when schools were reopened. Regular education teachers might

have experienced low confidence levels about successfully teaching the different special needs of students in their classroom (Scruggs, Mastropieri, McDuffie, 2007; Yell, 1995). Additionally, regular education teachers might not be experienced in online inclusion and collaboration with students that have disabilities as they had before COVID-19. (Allan, 2021; Glessner & Johnson, 2020). A 2020 study found that the request is strong from all teachers for professional development, increased administrative leadership and reassurances. This study researched the “resilience” or the ability for teachers to bounce back from stress. The teacher needs to be safe in mental as well as physical health, during COVID. (Bonella et al. 2020). The ETAP survey attached (See Appendix A) began examining attitudes and beliefs beginning in the 2020-2021 school year in August 2020.

Teachers came under pressure as COVID-19 hit the world in a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). Kansas was one of the first states to close their schools in response to COVID-19. As schools closed, teachers’ confidence and resiliency decreased (Bonella, et al. 2020). Teachers, students, and parents scrambled for technology, internet access, and for safety from COVID-19. The attitudes of parents, teachers, and students were affected not only temporarily but permanently when it became certain that COVID-19 was not going away. The pandemic may always be a part of the life in the world (Arellano, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Knowledge of the attitudes of teachers toward teaching students with disabilities during COVID-19 remained a tumultuous, fluctuating set of beliefs toward the success of education of students with special needs. All groups collectively created a strong presence of policy stated to aid students. Lack of policy specifically to meet the needs of those affected by disability and a pandemic increased stress and anxiety for all (Campbell, et al. 2009). The COVID-19 virus

affected both the educational needs of students with special needs, and the success of all educational needs (Krell, 2020, McClain-Nhlap, 2020, McKenna, 2020, Petretto, 2020, Toquero, 2020).

In this research, I surveyed the reported attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special educators from Kansas toward teaching students with special needs during COVID-19. Questions on the survey ranged from specific attitudes and perceptions of teaching during COVID-19 to general attitudes of awareness, beliefs, and practices regarding teaching students with disabilities during the school year August 2020 through May 2021. (See Appendix A)

The survey was analyzed for differences between elementary and secondary special education educators. The survey demographics categorized the size of the location of the teaching practice, the category that best fits the students' needs according to their IEP, teaching modality, which grade level the teacher taught, and the racial/ethnic background of the teacher.

The participants surveyed were elementary and secondary special education teachers from the Facebook group "Kansas Educators", KNEA or K-State webmail. Participation in the survey was voluntary and confidential. The survey was quantitative and did not allow for further comment qualitatively.

Most of the core subjects were taught (pre-COVID-19) in the regular education classroom to maintain the maximum amount of inclusion possible according to the legal provision in IDEA known as least restrictive environment (LRE) (Diament, 2021). At that time, students might be able to attend school physically if they do not have immune deficiencies and can wear a mask, provided the school was open for face-to-face learning opportunities and secure from COVID-19. There were provisions that allowed students with medical conditions to

attend school without a mask. For example, for those with asthma, heart conditions, children under the age of five, and students with intellectual disabilities, a mask covering the face was physically impossible. (Warner-Richter & Lloyd, 2020). Students with disabilities experienced anxiety while wearing a mask covering the nose and mouth. Stress and anxiety added to the lack of physical presence in a classroom and greatly affected the educational progress of all students. (Kansas Guidelines, 2020; Petretto, 2020). Therefore, not all of the students with disabilities were physically present in the general education classroom but inclusion and related services were to be provided according to the written current IEP when school was reopened (Brandenburg, et al, 2020).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly advised that students with disabilities “face greater challenges with social isolation. Schools need to be purposeful in optimizing inclusion in the classroom to avoid perpetuating isolation and separation from peers” (Brandenburg, et al., 2020. p. 429). Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks, goggles, gloves, gowns, and clothing barriers needed to be worn by teachers and staff that work with students with disabilities. COVID-19 affected students with disabilities more severely. (Brandenburg, et al, 2020, WHO, 2020).

“With appropriate safety precautions in place, school personnel, parents and students are required to adopt to the new norm. This can present unique challenges to promoting positive academic and social outcomes for students” (Yell & Samudre, 2021, p. 33). This new “norm” changed from state to state, district to district, and school to school in not only the teaching modality but also the requirements necessary for special education teachers in Kansas to meet the goals and objectives of the current written IEP for each special education student.

Theoretical Framework of Constructivism

COVID-19 marginalized teachers of students with special needs due to additional mental and physical stress. All teachers faced doubt about teaching face-to-face one day and online the next. During the spring of 2020, teachers not only dealt with educational needs of students but their own families. Support for teachers, students, and parents greatly diminished as expectations during the pandemic were unclear and unrealistic. This issue should be addressed in future studies (Glessner & Johnson, 2020, McKittrick, et al. 2020).

Teaching today lacked reflective lessons in racism, sexism, low socioeconomic levels, ableism, and religious preference (Yost, Sentner, Forlenza-Bailey, 2000; Beck, J. 2020). This dissertation unpacked the theoretical framework, constructivism, democratic ideals in education, and the concepts of free society in social justice.

The longstanding marginalization of ethnicity, sex, race, disability, and socioeconomic status have been subject to school laws since the 1950's (Yell, 2012, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). The Supreme Court recently ruled on a case, (*Endrew F. v Douglas County School*, 2017) to determine the extent of the IEP to determine reasonable progress. This decision in FAPE reinforced the continual need to decipher laws and public policy. The justification behind these laws provided inclusion to every student. "Inclusive education provides the place and the catalyst through which general and special educators, students, and parents can come together to create quality, democratic schools" (Skrtic et al., 1996, p. 149).

However, Black Lives Matter (BLM), LGBTQ, religious and political freedom, and the rights of those with disabilities are issues that appeared often in the media. Teachers must become immersed in reflective practices by engaging in constructivist ideals, to adhere to a long-standing theory of meeting the democratic needs of schools in our society (Cansiz & Cansiz,

2019, Dewey, 1938; Freire 2003; Temiz, & Topcu, 2013). Continued conversation and training in professional development helped with adaptation to the role of public education and the changing societal groups representing diversity. “Once again, people need from education a range of resources for living within socially and culturally diverse societies and avoiding their dangers, including chauvinism and racism” (Fairclough, 1995, 2013, p. 551). Education became a tugging war of potential power between government, media, and other institutions. To recognize individual thought, each educator created a classroom environment adhering to moral values and social justice. A start was initiated to become a catalyst for change. (Freire, 2003.

Constructivism

Constructivism is defined as the improvement of knowledge and skills to create solid, positive self-efficacy. Coined by Piaget (1953), it incorporated critical reflection of social justice theory in practice. This dissertation used the theoretical framework of constructivism to create a foundation of social injustice of the educational environment during COVID-19. Constructivism provided a sense of reality to the daily problems experienced during the pandemic. The theory attempted to explain the social repercussions.

Constructivism, often combined with the socio-cultural approach called social constructivist, (Skrtric, et al., 1996), social reconstructionism (Agarwal et al, 2010), and constructivist-based teaching (Temiz & Topcu, 2012), formed the theoretical basis required for the engagement of the student and was a product of high teacher self-efficacy (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2019). “Constructivism is a vague concept but is currently discussed in many schools as the best method for teaching and learning. Constructivist teaching strategies and practices are the next important step in educational reform” (Kalina & Powell, 2009, p. 242).

Constructivism related to social justice to promote interchangeable dialogues. For both students and teachers, constructivist thought encouraged the expansion of conversation and speech as empowering facets to the home and community. Social justice was not a new concept; however, it took on a new meaning and growth in education.

Social Justice and Dewey, Freire, and Piaget

Bell, Adams & Griffin (2007, p.1) defined social justice as “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs”. Institutions in American society demanded action against racism, sexism, linguistic diversity and needs, and a host of other areas that are now gaining recognition that they deserve (Berata, 2008, Boyland & Woolsey, 2015, Ladson-Billings, 2009). In the media not a day goes by that a group of marginalized individuals has not faced oppression by other society members.

Whether there are political representatives, members of other ethnic or racial groups, or society members from a wide range of religious, sexual orientation or language varieties, the attitudes of all people affect each other in the U.S. There is such an accepted freedom for speech, expression, and civil rights that currently, there is friction between the different society members. When the early philosophers of the U.S. wrote about a democratic society in the early 1900's, there was not as many diverse members of society that existed as today in daily life.

The early writings of social psychologists in the 20th century (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2003; Piaget, 1953) have reminded society of the promise for education to reflect a democratic ideal. This ideal has been written about much in the 1990's and early 2000's. Skrtic (et al. 1996) stated that “a successful inclusive learning community is a successful democratic school” (p. 150).

Freire stated, “The more educators and the people investigate the people’s thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate” (2003, p. 109). Therefore, teachers who taught during the August 2020 to May 2021 COVID-19 period needed to be encouraged to investigate their beliefs and instill this process of democratic thought in their discussions about the pandemic. During difficult periods in history, it has taken collective thinking to create an environment that nurtures students and overcomes challenges. This thinking of democracy was the basis upon which our education system was created and still exists today.

Dewey (1933) identified three characteristics of societal members that endeavor democratic education: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. He wrote early in the 1900’s “the most important problem of moral education in the school concerns the relationship of knowledge and conduct” (Democracy and Education, 2012, p. 379). It was the thought process involved in open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness that encouraged moral education.

Children may have acquired negative viewpoints of people with disabilities early on from exposure to school, media, and community. Teachers in the education system have displayed a powerlessness to change the system to include social justice viewpoints in their lessons (Boyland & Woolsey, 2015). Many teachers have lost the early reflective practices and discussions that preservice teachers entered the classroom with, knowing all too well that administrators do not positively perceive change from traditional teaching pedagogy. (Agarwal, 2010; Liston & Zeichner, 2006; Temiz & Topcu, 2013). Administrators have not always viewed themselves as properly prepared to include social justice in their buildings, resulting in traditionalist or behaviorist teaching styles (Temiz & Topcu, 2013; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Therefore, teachers,

students, and administrators furthered a lack of social justice and democratic education philosophies during COVID-19.

Lengthy moral discussions replaced strong ethical considerations during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Allan, 2021, Arellano, 2020). During the initial COVID phase of back to school in August 2020, many staff members were not sure of what policies would be provided to students with special needs. Support needed to be given everywhere and human resources were quickly depleted. There was a higher priority to get students with IEPs back in school to receive much needed academic minutes rather than making certain all students were included. It took some time for staff to adjust to the changes of plastic sheet barriers, masks, and six-foot distancing markers placed throughout the building than to instill the more important moral social justice foundations. (Toquero, 2020).

However, forgotten were the earlier works and words on American democratic education from John Dewey. Dewey wrote early in the 1900s, “Until the democratic criterion of the intrinsic significance of every growing experience is recognized, we shall be intellectually confused by the demand for adaptation to external aims.” (Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1916, 2012, p. 117). For America, this was the beginning of the relationship between education, the educator, and social justice issues; however, this relationship was not constant throughout the last century, especially during a disruptive disease such as COVID-19.

The social meaning of disabled has been a complex definition with which educators struggle today. Teachers in special education must apply the constructivist democratic approach to overcome barriers (Hehir, 2007, Adams, et al. 2007). “In short, in the eyes of many educators and society, it is preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids” (Hehir, 2002, p. 3).

Morals in reflective thinking, in practical lessons, field experiences, and selection of material and lessons have been scrutinized for oppressive bias (Giroux, 1986). Seen as unacceptable, ability grouping, preexisting beliefs of special education accomplishments and objectives have replaced inclusion. With this shift, there has also been a loss of knowledge of services and aids available to add to the curriculum of the student with special needs (Skrtic, et al, 1996). Furthermore, unattainable objectives that are not measurable are part of goals written in an IEP (Yell, 2019).

Even during COVID-19, the IEP had to allow for inclusion to guarantee free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Inclusion had to be discussed in the IEP meeting and decided upon to the “maximum extent possible”. Then the student with special education needs could fully proceed to a place in a democratic society, learning social skills and establishing relationships among students with and without disabilities. (IDEA 2004, Skrtic, et al., 1996; Yell, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and practices among elementary and secondary special education teachers regarding students with special needs in the classroom during COVID-19 in Kansas according to the current written IEP.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals?

2. Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary *and* secondary special education teachers in Kansas?
3. Do the demographic factors such as: approximate category of students with disability taught, size of community taught in, teaching modality and finally the ethnic/racial identity impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19?

Significance of the Study

The study attempted to identify major areas of concern toward teaching students with disabilities during COVID. The study included teachers attitudes and practices of students with disabilities who attended school physically whenever was possible, remotely or in a hybrid format of the two-teaching model. Fluctuating factors involved in the actual physical attendance of students with disabilities were not part of this survey. Instead, the focus of this study was to gather a collection of responses that represent teachers' attitudes and practices toward the education of students during COVID-19 with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

COVID-19: a world-wide pandemic of an outbreak of a respiratory disease caused by a new coronavirus named coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Special education teachers: the teachers who primarily teach students with disabilities that have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that legally defines services.

Inclusion: amount of time, placement, and for what purposes written into the students' IEP which provided for most or all academic instruction to students with disabilities in the general education environment to the maximum extent possible.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): the legal document which outlined goals and objectives for the student with disabilities. The IEP is annually updated and includes parents and administration, as well as all teachers working with that student, actively collaborating as part of the IEP team.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): the legislation from 1990, 1997, and 2004 that was required for evaluation, planning, and providing for services of students with disabilities.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): the federal mandate to guarantee the maximum inclusion appropriate a student with disabilities can be part of the general education classroom and with general education students throughout the school building.

Conclusion

Especially in the field of special education, many teachers were not prepared for COVID-19 needs. The obstacles that prevented collaboration and inclusion also inhibited freedom in expanding curricula to encourage social justice philosophies (Renfroe, 2006). From a critical discourse analysis from Fairclough (2013), social justice practices combined efforts in political, economic, and institutional facets. It cannot be isolated in a specific day, lesson, or unit. Integration occurred instead as hegemonic ideology. The struggle in what is written, seen, and heard required careful study. Future research to understand “structural inequalities” is imperative to its success (Beck, 2020, p. 77). Social justice education is “focused on raising awareness of impairment” and “fostering tolerance of individuals” (Lalvani & Broderick, 2013, p. 479). Awareness and tolerance are positive attributes for social justice in a democratic society.

In addition, oppression must be removed not only by simulation activities but also zero tolerance policies for ableism, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and prejudice

(Bell, et al, 2007). Future studies need to specify the role of oppression and social justice in special education. By analyzing specific instances and classroom dialogues for adhocracies in education for students with disabilities, a more finite method of action can be taken (Skrtic, 1991). Many teachers described biases regarding the marginalization of students with special needs during the pandemic. The teachers of these students felt the oppression daily and were unable to make up for the learning loss (Diament, 2021).

Meanings of collaboration and inclusion have varied from school to school, district to district, and state to state. Teacher education and professional development have been seen as starting places to instill strong social justice teaching and higher teaching self-efficacy (Bell, et al, 2007). This in turn led toward the ideal of democratic education described early in the 1900's by founding social psychologists. In this conclusion of Chapter One, "inclusive education provides the place and the catalyst through which general and special educators, students, and parents can come together to create quality, democratic school": (Skrtic et al., 1996, p. 149).

Especially during COVID-19, students with special needs were marginalized in fulfillment of their IEP goals and objectives. As stated previously, these students were unable to attend school due to mask requirements, health concerns or social distancing guidelines. The number of paraprofessionals was reduced, and the number of related services were unavoidably sporadic. Subsequently, the amount of inclusion time with their peers was very limited academically and nonacademically during the school day. "The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an ongoing challenge especially for those people and children with disabilities as their voices are unheard of [in] normal times and especially [in] this unfortunate situation. It is heightened during this emergency. Government policies during the pandemic may necessitate

inclusion for people with disabilities who also have their global rights for no one should be left behind in this crisis” (Toquero, 2020 p.158).

The additional challenges of COVID-19 impeded the teachers of students with special needs in achieving all of the goals and objectives in the IEP. The minutes of inclusion, all of the related services and time with a paraprofessional in the classrooms were difficult to achieve. Teachers of students with special needs felt it was their responsibility to make sure that the IEP goals and objectives were met. These teachers needed to be asked if they were confident in teaching students of special needs when the school year resumed in August 2020 through May 2021. Academic achievement was hindered, and the IEP inclusion minutes were not available to be included due to mask, social distancing, and other COVID restrictions.

The COVID-19 school closures interrupted special education services; however, the goals in an IEP must be followed because the IEP document is a legal mandate as part of IDEA (Yell, 2012, 2019). Students with disabilities might not have reliable internet access which is seen as an educational set-back and another obstacle to receiving an education (Sakellariou et al, 2020). Moreover, it was difficult to conduct online testing to ascertain present levels of performance and functional achievement (Warner-Richter & Lloyd, 20202). Measurement of IEP goals had to be assessed without the student present every day (State of Kansas COVID-19 Guidelines, 2020, 2021). Not all of the federal mandates toward continuity of LRE were protected (Yell, 2012, 2019). All these issues were certainly part of the everyday problem of educational attendance for students with disabilities during COVID-19.

Chapter 1 included the study overview, the presentation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement, research questions, significance, purpose of the study, and the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 contains a literature view relevant to the history of inclusion in special education and

teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and COVID. Chapter 3 outlines a description of the methodology. Chapter 4 presents a quantitative description of the data collected. Chapter 5 highlights conclusions of the data analysis and applies the data to strengthen social justice for teachers during and after COVID.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Historical Background of Special Education

Society has rejected persons with disabilities since the time of the Greeks. Plato suggested that people with “deformed offspring” hide them away. Martin Luther and John Calvin stated that persons with mental retardation were possessed by evil spirits (WaMunyi, 2015). Supporters of social Darwinism denied state aid to those with handicaps. In East Africa, those with physical handicaps were thought of to have evil spirits (Wa Munyi, 2015). History denied support for those with special needs from the earliest written account of time to today. (Noll & Trent, 2004).

After WWI and WWII, disabled veterans returned home to America with missing limbs and head trauma. This changed the way people viewed others with special needs. These were grown men returning from horrific wars. People needed to rethink the definition of disability. After Hitler’s atrocities were revealed regarding eugenics, sterilization and the mass murder of eleven million people, the world changed. Legislative action in employment, civil rights and health care began to make the past practices in the treatment of people with disabilities unacceptable in the U.S. Eugenics, sterilization, and institutionalization due to disabilities were no longer acceptable in America (Noll and Trent, 2004).

A combination of factors which occurred in the 1950s and 1960s shifted public opinion about disabled individuals. Some scholars argue that it was Sputnik’s launch into space from Russia that caused Americans to rethink their advances in education. Other educational scholars reported that it was *Brown v Board of Education, 1954* that altered the way America views civil rights of all people (Noll and Trent, 2004). Many children with disabilities were still excluded from public school in the 1950s and 1960s despite the compulsory education laws passed in

1918. *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954* and the civil rights movement guaranteed equal protection under the law for all people regarding education. It was the beginning of social change. People with disabilities were no longer members of the severely oppressed. However, they still had a long way to go to be included in the regular education classroom (Bell, Adams, Griffin, 2007).

President John F. Kennedy organized a national plan for people with mental retardation in 1961. He established the President's Panel on Mental Retardation (later called the President's Committee on Mental Retardation). Eunice Kennedy Shriver, his sister, wrote and published an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1962 called "The Hope for Retarded Children". The article was about their sister with intellectual disabilities and the family made the decision to keep her in the home. Institutionalization and the hiding of children with disabilities was no longer public policy (Noll and Trent, 2004). The events in American history regarding children with disabilities up to this point had been mostly social concerns. American society included social thought into legal action in public schools.

American Special Education Law

Special education was a relatively new entity in the law and history of American education. The history of the American people's struggle for disability rights and education was absent from law books until the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was necessary to update legislature to include students with special needs in the regular education environment after society recognized that special needs children were missing from public schools. Although the students with disabilities began most of their schooling in separate schools for "handicapped" children, these children started their journey to be included in a regular school environment in the late 1960s (Noll and Trent, 2004).

Public schools did not mandate students with special needs to be present in public school settings before 1975. The court cases of *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) and *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) were concluded after the initial mandate of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendment in 1965. This act provided federal funding to assist states to expand programs for children in poverty (Yell, 2012).

The Education of the Handicapped Act in 1970 expanded state programs for children with disabilities. After the two pivotal courts cases in 1972 (*Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) and *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) came the monumental Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. This was often referred as P.L. 94-142. It provided federal funding to states to educate students with disabilities as part of the earlier acts (Yell, 2012).

On May 20, 1974, Senator Robert Stafford introduced an amendment to the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1974, which became the basis for least restrictive environment (LRE). This amendment required that school districts mandate placement for students with disabilities in the least restrictive “maximum extent appropriate” education setting (Yell, 2012). However, this was a litigious and complicated amendment.

Today, the mandate is known as “inclusion”. It was not synonymous with mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was a term used for placing students with special needs in a regular education environment, usually for specials such as P.E., music, art or library. “Mainstreaming” suggested a student’s placement with their nondisabled peers in a nonacademic setting. The term “*mainstream*” was used to describe the placement of students with disabilities in general education classes . . . *Inclusion* describes much more than the acceptance of students with

disabilities into the mainstream. . . . *Inclusive education* is used to describe the development of schools in which every student belongs” (Westling and Fox, 2009, p. 243).

Inclusion and least restrictive environment depended upon the decision of the multidisciplinary team, when parents and school members each had ideas, goals and objectives, when writing an IEP. The amount, placement and setting of inclusion varied according to the services necessary for that student according to the IEP. Hence it was called Individualized Education Program (IEP). Again, this depended on the student’s individual needs and finding a school to provide those services, preferably the student’s home school (Skrtic, et al., 1996, Yell, 1995, 2012, 2019).

Another example of case law and legislation that shaped special education were the three Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts of 1990, 1997 and 2004. These acts are referred to using the IDEA acronym. The creation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) concept in IDEA was established to provide free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. However, IDEA did not specify how to determine LRE (Yell, 1995). The IEP should state the specifics of LRE to provide for FAPE. The legal ramifications continue to be debated today (Endrew 2017, Yell, 1995).

The LRE amendment instead mandated students be included in the general education setting to the “maximum extent appropriate” (IDEA 1997). The clause did not stipulate in what subjects or the length of time the students is included in the general education environment. This is referred to in an academic setting as “inclusion”. Nor does the LRE amendment state who is responsible for the teaching, and where the educational day is conducted in the educational environment (Yell, 2012, 2019). The decisions were often made in the current annual IEP

meeting. A series of “tests” to aid in the extent of LRE placement came about from past legislative court cases.

LRE and the various “tests” to determine placement

There were several court cases that led to “tests” for inclusion. “Few areas in special education law have been the subject of more debate and controversy than the LRE mandate”. (Yell, 2012 p. 276). LRE is determined, therefore by several factors. Historically, federal courts cases have decided the LRE parameters can differ for each student with disabilities. Three court cases stood out in the LRE decision by answering questions that would be set as precedents. There is the Roncker Portability Test, the Daniel Two-Part Test, and the Rachel H. Four-Factor Test.

The Roncker Portability Test was one of the first decisions regarding LRE. In the court case of *Roncker v Walter* (1983), 9-year-old student, Neill Roncker, was identified as having intellectual disabilities. Roncker’s parents fought to have their son in a general education setting. After some court appeals, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Court stated that Roncker be mainstreamed to the “maximum extent appropriate” (Yell, 2012, 2019). Two questions, therefore, must be answered, stated specifically in the Court of Appeals as:

1. Can the educational services that make a segregated placement superior be feasibly provided in an unsegregated setting?
2. If so, the placement in the segregated setting is inappropriate. (Yell, 2019, Figure 11.2, p. 264)

In the next test, Daniel Two-Part Test, the availability of general education classroom supplementary aids and services, as well as the maximum extent appropriate were the two main factors in inclusion. Indeed, the effect of special needs students’ presence on the teacher and

other students in the classroom, the cost, and the nonacademic benefits of interaction with students without disabilities all became part of legal cases regarding inclusion. Two questions determine the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms based on the Daniel Two-Part Test:

1. Can education in the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services be achieved satisfactorily?
2. If a student is placed in a more restrictive setting, is this student integrated to the maximum extent appropriate? (Yell, 2019, Figure 11.3, p. 266)

The third test determining inclusion for LRE is named the “Rachel H. Four-Factor Test”. The Rachel H. Four-Factor Test originated on January 24, 1994, in the Court decision in *Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H.* The case created a four-factor test to determine inclusion in the regular education classroom:

1. The educational benefits of the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services as compared with the educational benefits of the special classroom.
2. The non-academic benefits of interaction with students without disabilities.
3. The effect of the students’ presence on the teacher and on other students in the classroom.
4. The cost of mainstreaming (Figure 11.4, Yell, 2019, p.267).

This test was an extension of the two preceding tests including educational benefits of both students with and without disabilities and the cost of “mainstreaming” (a term later changed to inclusion when IDEA became into effect). The school district in this case did not prove that the “mainstreaming” was to the maximum extent appropriate. Rachel H. was therefore educated in the regular classroom to that extent (Yell, 2012).

The term “maximum extent appropriate” is still prevalent today. Each case of inclusion must satisfy that term. The Roncker Portability Test, the Daniel Two-Part Test, and the Rachel H. Four-Factor Test can be used to help the multidisciplinary team decide the amount of inclusion in IEP placements. Several other factors vary from student to student according to their individual needs, such as academic strengths and weaknesses or related service needs of the student with disabilities. These factors affected teachers’ attitudes and practices when they taught students with special needs (See p. 42, Educational and Environmental Factors).

Therefore, once these questions of during what academic setting the students will be included in the regular education environment have been answered, the IEP team must decide what inclusion should take place, along with the location and duration of inclusion. The decision is not made until after the IEP meeting by the parents and teaching with the administrative staff. If the guidelines for inclusion are not accurately met within IDEA 2004 guidelines and there is a clear violation of the due rights of the student for services, “due process hearings” might occur. In a due process hearing, initially, a local hearing officer would read the reports and decide whether the student’s right for special education was violated. The hearing could go to Circuit 2, which covers seven larger geographical areas of the United States. If the decision is appealed, it could go to U.S. District Court, then on to U.S. Courts of Appeal, all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. All staff that work with special education guidelines when deciding services for a student with special needs must be aware of these guidelines. Penalties resulting from a due process hearing include the cost and time for tuition reimbursement, compensatory education fees plus legal fees. (Yell, 2019).

COVID-19 and Inclusion

COVID-19 changed the ideal “maximum extent appropriate” (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020; McKenna, 2020, Toquero, 2020). The main factors which influenced the amount of inclusion during COVID-19 were a lack of paraprofessional support, and an inability for students with special education needs to physically attend school because of health and mask/social distancing reasons. Remote learning also caused several areas of concern in terms of a lack of technical services, equipment, reliable Wi-Fi, and available support staff (Bonella, et al., 2020).

The lack of services impacted every student during the time of COVID-19, which began in March 2020. Students with disabilities were especially impacted, unless IEP meetings and testing updates occurred with COVID-19 protocols. Complacency and acceptance of inclusion became less important than the past LRE mandates (Kauffman, 2020). Blogs and news articles presented the dissolution of special education as a natural consequence until COVID stabilized. (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Arellano, 2020; Banks, et al. 2020; Krell, 2020; Toquero, 2020).

For whatever amount of time was available for inclusion, students with disabilities were being included remotely or in a hybrid modality of instruction. However, during COVID-19, in some instances students with disabilities were allowed to be present in the regular education classroom a couple times a month for face-to-face instruction. This is far less than the four days a week non-disabled student were present face-to-face for academic instruction during COVID (Krell, 2020). This discrepancy in attendance was often due to lack of paraprofessional support. Many paraprofessionals were laid off in the initial onset of COVID-19 and there is uncertainty over how many returned. Lack of inclusion during COVID meant social isolation for students with disabilities (Brandenburg, et al. 2021).

The type of remote teaching modality varied according to the specific teacher, school, district and individual need for the students. Several sources used for this literature review differentiated between synchronous and asynchronous learning. “Online instruction is delivered in two main ways: (a) synchronous online instruction delivered in real-time through video teleconferencing platforms, or (b) asynchronous online instruction delivered through recorded material that can be watched” (Wheatley, 2021, p. 8). This was crucial for students with special needs. Those students needed to have an adult with them to explain any recorded lesson since there was no opportunity to ask questions or further differentiate for academic levels of understanding. However, when parents were interviewed regarding teaching their child with special needs, many were overwhelmed with the technology, terminology and task analysis (Schuck et al., 2021).

There were also students and parents/guardians of those students with special needs that approved of online learning. Several remarked that remote learning removed the physical differences of students and allowed for students to participate without those stigmas. Recorded instruction allowed for students to repeat lessons and also allowed students to learn at the best time and under the best conditions for them. (Wheatley, 2021). Online instruction was just beginning to be researched and further studies will ascertain its merits or disadvantages.

For changes to the IEP, an IEP meeting must be held due to lack of face-to-face school time during COVID-19. IEP meetings are held once a year for an annual review, but it is important to note that these meetings take place particularly when a change needs to be made due to an IEP out of compliance with IDEA and state regulations. There are certain guidelines which must be followed, especially including parents’ input and attendance. The concept of

“educational benefit” and “reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress appropriate to his/her circumstances”: are both important to evaluate. (Yell, 2012, 2019).

Schools must adhere to numerous parts of the IEP process and record them in the IEP meeting minutes. Data, reasonable goals that can be measured, a list of related services and the time/frequency of each service are all crucial parts of IEP goals and objectives. The IEP must address specific academic and functionality advancement. Specifically, during the COVID-19 school year of 2020-2021, the IEP was still required to follow the IDEA guidelines. The IEP must be amended to address these issues and cannot be left without stipulation of how to provide for inclusion.

In addition to the past requirements, there are three provisions that teachers of students with special needs must be aware of to avoid due process hearings. Due process hearings are complicated procedures attempting to “resolve disputes between the parents of children and youth with disabilities and school districts regarding the identification, evaluation, programming, placement or provision of a FAPE to a student with disabilities” (Yell, 2019, p. 290) The three provisions are procedural, substantive and implementation violations of FAPE. These three provisions have been in effect since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975 (Yell, 2019). Common procedural errors include failing to provide prior written notice, failing to ensure parents’ meaningful involvement, predetermining services and placement, and failing to address transitions needs (Rozalski, Yell & Warner, 2021). “More importantly, because of *Endrew* Supreme Court decision 2017, the student’s IEP will enable him or her to make progress in light of the student’s unique individual circumstances” (Rozalski, Yell & Warner. 2021. p 6).

The Supreme Court decision regarding the *Endrew* case established a pre-COVID guideline that outlined to what extent IDEA guaranteed free appropriate public education. Further research will be needed to determine FAPE and LRE in the following reopening of the school and the services for students with disabilities, post COVID. Specifically, how the student is guaranteed “appropriate progress” will need to be decided, as stated in the final ruling of the *Endrew* case. Then, each case of IEP compliance or procedural failure will need to be included in additional services due to amount of regression for each student with disabilities.

Other common substantive requirements for the IEP include failing to conduct a comprehensive, individualized assessment, evaluate current present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) and write “ambitious, measurable annual goals” (Rozalski, Yell & Warner, 2021, p. 7). These procedural and substantive errors can also lead to implementational failure. Prior determinations of services and placement before the IEP meeting could signal implementational issues with the IEP for FAPE. Further research on how IEP goals avoided substantive, procedural and implementational violations during COVID-19 should be conducted. It is unforeseen whether federal intervention, state guidelines or individual district policies conduct the investigation of FAPE violations during COVID.

Failure to provide measurement to change or amend IEPs causes procedural violations. In McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020, a review of legal obligations for IDEA included a due process to protect LRE with FAPE. In Chicago alone, 6000 IEPs had to be amended at the beginning of COVID. When the U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos reassured the public that FAPE would not be waived in LRE during COVID-19, this required substantive and procedural provisions of IDEA (Jameson, et al. 2020).

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Student with Disabilities

Past research regarding teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities focused on the concept of inclusion. There were several factors tied to the attitude of teachers in relation to this concept. In one study, the factors were listed as teacher acceptance and the ideal of inclusion. "Teachers' attitudes were found to be strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them (child-related variables), less by the teacher related variables" (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, p. 129). Indeed, it was shown that general education teachers' confidence to provide education decreased as the severity of students' disabilities increased (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002)

Teacher attitudes were also directly related to the success of the inclusion (See educational and environmental factors, p. 42). However, many of the studies and meta-analysis of the research were international. The wide differences in the education systems of each country gave a broader picture of inclusion but it did not aid in the definition of inclusion for the United States.

For example, a master's degree study from Japan in 2015 stated that "inclusion is relatively a new concept for teachers and the overall support system for children with disabilities is undeveloped" (Yada, 2015, p. 2). This Japanese study was due in part to the international UNESCO (2005) definition of inclusion. It was stated as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning cultures and communities and reducing exclusion with and from education" (Yada, 2015, p. 8).

It has been stated throughout the history of inclusion that teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities, the ability to teach students with disabilities, and support for teachers led to successful inclusion. "It is it argued that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in

ensuring the success of inclusive practices” (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, p. 138). The list of factors (See the list of educational and environmental facts, p.42) related to teachers’ attitudes is complex. No doubt special education law has had a great effect on whether an IEP is carried out as determined by the IEP team. Teachers’ attitudes have equally influenced the success of inclusion and addressing IEP goals (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

The following lists are a collection of factors deemed relevant to teachers’ attitudes in educational settings. These factors were collected from Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Idol, 2006; Kauffman and Horby, 2020; Krell, 2020; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2017; McKittrick & Tubman, 2020; Skrtic, Sailor, and Gee, 1996; Yada, 2015 to demonstrate a clearer picture of what research determined to be relevant towards teachers’ attitudes regarding inclusion and teaching students in special education.

List of educational factors related to teachers’ attitude towards inclusion:

1. Category/identification of disability type
2. Severity of disability
3. Amount of inclusion (part/full, daily/weekly, specific classrooms/all classrooms, etc.)
4. Educational level of teacher, gender, race/ethnic background and identity
5. Amount of experience in teaching students with disabilities (also length of current teaching assignment that requires teaching students with disabilities in a regular education setting).
6. Professional development, staff resources, and IT equipment in staff library in teaching inclusion
7. Elementary or secondary school
8. LRE and IEP guidelines (P.L. 94-142) and knowledge of special education law
9. Teachers’ socio-political views on inclusion
10. Female teachers of students with special needs had a more favorable attitude of inclusion
11. Pre-service professional development regarding inclusion of students in special education

List of environmental factors related to teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion:

1. Size of number of students in the regular education classroom

2. Location of school (home school or not)
3. Support of related services (SLP, OT, PT etc., special education teacher)
4. Paraprofessional support
5. Administrative/district level support
6. Parent/guardian support
7. Student philosophy (disabled and non-disabled peers)
8. Collaborative efforts within the school
9. Personal experience with students with disabilities
10. Location of teaching assignment (urban, suburban, community, or rural)
11. Public, private, charter, home school, homeless, or migrant school types

It cannot be denied that support/related services (speech and language therapy, physical and occupational therapy, behavioral and vision therapy, etc.), paraprofessional assistance, principal and parents support all increase the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom (Idol, 2006). Additionally, increased professional development and inclusion for classified and certified staff also increased positive attitudes (Idol, 2006).

Elementary Teachers of Special Education COVID-19 Literature Review

In Pressley (2021), a study of Elementary Teachers' Self-Efficacy, teachers reported to have difficulties during the pandemic with new technology and remote teaching, especially since many elementary lessons are "hands-on". Moreover, teachers experienced increased levels of stress trying to care for their own families and teach virtually during this time. 55, or 17% of the teachers who participated in Pressley's study had previously won teacher of the year award, indicating that teaching experience did not lead to higher teacher efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As children learned from home, parents shouldered a new burden for the education of their children. "Approximately one quarter of parents (26%) reported that their children did not receive the related services found on their IEP. Parents reported several challenges in supporting

their child online” (Wheatley, 2021, p. 12). In addition to this parental feedback, Glessner & Johnson, 2020 argued that: “One cannot take proven face-to-face teaching methods and simply move them to an online environment” (p.1). Teaching students with special needs during COVID-19 required more than using previous lessons through an online modality. Special technological resources were required to change lessons planned to provide IEP goals and objectives. Google classroom, Google Voice, Google Hangout, Google Forms, Seesaw, Schoology, and Zoom were among the many new variants of online tools that both parents and teachers navigated. (Glessner & Johnson, 2020).

Despite the numerous challenges, there were several positive outcomes of COVID-19. Parent-teacher bonds were strengthened. Teachers were able to witness different, independent skills learned by students at home, fostering empathy for the role of parents of a child with special needs (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Parents learned augmentative communication more quickly and learned correct redirection of negative behaviors (Schuck, Lambert & Wang, 2021).

A perceived lack of virtual teaching training, collaboration, and administrative support led elementary special education teachers to feel inadequacy, guilt, and despair. The necessary face-to-face data collection from all the IEP team members was severely lacking during the pandemic (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). One teacher stated, “distance learning is not the best for her [student’s] routine and learning” (Glessner & Johnson, 2020, p. 29).

Many teachers discussed going above and beyond a typical teacher role. For example, teachers dropped off supplies to families in need and chatted on the phone with parents while they vented or even cried. Teachers saw the home environment directly related to the child’s disability, including parents' support (of lack thereof) of the student academically, emotionally and physically (Schuck, Lambert & Wang, 2021). Teachers stepped up into the role of social

support for parents and students. They checked-in with families not only for academic lessons but also for well-being. Teachers taught parents about visual schedules, classroom strategies, token reward systems, and independence. However, there was a cost to all this extra effort and time. Studies began to show teacher burn-out, resignation, and signs of mental stress (Pressley, 2021).

Pre-COVID, special education referrals are crucial in elementary school. The lack of timely and complete psychological and related service evaluations led to a backlog of cases. Mandates from the U.S. Department of Education created guidelines for returning to face-to face instruction. In a 23- page document, the school's responsibilities were made known with subsequent documents to follow (Diament, 2021). Inclusion is one topic that is still being addressed.

Middle and High School Teachers of Special Educations COVID-19 Literature Review

There is a lack of research that measured the attitude between elementary and secondary regular education teachers in relation to inclusion. More specifically, research is missing regarding teaching students in the middle school and high school classroom during COVID. Although the structure of class schedules and subjects are separated between teachers, research shows secondary teachers are faced with different obstacles pre-COVID (Idol, 2006). The number of students in each secondary classroom was larger than elementary classrooms and some classes had too many students with disabilities depending on the class subject. "None of the administrators in the secondary schools were in favor of inclusion without extra support to the classroom teachers" (Idol, 2006, p. 87). In the same study, 80% of the elementary education teachers chose to have special education support compared to 77% of the secondary teachers.

(Idol, 2006) The closeness in the percentages of elementary and secondary teachers signaled unity.

Specifically, during COVID, in Haverback, 2020, middle school preparation in general education to teach was needed and was not obtained during the initial COVID-19 year. The lack of preparation time and use of successful lesson units made middle school teaching more difficult. Middle school differs from elementary school in that each subject is taught separately with different teachers. Inclusion typically means that a paraprofessional may be assisting in the regular classroom. These teachers scrapped existing past lessons, instead relying on on-line teaching, which was not as multi-dimensional in using tactile, visual, or auditory learning approaches. Haverback called the past lessons and units “mastery experiences” as in a poetry unit or history infused with replicas. “What works in the classroom may not work online” (Haverback, 2020, pg. 4). This led to lessened teacher confidence levels and affected the success of the lesson.

High school classrooms have generally been known to be extremely large and one high school teacher remarked, “I teach in a science classroom. It’s one of the largest classrooms on campus. I could not achieve social distancing if all my students showed up,” said Richard Lines, a science teacher at a Texas high school (Schwartz, 2021, p.4). A high school chemistry teacher in South Carolina commented on a common occurrence in high school that only half of the students wore a mask and they must be reminded to wear them properly or it will not help. (Schwartz, 2021). One middle and high school special education teacher in Iowa had students that encouraged other students not to get tested for COVID to prevent the quarantine of sports teams. Vaccines for high school students were not available at the time of the teachers’ interviews (Schwartz, 2021).

All parents and school staff that helped students with disabilities needed support, this was especially true during COVID-19. Many teachers that taught before or during COVID-19 asked for professional development, stress days, plan days, technology support, new ideas and new guidelines (Brubaker, 2021). These teachers had to be ready to take on the task of following IDEA guidelines, regardless of the pandemic. The memo from Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, supported by President Trump, did not waiver from IEP rights of students with disabilities (CDC, 2020; U.S. Dept. of Ed. Fact Sheet, 3-21-2020).

This literature review briefly included special education history, highlighted the role of the legal system and its many amendments for LRE, discussed inclusion, and explained teachers' attitude towards inclusion. The timeline of law regarding special education began in the United States in the mid 1900s and was recently continued in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2017. Recent court rulings affected students with special needs, their parents, regular and special education school staff, and related support staff. Traditionally, it has been the school administrator who oversaw that the law is followed, services received, and educational opportunities existed for students with disabilities. However, with the complexities of COVID-19, no inclusion remained as it was before March 2020.

The discussion of law and special education has been missing from many education administrators' preparation programs (Crockett, et al 2009). Special education law, policy, and the historical background of special education is important for school principals to understand. Especially during COVID-19, lack of mandatory inclusion in schools greatly affected meeting IEP goals (Cooner et. al., 2005). Principals subsequently provided professional support for students, parents, teachers and related services staff in teaching students with disabilities. However, to understand special education in America, one must understand the demands of

citizens who most likely were family members of people with disabilities (see recent 2021 literature about case of Woodsworth, Yell and Samudre, 2021).

A brief overview of research regarding teachers' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities demonstrated gaps in studies differentiating elementary and second teachers and their attitudes/concerns. The study brought to light a need for more research regarding middle and secondary school teachers' attitudes towards teaching student with disabilities.

Chapter Three relates the specifications of the Methodology and Research Approach. The nature of the study, the research questions, the research design, participants, data collection, instrument used, data analysis, and reliability/validity are addressed in that chapter.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

Methodology & Research Approach

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special educators toward students with disabilities during COVID-19. The study examined the significance of factors (see page 42) in the educational or environmental areas. This study focused on the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas that belonged to the Facebook group “Kansas Educators” or were part of a webmail from Kansas National Educators Association (KNEA)/Kansas State University (K-State) collected from the attached survey (See Appendix A).

Research Questions:

1. What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals?
2. Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas?
3. Do the demographic factors such as: category of students with disability taught, grade level taught, the size of the community taught in, teaching modality, and the ethnic/racial identity of the instructor impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19?

Research Design

This study involved employing a quantitative survey utilizing a Likert-type scale to report descriptive data on the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special educators. The dependent variable was the teachers teaching in Kansas and part of the Facebook group “Kansas Educators”, the webmail from KNEA or K-State. The independent variables were the approximate size of the community taught in, if the teachers taught elementary or secondary, the IDEA category for the special education students taught, the teaching modality, and the ethnic/racial identity of the teachers (Field, 2013).

Participants

The participants were special education elementary and secondary educators who were teaching students with disabilities during COVID-19 in the state of Kansas and were part of the Facebook group “Kansas Educators” or special education teachers responding to a webmail from KNEA/K-State.

Participants were asked not to respond to the survey if they did not currently have students with disabilities on their caseloads. “Telling sample members that only a small number of people have an opportunity to participate can be motivational” (Dillman, 2014, p. 29).

Pilot Study

A pilot study of the survey was given to ten teachers with backgrounds in special education. Participants in the pilot study reported that it was taken with ease, and they did not ask any questions that resulted in survey changes. “Pilot studies can also be very useful for web surveys as they give the surveyor the opportunity to test the entire survey process from start to finish and to assess its success in a number of useful ways” (Dillman, et al., 2014, p.343). Participants used a wide variety of technology to take the survey, which included: cell phones,

tablets, desktop computers and laptop computers. The teachers only commented that they wanted to give more information as to why they answered as they did on the pilot study. A future study using qualitative research methods would increase the possibility that participants provide more interview-derived answers rather than using only a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by means of a quantitative survey using the Qualtrics K-State survey computer program and a voluntary survey of elementary and secondary special education teachers teaching students with disabilities in the state of Kansas. The members of the study group were also part of the Facebook group “Kansas Educators” or KNEA/K-State association. The study did not differentiate between groups, adding to the anonymity of the results. Using Qualtrics eliminated the possibility that participants could take the survey more than once.

Instrument

An online system distributed the survey to elementary and secondary special elementary education educators. The writer of the study gave participants a ten-day window to return the surveys. The researcher posted the survey on the Kansas Educators Facebook page three times. Thereafter, the researcher made the survey available to special education teachers across the state of Kansas that received KNEA webmail. The survey was also accessible to recent teacher graduates of special education from Kansas State University.

The survey used a 5-point Likert scale to examine attitudes and practices of special education elementary and secondary teachers in Kansas during COVID-19. Bipolar scales allowed for two responses in agreement of the questions, two responses in disagreement of the questions and one in between for a neutral response. A gradation of the two positive and two

negatives resulted in five response options: Strongly agree, Agree, neither agree or disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree (Dillman, et al. 2014).

One of the strengths of this study was that it addressed a topic of concern for special education teachers teaching during COVID-19. There was only one such study, especially for the state of Kansas, during the time that this study was conducted. It was the White Paper on *Access, Engagement, and Resilience during COVID-19 Remote Learning for teachers, parents, and students in Kansas for the Time Period of March 2019* (Bonella, et al. 2020). Many international studies were also conducted from March 2019 forward, but the researcher did not find comparable results due to the uniqueness of the Kansas special education system.

Reliability/ Validity

In Field (2013), validity is defined as “evidence that a study allows correct inferences about the question it was aimed to answer or that a test measures what it set out to measure conceptually” (p. 885-886). Also, it is necessary to obtain reliability, which is “the ability of a measure to produce consistent results when the same entities are measured under different conditions” (Field, 2013, p.882). However, there was not a survey used in any past research that ascertained teachers’ attitudes and practices during COVID-19 since it was a novel coronavirus and had only been detected in late 2019. Eleven surveys were compared to the survey used in this study for flow, accurate wording, response questions for demographics, length, visual ease, correct spacing, and increased participation.

To add a phrase consistently to the end of every question on the survey may affect the reliability and validity. In *The Reviewer’s Guide to Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences* authored by Hancock & Mueller (2020, p. 338), it is stated that if a previous survey has been used with reliability and validity, the survey instrument can be used with another study if the

essential conditions for reliability and validity are answered in the positive. Therefore, if reliability and validity have been previously accepted in a study, then as long as the study's appropriateness addresses the purpose and research questions, and the conclusions are related to the evidence, then the condition for validity and reliability are within reasonable assurances to be statistically sound. (Hancock & Mueller, 2020)

Data Analysis

Teacher surveyed data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Teacher attitudes were described by means of percentages, tables, and number of responses. One- and two-tailed sample t-tests and two ANOVA were distributed "to test whether the groups mean differ" (Field, 2013, p. 870). Descriptive statistics were used to determine significance among factors.

Analysis Unit, Population and Sample

The analysis unit for this study was any elementary or secondary special education educator replying from the Facebook group "Kansas Educators" or KNEA/K-State website. The overall population of the study encompassed those elementary and secondary special education educators that volunteered for this confidential study. A targeted response rate was over fifty surveys to be completed. There were 70 responses (n=70).

Factors Studied

The factors studied were the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special education educators in Kansas teaching students with special needs. Demographics compared included: location of classroom (Rural, Urban, Suburban), teaching modalities used, grade level grouping taught, identification of the category of the special education needs, and racial/ethnic identity of the teacher.

Definition of Characteristics

1. Attitudes- a susceptible response based on previous experience.
2. Preparedness- a readiness, ability to carry out assigned duty, or feeling that the individual can carry out the assigned duty.
3. Inclusion- Regular education placement of students with disabilities according to the IEP designated time/amount and characteristics of the educational classroom that allow for the maximum extent possible. This has been extended to include inclusion placement during COVID-19 taking into consideration the educational environment and closures due to COVID-19 exposure.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to elementary and secondary special education teachers that taught students with disabilities during the school year August 2020 through May 2021 and were members of the Facebook group “Kansas Educators” or KNEA/K-State webmail. The following limitations are recognized:

1. Timing of the survey is to be during the active COVID-19 epidemic. This survey reflected teachers’ attitudes and practices from the period from August 2020 to May 2021.
2. Participants of the survey were volunteers from the Facebook group “Kansas Educators” or KNEA/K-State webmail. They taught students with disabilities at the time of the survey from August 2020 through May 2021.
3. Instructional modality was varied widely according to the geographic location and encompassing school districts and county closures.
4. The reported attitudes may or may not have been reflective of the actual practices.

The following chapter provides an analysis of the data collected in a more detailed discussion of the outcomes. Results of the demographics and survey of the special education teachers' perceptions of teaching during COVID-19 are provided, both individually and in relationship to one another.

Chapter 4 - Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary special educators toward students with disabilities during COVID-19. The study examined the significance of the elements of the educational and environmental factors listed on page 42 of the dissertation.

Research Questions:

The research questions of the study were:

1. What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals in Kansas?
2. Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas?
3. Do demographic factors such as: category of disability, size of community taught in, grade level of students taught, teaching modality used during teaching and finally, the ethnic/racial identity of the teacher impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19 in Kansas?

The sample for this study was drawn from elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas who taught students with special education needs from August 2020 to May 2021. The teaching could have been conducted face-to-face, online or a hybrid of the two modalities. The participants in this study completed the “Examining Teachers’ Attitudes and Practices in Special Education during COVID-19” survey (ETAP). The participants were part of the Kansas Educators Facebook group or on KNEA/K-State special education teachers webmail.

Description of the Sample

The study used descriptive statistics to characterize the sample according to the items on the demographic questionnaire and the ten subsequent questions regarding special education teachers' attitudes and practices teaching during COVID-19. The period of time used for the questions was from August 2020 through May 2021. Categorical variables were scored using percentages and frequencies (See Appendix C, Tables C.1 through C. 27).

VassarStats Analysis Tables and Numbers

The data from ETAP was exported to Excel in the Qualtrics program. Numerical values were assigned to the data and the data was then analyzed using VassarStats. One 5-way ANOVA, one three-way ANOVA, one two tailed t-test and a single sample t-test were used to test the overall fit of the linear model. These tests measured the variances of group means.

Data Analyzation

The fifteen questions of the study ETAP were analyzed quantitatively using percentages based on the respondents' choice and whether they positively or negatively answered the variables of strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. The researcher calculated percentages based on the true number of respondents (usually 65) and listed the tables sequentially in the Appendix C according to the question number. Table C.1 gives the data from question 1, and Table C.2 gives the data derived from question 2, etc.

Demographic factor data can be found in the list of questions used for ETAP in Appendix A in the formulation of the Tables C.1 through C.5 for the data derived in Appendix C for Questions 1-5. Corresponding data for the responses for the questions regarding the demographics population of the teaching population can be found on (Question 1, Table C.1), teaching assignment, (Question 2, Table C.2), racial/ethnic background, (Question. 3, Table C.3),

special education category, (Question 4, Table C.4), and teaching modality (Question 5, Table C.5).

Data analysis began with Question 1, although most of the significance was found with the demographic data in the 5-way and 3-way ANOVAs. Kansas teachers for children with special needs were primarily self-identified as teaching in a rural area in Question 1. In this study, 39 of 65, or 60% of, participants self-identified as teaching in a rural environment. (See Table C.1 in Appendix C). 40% of participants taught in suburban and urban environments (26.15% Suburban, 13.85% Urban).

The U.S. Census Bureau defined urban teaching environments as a specific geographical region with 50,000 people or more. Urban clusters, or what were also known as suburban teaching environments are specific geographical regions comprised of 2,500-49,999 people living together in one area. Environments with a population below 2,500 were deemed rural. Kansas had a higher rural population percentage than the national average of rural population in 2021. Kansas had a rural population of approximately 27%, whereas the entire United States had a rural population of approximately 19.30%. The urban population percentage for Kansas in the 2010 census was 49% and the suburban population percentage was 23% (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

For Question 2, 40% of respondents self-identified as K-6 special education teachers (See Table C.2 in Appendix C). While K-6 special education teachers were slightly the majority of respondents, 36.92%, of the participants self-identified as 6-12 special education (See Table C.2 in Appendix C). The national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2021) listed the number of elementary special education teachers at 187,070 (56%) and the number of secondary special education teachers 145,690 (43%). There were no statistics for Preschool special education. If

the figures for preschool were removed from the data from ETAP, 52% of respondents were elementary and 48% of the respondents were secondary. These numbers aligned closely to the national averages of elementary and secondary special education teachers.

The national percentage of white special education teachers was 74.8% and the national average of black special education teachers was 9.77% (DATAUSA, 2020). These averages were comparable with the national data obtained from ZIPPIA (2021), which gathered teachers' data using approximately 30 million profiles. The cited ZIPPIA (2021) data listed the ethnicity of special education teachers nationally as 75.4% white, 9.9% Black or African American, and 9.9% Hispanic or Latinx. In the ETAP study all of the participants were self-identified as white for Question 3 (See Table C.3 in Appendix C). This could be a limitation due to the fact that it may not be representative of the total of Kansas teaching population of students with disabilities.

Question 4 in the study, participants identified the category of students that they taught with special needs. The majority of respondents listed "Learning Disabled" as the highest category taught for elementary and secondary special education teachers (67.9%, See Table C.4 in Appendix C). Second in the percentages listed the category taught as "Intellectually Disabled" (20.31%, See Table C.4 in Appendix C). The third percentage of self-identification for category of instruction was "Emotionally Disabled" (10.94%, See Table C.4 in Appendix C). These three categories equaled 99.15% for the total of percentages for Question 4 in categories taught.

Comparatively in figure OV-1 in Appendix D, "Distribution of Special Needs Among Special Education Students 2017-18 School Year" was the category breakdown from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). Learning disability was the highest students' category of special education needs with 25, 581 out of 86, 502 students listed as qualifying as learning disabled. The percentage, therefore, using figure OV-1, approximately 29.5% of the students

with special needs qualified as learning disabled in the 2017-18 school year in Kansas. The second student category used for qualification for students with special needs in the 2017-18 school year in Kansas was speech/language with 16.1% of the total population and the third student category was developmental delay with 15.7% of the total of students with special needs in Kansas. Compared to the results of the ETAP study, the highest percentage of students with special needs corresponds with the category of the highest percentage of students 2017-18 figure OV-1 in the category of learning disabled. However, speech/language was not a choice in ETAP, nor was developmentally delayed a category choice that the participants in ETAP could select. Again, this could be a limitation to the study. No figures were available to the categories of the percentages of special education teachers currently teaching in Kansas.

Question 5 addressed a significant question as to the modality used in teaching during the COVID-19 period between August 2020 through May 2021. The study ETAP showed the highest percentage as face-to-face instruction with 66.54% (See Appendix C, Table C.5). This is not what has been presented in the national media. Most studies significantly report that a hybrid of the teaching modalities was used between August 2020 through May 2021 (Schwartz, 2021). The second highest percentage was teaching on-line with 32.30% in the ETAP survey and the third highest percentage of teaching modality during COVID identified by the participants in ETAP was hybrid of face-to-face and on-line with 1.53%.

The next section of the study ETAP collected data for teachers' attitudes and practices toward teaching children with special needs during the August 2020 through May 2021 school year. 64.65% of the participants responded in the affirmative, agreeing with the statement "I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs" for Question #6. Only one-fourth

(26.16%) answered negatively that they were not confident in their ability to teach children with special needs (See Table C.6 Appendix C).

This was the general trend for the study questions regarding teacher attitudes and practices toward teaching students with special needs during the time period August 2020 through May 2021. Questions 6 through 15 were answered affirmatively, with the exceptions of Questions 10 and 11. Question 7 was answered positively by 64.29% of respondents and negatively by 23.21% of respondents regarding being adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The participants answered neither agree or disagree 12.50% for question 7 being adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities. This could indicate a lack of professional development, training in technology or online teaching modality. A further study should be conducted to seek clarification.

For Question 8, 62.5% of the participants answered positively, 26.78% answered negatively and 10.71% answered neither agree or disagree for making academic progress towards IEP goals. Whether the IEP needs were met with amended IEPs was not part of the data collection (see Table C.8 in Appendix C).

For Question 9, 67.86% of respondents answered positively for “I saw special students with special needs adapt to mask wearing”. 17.86% of the participants answered negatively for Question 9 and 14.29% answered neither agree or disagree (see Appendix C for Table C.9). In a study in 2020, the American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP, Brandenburg, 2020) stated that mask wearing was still a priority.

In Question 10, only 48.21% of the respondents answered positively for “It was difficult for students with special needs to make stride in academic achievement”. 21.43% of the teachers answered negatively and 30.36% answered neither agree or disagree. Like question 10, a

relatively large percentage of respondents also answered neither agree or disagree in Question 11, with 30.36% of the participants responding in this manner. However, 51.79% of the participants answered negatively for Question 11: “Students with special needs participate in remote learning environment successfully with their peers”. Only 17.86% answered Question 11 affirmatively (see Appendix C Tables C.10 and C.11).

The responses for Question 12 revealed positive answers by a large majority of the participants. 91.07% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed for the statement: “Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP”. Only 3.57% of the teachers answered disagree and 5.36% answered neither agree or disagree. This could have been answered positively for reasons of legal issues, uses of on-line technology of computers or use of telephones (see Table C.12 in Appendix C).

In Question 13, the respondents addressed IEP goals and if those goals were adapted to the modality of learning (face-to-face, on-line or hybrid of the two). 64.28% of the participants answered either agree or agree strongly to this. 21.43% of the teachers surveyed answered disagree or strongly disagree. 14.29% answered neither agree or disagree that the IEP goals were adapted to the modality of learning.

Question 14 was “the success of adequate technology influenced the practices to meet the IEP goals.” A large percentage of the participants responded agree or strongly agree (60.71%, see Table C.14 in Appendix C). Only 14.29% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with Question 14. Surprisingly, 25% of respondents neither agreed or disagreed.

Researchers completed several studies regarding the effect of or lack of technology for students with special needs during COVID-19, namely: Bonella, et al., 2020, Brandenburg, et al., 2020, Brubaker, 2021, CDC 3-2020, Diamant, 2021, Frederick et al., 2020, Glessner & Johnson,

2020, Krell, 2020, Marshall, 2022, McKenna, 3-2020, McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020, Petretto et al, 2020, Schuck, et al., 2021, Schwartz, 2021, Toquero, 2020, Wheatley, 2021. A dissertation alone could be written about technology and students with special needs during the time of COVID-19. However, this topic was not one of the research questions in this ETAP study.

The Journal of Pediatric Nursing (Goldschmidt, 2020) published an article that discusses how nursing caregivers were able to provide services using technology. Many medical visits shifted to tele-health visits using the computer for video consultations. Likewise, some students chose to remain at home in the fall of 2020 and either received education online or through a hybrid of face-to-face and online learning depending on if they had contact tracing of COVID exposure in their families.

In Question 15, “I saw increased levels of anxiety in the students with special needs”, participants answered agreed or strongly agreed 64.28% of the time. Respondents answered negatively 16.07% of the time. Participants responded neither agree or disagree 19.64% of the time to “I saw increased levels of anxiety in the students with special needs”. These responses indicated concern on the part of the teachers over the mental health of their students.

Answering research Question. # 1 (Please see Appendix B for match of each research Question with survey ETAP Question).

1. What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals?

To seek statistical significance regarding research question # 1, the researcher ran a two-tailed independent samples test for Question. 2 (demographic data collected for the number of elementary K-6 and secondary 6-12 teaching assignments) and Question. 8 (I believe that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs). The f-ratio was 1.83 and the P value was 0.008 (See Table C.23 in Appendix C). The “F-test for the Significance of the Difference between the Variance of the Two Samples” (Table C.23 in Appendix C) Question.2 and Question.8 showed a very low f ratio of 1.5 (f-ratios need to be close to one for the variances to be equal, Field, 2013) and a significant p value. The “p” value must be less than 0.05 to be significant (Field, 2013). Therefore, the relationship between “elementary and secondary level of teaching” variable with “I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs” did not show statistical significance in this two-tailed T-test. However, the 5-way ANOVA run did find statistical significance in the comparison of teachers’ attitudes and practices combined with IEP goals attainment (see Table C.17 and C. 18 in Appendix C). The 5-way ANOVA positively answered the research question that elementary and secondary school special education teachers did feel that they could meet the students IEP goals.

Answering research Question #2

2. Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas?

The researcher ran another sample t-test using the data in Qualtrics from ETAP only within Question 2 (see Table C.28 in Appendix C). The variance, standard deviation and

standard error was low, close to 1.0 and the sample mean was 2.2857. A sample t-test was used because Question. 2 had independent values, the values were continuous and obtained from the same population. The f- ratio was 1.5, but the p value was >0.05 .

Therefore, in answer to research question #2 there was no statistical significance between elementary and secondary teachers as factors. The attitudes and practices during COVID-19 did not differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas.

Answering research Question #3:

3. Did demographic factors such as: approximate category of students with disability taught, size of community taught in, teaching modality, grade of students taught and finally the ethnic/racial identity of the teachers impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19?

ANOVA results for the data:

The first 5-way ANOVA included four of the demographic data (geographical location, grade level taught, special education category, and teaching modality). The first ANOVA #1 (see Appendix C Tables C.16, C.17 and C.18) measured for statistical significance between ETAP Questions 1 (suburban, urban or rural), 2 (preschool, K-6, 6-12 special education), 4 (Learning, Emotionally, Health/physical, Intellectual categories of services), 5 (face-to face, online, hybrid), and 8 (I believe that academic progress towards IEP goals possible).

Table C.16 ANOVA showed a very low standard error 0.10, a standard deviation of 1.80 and a variance of 3.2. When the researcher ran the Tukey HSD test to pair-wise samples, $P < .01$ was found in comparisons for all but ANOVA value # 2 vs ANOVA value #3 and ANOVA

value #3 vs ANOVA value #4 (See Table C.18 in Appendix C). This demonstrated statistical significance when compared to the teaching assignment, the special education category, the teaching modality, and the agreement that academic progress was possible toward IEP goals for students with special needs (see Table C.18 in Appendix C).

Therefore, the grade level or age range of the student and teaching modality was not statistically significant, nor the special education category compared with teaching modalities (see Table C.18 in Appendix C).

The researcher ran the last remaining three-way ANOVA between ETAP Question 6 (I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs), Question 10 (It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement) and Question 12 (Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP). The F value was 5.19 and P was 0.006. The Tukey HSD test showed significance between ETAP Question. 6 and Question 12 as well as Question. 10 and Question. 12. This test ascertained whether confidence levels were influenced by lack of academic achievement and/or parents meeting with staff regarding IEP goals.

Although this ANOVA showed a low standard of error 0.10, a low standard deviation of 1.4 and a low variance of 2.23, no statistical significance was found by comparing ETAP Question. 6 and Question 10 because the $P > 0.05$. A two tailed independent sample test should have been run for ETAP Question. 2 and Question 12 for additional analysis using the elementary/secondary data with the IEP with parents' data.

In Chapter 5, the results will be discussed for limitations, significance, need for further research, and conclusions for the study. There were many combinations of ETAP data run in ANOVAs that provided statistical significance and therefore a need for further research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion of the ETAP Data

The survey results of Examining Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions (ETAP) during COVID-19 linked not only the need for online teaching assistance in rural areas but, more importantly, the need for social emotional support for teachers. This need for teacher support increased when students with special education IEPs were part of teachers' daily caseload during COVID-19 from August 2020 through May 2021. In the statistical analysis of Question #6 in ETAP "I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs", 23.21% of the teachers surveyed reported negative attitudes and practices. Although approximately 64% of the teachers answered in the affirmative, 12.50% answered neither agree or disagree.

Study Limitations

There were a limited number of participants. The ultimate goal for participants was 50 responses. Initially, the number of participants was less than 20. The researcher made a call to KNEA Leadership and Training Coordinator, Idalia Shuman, to increase respondent numbers. Shuman sent the survey out to special education leaders and teachers for Kansas through KNEA webmail. The researcher also sent the survey to K-State special education teachers who were currently teaching (although both surveys were sent out over winter break and only for three weeks). The number of participants increased to 70 and the survey was paused for analysis.

Some of the surveys received were incomplete. The researcher inspected the data for missing responses. There were five missing responses from the demographic questions and only 65 of the participants completed the location of the teaching assignment. One possible explanation was that those respondents did not know the difference between urban, rural, and suburban and the definitions were not given in the study.

There were only 65 participants that completed identification of the teaching assignment, racial/ethnic background, and teaching modality. There were 64 participants that completed the question #4 “Select the response that best identified the special education category of children you taught.” Only 56 participants completed question# 7 “I was adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities.” 56 participants completed Questions #8 through #15; however, in the Qualtrics data set, the total count was 70 participants. This was a Quantitative study. The reasons why the participants began the study but did not finish remain unknown. Also, all of the respondents self-identified as white. This is an additional limitation. This may not be representative of the state of Kansas nor nationally among teachers of students with special needs.

Another limitation of the study was finding current and consistent data to interpret the percentage results. It was difficult to obtain current data on the state of Kansas population and there were conflicting percentages on census sites. On ruralhealthinfo.org, the 2021 rural estimate for Kansas was 31% rural and 48% urban. The percentages of urban environments for Kansas in the 2010 census were 49% urban and 23% suburban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Looking back at the study, more information explaining the questions could have been given. An explanation of the difference between rural, urban and suburban should have been provided to participants. Also, possible answer choices such as: “Did not apply”, “Choice not listed” may have provided more data. An incentive could have been given to complete the study, such as a \$5 gift card to increase participation. The researcher of this study would have changed “neither agree or disagree” to “neutral” or “neither agree nor disagree.” Percentages of participants who answered “neither agree or disagree” were very high in some of the responses.

The study was entirely quantitative and did not allow for any additional data collection qualitatively. Qualitative responses might clarify why the respondents agreed, disagreed, or with neither agreed or disagreed. Qualitative research might have led to more accurate demographics and explained why the participants selected the responses for attitudes and practices during COVID-19 August 2020 through May 2021.

No participants selected the demographic choice of K-8 self-identification. Perhaps the inclusion of another answer choice for the participants to select would have increased the likelihood of study completion. However, the biggest reason for lack of study completion could have been that teachers were tired of discussing COVID-19. Teacher attrition rates increased during and since COVID (Frederick, et al. 2020, Jenkins & Walker, 2021).

Additionally, there were no options for more specific teaching categories identified in the Federal IDEA 1990, 1997, and 2004. Unlisted categories included: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, hearing impairment, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment (Yell, 2019, p. 57). Perhaps this was the reason the total number of participants dropped from 70 to 65, or 56, for those completing the study.

Discussions of the Results (Please see Appendix B for match of each research Question with survey ETAP Question).

The first research question was

1. What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals?

The relationship between the “elementary and secondary level of teaching” variable with the “I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs” variable showed statistical significance in the 5-way ANOVA and positively answered the research question about elementary and secondary school special education teachers feeling that they could meet the students IEP goals. This might have been due to possible legal ramifications if the teachers answer no to the question of whether IEP goals were met. A qualitative study needs to be conducted to further research this question by using interviews to give explanations of the teachers’ attitudes and practices toward meeting IEP goals.

The second research question was:

2. Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas?

There was no statistical significance between the two groups of elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas for any of the questions. The percentages were approximately the same for each groups’ responses. Again, further qualitative studies should be conducted to ascertain why elementary and secondary teachers responded in such a way to the questions regarding attitudes and practices beyond demographic data in this study.

The third research question was:

3. Do demographic factors such as: approximate category of students with disability taught, size of community taught in, teaching modality, the ethnic/racial identification and finally grade level the teachers’ taught impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19?

The answer regarding the statistical significance of this third research question was complex. The researcher ran two ANOVAs to ascertain demographic factors, finding statistical significance between several factors, but the results deviated from the original hypothesis.

Ethnic or racial background was not found to be significant because 100% of the participants self-identified as white. Teaching assignment between elementary or secondary was not a significant factor between groups because the results were approximately the same in percentage. The self-identified category of students being taught by participants was not significant because the categories were very limited and did not cover the majority of students according to the Table found in Appendix D.

Surprisingly, the two demographic factors that showed significance were: teaching modality and size of the geographical area or community taught. An overwhelming majority of participating teachers reported that they taught face-to face and self-identified teaching a in rural community. This finding did not align with data found in national statistics. Further studies need to be conducted qualitatively to ascertain the size of the community and the teaching modality. Further quantitative research could be used to check for recent changes in percentages of teaching modalities and geographical size of teaching assignment. The parameters of the size of community were not included in this study. Data which consistently presented the population of Kansas as rural, urban or suburban was not consistent and difficult to judge based on U.S. Census data.

In both the ANOVAs, the size of the community in which participants taught was significant for all other two or four variables, depending on the ANOVA. Kansas had a higher rate of people living in rural communities than in many states and 60% of the teachers in ETAP reported teaching in a rural environment. Rural education is sometimes overlooked in the U.S.

and nationally less than 20% of people live in rural populated geographical areas (U.S.Census, 2010). It would be interesting to compare numbers when the 2020 U.S. Census is published. Rural education in Kansas needs to be researched further using variables of teacher salaries, attrition rates and attitudes and practices currently measured.

Significance of the Study

Grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors' offices, veterinarian clinics and other public spaces required masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, 6 feet distancing, and sometimes face shields during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ETAP study was circulated prior to the creation of the COVID-19 vaccine; however, experts theorized that with enough vaccinations required PCP routines could be loosened. After months of waiting, some teachers received one dose of the COVID vaccine before the end of the school year in May 2021, depending on their age, health status and occupation. On the CDC 2022 website, approximately two million people in Kansas received one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by May 2021.

The media broadcasted a national crisis regarding the fear of vaccines' unknown and permanent side effects. Some people chose not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccines were available initially for elderly, then reduced in age range over time. Some teachers were able to receive the first vaccine in February of 2021 due to the nature of their job and the everyday closeness in proximity to students. Scientists created additional boosters to offer to the public, but some citizens remained unvaccinated. (CDC, 2022)

In addition to the lack of research regarding the percentage of teachers being vaccinated, research has not yet conducted as to the IEP provision for inclusion during COVID-19. Especially, percentages of inclusion are not known for students with special needs in relation to their nondisabled peers. Students with special education needs were often overlooked and there

was no talk of inclusion as part of professional collaboration (McKittrick, 2020). Instead, all teachers sought administrative guidance, technological assistance, internet support for students and themselves, and resiliency to do the same tasks assigned each day (Bonella, et al. 2020).

In the study by Bonella et. al. 2020, one of the difficulties of teaching online was the lack of internet connectivity in rural settings. Mobile hot spots, church parking lots, and Wi-Fi on school busses allowed for an increase of internet connectivity. Families in rural homes often needed teacher to drop off work packets. Schools conducted IEP meetings and instructions in the home adhering to social distancing requirements, wearing masks, or even using cell phones (McKenna, 2021). In the white paper from Kansas State University in 2020, 56% of the respondents identified from rural communities. This high rate of rural participants compared to 60% of rural participants in the ETAP study (Bonella, et al. 2020).

Especially in rural areas where internet might not be strong, fast, or existent at all, Wi-Fi created a “digital divide” (Jameson, et al., 2020, p. 184). The “digital divide” was defined as a separation of areas that had digital access and those that did not have digital capabilities during COVID-19. There were not many studies about rural environmental or educational factors (see page 42) for positive or negative implications during COVID-19.

In all geographical areas, whether urban, suburban, or rural, students with disabilities were being left behind and teachers continued experiencing negative stress levels over the consequences of COVID-19. Special education students were distraught over the COVID-19 learning loss. The phrases “burned out”, “lack of attrition”, “teachers leaving teaching jobs for other opportunities” have been circulating about teachers’ responses to the stress of their work as more COVID-19 variants surfaced (Glessner & Johnson, 2021, Schuck, Lambert & Wang, 2021).

Question 5 addressed a significant question as to the modality used in teaching during the COVID period August 2020 through May 2021. The ETAP study showed the most common modality was face-to-face instruction, as selected by 66.54% of participants (See Appendix C, Table C.5). The second most common modality was teaching online, as selected by 32.30% of participants. The least common learning modality identified by the participants was a hybrid of face-to-face and on-line with a response rate of 1.53%. This does not compare to national statistics. Again, further research needs to be conducted to ask teachers of students with special needs which teaching modalities were used during COVID-19 and if/when modality changes occurred

Further Research Needed

Teachers of students with special needs expressed lack of high confidence levels, professional development and training. Further research needs to be conducted for Questions 6-15 where the teachers were able to select their attitudes and practices according to a five-point Likert scale. In study Question 6, 26% of respondents answered that they were not confident in their ability to teach children with special needs from August 2020 through May 2021 during COVID-19. In Question 7, the same teachers (26%) responding to the ETAP survey answered negatively to “I was adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities”. In Question 8, 23.21% of respondents answered negatively to “I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs”. In Question 10, “It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement”, 21.43% of teachers answered negatively, and 30.36% of teachers marked “neither agree or disagree”. Additionally, for Question 11, 51.70% of participants answered negatively and 30.36% of participants answered with “neither agree or disagree” to “Students with special needs participate

in remote learning environment successfully with their peers”. Finally, in Question 15, 16.07% of teachers of special needs students who completed the ETAP survey responded negatively to “I saw increased levels of anxiety in the students with special needs” and 19.64% of these teachers selected “neither agree or disagree.”

The literature review and research about teachers of students with special needs during COVID-19 revealed that these individuals were directly exposed to COVID on a regular basis while feeling responsible to meet IEP goals that were unattainable. These teachers provided emotional and educational support to students with special needs during COVID-19. Some teachers even brought groceries or masks to houses along with schoolwork. Teachers put their safety, their families’ safety, and their emotional/physical needs after their students and their students’ families’ needs (Pressley, 2021). Again, further research into teachers attitudes and practices involving their own needs, own families and own health (mental and physical) needs to be conducted to understand more specifically what teachers of students with special needs experienced from August 2020 through May 2021. In addition, subsequent time periods after May 2021 need to be researched as to the teachers’ attitudes, practices following the first year of COVID or when the school first reopened completely for face-to-face instruction.

As outlined in Chapter Two, the Literature Review, the IEP is a legal document that comes from the IEP team. Whenever there is a significant change in the IEP, such as a reduction in inclusion minutes or place of inclusion, an amendment needs to be written and agreed upon by the IEP team members. 6000 IEPs had to be amended in Chicago alone at the beginning of COVID-19 (Jameson, 2020).

It is questionable if the legal aspects of the IEP, IDEA and FAPE were maintained according to these three guidelines during the pandemic. Teachers of students with special needs

felt (and continue to feel) intense pressure to adhere to these guidelines. “Mental health” is an international buzzword from the Olympics to the hometown environment. Mental health problems were felt by teachers of students with special needs, who taught August 2020 to May 2021 (Bledsoe. et al., 2021).

Additional studies seeking more information regarding teachers’ mental health issues in relation to following FAPE, LRE and IDEA during COVID-19 are necessary. Manuals and guidelines need to be created to accommodate the mental health of teachers and increase awareness of legal mandates for special education.

Future research to understand “structural inequalities” is imperative to education’s success (Beck, 2020, p. 77). Social justice education is “focused on raising awareness of impairment: and fostering tolerance of individuals” (Lalvani & Broderick, 2013, p. 479).

Oppression must be removed not only by activities but by zero tolerance policies for racism, sexism, and all other forms of discrimination and prejudice. Other future studies need to specify the prevalence of oppression and social justice in special education. By analyzing specific instances and classroom dialogues for adhocracies in education for students with disabilities, a more finite method of action can be taken (Beckett & Buckner, 2012). As stated in Jameson, 2020 “Times of national crisis are not the time to roll back critical civil rights protection” (p. 182).

Research into rural education in America and specifically, the state of Kansas, needs to be conducted. The high percentages of teachers who responded to teaching in rural environments in the ETAP study as well as the study by Bonella, et al. (2020) requires further analysis. New future qualitative studies of geographically bound rural focus groups in Kansas could ascertain more specific issues (Nguyen, 2019).

Further need for teacher professional development.

The repercussions on preservice teachers are felt in university programs (Jenkins, 2021). A gap in knowledge regarding when preservice teachers become teachers of students with special needs during COVID reveals a need for further research on the topic. The negative impact of teaching during COVID greatly affected student teachers and teaching programs, leading to questions about the increased need for online training, the inclusion of technology training and assistance in preservice programs, and the training of teachers to address students' technical problems (Jenkins, 2021). Tomorrow's teachers experienced the same insecurities over the lack of face-to-face hours in academic settings during the pandemic.

COVID-19 ingrained injustices experienced by all in the attitude of future expectations. What if the variants don't stop? What if the vaccines fail? Will teachers be ready to go back online? All these factors and the numerous needs of students with disabilities would need to be adjusted again. Many of the students with disabilities could not wear masks, maintain six feet social distance, or have immune compromised health systems that prevented them to return to face-to-face instruction as often as the rest of the school population.

The truth is COVID-19 marginalized students with disabilities and all of those involved with their educational, social, emotional, and physical needs. Where were the people absent during COVID-19 and were they accounted for in percentages of students that did return to the school buildings? In high school alternate days (M&W or T&TH), how many of the students with disabilities could attend in good health with the schedule? In elementary school, the rate of infectious diseases such as flu and the common cold tripled. What would the effect of those diseases with COVID-19 have on the health of students with disabilities? Would it effect their attendance rate?

Based on the ETAP survey results, it was seen that teachers had strong concerns for their students' well-being, academic progress, and use of technology, especially in rural settings. In Jenkins 2021, (p.94) "We received no training or guidance for using technology or developing implementing appropriate lessons. Our students have individual and specific needs, and we were left to figure it out". Teachers of students with special needs in particular needed reassurance that the correct decisions were made during COVID-19. Teachers should not have been blamed for lack of any progress. Political action was required. Contact with legislative constituents needed to be made. IDEA amendments to deal with the lack of special education services during COVID-19 needed to be created. Teachers were not demanding an increase in pay, but instead a public recognition of a job well done under severe adverse conditions. Mental health days needed to be part of the teacher union state agency wording. Legislation was needed to guarantee mental health needs a part of teachers' contracts.

Inclusive Education

Inclusion is no longer a reality, as before COVID. The lack of paraprofessionals available to assist students in the regular education classroom became a threat to completing IEP goals. Paraprofessionals are essential for inclusion (Glessner & Johnson, 2021). Inclusion is not only an academic goal, but an essential component in forming social relationships - a chance of normalcy. The lives of students were interrupted. Proms and graduations, daily lunches, and memories of graduation were all lacking.

There was significant social isolation of students with special needs during COVID-19. Social isolation was one of the greatest concerns for students with special education needs, as Brandenburg, et al. 2020, indicated:

“Students with disabilities differ from their peers in a multitude of ways. They are more likely to be from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. They are also more likely to be of minority race, live in poverty, have adverse childhood experiences, be victims of bullying and live in households headed by single mothers. The benefits of school attendance extend beyond academics for students with disabilities because many are socially disadvantaged compared to their peers” (p. 426).

Question 11 “Students with special needs participate in remote learning environment successfully with their peers” was answered negatively by 51.79% of respondents in the ETAP survey. Also, the high percentage of teachers who responded with “neither agree or disagree” (30.36%) might have significance and indicate less inclusion for students with special needs. These missed opportunities are a fundamental right for students with special needs. The teachers of these students are currently at a loss on how to make up for the absences.

Depression, anxiety, and suicide were all on the rise for students following COVID-19. Student disengagement caused learning loss and increased social emotional needs. Several government reports indicate an increase in anxiety, depression, and suicide (Bledsoe et al., CDC, 2021, Mental Health in America, 2021). The chance to try harder and close gaps of what was missed in the pandemic guided us further from Dewey’s philosophy of a democratic school system of the early 1900s, which advocated for equal educational opportunities essential for a true democratic society (Dewey, 1916, 1933, 1938, 2012).

In Allan 2021, (p. 21) the last sentence is: “Similarly we might hope that the pandemic will precipitate a renewed commitment to inclusive education. Whereby all really does mean all.” Whether it is in a rural, urban, or suburban environment, inclusion amongst students with and without special needs is part of the IDEA stipulations for LRE.

The additional amount of preparation needed for online learning using a special education IEP leads to vast amounts of individuality. IEPs are tailored for each student. IEPs had to be amended during COVID when attendance, participation, and engagement were significant issues. For all working online, imagine if there was no support at the home because of parental work requirements.

Factors of social isolation, financial strain on families, job loss, physical illness, and lack of transportation to doctors' appointments added to the already existing stress of being a family of a child with disabilities. As reported earlier, Brandenburg (2020) wrote about social isolation leading to mental health concerns, lack of academic progress, and even regressing in academic progress and lack of school-lunch programs, clubs, and after school activities. Students with disabilities can join others in a school play, art exhibit, band performance, chess club or travel on field trips, museums, or outdoor concerts.

Positives of COVID-19

One of the positives of educational changes during the COVID-19 pandemic was that teachers reported that they were closer to parents. The special education teachers also reported that parents understood and participated in IEP goals more. Teachers saw their students with special needs become more independent in their work at home. Online teaching allowed time for teachers and students to interact one-on-one. Collaboration between parents and other staff formed. There was an increased need for collaboration between staff as well.

Online instruction did assist students that had chronic health problems or were suspended for behavior. It added flexibility where and when instruction took place, and the lessons were able to be repeated if presented asynchronously as recorded material. (Wheatley, 2021).

Conclusion

Teacher self-care coincided with theoretical studies and discussions of Dewey (1933), Piaget (1953) and Freire (1973). These theories laid the basic of constructivist theory of moral grounding toward the creation of the environment of a Democratic society (Dewey, 1916, 2012).

The foundation of the American educational system, teachers, need to be recognized for their achievements during COVID-19. A much-needed resiliency program will provide power toward attrition and a boost in teaching morale. It was not only students with special education needs that were hurting during COVID-19 from the lack of inclusion and missed opportunities. It was also the parents, the whole family unit of grandparents, sisters and brothers and aunts/uncles of children with exceptionalities that were affected by social isolation. The effect of despair is far reaching.

From a constructivist viewpoint, equal opportunities do not exist for students that are not incorporated into inclusion and are marginalized. This is not only because of race, gender, and religious characteristics but also disabilities and language. “In short, in the eyes of many educators in society, it is preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as non-disabled students” (Hehir, 2002, p. 3).

Shapiro (1994) warns of activities simulating disabilities negatively reinforces the concept of disability instead of instilling positive awareness. Many schools created a “Disability Awareness Day” (Beck, 2020), where students wear socks on their hands, blindfolds on their eyes, and are wheeled around the school campus. The overdramatization of disability invoked sympathy not empathy or understanding. Furthermore, this behavior promoted the idea that being disabled is a miserable life, and people that overcome disability are so rare that they become “supercrip” (Shapiro, 1994, p.16) with images of grandeur and praise.

Also, by reviewing federal and state special education policies and special education law, application of district-wide programs can increase the adherence to IEP regulations during a pandemic. Avoidance of painful and costly due process proceedings can be maintained by following procedure, as National Education Secretary Betsy DeVos assured would continue during COVID-19. Repercussions will be felt by all from the effects of COVID-19 for decades but learning from history will enable us as educators to be more prepared next time.

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Appendix A: Information and Demographic

Examining Teachers' Attitudes and Practices in Special Education during COVID-19

Start of Block: Default Question BlockH

Q1 Appendix A: Demographics and COVID-19 Survey

Please select the responses that best reflect your professional experiences from August 2020 through May 2021 in the state of Kansas. The information from this survey will be used as part of the requirements for a doctorate dissertation and is confidential, anonymous and voluntary. Thank you kindly for your assistance.

A. Select the response that best identified the location of your teaching assignment.

☐ Suburban (1)

☐ Urban (5)

☐ Rural (6)

Q2 B. Select the response that best identified your teaching assignment.

- ☐ Preschool Special Education (1)
 - ☐ K-6 Special Education (2)
 - ☐ 6-12 Special Education (3)
 - ☐ PreK-12 Special Education (4)
 - ☐ K-8 Special Education (5)
-

Q3 C. Select the response that best identifies your racial/ethnic background

- ☐ Asian (1)
- ☐ African American/Black (2)
- ☐ Hispanic (3)
- ☐ White (4)

Q4 D. Select the response that best identified the special education category of the children you taught.

- ☐ Learning Disabled (LD) (1)
 - ☐ Emotionally Disabled (ED) (2)
 - ☐ Health or Physical Disabilities (3)
 - ☐ Intellectual Disabled (ID) (4)
-

Q5 E. Select the response that best identified your teaching modality.

- ☐ I taught face-to-face. (1)
- ☐ I taught on-line only. (2)
- ☐ I taught a hybrid of face-to-face and on-line. (3)

Q6 Please select the response that reflects your opinion of the time period August 2020 through May 2021.

I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: Default Question BlockH

Start of Block: survey copy

End of Block: survey copy

Start of Block: Block 2

Q7 I was adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Q8 I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Q9 I saw students with special needs adapt to mask wearing.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Q10 It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Q11 Students with special needs participated in remote learning environment successfully with their peers.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
 - ☐ Disagree (2)
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
 - ☐ Agree (4)
 - ☐ Strongly agree (5)
-

Q12 Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Q13 IEP goals were adapted to the modality of learning (face-to-face, remote, hybrid of the two).

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
 - ☐ Disagree (2)
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
 - ☐ Agree (4)
 - ☐ Strongly agree (5)
-

Q14 The success of adequate technology influenced the practices to meet the IEP goals.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (6)

Q15 I saw increased levels of anxiety in the students with special needs.

- ☐ Strongly disagree (1)
- ☐ Disagree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ☐ Agree (4)
- ☐ Strongly agree (5)

Appendix B Research Questions and Corresponding Study Questions

Research Question #1: What are the attitudes and practices of elementary and secondary school special education teachers toward teaching students with special needs in meeting their IEP goals? Answered with

Question 2 Select the response that best identified your teaching assignment.

Question 8 I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs.

Research Question #2: Do the attitudes and practices during COVID-19 differ between elementary and secondary special education teachers in Kansas? Answered with

Question 2 Select the response that best identified your teaching assignment.

Research Question #3: Do the demographic factors such as : category of students with disability taught, grade level taught, the size of community taught in, the teaching modality taught and finally the ethnic/racial identity impact attitudes and practices in meeting instructional needs of students with disabilities for elementary and secondary special education teachers during COVID-19? Answered with

Questions 1 Select the response that best identified the location of your teaching assignment.

Question 2 Select the response that best identified your teaching assignment (grade taught).

Question 3 Select the response that best identifies your racial/ethnic background.

Question 4 Select the response that best identified the special education category of the children you taught.

Question 5 Select the response that best identified your teaching modality.

Question 6 I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs.

Question 8 I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students of special needs.

Question 10 It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement.

Question 12 Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP.

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Appendix C Tables C.1 through C.27

Table C.1

Q1 - Appendix A: Demographics and COVID-19 Survey. Please select the responses that best reflect your professional experiences from August 2020 through May 2021 in the state of Kansas. Select the response that best identified the location of your teaching assignment.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	6	4.55	2.14	4.59	65
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	Suburban	26.15	17				
5	Urban	13.85%	9				
6	Rural	60.00%	39				
	Total	100%	65				

Table C.2

Q2 - B. Select the response that best identified your teaching assignment.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	4	2.46	0.84	0.71	65
#	Answer	%	Count				

1	Preschool Special Education	12.31%	8				
2	K-6 Special Education	40.00%	26				
3	6-12 Special Education	36.92%	24				
4	PreK-12 Special Education	10.77%	7				
5	K-8 Special Education	0.0%	0				
6	Total	100%	65				

Table C.3

Q3 - C. Select the response that best identifies your racial/ethnic background							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		4	4	4	0	0	65
#	Answer	%	Count				

1	Asian	0.0%	0				
2	African American/Black	0.00%	0				
3	Hispanic	0.00%	0				
4	White	100.00%	65				
5	Total	100%	65				

Table C.4

Q.4 - . Select the response that best identified the special education category of the children you taught.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	4	1.75	1.2	1.44	64
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	Learning Disabled (LD)	67.19%	43				
2	Emotionally Disabled (ED)	10.94%	7				
3	Health or Physical Disabilities	1.56%	1				

4	Intellectual Disabled (ID)	20.31%	13				
5	Total	100%	64				

Table C.5

Q5. Select the response that best identified your teaching modality.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	3	1.75	0.96	0.92	65
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	I taught face-to-face	66.54%	43				
2	I taught on-line only.	32.30%	21				
3	I taught a hybrid of face-to-face and on-line	1.53%	1				
4	Total	100%	65				

Table C.6

Q 6. Please select the response that reflects your opinion of the time period August 2020 through May 2021. I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.48	1.3	1.7	65
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	Strongly disagree	12.31%	8				
2	Disagree	13.85%	9				
3	Neither agree or disagree	9.23%	6				
4	Agree	43.08%	28				
5	Strongly agree	21.54%	14				
6	Total	100%	65				

Table C.7

Q 7. Please select the response that reflects your opinion of the time period August 2020 through May 2021. I was adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count

		1	5	3.43	1.08	1.17	56
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	Strongly disagree	7.14%	4				
2	Disagree	16.07%	9				
3	Neither agree or disagree	12.50%	7				
4	Agree	55.36%	31				
5	Strongly agree	8.93%	5				
6	Total	100%	56				

Table C.8

Q 8. Please select the response that reflects your opinion of the time period August 2020 through May 2021. - I believed that academic progress was possible towards IEP goals with students with special needs							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.48	1.12	1.25	56
#	Answer	%	Count				

1	Strongly disagree	3.57%	2				
2	Disagree	23.21%	13				
3	Neither agree or disagree	10.71%	6				
4	Agree	46.43%	26				
5	Strongly agree	16.07%	9				
6	Total	100%	56				

Table C.9

Q 9. Please select the response that reflects your opinion of the time period August 2020 through May 2021. - I saw students with special needs adapt to mask wearing.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.48	1.12	1.25	56
#	Answer	%	Count				
1	Strongly disagree	1.79%	1				
2	Disagree	16.07%	9				

3	Neither agree or disagree	14.29%	8				
4	Agree	51.79%	29				
5	Strongly agree	16.07%	9				
6	Total	100%	56				

Table C.10

Q10 - It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.32	0.93	0.86	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	1.79%	1				
1	Disagree	19.64%	11				
2	Neither agree or disagree	30.36%	17				
3	Agree	41.07%	23				

4	Strongly agree	7.14%	4				
5	Total	100%	56				

Table C.11

Q11 – Students with special needs participate in remote learning environment successfully with their peers.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	0.98	0.96	0.86	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	14.29	8				
1	Disagree	37.5%	21				
2	Neither agree or disagree	30.36%	17				
3	Agree	16.07%	9				
4	Strongly agree	1.79%	1				
5	Total	100%	56				

Table C.12

Q12. Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP.							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		2	5	4.21	0.7	0.49	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	0	0				
1	Disagree	3.57%	2				
2	Neither agree or disagree	5.36%	3				
3	Agree	57.14%	32				
4	Strongly agree	33.93%	19				
5	Total	100%	56				

Table C.13

Q13. IEP goals were adapted to the modality of learning (face-to-face, remote, hybrid of the two).							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count

		1	5	3.59	1.1	1.21	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	3.57	2				
1	Disagree	17.86%	10				
2	Neither agree or disagree	14.29%	8				
3	Agree	44.64%	25				
4	Strongly agree	19.64%	11				
5	Total	100%	56				

Table C.14

Q14 - The success of adequate technology influenced the practices to meet the IEP goals							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.77	1.22	1.5	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	1.79	1				
1	Disagree	12.50%	7				

2	Neither agree or disagree	25.0%	14				
3	Agree	44.64%	25				
4	Strongly agree	16.07%	9				
5	Total	100%	56				

Table C.15

Q15 - I saw increased levels of anxiety in the students with special needs							
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
		1	5	3.68	1.07	1.05	56
	Answer	%	Count				
#	Strongly disagree	3.57	2				
1	Disagree	12.50%	7				
2	Neither agree or disagree	19.64%	11				
3	Agree	41.07%	23				

4	Strongly agree	23.21%	13				
5	Total	100%	56				

Data Summary of ANOVA Questions 1(Suburban, urban,rural),2(preschool, K-6, 6-12 Special Education),4(Learning, Emotionally, Health/Physical, Intellectual),5(face-to-face, on-line, hybrid),8(I believe that academic progress towards IEP goals possible).

Table C.16

		SAMPLES				
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
N	65	65	64	65	55	314
ΣX	272	150	98	106	177	803
Mean	4.18	2.30	1.53	1.63	3.21	2.55
ΣX^2	1502	414	238	240	681	3075
Variance	5.68	1.06	1.39	1.049	2.62	3.26
Std. Deviation	2.38	1.02	1.18	1.02	1.43	1.80
Std. Error	0.29	0.127	0.1477	0.127	0.19	0.1019

Table C.17

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Treatment[between groups]	323.3796	4	80.8449	35.78	<.0001

Table C.18

Tukey HSD Test	
M1 vs M2 (Q. 1 & 2.)	P<.01
M1 vs M3 (Q. 1 & 4)	P<.01
M1 vs M4 (Q 1 & 5)	P<.01
M1 vs M5 (Q 1& 8)	P<.01
M2 vs M3 (Q 2 & 4)	P<.05
M2 vs M4 (Q 2 & 5)	nonsignificant
M2 vs M5 (Q 2 & 8)	P<.01
M3 vs M4 (Q 4 & 5)	nonsignificant
M3 vs M5 (Q 4 & 8)	P<.01
M4 vs M5 (Q 5 & 8)	P<.01

ANOVA BETWEEN Q. 6, Q. 10 & Q. 12(Q. 6 “I was confident in my ability to teach children with special needs; Q. 10 “It was difficult for students with special needs to make strides in academic achievement: Q. “Parents were able to meet with staff regarding the annual IEP goals and any changes necessary to the IEP).

Table C.19

Data Summary	Samples		
	1	2	3
N	65	55	55
ΣX	211	170	214
Mean	3.24	3.09	3.89
ΣX	839	612	924
Variance	2.40	1.60	1.69
Std. Deviation	1.55	1.266	1.3006
Std. Error	0.19	0.17	0.17

Table C.20

ANOVA Summary for Table .19

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Treatment [between groups]	20.0476	2	10.0238	5.19	0.006477

Table C.21

Tukey HSD Test for ANOVA .19

Tukey HSD Test	
M1 vs M2	nonsignificant
M1 vs M3	P<.05
M2 vs M3	P<.01

--

Data sample for two tailed t-Test for Independent samples for Q .2 & Q. 8

Table C.22

	A	B	Total
n	70	59	129
Σ X	160	191	351
Σ X ²	440	733	1173
SS	74.2857	114.768	217.953
mean	2.2857	3.2373	2.7209

Table C.23

F-Test for the Significance of the Difference between the Variances of the Two Samples Q. 2 and Q.8 for data from Table .22

df ₁	df ₂	F	P
58	69	1.83	0.0082

Table C.24

T-Test Assuming Unequal Sample Variances for Q. 2 and Q. 8 for data from Table .22

Mean _a — Mean _b	t	df	P	One-tailed	<.0001
-.9516	-4.3	104.88	P	Two-tailed	<.0001

Table C.25

Single Sample t-test for Q. 2 Teaching Assignment (Preschool Special Education 12%, K-6 Special Education 40%, 6-12 Special Education 37%, PreK-12 Special Education 11%, K-8 Special Education 0%.

Summary Values	
n	70
ΣX	160
ΣX^2	440
SS	74.2857
Variance (inferential)	1.0766
Standard deviation (inferential)	1.0376
Standard error	0.124
Sample mean	2.2857
Hypothetical population mean	
difference	2.2857
t	18.4331
df	69
p- one-tailed	<.0001
P two-tailed	<.0001

Table C.26

Data for Sample t-test Q. 2

Mean _a — Mean _b	t	df	P	one-tailed	<.0001
-1.6465	-8.1	127		Two-tailed	<.0001

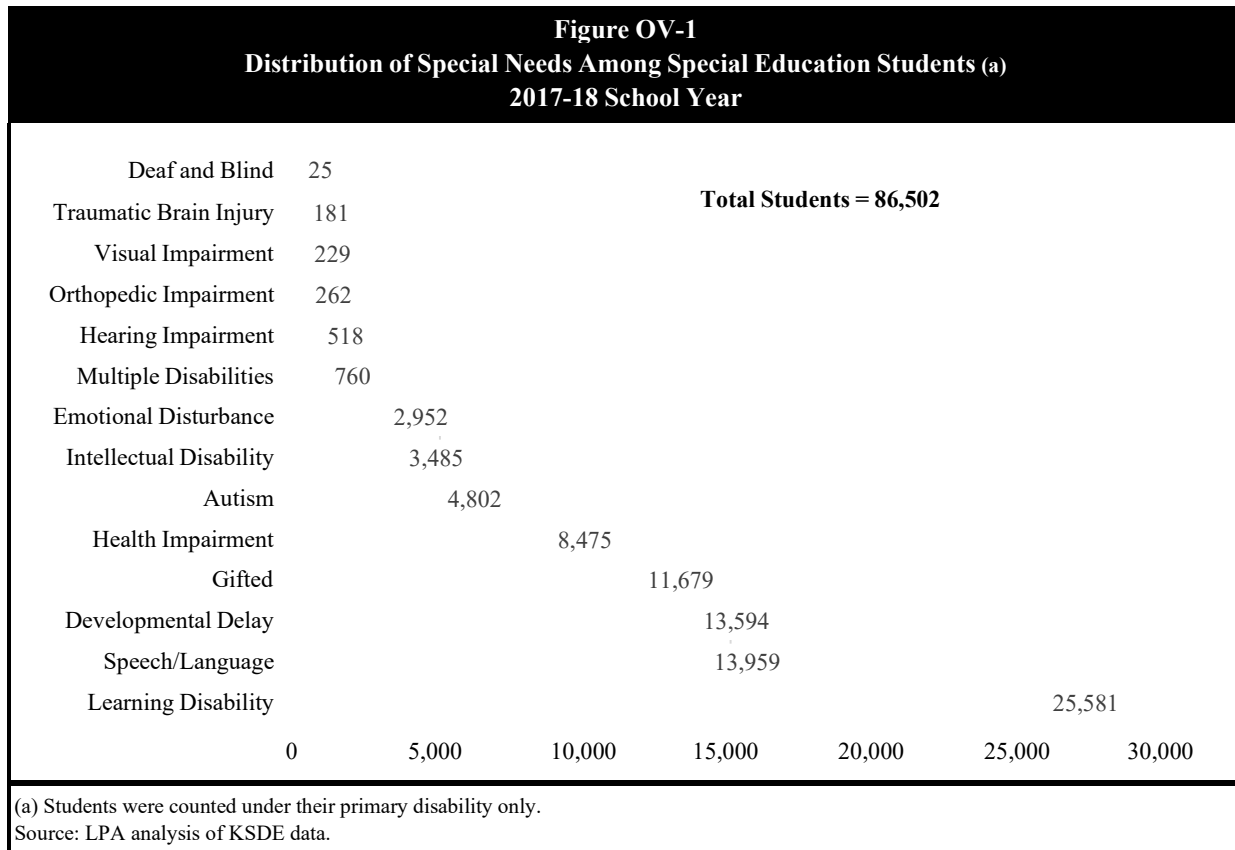
Table C.27

**F-Test for the Significance of the Difference
between the Variances of the Two Sample**

(For independent samples, these results pertain to the "usual" t-test,
which assumes that the two samples have equal variances.)

df_1	df_2	f	P
58	69	1.5	0.053239

Appendix D Current Staff Totals



Kansas information taken from: <https://www.kslpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/r-18-012.pdf>