

A Qualitative Descriptive Study of a Highly Effective Inclusive School District in New Jersey

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Abstract

Despite the increased percentage of students with disabilities learning in an inclusive setting, the achievement gap remained wide between students with and without disabilities. Largely absent from research was an exploration of effective inclusive practices in secondary schools, a lack of clear guidelines for inclusive practices, implementation, and sustainability of strategies. Using collective teacher efficacy theory, the qualitative descriptive study explored how special and general educators described their collective teacher efficacy practices in inclusive classrooms that influenced the academic achievement of secondary school students with disabilities. The research questions focused on teacher behaviors such as adaptations, co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing, and co-managing practices. Data sources included semi-structured individual interviews and 2 member-checking focus groups from 10 general and 11 special educators involved in inclusive education in one New Jersey school district. Braun and Clarke six-step thematic data analysis resulted in 9 emergent themes. The findings pointed out the strategies for implementing and sustaining effective inclusive practices and enhancing students' achievement through administrative, parent, and teacher practices. School personnel could use the findings to create an inclusive vision and establish effective and impactful collaboration among stakeholders. Future research should replicate this study with school and district administrators to capture first-hand insight into the planning and the implementation of inclusive practices.

Keywords: Collective teacher efficacy, inclusive practices, implementation and sustainability, teacher behavior, collaboration, administrative practices, teacher practices, parent and community practices