



What's Special about Special Education in Lutheran Schools?

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Concordia University Faculty Scholarship Week
April 22, 2021



Research Questions

- How are students with special needs being served in Lutheran K-8 Schools?
 - What observed practices are aligned with the High Leverage Practices?
 - What other practices are effective in serving students?
 - What are the challenges to serving students with special needs in Lutheran Schools?
 - What is special about special education in Lutheran Schools?



Research Sites

- 14 Lutheran K-8 Schools in 5 midwestern states:
 - Illinois: 3 schools
 - Indiana: 2 schools
 - Michigan: 4 schools
 - Missouri: 3 schools
 - Wisconsin: 2 schools
- 5 schools were affiliated with LSEM (Lutheran Special Education Ministries)
- 3 with LASE Specialized Education
- 6 hired their Special Education teachers independently
- Length of time the schools have had a Special Education program: 4 to 33 years



Research Participants

Interviewed:

- 15 administrators
- 17 teachers (10 full time, 7 part time)

Observed:

- 16 of the 17 teachers

Teachers:

- Years of experience: 1 to 34 (mean = 13.7)
- All were licensed teachers: 14 in SPED, 3 non-SPED

Caseloads:

- Range of 15-54; Total School Population ranged from 116-389
- Percentage of students receiving special education services: 7 to 22% (mean = 13%)
- Student needs included diagnosed disabilities and academic delays



Administrators Interview Protocol

- Describe the history of serving students with special needs at your school.
- What motivates you to serve students with special needs?
- What are the successes of the special education program? What factors contribute to the success of the program?
- What lessons have you learned from past challenges? Is there something that you would do differently?
- What challenges do you still face?
- What would you want other administrators to know about serving students with special needs?



Teachers Interview Protocol

- Describe your teaching history with special education, including your current position.
- What teaching licenses/certifications do you hold? What college degrees do you have?
- How many students are on your current caseload and what types of disabilities/needs do they have?
- What motivates you to serve students with special needs?
- Describe your practices in the following areas:
Collaboration, Assessment, Social/emotional/behavioral Practices, Instruction
- What else contributes to success of your special education program?
- What challenges do you face in serving students with special needs in your program?
- What would you want me to tell others about your special education program?



Teacher Observations

Time/ Activity	Observations (Descriptive Notes)	Observations (Descriptive Notes)	Interpretations (Reflective Notes)
	Collaboration:	Assessment:	
	Social/Emotional/Behavioral Practices:	Instruction:	
	Successes:	Challenges:	Additional Observations:



High-Leverage Practices

There are 22 high-leverage practices. They are organized around 4 aspects of practice: **collaboration (3), assessment (3), social/emotional/behavioral practices (4), and instruction (12).**

They represent the essence of effective practice in special education.

- Focus directly on instructional practice.
- Occur with high frequency in teaching.
- Research based and known to foster student engagement and learning.
- Broadly applicable and usable in any content area or approach to teaching.

Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. (2017). *High-Leverage practices in special education*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.



Results: HLPs

100% of teachers used the following high-leverage practices:

- Collaborate with professionals to increase student success. (C)
- Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs. (A)
- Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. (S/E/B)
- Provide scaffolded supports. (I)
- Use explicit instruction. (I)
- Use flexible grouping. (I)
- Use strategies to promote active student engagement. (I)
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning. (I)



Results: HLPs

78% or more of teachers utilized the following practices:

- Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services. (C)
- Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes. (A)
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' behavior. (S/E/B)
- Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. (I)
- Use assistive and instructional technologies. (I)



Results: HLPs

29% or fewer of teachers used the following high-leverage practices:

- Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs. (A)
- Teach social behaviors. (S/E/B)
- Conduct functional behavior assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans. (S/E/B)
- Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence. (I)
- Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings. (I)



Factors that contribute to teacher success

1. Support
 2. Collaboration
 3. Communication
- With
- administrators
 - other teachers
 - parents
 - the local public school district



Successes for Administrators

1. Success of present and past students
2. The excellent attributes of their special education teacher
Top notch, wonderful, dedicated, impressive, personable, empathetic, experienced
3. Partnership with the local public school district



Challenges

Teachers

- Limited Resources
 - scheduling
 - finances
 - time
 - caseloads
- Failing to Meet Needs
 - Academic and Social/Emotional/Behavioral
 - Lack of training or time
 - Working with parents

Administrators

- Limited Resources
 - finances
 - resources
 - personnel
 - caseloads
- Failing to Meet Needs
 - Can't meet the needs of all students
 - Turn some away
 - Tough conversations with parents



What's Special?

- These educators have a deep sense of mission to serve students with disabilities or special learning needs and their families.
- Many are motivated by the opportunity to tell children and families about Jesus, and to serve them as Christian educators.
- They want others to know about the caring, Christian environment they provide for students with unique learning needs and that they can meet the needs of these students!
- The administrators emphasized that Lutheran schools can and should embark on the mission of serving students with disabilities and in doing so they will add great value to their school.



In their own words...

- If we value our Lutheran schools, we have to continue to think out of the box. If we want them to stay around and be a viable option in our area, we have to do things differently. We need programs for students who excel as much as we need them for students who struggle or learn or think differently.
- It's a blessing. We are blessed to have students who struggle academically or emotionally or just learn differently. We're blessed to have that diversity. God's family is diverse. It's a blessing to see those kids learn, grow, and achieve just like it is a blessing to see any student learn and achieve.
- It is a great value to ones' school. The more times you can say yes to a perspective family, the more likely they will come to your school. And then we can share the gospel with them. Special education is a big, big yes for many families.



Biggest Surprise

- The importance of partnering with the local public school district.
 - Teachers and administrators talked about this as one of their successes.
 - Strong communication and collaboration with the public school district was cited as important to the success of the Lutheran school's special education program.
 - “[Public School District] is not afraid to say that they might not be the best fit for a child. They will tell parents to come and talk to [us]. [Public School District] will say that we might be a better fit”.



Further Research

- Number of LCMS Schools serving students with special needs
 - Early Childhood Programs
 - K-8 Schools
 - High Schools
- Barriers to serving students with special needs in Lutheran Schools
- Expansion to further sites
- Collaboration with other researchers

Questions

Thank you for coming!

