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Transitioning Elementary-Aged Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Into an Inclusive Educational Setting

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Walden University

College of Education

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Stevanie Jackson

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Transitioning Elementary-Aged Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Into an Inclusive Educational Setting

by

Stevanie Jackson

MS, Walden University, 2007

BS, Hardin-Simmons University, 2001

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

In an urban school district in the southwestern United States, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) who were in third- through fifth-grade self-contained classes were not consistently transitioning successfully into inclusive classrooms; therefore, the students were remaining in a restrictive environment for an extended time. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the reasons for such inconsistencies. The concept of inclusion as outlined in the Salamanca Statement framed the study. Semi structured interviews were conducted with six special education teachers and six general education teachers, all of whom had experience educating students with EBD. Research questions asked why there has been inconsistent successful transitions for students with EBD, from the perspective of each group of teachers. Data were transcribed and coded through two cycles of coding to determine themes. The findings of this study were that teachers perceived that students with EBD were inconsistently successful when transitioning from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom because communication, training, appropriate supports, and positive relationships were not consistently in place. Based upon these findings, a policy recommendation was written to be followed when students with EBD transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive. Successful transitions into inclusive classrooms could contribute to positive social change by equipping students with EBD with strategies to build relationships and self-regulate their behaviors, exposing them to age-appropriate curriculum, and college- and career-readiness standards.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated first and foremost to my family. My husband, CJ, who passed away during this process. He supported me and allowed me to spend many hours working while he took care of our lives. To my children, Keegan, Korban, and Brooklynn, who continued to understand mom needed school time even after CJ passed. To my siblings, Lou, Bubba, and Tucker, for standing in the gap and taking care of my life when I couldn't. To my mama for always being available for anything I needed. And to my precious nieces, Lizzy and Sarah, for always taking care of me and your sister cousin. Next, this study is dedicated to my tribe. These women picked me up, dusted me off, and didn't allow me to stop moving forward. Lin, Keathley, Christy, Teri, Kristi, Lauren, Jessica, Sheila, Carlotta, Bonnie, Joy, and Alison—I love each of you fiercely. And to Nicholas. During difficult times towards the end of this journey he did not allow me to give up or stay in dark places, and he continued to push me to take care of myself. God placed each one of these people in my life for a specific reason. I could not have completed this study or this time in my life without each and every one of you and God's amazing grace. Thank you all.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Special education is governed by policies and laws that dictate how and where children with disabilities should be educated. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), children in special education should be taught in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and are entitled to a free and appropriate public education, also referred to as FAPE (right & Wright, 2007). This allows for students with disabilities to be educated with their regularly developing peers as much as is appropriately possible. This law is not only for students with academic disabilities, but also for students with other disabilities, including those with emotional and behavioral disabilities or EBD (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Students with disabilities can be perceived as challenging to educate, and teachers may find it difficult to educate students with EBD, especially in the inclusive classroom; however, more than 60% of students with EBD spend at least 40% of their academic day in the general education setting (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). Simply being placed in the general education classroom does not assure that students will be successful academically, socially, or behaviorally (Kauffman et al., 2021). Often, students with EBD are not supported during the transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive setting; therefore, they can be unsuccessful (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Students with EBD could have increased behavioral issues during the transition process. To address the student's needs during this time, specific supports should be provided in order to reduce the barriers that the teacher and the student face (Cumming & Strnadova, 2017). Without

the proper supports being provided to these students during the transition period, the chance of failure in the inclusive setting could increase (Hunsaker, 2018).

The Local Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that in an urban school district in the southwestern United States, students with EBD who were in third- through fifth-grade self-contained classrooms were not consistently transitioning successfully into an inclusive classroom; therefore, the students were remaining in a restrictive environment for an extended time. The special education coordinator from the local district stated,

the amount of students that are successfully transitioning out of the self-contained classes is very low. Many times, students begin to transition but were unsuccessful and had to return to the self-contained classroom because they struggled in the general education classroom.

In a specific urban school district in the southwestern United States, third- through fifth-grade teachers of self-contained classes for students with EBD could transition students to inclusive classrooms how they chose; therefore, the teachers approached the transition period differently.

Rationale

Schools have continued to focus on not just academic success, but also the emotional and behavioral success of students (Capp et al., 2018). There are many strategies and teacher resources that exist that can assist students with EBD to be successful in the inclusive classroom. Research conducted by Scott and Burt (2018)

suggested that creating an individualized transition plan can improve academic and behavioral success for students with EBD as they transition to a new setting.

Teachers who taught third- through fifth-grade self-contained special education classes for students with EBD in a specific urban district in the southwestern United States approached transitioning students to inclusive classrooms differently, and at times the success of the transition was inconsistent. One example was that some teachers sent the students with an instructional aide and began with 1-hour increments in the inclusive classroom. Even though this may have been good for the individual student, it caused the self-contained teacher to be without additional help for the remaining students in the class. Another example was that teachers sent the students for larger blocks of time without an instructional aide present, which allowed the students to be exposed to age-appropriate peers and for the instructional aide to remain in the self-contained classroom. According to the statistics from the research site, without the instructional aide present, transitioning students often were not successful. Still others sent students for hour increments of time without an instructional aide but with tangible supports such as fidget tools, social stories, or schedule checklists. These tangible supports allowed for students to self-regulate their behavior and the instructional aide to remain in the self-contained classroom, although without one-on-one support, some students were unsuccessful (Young, 2019).

Collaboration between teachers, both special education and general education, has been shown to improve students' academic success as well as to increase teacher understanding of the needs of each student (Reeves et al., 2017). There was no

expectation for the inclusive teacher to receive specific training on educating students with EBD prior to receiving the student, nor was there an expectation for the general education teacher to receive support from the special education teacher during the transition period. As represented in the research site statistics, this practice could create barriers for the student and teacher and could cause the student to be unsuccessful during transitions (Young, 2019). There was a gap in practice in that third- through fifth-grade students with EBD were not transitioning from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom as they should .

Table 1 displays the number of students in self-contained classes from the research district for third through fifth grades. It indicates the number of students who were in the self-contained classes for less than 1 year, 1 to 3 years, and more than 3 years. It also reveals the total number of students who had successfully transitioned to a full day in an inclusive classroom.

Table 1

Students With EBD in Self-Contained Grade 3–5 Classrooms

Year	Number of students in Grade 3–5 self-contained classes	Number of Grade 3–5 students in the self-contained class for less than 1 year	Number of Grade 3–5 students in the self-contained class for 1–3 years	Number of Grade 3 –5 students in the self-contained class for more than 3 years	Number of students who transitioned to inclusive classrooms successfully
2019–2020	32	10	12	10	2
2020–2021	30	9	7	14	1

Note. Research school district Student Achievement program statistics from 2019–2020 and 2020–2021.

Based on personal communication with the staff from the research district, possible contributing factors to the inconsistent transitions included the lack of a requirement to set and follow a plan and lack of training for both general education and

special education teachers. In my study, I explored these possibilities, among others, to understand the reasons for inconsistent success in the transition. The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for inconsistent successful transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from self-contained classes to an inclusive classroom, from the perspectives of general education and special education teachers, at the research site. With this understanding, a policy recommendation position paper was submitted to possibly improve the rate of successful transitions.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms and definitions of the terms that are associated with and used throughout this study:

Emotional disturbance (ED): Qualifying factor to receive special education services. Students are often referred to as students with an *emotional and behavioral disability* (EBD) or students with *serious emotional disturbance* (SED). Students with ED can be resistant to interventions and are prone to challenging behaviors that affect their educational success (McKenna et al., 2019).

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE): Addressed in the IDEA 2004, FAPE provides individualized instructional programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities at no cost to the parents (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Inclusive classroom: General education classroom that serves both special education and general education students (McKenna et al., 2019).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004): Federal law concerning educating children with disabilities that was most recently updated in 2004.

There are two purposes of this law. The first is to educate all students in the least restrictive environment that meets their unique needs and prepares them for their future. The second purpose is to protect the rights of children with disabilities and the children's parents (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): Addressed in IDEA 2004, LRE is the policy of educating students with disabilities alongside their regularly developing peers in the school where they would attend if they were not disabled to the maximum extent as appropriate (McKenna et al., 2019).

Self-contained classroom: Special education classroom in which students are educated in all subjects by the same teacher or teachers and remain for the majority of their day in the same classroom (Bettini et al., 2019).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that the findings could positively impact students with EBD at the research site and could contribute to positive social change for these students. Students with EBD could be perceived as challenging in the inclusive classroom during the transition period, and at times teachers could take a punitive approach to address their behaviors, which could affect the students in a negative manner both academically and socially (Zaheer et al., 2019). Students with disabilities, including those with EBD, should have the opportunity to be successfully educated with their age-appropriate peers and be exposed to college- and career-readiness curricula (Anderson, 2021). These opportunities occur in the inclusive setting, and the time spent in inclusive settings could increase based upon the findings of this study.

Research Questions

I investigated the perceptions of third- through fifth-grade general education and special education teachers as to why the transitions from self-contained classrooms to inclusive classes had been inconsistently successful in the research site. The following were research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: According to general education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?

RQ2: According to special education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the concept of inclusive education as outlined in the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The concept of inclusion involves educating all students in the mainstreamed classroom as much as possible based on their educational needs; therefore, the educational system should avoid seclusion (Martier, 2020). Including all students in one setting creates a diverse learning environment in which students have the opportunity to be successful (Stiefel et al., 2018). The diversity in an inclusive classroom encompasses ability and gender, as well as possible differences in age, culture, and language (Pandey, 2019). These elements of diversity could have

positive or negative impact on students, depending on how the class is structured and the ability of the teacher to meet the individual needs of the students (Pandey, 2019).

Although including students with disabilities in a general education classroom can be challenging, all students involved could benefit from the process academically, socially, or both (Mortier, 2020). Schools employing the concept of inclusion changed from segregating students with disabilities to including all students by making accommodations to ensure that learning was possible for all regardless of the student's needs (Pandey, 2019). The concept of inclusive education continued to make positive progress and gain support in the United States and other countries that focus on the idea that all children have the right to equal education (Mortier, 2020; Pandey, 2019). This concept continues to be important to work toward, in that "it is crucial to persist in the inclusion efforts for these students because it is their right to be included" (Mortier, 2020, p. 330). This concept was directly related to this study because the study's outcomes could increase the number of students with EBD educated in the inclusive classroom. By identifying the barriers that existed for teachers and students as students transitioned into an inclusive classroom, teachers were able to create transition plans that addressed the barriers and students had the opportunity to be successful in the inclusive classroom.

Review of Broader Literature

I conducted a search for literature using the Walden University Library's search database EBSCO in addition to Google Scholar. The terms I searched were *the concept of educational inclusion* and *students with emotional and behavioral disabilities*. Articles included were peer-reviewed articles that were published within the past 5 years. The

only article included that was more than 5 years old was a document that included the concept of inclusive education.

For the broader literature review, I expanded the search terms to include *inclusion, emotional and behavioral disabilities, students with emotional and behavioral disorders, self-contained classes for students with EBD, transitioning students with EBD from self-contained classes, and barriers teachers face with students with EBD*. Each term searched produced a lengthy list of articles. I narrowed the search to include only articles published in the past 5 years. I narrowed the article list even further to studies that were performed at least in part in the United States and were focused on students with EBD being educated in public schools. Eighty-four articles were reviewed, and 41 were found to be relevant to this study. When no additional literature that was relevant to the study was found within a 5-year span of publication from the present, saturation of the literature was achieved. The literature review includes a brief history of special education, background information on EBD, educational settings, barriers teachers face when educating students with EBD, and the conceptual framework on which the study was based.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act 2004

After 1975, Congress amended the law governing special education several times and renamed it the IDEA (Wright & Wright, 2007). Congress's intent with the IDEA was to aid states financially in their responsibility to provide FAPE for students with mental and/or physical disabilities. As required by the IDEA, children with disabilities who can be successful in the general education classroom must be educated there. This is referred

to as educating in the LRE. Modifications and accommodations must be considered in the general education classroom prior to a student being placed in a more restrictive setting. The IDEA allows for students to be in both general education and special education classes rather than an “all-or-nothing” system. Additionally, the IDEA required schools to offer a continuum of services for students (Martin et al., 1996).

Once again in 2004, Congress revised the IDEA. With this revision, special education teachers were required to be highly qualified for the classes they taught. This revision also “increased the focus on accountability and improved outcomes by emphasizing reading, early intervention, and research-based instruction” (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 15). Wright and Wright (2007) described the purposes of the IDEA of 2004 as continuing to educate students with disabilities by meeting their needs while preparing them for their future and protecting the rights of the children and their families.

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

ED is one of the categories for students to qualify for special education services in the United States. IDEA (2004) in §300.8(c)(4) defined ED as

- (i) a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:
 - (a) an ability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
 - (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

- (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feeling under normal circumstances;
 - (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;
 - (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- (ii) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Often students who qualify for special education as students with ED are also referred to as students with emotional and behavioral disabilities or EBD (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). Still others refer to students with ED as students with serious emotional disturbance (; Moffett et al., 2018). Using the alternative term of EBD provides educators with a more comprehensive view of the students, as emotional and behavioral issues can exist together or separately (Mitchell et al., 2019). For the remainder of this study, “students with EBD” will be used to describe the disability.

Students with EBD display internalizing and/or externalizing behaviors.

Externalizing behaviors include verbal or physical aggression, eloping, and noncompliance. Internalizing behaviors include social anxiety, phobias, overall anxiety, and depression (Garwood & Moore, 2021). With these behaviors present, daily life, including education, can be challenging. Students with EBD are among the most difficult students to educate successfully (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021).

Inclusion

Special education has moved from isolating and segregating students with disabilities to educating them with their regularly developing peers (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Inclusive education is a method of educating students with disabilities alongside those without disabilities as often as possible in order to educate the students in the LRE (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). The process of inclusion reduces educational barriers and allows all students, even those who were previously segregated from regularly developing peers, to be effectively taught and successfully participate in a general education setting (Pandey, 2019). Additionally, educating students with disabilities in an inclusive setting can increase student attendance, which can lead to improved academic outcomes (Anderson, 2021).

Simply placing students with disabilities in a general education setting does not guarantee that they will be successful (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). Pandey (2019) stated, “inclusive education has a flexible system with the underlined norm of changing the system to fit the child in which all children can learn” (p. 1278). This is a shift in mindset for many teachers as students previously were excluded from the class if they could not learn the way the teacher taught (Francisco et al., 2020).

The inclusive classroom can have far-reaching effects for students academically, behaviorally, and socially if students are successful in the setting (Stiefel et al., 2018). Students are exposed to academic and cultural diversities when they are educated in an inclusive classroom; however, the inclusive environment could bring on challenges for the teacher to manage a class with multiple academic levels and with students who pose

behavioral issues (Pandey, 2019; Van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). These challenges can be lessened and success can be achieved in an inclusive classroom when there is collaboration between the administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and support staff (Francisco et al., 2020). Moreover, with collaboration, teachers can feel more confident in educating students in an inclusive classroom, which could have a positive effect on teacher attitude and increase student success (Boyle et al., 2020).

Educating Students With EBD

Students with any disability can be difficult to educate, and those with EBD are among the most difficult due to extreme behaviors (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). It is necessary for schools to offer alternative settings for students to be educated in when the general education setting is not appropriate (Kumm et al., 2020). A continuum of services should be offered in order to best educate all students, including those with EBD (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021).

Extreme behaviors by students often lead to punitive consequences, which in turn can cause a loss of instructional time due to out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP), or expulsion (Melloy & Murry, 2019). As students miss instruction, there is the possibility of the students falling behind academically (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). Further, when students miss instructional time due to exclusionary discipline practices, the students have less access to curriculum that leads to higher education, which could impact the students' future (Bal et al., 2019).

When students with EBD are not successful academically, frustration could increase severe behaviors (Whitney et al., 2021). In extreme cases, these frustrations may result in the student dropping out of school (McKenna, Adamson, et al., 2021). Students with EBD are at a higher risk for dropout; therefore, determining correct placement and forming relationships early in the year could positively impact these students' academic success (Garwood & Moore, 2021).

Challenges in Educating Students With EBD. Teachers, students, and other educational staff face challenges when educating students with EBD. Challenges for the teacher exist in classroom management due to internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Garwood & Moore, 2021). Hunter et al. (2017) stated, “the management of the classroom must be deliberate and specific for teachers to provide an environment that supports academic, social, emotional, and behavioral progress for students with EBD” (p 81). When the class is not managed well, students who exhibit externalizing behaviors could disrupt the learning of other students (Didion et al., 2020). These disruptions can lead to the placement of the student in a more restrictive environment, which secludes them from their peers and could have negative effects on their emotional and academic success (Whitlow et al., 2018). Additionally, they have less access to grade-level curriculum and reduced opportunities to participate in elective courses and extracurricular activities (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018).

Such students face challenges of making friends and understanding boundaries with peers, which could lead to additional negative behaviors (Whitlow et al., 2018). They also frequently do not feel connected to their school, which could result in health-

risk behaviors such as substance abuse or physical violence (Marsh et al., 2019). Students with EBD may also have other mental health concerns that could affect their ability to successfully function in a school setting (Gagnon, 2021).

Finally, other educational staff members face the challenge of matching the students' needs to the educational placement. Determining the student's individual needs and providing the services necessary in the LRE is the law and can be a challenging decision for all involved (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). Other educational staff may also be responsible for providing mental health support as well as social and emotional support to students with EBD (Gagnon, 2021).

Self-Contained Classes for Students With EBD. Public schools should provide a continuum of services for students with disabilities, including those with EBD (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). Evidence-based strategies and programs should be used in order to meet educational and emotional needs of students (Lloyd et al., 2019). Although educating students with disabilities in the LRE could encourage the use of inclusive classrooms, some students, including those with EBD, may need more support than can be provided in the general education classroom (Gagnon, 2021). The placement should be determined based on the student's needs, which could require a self-contained setting specifically for students with EBD (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). These classrooms not only focus on the academic needs of students, but also their behavioral and emotional needs (Bettini et al., 2019).

Often, multiple grade levels are placed in one class due to the number of students being served. Because of the increased demands of teaching multiple core subjects to

multiple grade levels, teacher turnover in self-contained classes is high, which could affect the students' academic and behavioral growth (Bettini, Cumming, O'Brien, et al., 2020). Further, having multiple grade levels in class together could make it difficult to ensure that grade-level curriculum is being taught at all times; therefore, as students are behaviorally successful, transitioning to inclusive classrooms should be considered (Hunsaker, 2018).

Inclusion Classes for Students With EBD. McKenna et al. (2019) stated, "the majority of students receiving special education services for emotion disturbance (ED) receive a significant amount of instruction in the general education classroom" (p. 587). However, placing these students in general education classrooms does not assure that their needs are being met academically or behaviorally (Kauffman et al., 2021). Students with EBD require specialized instruction and support to be academically, emotionally, and behaviorally successful (McKenna, Newton, et al., 2021).

Evidence-based strategies should be in place to promote academic, emotional, and behavioral success for students with EBD when they are being educated in an inclusive classroom (Lanterman et al., 2021). Whitlow et al. (2018) conducted a research project with three female middle school students with EBD who spent much of their school day in an inclusive classroom. They found that the girls had a hard time making and keeping friends, and they had an inability to identify social boundaries (Whitlow et al., 2018). Additionally, research by McKenna, Newton, et al. (2021) focused on ways to increase success for students with EBD when they are educated in the inclusive classroom. They found that there were significant differences in the knowledge and use of the practices

between special educators and general educators; therefore, the researchers noted the importance of collaboration when educating students with EBD in the inclusive setting (McKenna, Newton, et al., 2021).

Transition

When students with EBD were thriving in a more restrictive environment, a plan should be created to transition the students into a less restrictive setting (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Allowing students to be involved in creating their support plan can improve success in the inclusive classroom (Yeager et al., 2020). Also having evidence-based strategies in place to support the student during transition can improve their academic, behavioral, and social progress (Zaheer et al., 2019). Having highly qualified teachers and staff in place is another important aspect to transitioning students with EBD successfully from a more restrictive classroom to less restrictive classroom (Gagnon, 2021).

Determining the strengths and needs of the individual student can be beneficial when developing a plan for students with EBD to transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom (Yeager et al., 2021). Another strategy that can be beneficial would be to allow the student to choose the course they begin their transition into (Cunning & Strnadova, 2017). No two students transition plans will be the same, although there are aspects that should be included in all plans. Maximoff et al. (2017) stated “these include (1) consistency, (2) gradual change, (3) communication and reliable support, (4) community experience, and (5) youth involvement” (p. 275).

Each student can transition at different paces but remaining consistent and extending transition time slowly can improve the student success (Maximoff et al., 2017). Having a team of people to support the student rather than just one person ensures the student will have continual support. Also, involving the student in forming the team could increase the student's confidence and comfort with their team and subsequently the student could rely more closely on the team for the support that they need to be successful (Yeager et al., 2020).

Collaboration. Collaboration between professionals, including teachers and other educational staff, should take place prior to students with EBD transitioning to a new setting and should continue after the transition in order to support the student, staff, and the teachers (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). Collaboration among teachers can increase teacher knowledge and can provide a time to reflect on current practices and to gain feedback from other teachers (de Jong et al., 2019). Often teachers spend the majority of their day in the classroom with students isolated from other teachers and staff members. Collaboration allows for teachers to interact with other adults who may not be in close proximity to their classroom, which can increase a sense of community among teachers (Reeves et al., 2017). A challenge for administrators is creating a schedule that permits on going collaboration, although, the possibility of positive student outcomes can be far greater than the challenge of time (Lockton, 2019).

Barriers Teachers Face

When students with EBD are transitioned to inclusive classrooms the teacher may also face barriers that can impede the success of the student. Student success can increase

or decrease based on the teacher's attitude toward the student (French, 2019). Often the attitude of the teacher toward the student with EBD is based upon their knowledge of the disability and the amount of training they have received concerning the topic of including these students in their class (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Also, when teachers are unable to manage classroom behavior, instruction time can be reduced (Gilmour et al., 2021). Losing instructional time can lead to teacher frustration and negative attitudes (Scott & Burt, 2018). As teachers have positive experiences with students with EBD, their attitudes can change as they feel more confident to include these students (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Another barrier teachers face when teaching students with EBD in an inclusive classroom is a lack of training on effective strategies for instruction and classroom management (Scott & Burt, 2018). Administrators could reduce this barrier by ensuring appropriate professional development opportunities are available for teachers and staff (Bettini, Cumming, Brunsting, et al., 2020). When effective strategies are not used, teachers could encounter challenges to meet both academic and behavioral needs of the students with EBD, which not only effects the student but also the teacher (Gilmour et al., 2021). Teachers often feel adverse emotions when students are not successful, which can lead to teacher burnout (Granger et al., 2021). As teachers are prepared to educate students with EBD, the risk of negative student outcomes could decrease (Scott & Burt, 2018).

Implications

This study was useful in that based on the data collection and analysis, reasons for inconsistent successful transitions from self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom were identified. Once identified, a policy recommendation was made which can lead to more successful transitions into inclusive settings. This policy could be deliverable for all third- through fifth-grade students with EBD as they transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. The implications of this project could increase the amount of time the third- through fifth-grade students with EBD spend in an inclusive classroom. This could also affect positive social change for the student by increasing the successful transitions into inclusion. As students are educated in the inclusive classroom, they have the opportunity to be exposed to “curriculum based on college and career readiness standards” (McKenna et al., 2019, p. 587). These standards could impact the student’s future by guiding them into the next step of their education or the workforce (McKenna et al., 2019).

Summary

Section 1 introduced the background of the study, a description of the local research problem, and indicated the rationale for the study. Also, in Section 1 there were definitions of term related to the study. The significance of the study, research questions, a review of current literature, implications of the study and how the study could affect positive social change were also explained in Section 1. The conceptual framework of the study, which was the concept of inclusive education, was discussed in the literature review. Section 2 will focus on the research methodology for this study which will

include the research design and approach, the setting of the project, the participants, how data were collected and analyzed, and the results from the study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In this section, I discuss the justification for selecting a basic qualitative study approach to pursue answers to the research questions. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived reasons of general education and special education teachers for the inconsistent transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained class to an inclusive classroom at the research site. Participants in this study met specific criteria, including grades taught and either general or special education. Data were collected through individual semistructured interviews. A self-designed responsive interview protocol was developed to address the problem and purpose of this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Research Design and Approach

A qualitative research approach was appropriate to gather data to answer the research questions in this study. Qualitative research is used to describe a phenomenon that occurs and to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Aspers & Corte, 2019). As Burkholder et al. (2020) explained, “Qualitative research tends to be exploratory, with the function of gaining a better understanding of complex phenomena through observation and description” (p. 83). Data can be collected in multiple ways, including observations, interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The data were collected through interviews and were textual; therefore, the data were analyzed in order to be used to answer the research questions (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Educational research can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods (Burkholder et al., 2021). A mixed method approach was considered, but I narrowed my topic to only include the participants' perceptions and exclude the rate of successful transitions of students into an inclusive setting from a self-contained classroom. I chose a qualitative research methodology because I wanted to examine participants' perceptions of the barriers that exist when students with EBD transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom.

Data collection for qualitative research design can be completed in many ways. Interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were considered for data collection for this study. Focus groups were rejected because participants may be "reluctant to share their experiences and perspectives in a group format" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 150). Questionnaires were rejected because I wanted the opportunity to ask follow-up and probing questions when appropriate. I collected data through interviews because interviews are a powerful way to collect qualitative data. Interviews enable researchers to gain in-depth knowledge of an experience that they may not have ever experienced. The researcher could also obtain information from a participant who has specific knowledge of the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded methods are all qualitative research designs (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Phenomenology research involves collecting and analyzing the perceptions of a specific group of people concerning a particular event or phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that "phenomenological research methods tend to be interested in individuals' lived

experiences of a phenomenon” (p. 24). The ethnography approach to qualitative research entails the researcher spending time in the field setting with participants to gather descriptive and cultural data while developing relationships with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ethnographic research requires researchers to immerse themselves into a participant group to gather data over a long period of time (Burkholder et al., 2020). Case study describes “behavior of a bounded unit in relation to a phenomenon” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 87). Researchers using the case study approach study participants’ real-world experiences in depth (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The grounded theory design involves using the data collected to develop a theory rather than beginning with a theory and collecting data that support or refute the theory (Burkholder et al., 2020).

A basic qualitative research design was appropriate in this project study because the study included an investigation the perception of teachers as to what barriers exist when students with EBD transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. This transition was a specific lived experience for the students and teachers involved in the transition. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated, “Qualitative research involves systematic and contextualized research processes to interpret the ways that humans view, approach, and make meaning of their experiences, contexts, and the world” (p. 4). A case study approach was considered but rejected because the study focused on individuals’ perception of a given experience, rather than their actual experience. An ethnographic approach was also considered but rejected because this study focused on the perceptions of the teachers and not the behaviors of the participants in a field setting.

Participants

Setting and Sample

A school district in the southwestern United States was chosen for this study. Based upon the research site enrollment data, the district was medium in size, with 15,864 students at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year . The district had 13 elementary schools, all of which had general and special education teachers; however, only two campuses housed self-contained classes for students with EBD

Participant Selection

Participants were chosen using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling means that participants are chosen with purpose because of their experience, qualifications, knowledge of the topic, or other reasons (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I took a naturalistic approach in this qualitative study; therefore, I looked for participants who had knowledge of the problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The criteria for selecting participants for this study indicated that participants needed to be teachers who taught third, fourth, or fifth grade who had taught or currently taught a student with EBD. The sample of participants included six general education teachers and six special education teachers, including three teachers who taught in self-contained classes.

I gained approval from Walden’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee, approval number 03-28-22-0109388, and the school system’s permission to conduct the study in the chosen district (Appendix B). I consulted administrators of the 13 elementary schools in the district to determine possible participants for the study who met the purposeful sampling criteria. I then composed an email for the principals to send to the

teachers and ask for their participation (Appendix C). Those who replied to me agreeing to participate were provided an informed consent document that contained more information about the study. Sixty-three teachers met the criteria to participate. Of the 63, 15 teachers agreed to participate, although only 12 gave informed consent when more information was provided.

Researcher–Participant Relationship

When participants were chosen, I contacted each one individually to set up a semi structured interview. Prior to the beginning of the interview, I established a researcher–participant relationship by explaining the reason for my research, making sure to note that my findings were to be used to complete my doctoral capstone project. Being a member of the research site district, I knew several of the participants, although I did not directly supervise any of the participants. I encouraged the participants to be transparent, and I reminded them that all information about their identity was confidential. I also explained that by being completely honest, the participant was assisting me in constructing the best procedures to meet the needs of the students. By establishing these guidelines, we worked toward a conversational partnership, where the participants’ experiences were valued and the relationship between the researcher and participant was trusting (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Protection of Participants

I also explained how participant identity would be kept confidential. Each participant was given a number and letter combination to protect identity. General education teachers were assigned G1–G6, and special education teachers were assigned

S1–S6. A list containing names and codes was kept only until all interviews were completed. Once the data were coded and follow-up questions were not needed, the name and code list was destroyed. By destroying the list, I was able to ensure confidentiality and protection from harm (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi structured one-on-one in person interviews with each participant. The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes and were conducted after school or during the teacher’s conference period. I developed a protocol to guide the interviews (Appendix D). The interview questions were vetted by a committee of three educators, all of whom were administrators in the public school system and held a doctoral degree, to determine if the questions were adequate to answer all research questions. The committee consisted of educators who held doctoral degrees and had some experience in special education. The members of the committee included an executive director of federal programs, a director of communications, and a building principal. Suggestions were given prior to conducting the interviews; therefore, I adjusted the order of the questions based on the committee’s feedback.

Description of Sample

There were 12 participants who were all elementary teachers who taught third, fourth, or fifth grade and had taught at least one student with EBD. Six of the participants taught special education. Three of the six taught in a self-contained classroom, while the other three taught in an inclusive setting. The other six participants were general education teachers. The overall teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 23 years, while

experience teaching students with EBD ranged from 1 year to 15 years. In order to maintain confidentiality, I assigned each teacher a letter and number code. General education teachers were labeled G1–G6. Special education teachers were labeled S1–S6. Table 2 demonstrates the number of years that the participants had taught and the number of years they had students with EBD in their classes.

Table 2

Participant Experience

Participant code	Number of years teaching	Number of years teaching a student with EBD
G1	10	2
G2	23	10
G3	3	2
G4	13	12
G5	12	12
G6	4	2
S1	18	15
S2	11	11
S3	14	14
S4	8	5
S5	1	1
S6	10	2

During the interviews, structured notes were used to document participants' answers, along with audio recordings. Structured note taking allowed me to record answers in case the audio recording failed. Additionally, this helped to pace the interview and permitted me to make note of body language and to devise follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Audio recordings ensured that participants' responses were able to be transcribed in their entirety (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings using an application called Rev Recorder. After the application transcription was completed, I reviewed the transcription and my notes in order to make adjustments to the transcription due to the application not understanding the participant correctly. This process was completed within 1 day following the interview to ensure that my memory was clear to ensure accuracy of the transcription (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The transcriptions were organized in Excel spreadsheets with one sheet dedicated to each question. Once the transcription process was completed, the next step was to code the data so that they were usable to answer the research questions.

Validity of the study was achieved through triangulation. Triangulation involves looking at data from multiple vantage points. With within-method triangulation, the researcher looks at one type of data collection but uses several ways to group the data for comparison (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, the data were collected through one-on-one semi structured interviews, and the data were grouped in multiple ways, including by grade level, by general or special education, and by inclusive or self-contained classes taught.

Transcript and Bias Checking

After transcriptions were completed and corrected with my notes, I provided a copy of the transcription to the appropriate participant. This gave the participant the opportunity to correct the transcription if needed. No participant requested a change in their interview transcription.

Because I worked closely with behavioral supports in the research site district, I had a member from the interview questions committee check the analysis of the data for noticeable bias. The committee member held a doctoral degree and had knowledge of special education; however, the committee member had not taught special education students. The committee member provided feedback and did not find noticeable bias in my analysis of the data.

Data Analysis Results

I examined general education and special education teachers' perceptions of why third- through fifth-grade students with EBD in a specific school district in the southwestern United States transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom inconsistently. **The purpose of this study was to explore reasons for the inconsistent transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from self-contained classes to an inclusive classroom, from the perspective of general education and special education teachers, at the research site.** With this understanding, a policy could be recommended to possibly improve the rate of successful transitions.

Using a recording and transcribing application, I recorded all interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participant of the purpose of the study and encouraged the participant to be transparent in their answers. The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes, and the actual time of the interviews ranged from 11 to 32 minutes. The array of experience teaching and specifically teaching students with EBD led to varied answers and depth of the answers to the interview questions. The interviews were transcribed, and data were coded and analyzed such that four themes emerged.

For the first cycle of coding, I took a descriptive coding approach. This involved taking data collected from the transcribed interviews and placing them into categories. To determine the categories, I analyzed sections by lumping answers together rather than analyzing line by line. These categories were documented in table form (Saldaña, 2016). The second cycle of coding took place by determining themes from the categories. These themes were documented and used to answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). The interview questions were placed into three sections as follows: experiences with students with EBD, what students need in order to be successful, and what teachers need to assist the student to be successful. In these three sections, 11 descriptive codes were identified and four themes emerged. Table 3 aligns the sections to the descriptive codes and the themes.

Table 3

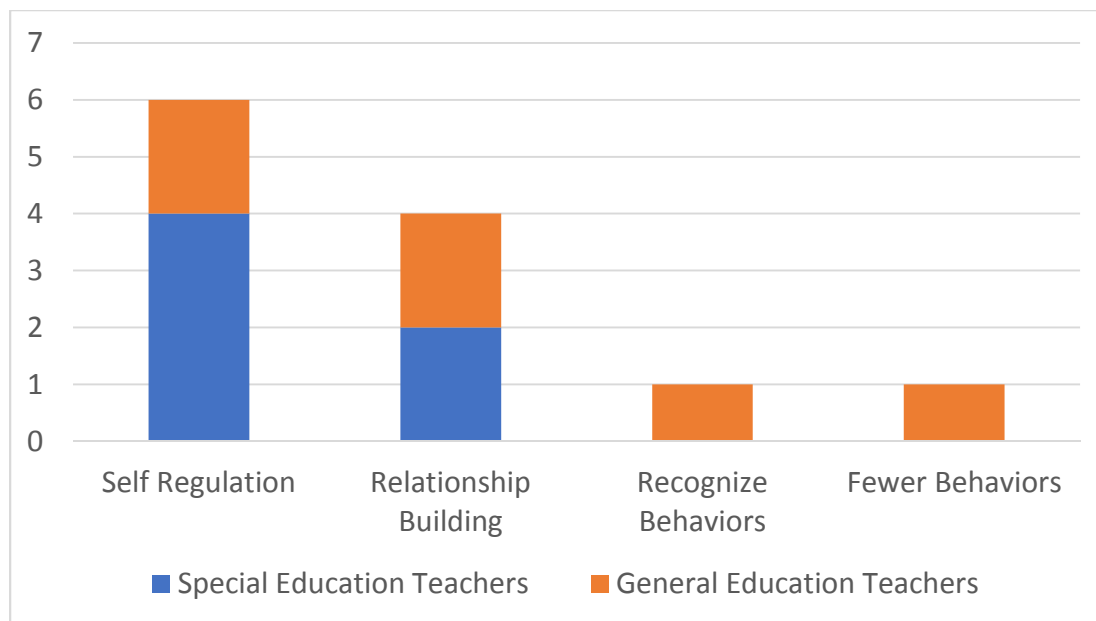
Sections, Codes, and Themes

Section	Codes	Themes
Teacher's experiences with students with EBD in an inclusive setting	Growth, triggers, trust, relationships, strategies for self-regulation	Students grow with strategies Need for strong relationships with teacher and peers
What students with EBD need in order to be successful in the inclusive setting	Desire, relationships, support	Need for support during transition
What teachers need to assist students with EBD to be successful in the inclusive setting	Training, support, relationships	Need for training and support

Theme 1: Students Grow With Strategies

The first theme was created from participants responses to interview questions that focused on positive experiences, challenges, and examples of what they have done to help students with EBD to be successful in their class. I learned that the special education teachers worked with the same students over several years and saw much more growth than the general education teachers. S4 stated that “growth was seen over several years in self-regulation skills”.

Two types of growth were prominent in participants responses with two outliers. The prominent types of growth were self-regulation and relationship building. G1 focused on the student recognizing their behaviors and apologizing for them, while G6 focused on fewer unacceptable behaviors. Participant S5 explained that “having a buddy system for the student who is transitioning is helpful, so they know a student in the class prior to transitioning”. Figure 1 demonstrates the breakdown of the data.

Figure 1*Areas of Growth*

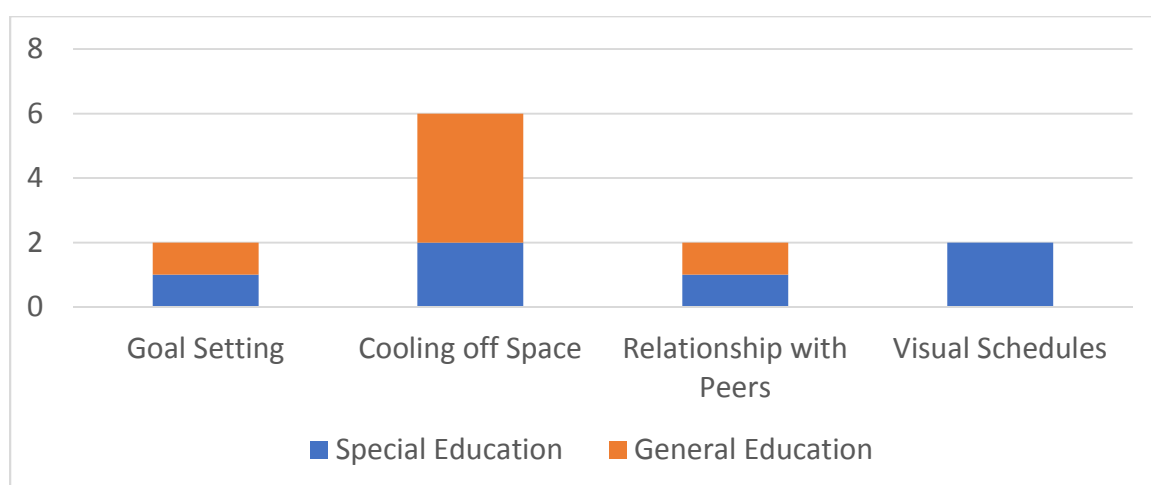
Participants saw growth when students were provided strategies to assist in self-regulation. Four strategies were mentioned by participants. Fifty percent of the participants agreed that a cooling off space assisted students with EBD in self-regulating their behaviors. Of these six participants, four were general education teachers and two were special education teachers. Participant G2 stated that an important factor for students with EBD to be successful is having “cooling off periods and having a cooling off space in the classroom”. Participant S1 referred to the area in the classroom for students to self-regulate as “calming spaces”, which they felt was important for the success of students with EBD in the inclusive classroom.

Goal setting and visual schedules were strategies that were specified by two participants each. Goal setting was mentioned by one general education teacher and one

special education teacher; however, visual schedules were described by two special education teachers. The final strategy was building relationships with peers. This strategy was stated by one general education teacher and one special education teacher. Figure 2 expresses this data.

Figure 2

Strategies for Self-Regulation



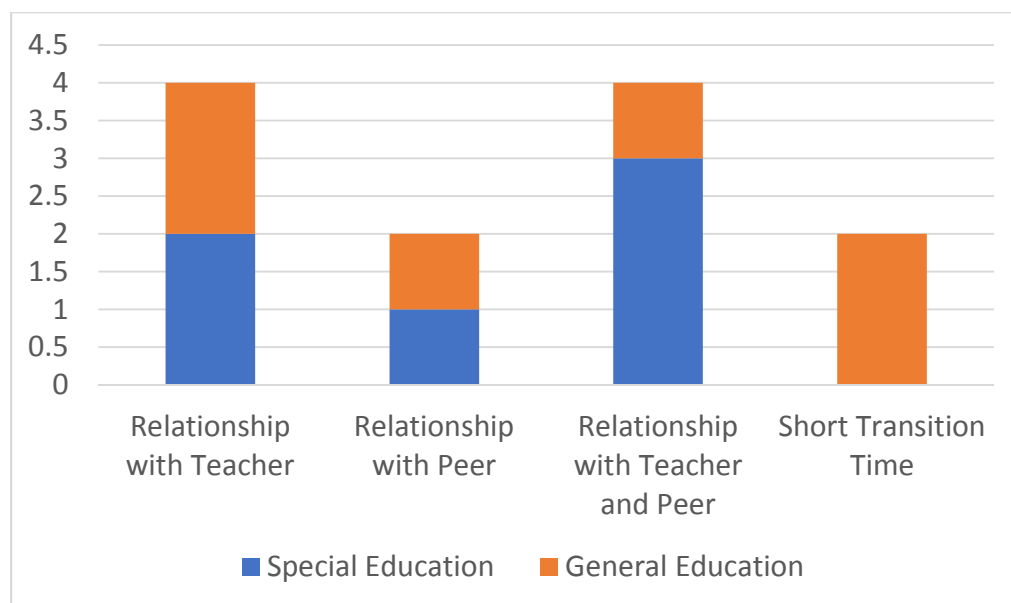
Theme 2: Need for Relationships With Teacher and Peers

The second theme was identified from participants' responses to interview questions that focused on what participants thought were helpful when students with EBD successfully transitioned to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom. I learned that the majority of the participants, 10 of the 12, felt that having a positive relationship prior to the transition was key to the success of the student with EBD. Although, they did not all agree with whom the positive relationship should be - four mentioned the inclusive teacher; two said a peer that was in the class the student would

be transitioning to; and four said the inclusive teacher plus a peer. Participants felt that without a positive relationship prior to transitioning, the student with EBD may not be successful during the transition. Participant G4 stated that “finding a peer that the transitioning student is comfortable with could motivate them to be successful in the inclusive classroom”. S3 explained that the student with EBD should “develop positive relationships, this is key to their success”. The other two participants responded that they thought that beginning with short transition times until the student with EBD was comfortable in the classroom contributed to the success of the student in the inclusive classroom. This data are represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Relationships With Teachers and Peers



Theme 3: Student Need for Support During Transition

The third theme was derived from participants’ responses to interview questions that centered around what supports they had used with students with EBD during

transition to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom that assisted with success and what other supports would be useful during the transition period. Nine of the 12 participants perceived that having an instructional aide that was dedicated to working with the student with EBD as they transition to the inclusive classroom was important, although that is not the only support the student needed. G4 stated, “I think having an aide is key. Somebody the student knows and is comfortable with”. S1 was specific about the length of time the student needed assistance from an instructional aide saying “being able to have a shadow to help them in transition the first two weeks” is important for the success of the student. Other supports such as counseling, visual schedules, common language, class size, and calming boxes were also mentioned. Several participants listed multiple supports. When these supports are not present, the transition could be inconsistently successful. Table 4 displays the participants responses.

Table 4

Support Needed for the Student

Participant	Aide	Visual schedule	Common language	Counseling	Class size	Calming box
G1	X	X				
G2	X					
G3		X				
G4	X					
G5				X		
G6	X					
S1	X		X			
S2		X	X		X	
S3	X		X			
S4	X	X	X			
S5	X	X	X			
S6	X		X			X

Theme 4: Teacher Need for Training and Support

The fourth theme stemmed from participants responses to interview questions that focused on barriers they perceived that hindered the success of the student with EBD during the transition period to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom. Also, what protocols could be followed to assist with a successful transition were explored. Several participants thought there were multiple areas that can be addressed in order to improve the success of the transition. Fifty percent of the participants felt that the general education teacher needed specific training prior to receiving a student with EBD in their classrooms. Participant G1 explained why they felt unprepared to have a student with EBD transition to their classroom. “I don’t feel like I got any training to prepare for this student that has been at this school since kindergarten”.

Some other areas to be addressed were communication and support from an instructional aide. Nine of the 12 participants believed that being in constant communication with all involved was necessary for a successful transition. This communication should begin prior to the transition and continue throughout the transition process. Six of the nine referred to this communication beginning with a transition meeting when the student with EBD was still in the self-contained classroom. Seven of the 12 participants considered support from an instructional aide as important for the general education teacher and the student with EBD during the transition process.

There was one outlier which was using common consistent language between classrooms. Participant S5 spoke about the need to use common and consistent language for de-escalation and self-regulation between the classrooms. They explained that this

could assist the teacher and student to de-escalate during a behavioral situation.

Participants thought that without communication, support, and training the transition period could be inconsistently successful for the general education teacher and the student with EBD. Table 5 presents the participants perceptions of teacher need in order to assist the success of students with EBD as they transition to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom.

Table 5

Teacher Needs

Participant	Training for general education teacher	Communication	Aide	Common language
G1		X	X	
G2	X	X	X	
G3		X		
G4	X		X	
G5	X			
G6			X	
S1	X	X		
S2		X	X	
S3	X	X		
S4	X	X	X	
S5		X		X
S6		X	X	

Answered Research Questions

The data collected were adequate to answer the research questions presented in this study. The data also revealed areas to address in policy to increase the consistency of successful transitions for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD when they transition from a self-contained setting to an inclusive setting.

Research Question 1

According to general education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD? Based upon the data collected, general education teachers perceived transitions between a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom were inconsistently successful for students with EBD because communication, training, and appropriate support were not consistently in place. The students need self-regulation strategies, access to an instructional aide for support of the teacher and the student, short transition periods, and have the opportunity to build positive relationships prior to transitioning to an inclusive classroom. The participants also thought that it is important for the general education teacher to be specially trained for working with students with EBD prior to the beginning of the transition. With these strategies in place, the participants felt transitions could be more consistently successful.

Research Question 2

According to special education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD? Based upon the data collected, special education teachers perceived transitions between a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom as inconsistently successful for students with EBD because communication, common language, training, and appropriate support were not consistently in place. The students need self-regulation strategies, access to an instructional aide, the opportunity to build positive relationships prior to the transition and the use of common language

between classes. Special education teachers also thought, in order to support the general education teacher, there should be training for the general education teacher and consistent communication between parents, special education teachers and general education teachers. The participants felt with these strategies in place, transitions could be more consistently successful.

Evidence of Quality

One-on-one semi structured interviews were used to collect data in this study. The interview questions were reviewed by a committee of public educators who each hold a doctoral degree. Feedback was given to me by the committee and adjustments in the order of the questions were made. The interviews were all transcribed and the participants were provided a copy of their transcribed interview. This allowed the participants to make corrections to the transcription if needed. No changes were requested to be made. After the transcriptions were complete, descriptive codes and themes were analyzed. Once the coding stage was complete, a member of the committee reviewed the transcriptions, codes, and themes to ensure bias was not evident. No noticeable bias was reported.

In this study, the data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and the data were grouped in multiple ways including by grade level, by general or special education, and by inclusive or self-contained classes taught. Validity to the study was achieved through triangulation, specifically methodological triangulation. Triangulation is looking at data from multiple vantage points. Within methodological

triangulation the researcher looks at one type of data collection but uses several ways to group the data for comparison (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Conclusion

The two research questions presented in this study were answered through data collection and analyzation of the data. The participants, both special education and general education teachers, indicated that transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom were inconsistently successful for students with EBD because communication, training, and appropriate supports were not consistently in place. Participants also perceived students need to build positive relationships prior to transitioning to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom. With these strategies along with access to an instructional aide that is familiar with the student, transitions from self-contained classrooms to inclusive classrooms for students with EBD could be more successful. The project that resulted based upon these findings was a policy for transitioning students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. This policy was for students in the third, fourth, or fifth grade.

In this section the research design and approach, setting and sampling, data collection, data analysis procedures, and data analysis results were discussed for this study. In Section 3 an overview of the project, a policy paper recommendation for transition, will be given. Section 4 will include discussion and reflection of the study.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

A policy recommendation, presented in a position paper, was created for the project in this study. The policy recommendation includes needs for special education and general education teachers to provide for students with EBD as they transition from self-contained classrooms to an inclusive classroom. A policy could increase the consistency of what is provided to teachers and to students with EBD as they transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom.

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for the inconsistent transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from self-contained classes to an inclusive classroom, from the perspectives of general education and special education teachers, at the research site. This study was conducted in a local school district in the southwestern United States. The study was intended to answer the following two research questions:

1. According to general education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?
2. According to special education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?

This section includes the rationale for the project, a literature review, a description of the project, the project evaluation plan, and the implications of the project.

Data were collected through semi structured interviews with six special education teachers and six general education teachers who all had experience in educating a student with EBD. The findings from the data collection were that the participants, both special education and general education teachers, indicated that transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom were inconsistently successful for students with EBD because communication, training, and appropriate supports were not consistently in place. Participants also perceived that students could be more successful if they built positive relationships prior to transitioning to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom.

Rationale

A policy recommendation, in the form of a position paper, was chosen as the project genre in order to provide teachers and staff with a consistent process for transitioning students from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom, which could increase the success of the transitions. Hourani and Litz (2018) stated, “policies, besides school leaders and managers, shape the operations of educational institutions, identify systemic connectivity and integrity, and clarify processes for equitable and inclusive practices” (p. 33). The policy recommendation outlines what steps teachers need to take prior to and during the transition, as well as what supports need to be in place to assist students as they transition to the inclusive classroom. The policy recommendation addresses students with EBD in the third through fifth grade in a specific school district in the southwestern United States.

Review of Literature

Educational policy entails the standards, beliefs, and practices that influence education (Hourani & Litz, 2018). Educational policies should consistently be evaluated and recommendations should be made for change or additional policies made to ensure that the policies are meeting the unique needs of the students being served (Wilinski & Morley, 2021). A policy recommendation is an appropriate genre for this project based upon the findings from the data collection concerning perceptions of third- through fifth-grade general education and special education teachers of reasons for inconsistent success of transitions from self-contained classes to inclusive classes for students with EBD. With the creation of a policy recommendation, all stakeholders involved in the transition will have procedures to follow to possibly increase consistency in the transition.

A search for literature was conducted using Google Scholar, Walden University's Library database EBSCO, and exploring several years of *Educational Policy* journal through SAGE Journals. Key terms searched were *educational policy*, *creating educational policies*, *educational policy narratives*, *policy recommendations*, *implementing educational policy*, and *stakeholders involved in educational policy*. Through these searches, 65 articles were found that were written within the past 5 years. After further exploration of the articles, 26 were usable in this literature review. Saturation of the literature was achieved when no further sources could be located within the past 5 years. The literature review includes discussion of the justification for the policy recommendation, why educational policy is needed, policy design, who speaks into creating policy, and policy implementation.

Justification for Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations for updating policy or creating new policies should be based upon research findings and other data sources (Weissman, 2021). It is also important to involve the community and multiple stakeholders when recommending changes to current educational policies or making recommendations for new policies (Mohammed, 2018; Weiss-Laxer et al., 2020). At times, policy recommendations are made but they are not directly connected to research, stakeholders' voices, or the cause of the issue that the policy is addressing (Weissman, 2021). Further, in the midst of so many academic and social changes, there is a higher need for founded research to help shape policy-based solutions to educational concerns than in previous years (Duprez & Boykin, 2021). Therefore, considering policy recommendations derived from research and stakeholders' voice is important and could improve the educational practices of the teacher and the entire school district (Kuchynka et al., 2022).

As stakeholders identify that current policies are not meeting the needs of students, policy recommendations for change or new policies should be derived. In order to make changes in education to best serve all students, policy recommendations should be considered (Soyngam et al., 2021). Educational policy represents what the educational system and specific district value and strive to promote (Henriksen et al., 2019). When making recommendations for policy, the policy actor should consider several factors, analyzing the situation, considering current policies, and generating options to add or change current policies (Mohammed, 2018). Additionally, following policy

recommendations could contribute to more effectively educating all types of students, including those with and without disabilities (Cook, 2019).

Why Policy Is Needed

Educational policies are what drives practice for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders (Henriksen et al., 2019). Instructional leaders are important during the policy implementation stage as they provide direction to teachers on strategies to implement the policy (Peresinger et al., 2020). It is important to ensure that school leaders are making decisions based upon the law and the best interest of the whole child; therefore, policies are necessary (Visnjic-Jevtic et al., 2021). Policies are derived to provide guidance concerning what is being taught and how situations are addressed at school, as well as to provide interventions to promote success for all students (Abbott et al., 2019; Chang-Bacon, 2022; Gulson & Webb, 2018).

Policies can initiate change within the school system (Farley et al., 2021). Evaluations of policies can identify adjustments that should be made as needed so that the educational system continues to improve (Wilinski & Morley, 2021). When policies are not continually evaluated and adjusted, they could backfire, which might increase the problem that they were intended to address (Farley et al., 2021).

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, educators saw the outcome of not having adequate policy. Many schools did not have a policy for remote instruction; therefore, it was handled differently district by district, school by school, and even class by class (Visnjis et al., 2021). There were large variations in the results, from forward progress to regression. Without policies in place to address school closure, educators saw many

students, specifically those with disabilities and lower income students, have significant gaps in social, emotional, and academic progress. Had policy been in place, it is possible that progression could have increased for all during the schools' closure (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Policy Design

Education is a complex system that requires research and policies to continually be evaluated for change to make progress towards student success (Jacobson et al., 2019). Stakeholders often interpret policies differently, and the research that backs policy can be inconclusive. Therefore, it is very important to ensure that policy makers have accurate research and data prior to writing policy and that all stakeholders who will be implementing policy are in consensus as to how to interpret the policy (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). Frequently, education policies encompass the processes and practices that a school district follows (Gulson & Webb, 2018).

Many factors are taken into consideration when policies are being designed. At times, new knowledge is the focus of the design, while other times, research theory drives the design (Gulson & Webb, 2018; Hu, 2019). Policies can also be developed from evidence-based practices and reflection on those practices (Brady & Hazelkorn, 2019; Rude & Miller, 2018).

Several agents influence policy. Persinger et al. (2020) stated, "Schools' policies and practices are influenced by laws, community pressures, and court responses" (p. 24). Another aspect that drives policy design is the policy makers' own beliefs (Allbright &

Marsh, 2022). Knowing policy makers' beliefs is important for stakeholders because their morals may influence their policy decisions (Haslip & Gullo, 2018).

Policy Actors

Many people speak into policies as they are being designed. In order to best represent the community, it is important to involve multiple stakeholders when considering policy change (Weiss-Laxer, 2020). Policy makers listen to thoughts and concerns from stakeholders, including educators, parents, community members, and students (Wilinski & Morley, 2021). The stakeholder's position in relation to the school can influence policy and the implementation of policy (Phillippo et al., 2021).

Once policies are in place, it is the responsibility of the central office administrators and school board members to interpret the policy and how it affects the district (Green et al., 2022). There should be a direct correlation between policy and practice; therefore, teachers and administrators must understand the policy (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018; Green et al., 2022). As education changes, it is necessary for policies to change in order to continue to best serve all students (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2022). Therefore, there is a constant need for educators to be aware of the current policies and how they affect their district or school (Farley et al., 2021).

Policy Implementation

Clear and concise policies can provide direction for educational leaders. Policies that address current issues that allow for outcomes to be measured and are based on valid research data have value in education (Henriksen et al., 2019). As new policies are created or existing policies are adjusted, planning and implementing of policy must take

place (Mohammed, 2018). Once policy is in place, it is needed for stakeholders to learn how to implement the policy in order to improve the development of positive change (Hu, 2019). In order to implement the policy to reach the goals that the policy has been set to address, many levels of educators must be involved. Training should take place with educational leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders to ensure that the policy is implemented correctly (Mohammed, 2018).

Project Description

Policy Recommendation

The policy recommendation for this project study outlines the steps that should be taken prior to, during, and after the transition of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. Based upon this study's findings, there are three recommendations to consider putting into a policy in order to support both students and teachers during the transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. These recommendations will allow for the student to build positive relationships with teachers and peers and will allow the teacher to be prepared and knowledgeable about both the student and the behaviors the student presents.

Recommendation 1: Transition Teams

Based upon the findings of this study, in order to increase the success of the transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD, transition teams are needed. Such teams should be created prior to students beginning the transition that will allow for relationships to be built and constant communication (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Seventy-five percent of the participants

in this study agreed that communication between all involved is vital to a successful transition. Among the participants, 83% felt that building a positive relationship prior to the transition could increase the success of the transition.

The team could consist of the special education teacher, the inclusive teacher who will be receiving the student, the instructional aide who will transition with the student, and the parents. The members of the team should meet to discuss progress and plan together when the student should start the transition process and into which course the transition should begin (Yeager et al., 2021). No two students are the same; therefore, each student in the self-contained class would require an individualized transition team to ensure that their needs are being met (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Recommendation 2: Teacher Training

General education teachers do not always have specific training in working with students with EBD (French, 2019). Fifty percent of the participants thought that training for the receiving teacher could increase the success of the transition. This training could educate the general education teacher on ways to best work with the student coming out of the self-contained classroom (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Recommendation 3: Slow and Supported Transition

In order to support both the inclusive teacher and the student, it was suggested by 75% of the participants in this study to have an instructional aide go with the student to the inclusive classroom for a period of time. The instructional aide would have a relationship with the student and the teacher by serving on the transition team and working with the student in the self-contained classroom. This would allow the

instructional aide to assist the student with self-regulation strategies, academic support, and de-escalation if an unwanted behavior arises. The instructional aide could provide support to the teacher by working directly with the student until the student is comfortable and confident in the class (McKenna, Newton, et al., 2021).

The student should start off in the general education classroom for a short amount of time and increase time in the classroom as they are successful. The inclusive classroom could be overwhelming to the student, as the self-contained class has 10 or fewer students and the inclusive classroom has up to 22 students. As the student is successful, the time could be increased while the support of the aide could be decreased.

Needed Resources

Resources that are needed in order to provide the mentioned recommendations are training and personnel. Trainings could be done in the local district or educational region center. If district leaders chose to hold the trainings in house, the training would need to be specifically developed to meet the needs of the inclusive teacher to ensure that they were prepared to work with a student with EBD. Having access to an instructional aide to transition with the student would require an additional instructional aide in the self-contained classroom. This would allow the self-contained classroom to continue functioning as normal while a student and aide worked on transitioning.

Potential Barriers and Possible Solutions

One potential barrier is having time to meet with the transition team. Teachers and staff are very busy, and adding another meeting could cause additional stress. A possible solution to this is to schedule the transition meetings on teacher workdays when students

are not on campus so that the teacher does not feel pressed for time. Another possible solution to this barrier is to have a substitute teacher come into the self-contained classroom and the inclusive classroom while the transition meeting takes place. Either solution would allow for multiple transition meetings to take place in one day if needed.

Another potential barrier is funding for an additional instructional aide. Financial constraints could limit the ability to hire a new position. A possible solution to this problem is to evaluate and restructure the instructional aides that are currently in the district to ensure each self-contained classroom for students with EBD have two instructional aides.

Implementation and Timeline

The policy recommendation will be presented to the director of special education for the research site. If there is interest by the director, it will be presented to the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the superintendent of the research site. If it is approved through this presentation, the next step will be presenting to the local school board. This will be presented two separate times before it can be voted upon. If approved, the local school board will then work with the superintendent and the director of communications to write a local policy. This process will take 3 to 6 months. Once approved the policy could go into effect the following academic year.

Roles and Responsibilities

Once the policy is created and approved by the local school board, the behavior coordinator for special education will train the self-contained special education teachers and instructional aides on the process for transitioning students to inclusive classrooms.

The assistant principal over these classes will also be trained and will become the expert on how to transition students to inclusive classrooms so that they can provide support to the transition team. The director of special education will ensure that training for the inclusive teachers is available and will work with principals on which teachers should be trained. The associate superintendent for human resources will evaluate the instructional aides in the district and reassign instructional aides to the self-contained classrooms as needed.

Project Evaluation

The purpose of this policy recommendation paper is to increase the successful transitions of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. Data from a local school district showed inconsistent successful transitions. Data collected and analyzed for this study demonstrate several areas that could improve the success of transitions. The strategies include having a transition team that meets regularly, building positive relationships with the student prior to transitioning, providing training for the inclusive teacher, and having an instructional aide go with the student for support for a period of time during transition. Each of these recommendations should be evaluated yearly. Once the policy is approved and being implemented, data can be evaluated yearly. At the end of 3 years of implementation, data should be collected and analyzed so that adjustments can be made to the policy if necessary.

Transition team meetings being held can be evaluated by sign in sheets being collected and turned into the instructional coordinator on the campus. They will enter the

meetings into the local district system, Eduphoria, so that meetings being held can be easily tracked. Evaluating building a positive relationship with the student prior to transitioning be will more challenging, although, if the inclusive teacher will spend a short amount of time with the student in the self-contained classroom on a regular basis, over time the student could become comfortable with the teacher and have a positive relationship.

Trainings for the inclusive teacher will be monitored on a district level. Once the teacher has completed the training, sign in sheets will be turned into the director of professional development and the director of special education. The director of special education will let the principal on the campus know when the inclusive teacher has completed training and is approved to begin working with the student that will be transitioning. The instructional aide participation in the transition will be monitored by both the self-contained and the inclusive teacher. As the student is successful in the inclusive classroom, the transition team can increase the students time and decrease the level of support from the instructional aide. At the end of each year, the successful transition statistics will be collected and documented to be evaluated after three years.

Project Implications

Implications for Local Stakeholders

Transitioning third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom successfully could have positive social change for the students with EBD and others in the classroom. The student with EBD will be exposed to on grade level curriculum as well as college-and-career readiness standards,

which could guide them at a young age to choose a career path. For the other students in the classroom, including a diverse population of students could help teach tolerance and compassion as they model behaviors for the student with EBD as they transition. Because the district will allocate the instructional aides from other campuses, this policy creates very little if any additional taxpayer money. This will allow the school system to improve their experiences for all students at little to no additional cost.

Implications in the Larger Context

As students with EBD transition successfully into an inclusive classroom, they use strategies and gain the ability to self-regulate their behaviors. This could have a positive social change for the larger community as these students are out in the community in public settings. Students who never have the opportunity to be in an inclusive setting could have difficulty with behaviors in a public setting (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). By working with students with EBD to successfully transition to the inclusive classroom, the ability to self-regulate their behaviors in the public setting thus allowing them to be more involved in community activities could increase.

The community could be affected for years to come if students with EBD do not have the opportunity to successfully be educated in the inclusive classroom and do not receive college-and-career readiness curriculum. Students who do not receive college-and-career readiness curriculum might enter higher education or a career path but could be ill equipped. This could lead to low-level employment, regardless of their intellectual ability. Low-level employment could lead to the need for assistance from other stakeholders in the community (Melloy & Murry, 2019).

Summary

In Section 3, I provided a detailed overview of the project study. A policy recommendation paper was the most appropriate project for the study that was completed. Three recommendations were included in the policy recommendation paper. A review of literature concerning educational policy was included in Section 3. Areas of literature reviewed included why policy is important, policy design, and policy actors. The project evaluation and possible implications of the project were also incorporated into Section 3.

In Section 4 I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the project. I will include a recommendation for an alternate approach for this research. I will also reflect on the project and give implications for further research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

In this study, it was found that teachers, both special education and general education, perceived that students with EBD would be more successful in transitioning from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom when specific aspects were consistently in place. These attributes included positive relationships being built prior to transitioning by there being constant communication between teachers and parents, and by the student and the inclusive teacher having proper support. The following information will point out strengths and limitations of the project created based upon the findings of the study.

Strengths of the Project

One strength of the project is that it was created based upon the findings of the study to address a local problem. The project consists of policy recommendations to assist in improving the local concern. All data that led to the policy recommendations were gathered by local teachers, and their perspectives were recorded. If the policy recommendations are approved, the findings of the study could lead to lessening the gap in practice, which could improve the success of the transitions to inclusive classrooms for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom. As more students successfully transition, more students will have the strategies to self-regulate their behaviors, which could lead to more positive interactions at school and in the community.

Another strength of the project is that the recommendations are for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD as they transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive setting. Given the grade range, the policy recommendations can assist with more students than if the project focused on one specific grade level. Moreover, the policy recommendations made in this project could be easily carried out and will cost the district a minimal amount to implement.

Limitations of the Project

A limitation to this project is that the grade range was small. Strategies that are perceived to work for third- through fifth-grade students may not be the same as strategies that are perceived to work for students in kindergarten, first grade, or second grade. The policy recommendations could be implemented in other grade levels, but the perception of the teachers concerning how successful the transitions will be could differ.

Another limitation is that the project was focused on one district. Even though data were collected from multiple grade levels and teachers taught at several campuses, all were affiliated with the same district. The results could have varied if teachers from surrounding districts had participated in the study.

Recommendations for Alternative Approach

There are alternative ways in which this study could have been conducted. The data collection could have been completed through a digital survey. Had this been the collection tool, more questions could have been asked and possibly more participants could have been used.

Another alternative approach could have been the project outcome taking a different direction. The project could have focused on professional development for all staff members to be trained on best practices for educating students with EBD in an inclusive setting. This could have resulted in very large trainings and would have taken multiple sessions of the 3-day training in order to train all third- through fifth-grade teachers in the local district.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and

Leadership and Change Scholarship

Scholarship

I chose Walden University's Doctor of Education program with a specialization in Special Education to continue my career as a leader in the local district. Throughout my program, I learned to effectively read and to conduct research in order to contribute to improving identified problems in education. Interactions with instructors and peers during the coursework encouraged me to deepen my learning in order to best serve special education students and teachers who interact with special education students through evidence-based practices. This program journey has solidified my position as a lifelong learner.

Project Development

Throughout this program of study, I had the opportunity to research my topic of choice in the majority of the courses. This allowed me to grow my understanding of my topic of choice as I moved through coursework. When I reached the prospectus stage of

my capstone project, I had collected many peer-reviewed articles and had a greater understanding of the topic.

If the local district approves the policy recommendations made based upon the findings of this study, I expect that the successful transition rate of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom will increase. This will allow for more students to be exposed to a college- and career-readiness curriculum, which could better prepare students for their future. Additionally, in order for the students to successfully transition, they will have to use self-regulation strategies for unwanted behaviors. If the students can self-regulate in the inclusive classroom, this could translate into the community and allow these students to participate in community activities.

Leadership and Change

Being a leader of change is an important attribute for any leader in education. Anyone involved can lead for change by working collaboratively to find solutions to the problems that arise in their class, school, district, or community. Having a policy in place to lead a change can ensure the change continues in the proposed direction.

Reflection of Importance of the Work

Although the research site district has self-contained classrooms for students with EBD, third- through fifth-grade students were not successfully transitioning from self-contained classes to an inclusive classroom. This study led to policy recommendations. If approved and implemented, these policy recommendations could increase the number of students with EBD who successfully transition from a self-contained classroom to an

inclusive classroom. Successful transitions could increase the amount of grade-level curriculum and appropriate peer interactions that the student with EBD receives as well as college- and career-readiness standards. Being exposed to college- and career-readiness standards at a young age could guide the students into possible career fields.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

This study's findings led to policy recommendations to increase the success of transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained to an inclusive classroom. The recommendations include building positive relationships prior to the transition beginning, constant communication, and support for students and teachers. Implementing this policy could provide the community with positive social change by increasing the number of students with EBD who are successful in the inclusive classroom. This success could translate to community activities and allow students with EBD to participate as positive members of the community.

Application

The findings of this study could be used in other districts to improve successful transitioning to inclusive classes from self-contained classes for students with EBD, or for other grade levels in the research site district. The policy recommendations could be altered so that the recommendations fit the needs of the other district or grade levels. The current recommendations could serve as a starting point for other districts to explore the needs of their individual students.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could expand the study to other grade levels and determine if what is recommended for third through fifth grade is appropriate for kindergarten to second-grade students and secondary students. Upon implementation, 3 years of data should be collected and analyzed to determine if the recommendations are impacting the success rate of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD as they transition from a self-contained class to an inclusive class. After the 3-year analysis, if additional recommendations are determined, the recommendations can be presented and possibly be added to the policy.

Conclusion

The inconsistent success of transitions from self-contained classes for third-through fifth-grade students with EBD was the focus of this study. I will share this study's results and policy recommendations with the appropriate administrators in the research site district. The policy recommendation, if approved, could provide teachers, both special education and general education, guidelines on best practices to support students with EBD as they transition from self-contained classes to inclusive classes. These results could transfer to other grade levels or even other districts.

My educational journey at Walden University prepared me to review scholarly literature and conduct my own research. I have been equipped to analyze data and use the data to answer research questions. With this knowledge, I am prepared to be a lifelong learner and strong administrator who advocates for the best education possible for all students. This study and policy recommendations project provides clear guidelines for

educators to follow when transitioning students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom, which will impact how transitions are handled with other grade levels and in other school districts as well as contributing to scholarly literature regarding this topic.

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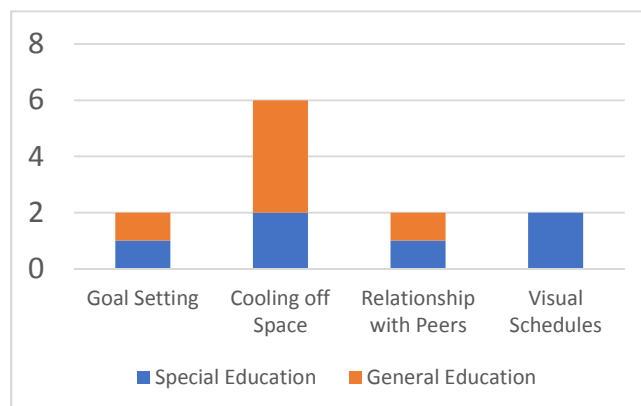
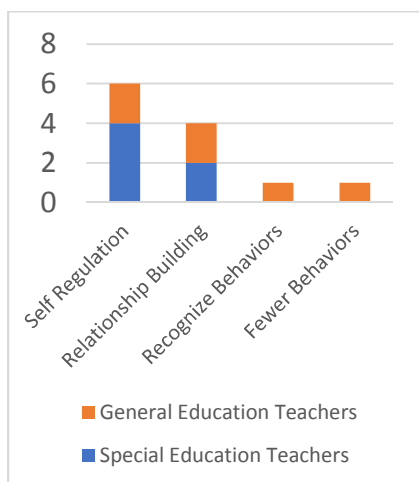
Appendix A: The Project
Transition Policy Recommendation
Prepared by Stevanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate

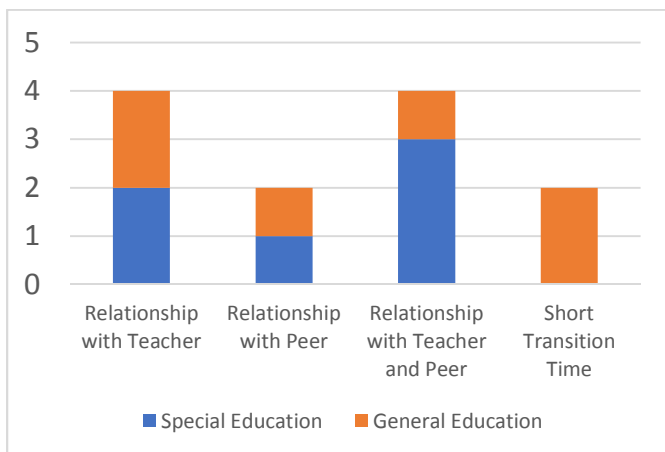
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Executive Summary

In an urban school district in Southwestern United States, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) who are in third- through fifth-grade self-contained classes are not consistently transitioning successfully into inclusive classrooms; therefore, the students are remaining in a restrictive environment for an extended time. The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for the inconsistencies. Guided by the concept of inclusion outlined in the Salamanca Statement, I examined teachers' perspectives of the reasons for the inconsistent success in transitioning from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. Interviews were held with six special education teachers and six general education teachers, all who had experience educating students with EBD. Data was transcribed and coded through two cycles of coding to determine themes and validity will be achieved through triangulation. The findings of this study were that teachers perceived that student's with EBD were being inconsistently successful when transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom because communication, training, appropriate supports, and positive relationships were not consistently in place.





Participant	Aide	Visual schedule	Common language	Counseling	Class size	Calming box
G1	X	X				
G2	X					
G3		X				
G4	X					
G5				X		
G6	X					
S1	X		X			
S2		X	X		X	
S3	X		X			
S4	X	X	X			
S5	X	X	X			
S6	X		X			X

Participant	Training for general education teacher	Communication	Aide	Common language
G1		X	X	
G2	X	X	X	
G3		X		
G4	X		X	
G5	X			
G6			X	
S1	X	X		
S2		X	X	
S3	X	X		
S4	X	X	X	
S5		X		X
S6		X	X	

Based upon these findings, a policy recommendation has been written to be followed when students with EBD transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom to assist in possibly improving the consistency of success. This could cause positive social change by arming students with EBD with strategies to build relationships, self-regulate themselves, and exposure to age-appropriate peers and curriculum.

Recommendation 1: Transition Teams

The transition team should be created prior to the student beginning the transition that will allow for relationships to be built and constant communication (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Overall, the participants agreed that constant communication and position relationships could increase success of the transition.

Recommendation 2: Teacher Training

General education teachers do not always have specific training in working with students with EBD (French, 2019). Half of the participants felt that if the receiving teacher had specific training on working with students with EBD, the transition from the self-contained classroom could be more successful.

Recommendation 3: Slow and Supported Transitions

In order to support both the inclusive teacher and the student, it was suggested by 75% of the participants in this study to have an instructional aide go with student to the inclusive classroom for a period of time. The instructional aide would have a relationship with the student and the teacher by serving on the transition team and working with the student in the self-contained classroom.

Final Thoughts

This policy recommendation paper used research-based evidence from the local school district to develop recommendations that could improve successful transitions for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD as they transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. The recommendations would require training for the teacher, but would not require additional positions, due to relocating instructional aides throughout the district.

Introduction

Special education is governed by policies and laws that dictate how and where children with disabilities should be educated. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), children in special education should be taught in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Wright & Wright, 2007). This allows for students with disabilities to be educated with their regularly developing peers as much as is appropriately possible. This law is not only for students with academic disabilities, but also for students with other disabilities including those with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Students with disabilities can be perceived as challenging to educate and teachers may find it difficult to educate students with EBD especially in the inclusive classroom; however, more than 60% of students with EBD spend at least 40% of their academic day in the general education setting (McKenna, Garwood et al., 2021). Simply being placed in the general education classroom does not assure that students will be successful academically, socially, or behaviorally (Kauffman et al., 2021).

The Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that in an urban school district in the Southwestern United States, students with EBD who are in third- through fifth-grade self-contained classroom were not consistently transitioning successfully into inclusive classroom; therefore, the students were remaining in the in a restrictive environment for

an extended time. This could cause a negative outcome. The special education coordinator from the local district stated

“the amount of students that are successfully transitioning out of the self-contained classes is very low. Many times, students begin to transition but were unsuccessful and had to return to the self-contained classroom because they struggled in the general education classroom”

In a specific urban school district in Southwestern United States, third- through fifth-grade teachers of self-contained classes for student with EBD could transition students to inclusive classrooms how they choose; therefore, the teachers approach the transition period differently.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore reasons for inconsistent transitioning of third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from self-contained classes to an inclusive classroom, from the perspectives of general education and special education teachers, at the research site. Participants in this study met specific criteria including grades taught and either general or special education. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews. A self-designed responsive interview protocol was developed to address the problem and purpose of this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Methodology

Research Questions

The following were research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: According to general education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?

RQ2: According to special education third- through fifth-grade teachers, why have transitions from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom been inconsistently successful for students with EBD?

Study Design

A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological method was appropriate in this project study because the study investigated the perception of teachers as to what barriers exist when students with EBD transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. This transition was a specific lived experience for the students and teachers involved in the transition. “The goal of phenomenological research is to discover and describe the essence of a given experience” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p 24). A case study approach was considered but rejected because the study will focus on individuals’ perception of a given experience, rather than their actual experience.

Evidence-Informed Literature

Students with any disability can be difficult to educate, and those with EBD are among some of the most difficult due to extreme behaviors (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021). It is necessary for schools to offer alternative settings for students to be educated in when the general education setting is not appropriate (Kumm et al., 2020). A continuum of services should be offered in order to best educate all students, including those with EBD (McKenna, Garwood, et al., 2021).

Extreme behaviors by students often lead to punitive consequences which in turn could cause a loss of instructional time because of out of school suspension, in school suspensions, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP), or expulsion (Melloy & Murry, 2019). As students miss instruction, there is the possibility of the students falling behind academically (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). Also, when students miss instructional time due to exclusionary discipline practices, the students have less access to curriculum that leads to higher education, which could impact the student's future (Bal et al., 2019).

When students with EBD are not successful academically, frustration could increase severe behaviors (Whitney et al., 2021). In extreme cases these frustrations may result in the student dropping out of school (McKenna, Adamson, et al., 2021). Students with EBD are at a higher risk for drop out; therefore, determining correct placement and forming relationships early in the year could positively impact these students' academic success (Garwood & Moore, 2021).

Analysis of Findings

Data were collected through semi structured one-on-one interviews with each participant. The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes and were conducted after school or during the teacher's conference period. No follow up interviews were needed.

There were 12 participants who were all elementary teachers who taught third, fourth, or fifth grade and have taught at least one student with EBD. Six of the participants taught special education. Three of the six teach in a self-contained classroom,

while the other three teach in an inclusive setting. The other six participants were general education teachers.

During the interviews, structured notes were used to document participants answers as well as audio recordings. Structured note taking allowed the researcher to record answers in case the audio recording failed. Also, this helped to pace the interview, and permitted the researcher to make note of body language and to devise follow up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Audio recordings ensured that participants responses were able to be transcribed in their entirety (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings using an application called Rev Recorder. The transcriptions were organized in Excel spread sheets with one sheet dedicated to each question. Once the transcription process was completed, the next step was to code the data so that they are usable to answer the research questions.

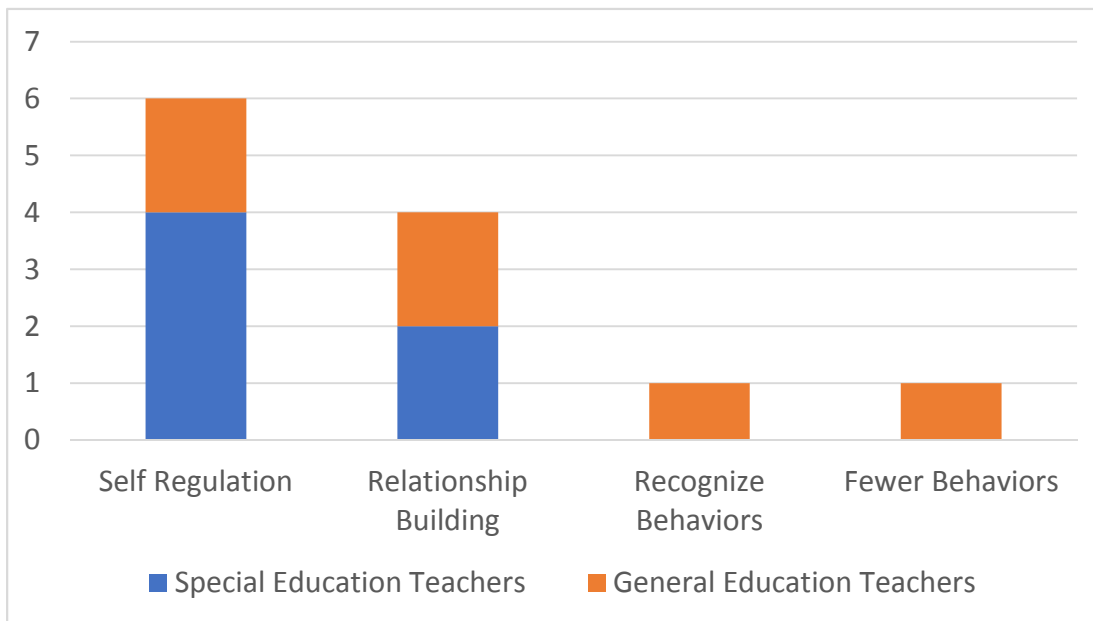
The interview questions were placed into three sections as follows: experiences with students with EBD; what students need in order to be successful; and what teachers need to assist the student to be successful. In these three sections 11 descriptive codes were identified and four themes emerged. Table A1 aligns the sections to the descriptive codes and the themes.

Table A1*Sections, Codes, and Themes*

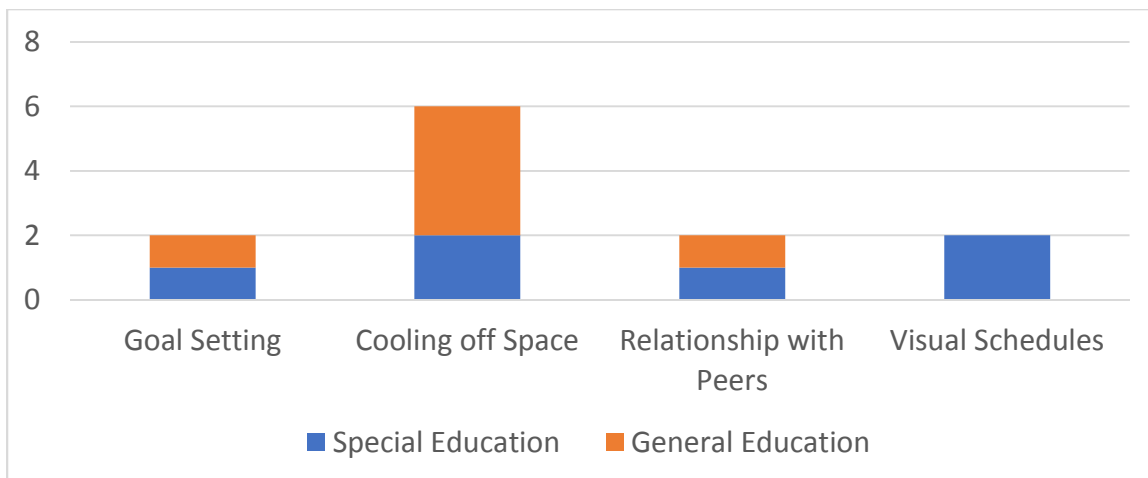
Section	Codes	Themes
Teacher's experiences with students with EBD in an inclusive setting	Growth, triggers, trust, relationships, strategies for self-regulation	Students grow with strategies Need for strong relationships with teacher and peers
What students with EBD need in order to be successful in the inclusive setting	Desire, relationships, support	Need for support during transition
What teachers need to assist student with EBD to be successful in the inclusive setting	Training, support, relationships	Need for training and support

Theme 1: Students Grow with Strategies

The first theme was created from participants responses to interview questions that focused on positive experiences, challenges, and examples of what they have done to help students with EBD to be successful in their class.

Figure A1*Areas of Growth*

Four strategies to assist students in areas of growth were mentioned by participants.

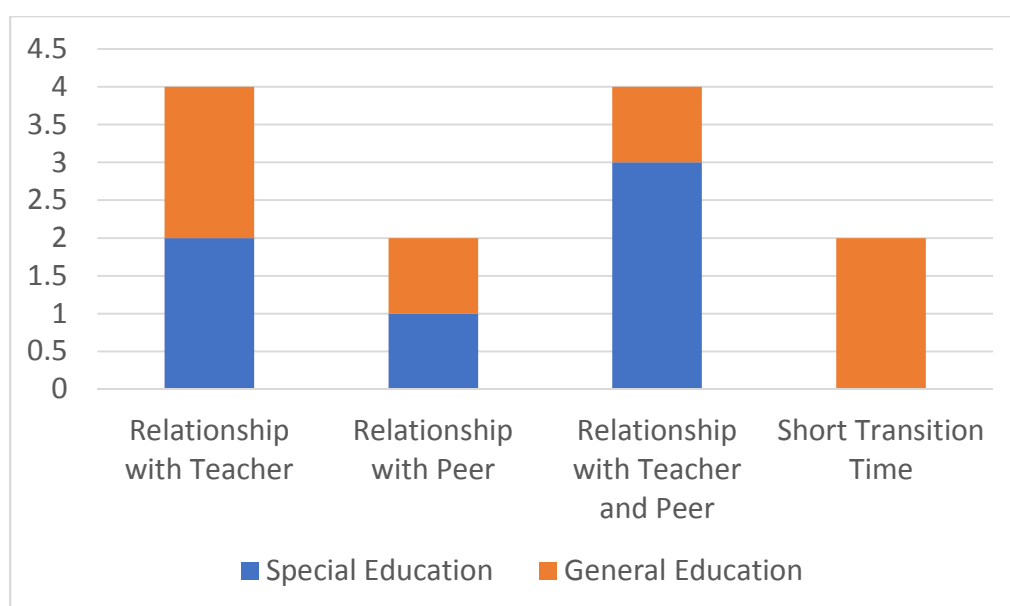
Figure A2*Strategies for Self-Regulation*

Theme 2: Need for Relationships with Teacher and Peers

The second theme was identified from participants' responses to interview questions that focused on what participants thought were helpful when students with EBD successfully transitioned to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom.

Figure A3

Relationships with Teachers and Peers



Theme 3: Student Need for Support During Transition

The third theme was derived from participants' responses to interview questions that centered around what supports they had used with students with EBD during transition to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom that assisted with success and what other supports would be useful during the transition period.

Table A2*Support Needed for the Student*

Participant	Aide	Visual schedule	Common language	Counseling	Class size	Calming box
G1	X	X				
G2	X					
G3		X				
G4	X					
G5				X		
G6	X					
S1	X		X			
S2		X	X		X	
S3	X		X			
S4	X	X	X			
S5	X	X	X			
S6	X		X			X

Theme 4: Teacher Need for Training and Support

The fourth theme stemmed from participants responses to interview questions that focused on barriers they perceived that hindered the success of the student with EBD during the transition period to an inclusive classroom from a self-contained classroom. Participant's responses represented what the teacher needed in order to assist the student with EBD that was transitioning to the inclusive classroom.

Table A3*Teacher Needs*

Participant	Training for general education teacher	Communication	Aide	Common language
G1		X	X	
G2	X	X	X	
G3		X		
G4	X		X	
G5	X			
G6			X	
S1	X	X		
S2		X	X	
S3	X	X		
S4	X	X	X	
S5		X		X
S6		X	X	

Policy Recommendations

Based upon this study's findings, there are three recommendations to consider putting into a policy in order to support both students and teachers during the transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. These recommendations will allow for the student to build positive relationships with teachers and peers and will allow the teacher to be prepared and knowledgeable of both the student and the behaviors the student presents.

Recommendation 1: Transition Teams

Based upon the findings of this study, in order to increase the success of the transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom for third- through fifth-grade students with EBD, transition teams are needed. The team should be created

prior to the student beginning the transition that will allow for relationships to be built and constant communication (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Seventy-five percent of the participants in this study agreed that communication between all involved is vital to a successful transition. While 83% of the participants felt that building a positive relationship prior to the transition could increase the success of the transition.

The team could consist of the special education teacher, the inclusive teacher who will be receiving the student, the instructional aide that will transition with the student, and the parents. The team should meet to discuss progress and plan together when the student should start the transition process and into what course the transition should begin in (Yeager et al., 2021). No two students are the same; therefore, each student in the self-contained class would require an individualized transition team to ensure their needs are being met (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Recommendation 2: Teacher Training

General education teachers do not always have specific training in working with students with EBD (French, 2019). Fifty percent of the participants thought that training for the receiving teacher could increase the success of the transition. The training could educate the general education teacher on ways to best work with the student coming out of the self-contained classroom (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Recommendation 3: Slow and Supported Transition

In order to support both the inclusive teacher and the student, it was suggested by 75% of the participants in this study to have an instructional aide go with student to the inclusive classroom for a period of time. The instructional aide would have a relationship

with the student and the teacher by serving on the transition team and working with the student in the self-contained classroom. This would allow the instructional aide to assist the student with self-regulation strategies, academic support, and de-escalation if a behavior arises. The instructional aide could provide support to the teacher by working directly with the student until the student is comfortable and confident in the class (McKenna, Newton, et al., 2021).

The student should start off with a short amount of time and increase as they are successful. The inclusive classroom could be overwhelming to the student, as the self-contained class has 10 or fewer students and the inclusive classroom has up to 22 students. As the student is successful, the time could be increased while the support of the aide could be decreased.

Next Steps Follow Policy Acceptance

The policy recommendation will be presented to the director of special education for the research site. If there is interest by the director, it will be presented to the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the superintendent of the research site. If it is approved through this presentation, the next step will be presenting to the local school board. This will be done two separate times before it can be voted upon. If approved the local school board will then work with the superintendent and the director of communications to write a local policy. This process will take 3 to 6 months. Once approved the policy could go into effect the following academic year.

Once the policy is created and approved by the local school board, the behavior coordinator for special education will train the self-contained special education teachers

and instructional aides on the process for transitioning students to inclusive classrooms. The assistant principal over these classes will also be trained and will become the expert on how to transition students to inclusive classrooms so that they can provide support to the transition team. The director of special education will ensure that training for the inclusive teachers is available and will work with principals on which teachers should be trained. The associate superintendent for human resources will evaluate the instructional aides in the district and reassign instructional aides to the self-contained classrooms as needed.

Conclusion

Transitioning third- through fifth-grade students with EBD from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom successfully could have positive social change for the students with EBD and others in the classroom. The student with EBD will be exposed to on grade level curriculum as well as college-and-career readiness standards, which could guide them at a young age to choose a career path. For the other students in the classroom, including a diverse population of students could help teach tolerance and compassion as they model behavior for the student with EBD as they transition.

As students with EBD transition successfully into an inclusive classroom, they use strategies and gain the ability to self-regulate their behaviors. This could have a positive social change for the larger community as these students are out in the community in public settings. Students who never have the opportunity to be in an inclusive setting could have difficulty with behaviors in a public setting (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). By working with students with EBD to successfully transition to the

inclusive classroom could increase their ability to self-regulate their behaviors in the public setting and allow them to be more involved in community activities.

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Appendix B: Research Site Approval

April 4, 2022

Stevanie Jackson
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Jackson:

After reviewing your IRB consent form and related documents, I hereby approve your research project as described.

Because you are an employee of [REDACTED] and to safeguard the integrity of your research, please use a non-[REDACTED] account to send all research-related emails. Also, as you have indicated in your IRB consent document, you will use personal time to conduct your research tasks such as interviews and data analysis. Please work with your direct supervisor to either take personal time or arrange for an alternate schedule that will allow you to meet during the times your subjects are available and enable you to complete your regular work assignments.

I wish you the best in this endeavor. Please let me know if I can help in any way.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
[REDACTED]

Appendix C: Email to Principal and Participant Flyer

Principals,

My name is Stevanie Jackson. I am a Walden University Doctoral student, and I am working on an exciting research project that could assist teachers who work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. My research will focus on exploring teachers' perceptions of inconsistent successful transitions for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom. I will interview teachers and document my findings. Please forward the below flyer along with a list of all 3-5 grade teachers to your secretary. Please have your secretary send out the flyer to all eligible teachers on your campus. Please include general education and special education teachers. All teacher names and campus names will be held confidential in the research project. Interviews will be held in person or over the phone and will not interfere with any trainings or instructional time.

Thank you so much for your cooperation,
Stevanie Jackson

My name is Stevanie Jackson, and I am conducting research for my doctoral capstone project.

My exciting research project could assist the way we work with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). I am inviting you to take part in this research.

You qualify to participate if you:

- Teacher 3rd – 5th grade
- General education, inclusion special education, or self-contained special education
- Have taught at least one student with EBD

What you will have to do:

- Set up and attend an interview with me – either in person or by phone
- If a follow up interview is needed, set up second interview to be completed by phone

What you gain:

- Opportunity to potentially improve the educational experience for students with EBD
- Opportunity to potentially improve teachers experience when educating a student with EBD
- \$15 gift card to a local coffee shop / eatery

All participants campus and personal identity will be confidential. The only demographic information that will be reported is the grade you teach, the number of years you have taught, and whether you teach general education, inclusion special education, or self-contained special education.

If you are interested in possibly participating, please email me at Stevanie.jackson@waldenu.edu. I will send you more information about the study and an informed consent form.

Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Stevanie Jackson

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview questions

1. How long have you been teaching? In what capacity (grade, general education, special education)?
2. How often have you had students with EBD in your classroom?
3. How do you feel about students with EBD being educated in an inclusive setting?
4. What positive experiences did you have with these specific students?
5. What challenges did you have with them?
6. When students with EBD are in your class, what are some things that you have done to help them be successful?
7. Have you taught a student with EBD who transitioned from a self-contained class to an inclusive class?
 - a. If yes –
 - i. Was the student successful or unsuccessful in the transition?
 - ii. What supports were provided to the student to help them be successful during the transition?
 - iii. What areas could have been different that you feel would have increased the success of the transition?

Preface the next question with back information:

Currently in our district some students with EBD are educated in a self-contained classroom. When they are behaviorally ready, the student transitions to an inclusive classroom. Some students are successful while others are unable to be successful outside of the self-contained classroom.

8. Why do you think some students with EBD are successful while others are unsuccessful when they transition from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom?
9. What are some barriers that you perceive impact the success of students with EBD when they transition from self-contained classes to inclusive classes?
10. What type of supports do you perceive could assist students with EBD to be successful when transitioning from a self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom?
11. What do you think are some strategies or protocols that could be followed that would help with consistent transition?