Kendra L. Allen. The School Library Media Program and Special Education Programs. A Master's Paper in the M.S. in L.S. degree. November, 2008. 47 pages. Advisor: Sandra Hughes-Hassell.

This study examines the relationship between school library media programs and special education programs in the context of meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities. Library media specialists in a large public school system in North Carolina were surveyed on how they gather information about best practices in special education and students enrolled in special education programs, what services and instructional accommodations they provide, and how they collaborate with special education teachers. Participating library media specialists work at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The survey results indicate low confidence among library media specialists in their knowledge of special education practices; however, there is a strong preference to learn more from special education professionals in their schools through means like school-sponsored professional development. Results also show efforts being made to provide services and accommodations as well as to collaborate to improve student learning.

Headings:

       School libraries/North Carolina

       School libraries/Relations with teachers and curriculum

       Handicapped, Library services for/Handicapped children

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAM AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

by
Kendra L. Allen

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

November 2008

Approved by

_____

Sandra Hughes-Hassell

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Gathering Information about School Library Media Best Practices

Gathering Information about Special Education Programs

Services, Accommodations, and Modifications for Students with Special Needs

Collaboration

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Services for Parents

<u>Introduction</u>

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education reported that during the 2005-2006 school year students with disabilities were 13.8 percent of the total student enrollment in elementary and secondary public schools nationwide (2006). Given their central position in school environments as facilities for all students, school library media centers have to be equipped to meet students' varying needs. Hopkins (2004) asserts that barrier-free information access facilitates student self-determination and helps students avoid becoming dependent on the assistance of others.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004 specifies that not only are students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment but also that students should be provided with services that meet their unique needs so that they might be prepared for further education, employment, and independent living (IDEA 2004 Section 300). Given this federal mandate, all school personnel have a responsibility to ensure that the students in their school are educated appropriately. Since special education teachers have specialized training and knowledge pertaining to working with individuals with disabilities, education experts suggest that others should look to these colleagues for advice, information, and assistance.

Experts in the field of school library media programs, such as Noonan and Harada (2007), advocate that library media specialists consult and collaborate with special education teachers as a means of gathering needed information and forging partnerships

that can translate into a library media program that is better equipped to meet the needs of the school's students who have disabilities. The purpose of this research study is to examine if and how school library media specialists gather information about the students with disabilities in their schools and if and how they meet students' varying educational needs.

Literature Review

Since IDEA requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment, the intent is that "special education should be viewed as a set of services, not a place" (Noonan and Harada, 2007, p. 132). As a result, library media specialists have to be prepared to meet the service needs of students with disabilities who participate with their peers without disabilities in library media center activities. In addition, preparation for these students must acknowledge their range of disabilities and educational needs.

Education and library science experts agree that a partnership between library media specialists and disability professionals is a critical component to successful integration of individuals with disabilities into library programs. Paulsen (2008) advocates for collaborative efforts wherein there is "an interactive process involving individuals with varying levels of expertise who work together to solve a mutually defined problem" (p. 313). In this case, the problem is identified as being the inclusion of students with disabilities in the library media program. Hopkins (2005) asserts that library media specialists can enhance and promote the value of the library media program and the special education department by working closely with special education teachers

to develop services and collections that support school-wide inclusion. Not only that, but such collaborations can help classroom teachers by reducing their preparation demands as they try to meet the learning needs of all of their students. Noonan and Harada (2007) state that "to address the numerous student, curriculum, and instructional factors associated with planning and implementing inclusion, a collaborative team approach, involving the general education teacher, special education professionals, and the library media specialist, is vital" (p. 135).

Jouzaitis (2004) argues that library media specialists need to be briefed on the goals and educational strategies as outlined in students' individualized education plans soon after they are written so that they might be able to anticipate how they can accommodate students' needs prior to actual visits to the media center. This exchange of information can only come with cooperation between the special education teachers who oversee the individualized education plans and the library media specialists.

With recognition that a growing number of students with disabilities are being educated in inclusive settings wherein they spend at least 80 percent of their day in regular classroom environments, Murray (2002) notes that the need for school library media specialists to be aware of the needs of these students also grew in an effort to provide them with adequate library services alongside their peers. She further advocates that to improve in service delivery, much could be achieved through enhanced communication and cooperation between school library media specialists and special education teachers. Through such communication, Murray suggests school library media specialists can find out how many students with disabilities are enrolled in the school and

can discover the nature of their disabilities, thus allowing them to tailor their programs accordingly.

Hopkins (2003) asserts that "an inclusive library with a knowledgeable staff and a diverse selection of resources can be the key to developing enthusiasm for literature, research, and learning" (p. 46). In the effort to become knowledgeable, Hopkins believes that special education teachers can inform library media specialists about which students are not making use of the library and why . With regard to improving the academic achievement of at-risk students, as defined by Jones and Zambone (2008), "a media specialist analyzes, synthesizes, and applies research findings to building a library program that meets the unique needs of students in the school and community" (p. 30) By looking to research, media specialists can pull instructional and behavioral strategies that will help students achieve their academic goals. To access such information, Wojahn (2006) suggests that school library media specialists attend any in-service training sessions about children with special needs that schools and school districts offer to teachers.

The inclusion of resources and technologies in the library media center for individuals with disabilities is both recommended and challenging. Current literature advocates for greater accessibility for this population of individuals both in their access to the facility and to the information, resources, and reading materials.

According to Kaiser (2007), it is important to both children with disabilities and their teachers that the children are able to find literature that is at their interest level and that reflects an acceptance of their particular disability or special need. However, library media specialists often find that locating the appropriate books among the current

offerings from publishers is difficult and time consuming. As they evaluate possible additions to their collection, they have to conversely take into account that what may be on their shelves at present includes titles with outdated information and objectionable attitudes and depictions of individuals with disabilities. Hopkins (2003) advocates that the resource focus should not center solely on print books. Instead, an assortment of books on tape and CD, as well as e-text resources will provide more options for students who have print-related disabilities.

Akin and MacKinney (2004) note that to serve students with autism spectrum disorders, for example, librarians should have a collection development strategy that includes the purchase of literature in all formats. They also recommend the use of books that contain repetitive language for read-aloud story times. In addition, they suggest using stories that illustrate a social problem or situation, and then explicitly present the appropriate behavior so children learn common social conventions. Specific information such as what Akin and MacKinney (2004) present is put to best use when school library media specialists have consulted with disability professionals to determine if these collection development and read-aloud strategies would be appropriate for the school's population of students with disabilities.

Like other experts, Peters and Bell (2006) acknowledge that library media specialists face many challenges in their pursuit to provide materials and services for individuals with disabilities. For one, assistive technology devices can be expensive and small budgets put added pressure on the selection of the right tools. This is coupled with a lack of knowledge of current options, trends, and user preferences. Wojahn (2006) suggests that making the library accessible to all students does not necessarily mean that

a library media specialist has to purchase expensive, high-tech equipment to serve one child out of 500. Rather, there are low-cost options that can meet children's needs and stay within a tight budget.

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that a library media specialist must work on several tiers of involvement with special education programs within a school so as to best serve the population of students who have special needs. Communication and collaboration with the special education professionals must be coupled with provision of appropriate resources and technologies.

Methodology and Analytic Techniques

This study addresses the relationship between the school library media program and the special education programs in a shared school environment. The school library media program is defined as being staffed by at least one certified school library media specialist. Special education programs are defined as the academic programs designed to meet the needs of enrolled students with disabilities who have individualized education plans (IEPs).

To study the relationship between library media programs and the special education programs, an electronic survey that collected quantitative and qualitative data was distributed to 223 school library media specialists in a large public school system in central North Carolina. Publicly available staff email addresses were used for the distribution of the survey to library media specialists in elementary, middle, and high schools. The subjects were sent an email with a hyperlink to the electronic survey. Upon

selecting the link, subjects were taken to an online survey that requested that subjects either accept or decline participation in the survey with its outlined conditions and parameters. With consent granted, subjects proceeded with the survey. Without consent, subjects were taken to the final screen of the survey, which thanked them for their participation.

Thus, in keeping with ethical standards, participation was voluntary. There was no penalty to any subject who declined participation in the study. By using Qualtrics™ survey software for the survey, subjects' email addresses, IP addresses, and any other identifying information were not collected or recorded. Within the survey itself, questions were designed so as to gather information about the participating population without soliciting details about subjects that might directly or indirectly identify them.

Since gender, age, race, ethnicity, and education are not pertinent to this study, no demographic information of this nature was included in the survey. In lieu of demographic information as previously mentioned, participants were asked to identify their years of experience as a library media specialist, the level of school (elementary, middle, or high) at which they currently work, and whether they have National Board Certification. In addition to these questions which were designed to help characterize the participants, the majority of the questions gathered data about self-reported: (1) instances of information gathering about best practices in school library media and best practices in special education; (2) instances of information gathering about students with disabilities enrolled in the participants' schools; (3) communication and collaboration between library media specialists and special education teachers; (4) library services offered to students with disabilities; (4) library services and resources offered to parents of students

with disabilities; (5) confidence of the media specialists in their knowledge of special education best practices and the students with disabilities in their schools; and (6) involvement with Individualized Education Plan meetings and goal-setting (see Appendix A). The questions were designed to elicit information about the relationship of the school library media programs and the special education programs in the context of circumstances which library media specialists could easily identify and quantify. The intent was to focus on behavior rather than attitudes to maintain objectiveness in the responses.

For the purposes of this study, participants were given two weeks to complete the electronic survey. During this time, participants had the option to stop and start the survey, returning to the unfinished portion at a later time if so needed. While taking the survey, participants could choose to not answer a question without penalty. If a participant chose not to respond to a question, he or she could continue to the next screen in the same manner as if a response had been provided. Such an arrangement was to further the intent of the survey to be a voluntary process, and at no time were participants forced to provide a response. The lone exception to this rule was with regard to the letter of consent at the start of the survey, which required the participant to either accept or decline the conditions of participation in the study. At the completion of two weeks, the survey was deactivated so that data could be collected and analyzed. At this time, participants were no longer able to return to unfinished surveys to enter responses.

Data Analysis

Of the 223 subjects to whom the electronic survey was distributed via email, 67 subjects accepted the terms of participation in the study and therefore were directed to the survey questions. Three subjects chose to formally decline participation in the study by not providing consent. The remaining subjects have no record as they opted to not select the link to the survey as included in the recruitment email or opted to not select either accept or decline with regard to the condition of consent, thereby not entering the survey. Throughout the survey, the number of participants who responded to individual questions varies. Discussion of responses will indicate the number of participants for each question so as to provide an accurate context for the responses and their corresponding percentages. The variance is a condition of the allowance for participants to select the questions for which they provide responses with no risk of penalty for skipping one or multiple questions. This allowance was in accordance with the intent for participation to be purely voluntary. The only forced answer question was with regard to the letter of consent.

At the completion of the survey, participants were asked to provide information regarding the level of school at which they work, their years of experience, and their qualifications with regard to National Board Certification. Of 60 responses to level of school at which the respondents work, 57 percent are elementary, 22 percent are middle, and 22 percent are high. Given the higher ratio of elementary to middle and high schools in the school district, this breakdown is expected. Of 60 respondents, 30 percent have National Board Certification. When asked how many years they had been library media

specialists, 27 percent are 0-5 years, 35 percent are 6-11 years, 17 percent are 12-17 years, and 22 percent are 18 or more years.

Gathering Information about School Library Media Best Practices

Before addressing the specific nature of the relationship between the library media program and special education programs, the goal was to establish a precedent of how library media specialists received information about best practices in the school library media field. To what and to whom do they target for information they perceive as relevant to their performance as professionals? If one were to want to disseminate information to this group, what would be the best avenue? Respondents were permitted to indicate multiple resources, thereby acknowledging that often there may be no single source from which to seek information about best practices. Instead, what range of resources do library media specialists tap into?

For this query, there were a total of 65 respondents. The resources with the highest percentages of users were other library media specialists and professional literature; for both, 86 percent of respondents indicated these sources (Table 1). Following close behind, 83 percent of respondents noted that they receive information from the district's school library media supervisor. Additionally, 53 percent of respondents said that they get information from professional conferences, and 11 percent of respondents flagged other sources not explicitly listed in the survey. Those seven respondents mentioned the following sources of information: current enrollment in a MLS program; classes and workshops; LM_Net; blogs; online sources; IMPACT, a state of North Carolina initiative; and professional learning community (PLC).

Sources of best practices in school library media	Percent (%) of respondents (n=65)
District's school library media supervisor	83
Other library media specialists	86
Professional literature	86
Professional conferences	53
Other	11

Table 1: Sources of information about best practices in school library media

To further target the use of professional literature to acquire information about best practices in school library media, participants were asked to note what professional literature they read on a regular basis (Table 2). In response, 81percent, a clear majority of the 54 respondents indicated that they read *School Library Journal*. Other publications receiving five or more mentions include *American Libraries*, *Knowledge Quest*, *Library Media Connections*, *Voices of Youth Advocates*, *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, and *Booklist*. Following these publications, other resources that garnered attention from the respondents include: American Library Association (ALA)/American Association of School Librarians (AASL) websites, *Education News*, LISnews, ALA wikis, ACRLog, blogs, *Horn Book*, Edutopia, Permabound reviews, Follett reviews, Follett updates, Library Link of the Day, *Educational Leadership*, *Middle School Journal*, 21st Century Partnerships newsletter, *Bookbag*, ISTE publications, *Library Sparks*, *Teacher Librarian*, professional books, and miscellaneous articles. Of particular note with regard to this question was that two respondents indicated that they don't read professional literature on a regular basis. One respondent qualified the answer with an exclamation about not having enough time to do so.

Professional literature read regularly	Percent (%) of respondents (n=54)
School Library Journal	81
American Libraries	17
Library Media Connections	13
Booklist	13
School Library Media Activities Monthly	11
Knowledge Quest	9
Voices of Youth Advocates	9
professional books	7
Library Sparks	5
Educational Leadership	5
blogs	5
ALA/AASL websites	5
Teacher Librarian	4
miscellaneous articles	4
Voices in the Middle	4
none	4
ISTE publications	2
Bookbag	2
Follett reviews	2
21st Century Partnerships newsletter	2
Middle School Journal	2
Library Link of the Day	2
Updates from Kathy Schrock	2
Follett updates	2
Permabound reviews	2
Edutopia	2
Horn Book	2
ACRLog	2
American Library Association wikis	2
LISnews	2
Education News	2

Table 2: Self-reported professional literature read on a regular basis

Gathering Information about Special Education Programs

After recognizing the ways that library media specialists participating in the study

are gathering information about best practices in school library media, the next step was

to turn to if and how they receive information about best practices in special education programs. The juxtaposition of the questions was intended to show the potential duality of the task to acquire knowledge of best practices. The task put forth to library media specialists is to gather information about more than just their specific area of expertise and to recognize that in doing so a variety of means may be necessary.

With this in mind, when asked if they receive information about best practices in special education programs, only 14 respondents out of 64 said yes. That means that 78 percent of the respondents to the question indicated that they do not receive information about best practices in special education. Of those 14 library media specialists who said yes, a majority (13 out of 14) said that they get their information from special education professionals. Among the other options, only one person indicated getting information from each of these categories: district's school library media supervisor, school principal, and professional conferences. Three respondents marked general education teachers; the same was true for professional literature. Other sources of information contributed by respondents were: experience as a special education teacher, staff development, and materials sent to the respondent by mistake of the sender.

Keeping in mind that those respondents who do receive information about best practices in special education overwhelmingly said they acquire that information from special education professionals, all participants were then asked how they would prefer to get information. Respondents were only permitted to mark one option from the list or contribute their own suggestion (Table 3). Of the 64 responses, 32 of them were in favor of getting information from special education professionals. None of the respondents indicated that they would prefer to receive information from either their principals or

from general education teachers. Four respondents selected their district library media

supervisor, six selected from professional literature, and three selected from professional

conferences. The second-largest response, 18 respondents' preference, was for school-

sponsored professional development. The final respondent used the other category to

frankly note, "Anywhere."

Preference for source of information about best practices in special education	Percent (%) of respondents (n=64)
Special education professionals	50
School-sponsored professional development	28
Professional literature	9
School district's library media supervisor	6
Professional conferences	5
Other	2
General education teachers	0
Principal	0

Table 3: Respondents' preferences for sources of information about best practices in special education

School level breakdown

As Figure 1 shows, few library media specialists at each level of school receive

information about best practices in special education programs. Among those who do,

there is a noticeable lower percentage of respondents at the high school level. Only one

respondent out of 13 who work at the high school level reported receiving information

about special education best practices. This respondent noted that he or she receives

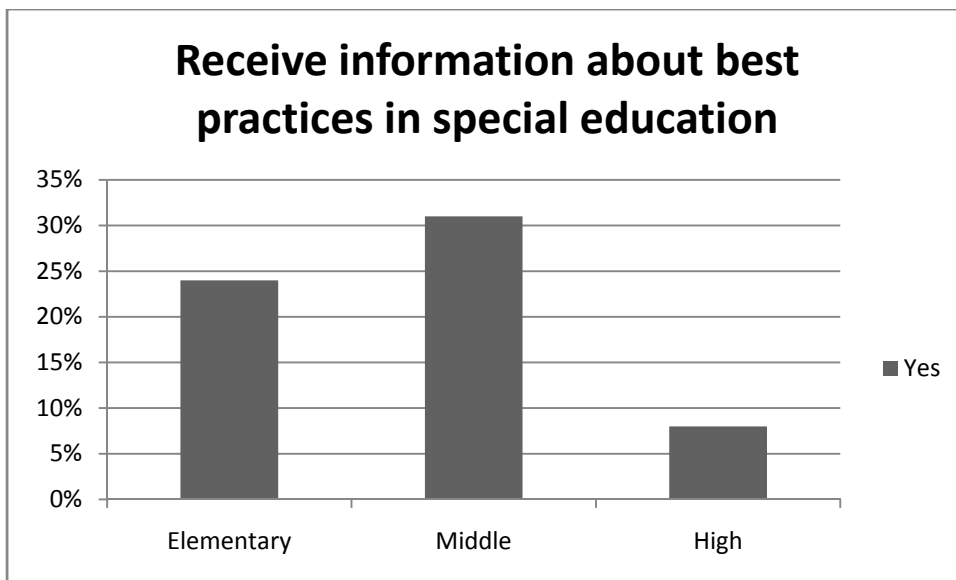information from special education professionals and from professional literature.

Figure 1: Percent of school library media specialists who receive information about best practices in special education—school level subgroups (Elementary n=34, Middle n=13, High n=13)

In reflection on the responses indicating preference, there is an evident need to disseminate information about best practices in special education to library media professionals. In going about doing this, the largest reception, as indicated by the data, would be if the information came from special education professionals. Given the strong response for school-sponsored professional development, there is reason to discuss the possibility of organizing school-sponsored professional development opportunities led by familiar, knowledgeable special education personnel who are already within the school. If looking at numbers alone, this option might have been the preference of 68 percent of the respondents. To test this hypothesis, a follow-up question would be necessary.

Parallel to the line of questioning regarding gathering information about best practices in special education programs, subjects were also asked if and how they gather information about the students enrolled in special education programs in their schools. The literature shows that successful interaction with students who have special needs is to

correctly identify those needs and then make accommodations and modifications accordingly. No two students are alike, even if they share a disability. Best practices are only as effective as how they are tailored to each student; therefore, it is not sufficient for library media specialists to have knowledge of just best practices in special education programs. It leaves them with only half of the equation. The same can be said for knowing about students in one's school but not having tools to meet their needs.

So in looking at the other side of the equation, subjects were asked if they receive information about the students enrolled in special education programs in their schools (Table 4). Of the 64 respondents, 45, or 70 percent, said yes. Those 45 respondents were then asked to note how they receive information. All 45 potential respondents chose to answer the question, which allowed them to highlight all the means they use for information gathering. The most popular response was from special education professionals (40 respondents = 89 percent). Comparatively, 18 selected from general education teachers, 13 selected during professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and 12 selected during Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Four respondents each marked from the principal and from parents. Finally, five people chose the other category. Their open-ended responses included while reading all of the IEPs for the school, from counselors, from SAM (School Assistant Module) and NCWise (North Carolina Window of Information on Student Education), and from the data manager and the teacher. Among the other group, one respondent noted from special education teachers, which, for the purposes of this study, should be grouped under special education professionals.

Sources of information about students enrolled in special education programs in schools	Percent (%) of respondents (n=45)
Special education professionals	89
General education teachers	40
Principal	9
Parents	9
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings	27
Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings	29
Other	11

Table 4: Sources of information about students enrolled in special education programs in schools

After noting that most respondents who currently receive information about the students with special needs in their schools from special education professionals, subjects as a whole group were asked to indicate by what means they would prefer to learn about these students (Table 5). Of the 62 respondents, 69 percent of them prefer to receive information about students enrolled in special education programs from the special education professionals. The means with the next closest margin of preference was during PLC meetings, which garnered 13percent of the responses. Of minimal popularity were from general education teachers, from the principal, from parents, and during IEP meetings, each option had between 1 and 3 votes. Four respondents did mark the other category. However, two of the write-in responses were for special education teachers, which would fall under special education professionals, thus adding to that total, and one of the responses was for from general education teachers during collaborative sessions. This response should either fall under from general education teachers or during PLC meetings, which are meant to be collaborative sessions. The one unique write-in response indicated a preference to receive information from school counselors.

Preferences for source of information about students enrolled in special education programs in schools	Percent (%) of respondents (n=62)
Special education professionals	69
General education teachers	3
Principal	2
Parents	2
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings	5
Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings	13
Other	6

Table 5: Respondents' preferences for sources of information about students enrolled in special education programs in their schools

School level breakdown

Compared to the percentages of school library media specialists who reported receiving information about best practices in special education, more respondents reported receiving information about the students enrolled in special education programs in their schools. This trend is consistent across elementary, middle, and high school respondents (Figure 3). While 77percent of middle school library media specialists who responded indicated they receive information about students, both elementary school and high school library media specialists exceeded 65 percent positive responses. Despite the higher instance of this information-gathering practice among respondents, there remains a consistent deficiency in the area of information about best practices in special education.

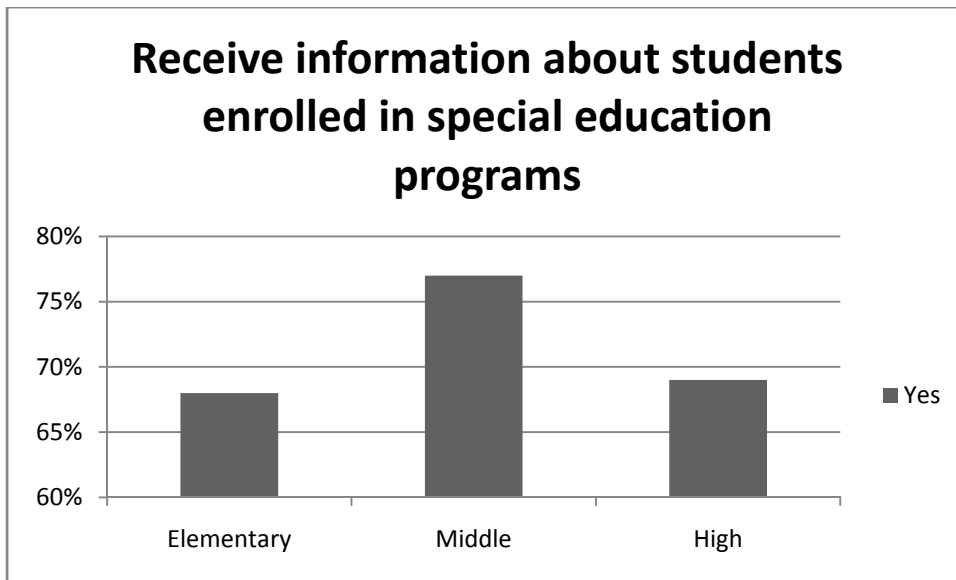**Receive information about students enrolled in special education programs**

Figure 3: Percent of school library media specialists who receive information about students enrolled in special education programs in their schools—school level subgroups (Elementary n=34, Middle n=13, High n=13)

In considering the whole equation, it appears that school library media specialists participating in this study have a strong preference to work with special education professionals in respect to learning about best practices and learning about students enrolled in special education programs within their schools. This relationship between professionals in both programs is in line with best practices advocated by the literature. Library media specialists have thus identified special education professionals as valuable resources who can improve the accommodations and modifications made to the library media program so as to best service students with special needs.

To conclude this section of the study, which focused on information-gathering behavior, subjects were asked to grade themselves on both their knowledge of best practices in special education as well as on their knowledge of students enrolled in special education programs in their schools. With regard to knowledge of best practices, only 5 percent of the 64 respondents gave themselves As, 5 percent gave themselves Bs,

58 percent of the gave themselves Cs, 25 percent gave themselves Ds, and 8 percent gave themselves Fs (Figure 4). In keeping with the role of letter grades in the modern education system, a self-reported response of this nature shows a lack of mastery that necessitates close and thorough examination.

Figure 4: Respondents' evaluation of their knowledge of best practices in special education (n=64)

The grade report on knowledge of students with special needs equally favored the lower end of the grading scale. Of the 64 respondents, only 2 percent (or one respondent) awarded an A, 5 percent gave themselves Bs, 34 percent gave themselves Cs, 44 percent gave themselves Ds, and 13 percent gave themselves Fs (Figure 5). Again, the respondents were not confident in their knowledge; therefore, further indicating the need for professional development and collaboration between library media specialists and special education professionals.

Knowledge of students enrolled in special education programs

■ A ■ B ■ C ■ D ■ F
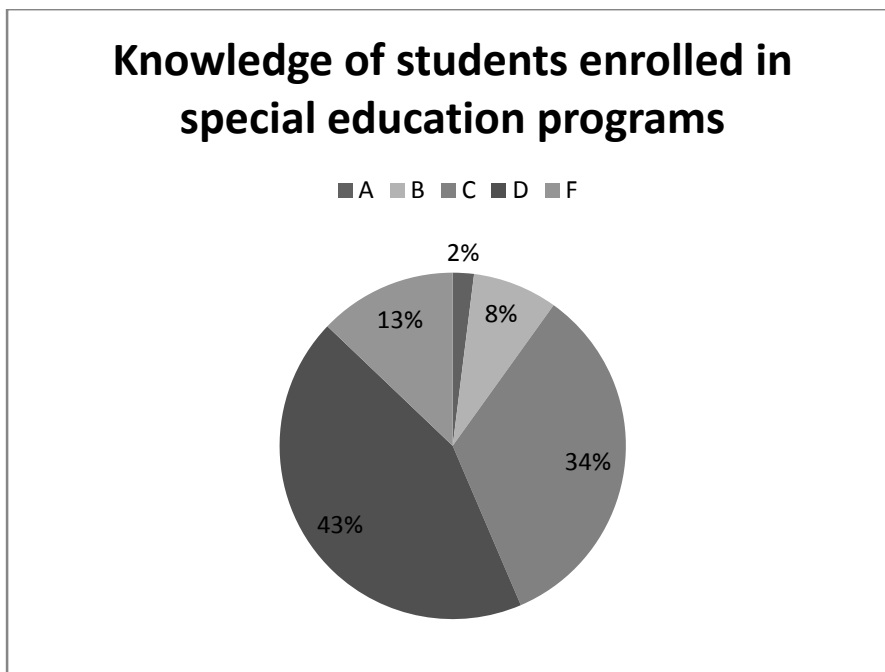
2%

8%

13%

34%

43%

Figure 5: Respondents' evaluation of their knowledge of students enrolled in special education programs (n=64)

The responses to this section of the study prompt not only a call to action to improve self-reported levels of knowledge in the area of special education, but they also shed light on ways in which to provide information to which library media specialists will be receptive. Special education professionals are the key to the complete equation. Respondents have distinctly put their trust in the information provided by these professionals. Conversely, there is evidence from respondents that information is usually neither disseminated nor preferred from principals and parents. Rather, there is a stronger inclination for information gathered during school-sponsored communication activities, like professional development and PLCs. These forums have specific focuses on student learning and have the potential to bring school library media specialists together with special education professionals.

Services, Accommodations, and Modifications for Students with Special Needs

The next part of the study was designed to ascertain what services, accommodations, and modifications the library media specialists surveyed were providing in their schools for students with special needs. Given their backgrounds in knowledge of best practices in special education and knowledge of the students enrolled in special education programs in their schools, the intent was to examine the ways their knowledge was demonstrated in library media programs.

To begin this line of questioning, subjects were asked what services they provide to students with special needs. A list of services gleaned from the literature was provided, and subjects were asked to select all of the options that applied to their programs (Table 6). Of the 62 respondents, 58, or 94 percent, indicated that they provide books that are considered to be on a low reading level and are of high interest. Forty-two respondents, or 68 percent, said they provide books with accurate and non-stereotypical portrayals of children and youth with disabilities. Forty-four respondents, or 71 percent, offer guided or individualized instruction on how to use the library media center. Forty respondents, or 60 percent, provide wide aisles that allow for wheelchair navigation. Thirty-three respondents, or 53 percent, have audio books in their collections. Thirty-two respondents, or 52 percent, have print materials suggested to them by special education teachers. Twenty-three respondents, or 37 percent, have commonly used materials on reachable shelves. Twenty-five respondents, or 40 percent, have computer workstations at wheelchair height. And 19 respondents, or 31 percent, have assistive technology devices. Dropping down in the services of lesser prevalence, eight respondents, or 13 percent, have large-print books in their collections. Dropping further, only one respondent, or 2

percent, indicated having computer monitors mounted on adjustable arms. The two

respondents who chose the other category wrote in that they offer services for students

with hearing impairments and provide storytime with songs and puppetry.

Services provided to students with special needs	Percent (%) of respondents (n=62)
Low reading level/high interest books	94
Audio books	53
Large-print books	13
Books with accurate and non-stereotypical portrayals of children and youth with disabilities	68
Print materials suggested by special education teachers	52
Access to assistive technology devices	31
Guided or individualized instruction on how to use the library media center	71
Wide aisles for wheelchair navigation	65
Computer workstations at wheelchair height	40
Commonly used materials on reachable shelves	37
Computer monitors mounted on adjustable arms	2
Other	3

Table 6: Services provided by the respondents for students with special needs

To follow up the question regarding services, subjects were then asked what types

of accommodations they made in their instruction of students with special needs. As with

the list of potential services, accommodations were taken from the literature and an other

category was added to collect accommodations not explicitly listed (Table 7). Subjects

were asked to check all of the accommodations that apply to their programs. Of the 61

respondents, 45, or 74 percent, adjust the pacing of their instruction according to

students' attention spans. Forty respondents, or 66 percent, repeated instruction. Thirty

respondents, or 49 percent, adjust group size. Twenty-eight respondents, or 46 percent,

pair students without disabilities with students with special needs. Twenty-two

respondents, or 36 percent, use picture books with large, clear illustrations. Twenty

respondents, or 33 percent, use visual cue cards or reminders. Nineteen respondents, or

31 percent, present a unit of stories that are related by a common theme or character.

Seventeen respondents, or 28 percent, perform task analysis. Falling into the

accommodations with lesser prevalence, using big books and moving a chair from in

front of a window to across from it both were selected by 10 respondents, or 16 percent.

Two respondents chose the other category option, and one wrote in that he or she offers

preferential seating.

Accommodations made in instruction for students with special needs	Percent (%) of respondents (n=61)
Task analysis	28
Repetition of instruction	66
Adjust pacing for attention span	74
Adjust group size	49
Use visual cue cards or reminders	33
Move read-aloud chair from in front of a window to across from a window	16
Present a unit of stories that are related by a common theme or character	31
Pair students without disabilities with students with special needs	46
Use big books	16
Use picture books that have large, clear illustrations	36
Other	3

Table 7: Accommodations respondents make in instruction for students with special needs

If the responses gathered in this section are any indication, school library media

specialists are trying to offer services and make accommodations in an effort to meet the

needs of students using their library media centers. Their efforts widely vary as many

categories fall into a mid-range of prevalence; however, this may be in part due to the

specific needs of the students in the schools and the variances among them. In addition,

there is no specificity as to whether students are participating in inclusion classrooms or

if they are being taught in self-contained classrooms. From an instructional standpoint,

accommodations may manifest in different ways based on the setting in which the

students learn and with whom they visit the library media center. Of strongest popularity

among both questions, though, was the provision of low reading level/high interest

books. Considering the rates of the occurrence of disabilities, it stands to reason that such

a service would be applicable to the larger population of students with learning

disabilities. In addition, these texts often appeal to students without identified disabilities

but who are reluctant readers. With multiple population appeal and the popularity of

reading encouragement efforts in the face of standardized testing, these books become an

important print resource in the collection.

Collaboration

The literature advocates for collaboration between library media specialists and

special education professionals. As examined previously, library media specialists rely on

special education professionals as resources for information about best practices in

special education programs as well as for information about students enrolled in special

education programs in schools. However, the best practice approach is not to treat the

relationship between education colleagues as a one-way street. Rather, the literature is in

favor of taking the collaborative teaching model found in discussions of best practices

with general education teachers and applying those principles to the instructional

partnership between media specialists and special education professionals. In an effort to

explore if collaboration is indeed taking place, the study asked subjects if they work

collaboratively with special education teachers. Of the 61 respondents, 59 percent of them reported that they do work collaboratively.

School level breakdown

In examining the percentages of respondents who reported collaborating with special education teachers, it appears that the respondents at the elementary school level were less likely to work collaboratively with special education teachers (see Figure 6). The survey was not designed to discover the causes of collaboration, or lack thereof in the case of elementary schools. However, it did go on to explore how collaboration manifested at the three levels of school.
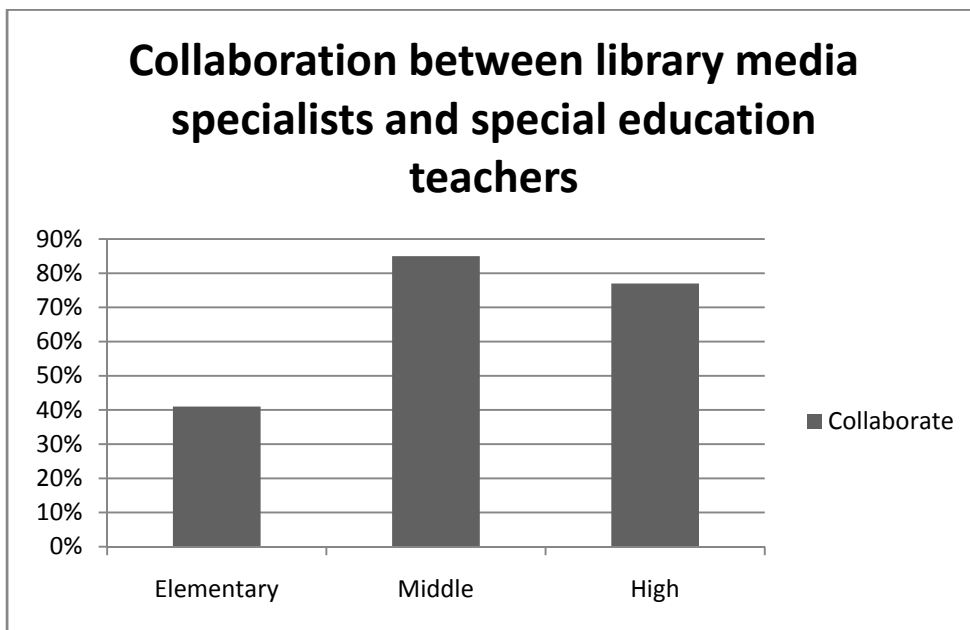

Figure 6: Percent of library media specialists who report collaborating with special education teachers—school level subgroups (Elementary n=34, Middle n=13, High n=13)

While the literature makes a case for collaboration, it generally fails to document successful examples of collaboration, thus leaving professionals with the sense that action

is necessary but without ideas and direction as to implementation. With that in mind, respondents who answered affirmatively to the question regarding their practice of collaboration were directed to a question that asked them to provide one or two examples of collaborative projects. While not going into great detail about the projects, respondents offered a considerable response, which is documented in the bulleted list below. Of the 36 respondents who were directed to this question, 31 provided ideas and comments.

Elementary School

- Working with the students on units that the teacher has introduced; mirroring the same techniques as the teachers

- Offer support by providing appropriate nonfiction science related books for units of study in the classroom; read science related nonfiction books at storytime in the media center

- Lesson using a read-aloud story relating to their curriculum, help students select books on their level; reward special needs student with individual attention in the media center

- Choosing stories that have a theme they are studying or learning about in class

- 1) Animal studies involving stories, finding information, sorting information, creating ways to present information. 2) Country study (going with our magnet theme) including producing a power point presentation.

- I try to coordinate with the special education teachers on the topics they are discussing and I try to incorporate more hands-on manipulatives and songs and general multi-sensory tasks with the input from the teacher about each child.

- Thematic units with self-contained classes

- Use of visual stimulation through pop-up books and the choosing of books that enhance their units of study

- Creating web-based activities to provide curriculum instruction in different modalities (visual, aural)

- Introducing the Hank Zipzer series to special education kids

- Collaborative planning as to themes of study, reading incentive program

Middle School

- Wrote a grant to purchase hi-low books and we are using them with students in SSR. I purchased graphic novels and used them in literature circle reading for classes who were not ready to study Shakespeare.

- Research projects

- We worked on character traits using storybook characters; we worked on various concepts (i.e., seasons, health, ordinal words) using storybooks

- We work with the AU [autism] teacher to have students come into the Media Center to help with the shelves - regularly. We do story time with the TMD [mental disability] class which is a special event for the class of middle schoolers.

- Understanding nonfiction (guide words, context clues, etc.)

- Collaboration with regular education teacher, special education teacher and media specialist to provide differentiation for students working on weather project

- Choice of materials from the collection geared to individual students, a collection of materials specifically for special education students

- How to choose a book for you, Special leveling for integration in regular classroom on research assignments

- Independent Reading, and using databases for research.

- Books, read-alouds, and flannel boards on folktales

High School

- Reading lesson and discussion of the book Night

- Career project is upcoming; utilization of interactive software in classroom

- Banned Book Week project; president research

- Booktalking level-appropriate books; Media Center orientation.

- Modifying 9th Grade Library-Media Orientation for students with limited literacy proficiency to enable success for special education students; also, working individually with Down Syndrome student (we have one in our school) to teach her media skills, including use of digital camera (she actually "published" a scrapbook of digital photos of her 9th grade year with my help in the library.)

- Accommodations in Freshman Orientation, individual support for students in Curriculum Assistance classes

- Hands-on lessons for using databases and catalog

- We collaborate with curriculum teams so we teach lessons to all levels including ICR [In-Class Resource] courses - at those meeting special

education teachers participate and we add to our instruction graphic

organizers, notes in different forms, lower leveled texts, etc.

- Home hospital teaching where I work with special needs teachers to plan

  lessons for students. Adjusting lessons to accommodate special needs

  students' disabilities in our classroom.

- Reading aloud time and book talking high interest, low vocabulary books.

The responses appear to vary from addressing areas of academic instruction to reading-related activities. There is a common theme of read-aloud activities and booktalks that involve props and books tailored to the students reading levels. In doing these reading activities, library media specialists indicate consideration of what the students are studying in their classrooms so that the reading materials for storytime are appropriately reflective of those units. What seems to be less prevalent is the use of technology in these collaborative projects. Database instruction is mentioned more than once, but of particular note is the digital scrapbook project completed by a high school student with Down syndrome and the creation of web-based activities to provide curriculum in different modalities (visual and aural). Both of these efforts extend past leveling and storytimes to actively engage students in ways not commonly mentioned in this list. In addition, the actions taken by the library media specialist are targeted to the individuals, not just the students as collective entities.

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Continuing the discussion of addressing students with disabilities as having individual needs, the study asked subjects about their participation in the individualized education plan (IEP) process. These documents are contracts stipulating the needs of the student as well as goals for the student and how to provide accommodations and modifications to acknowledge the needs and meet the goals in a manner that provides the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the student. Generally, participants in the IEP process include special education professionals, general education teachers who teach the student in question, and the student's parents or legal guardians. If a student is old enough, then he or she is also able to participate. Given that participants are those individuals responsible for the welfare and educational success of the student, the literature advocates for library media specialists to be involved as well. Not only should they be present at meetings, but they should also work to establish IEP goals related to information literacy skills as appropriately needed by the student. After polling the subjects, only 13 of the 60 respondents said they attend IEP meetings. The majority, 78 percent, do not. Of the 13 respondents who said they do attend meetings, only two said they create IEP goals related to information literacy skills.
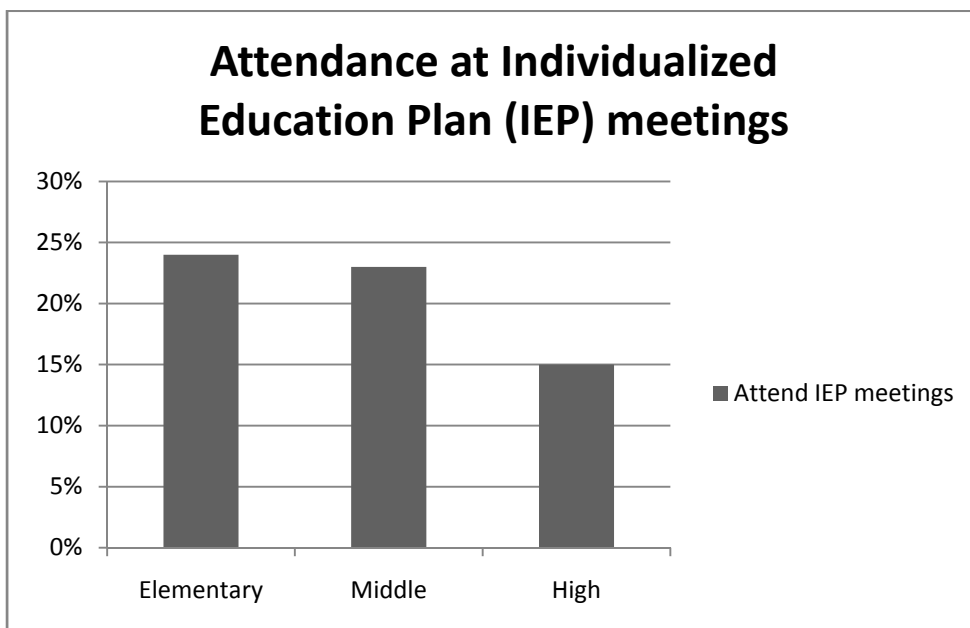
School level breakdown

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who attend individualized education plan meetings—school level subgroups (Elementary n=34, Middle n=13, High n=13)

As shown in Figure 7, elementary and middle school library media specialists who reported their attendance at IEP meetings did so at a fairly similar rate. However, high school library media specialists fell short in this category, as only two of the 13 respondents reported attendance. While factors affecting these responses are not elicited from the respondents, there is room to question if there is a philosophical difference among the levels of school as to the definition of the involvement of the library media specialist in formal affairs related to students with disabilities, such as IEP meetings. Perhaps, though, there is also a matter of size of total student enrollment and consequential number of responsibilities assigned to study participants. Although not able to be determined at this time, it is an area of potential future study.

Services for Parents

In recognizing the critical role of parents in the success of students with disabilities, subjects were questioned in regards to the services they offer parents of this population of students. The list of options from which the respondents were able to select services was adapted from literature discussing services generally provided to parents, regardless of the nature of the student (Table 8). Respondents were allowed to choose all of the services that apply to their library media programs. Of the 40 respondents, the largest majority, 84 percent, allow parents to check out materials from the library media center. Since a policy of this kind is applicable to all parents, this response is less surprising. The same goes for the response with the next highest response; 21 respondents, or 48 percent, said that they have resources (print, audio, electronic) that address parenting issues and child development. Growing more specific to the needs of parents of students with disabilities, 39 percent of respondents said they have resources about disabilities. Only three respondents, or 7 percent, said that they offer direction on the library media program website to online resources for parents of students with special needs. None of the respondents indicated that they provide afterschool or evening family reading programs designed specifically for families of students with special needs. Two respondents marked the other category and qualified that services for parents were not applicable. Collectively, there appears to be no special effort made for parents of students with special needs. The services they are offered are grouped into the services made available to all parents.

Services offered to parents of students with special needs	Percent (%) of respondents (n=44)
Allowance for parents to check out materials from library media center	8
Afterschool or evening family reading programs designed specifically for families with students with special needs	0
Direction on library media center website to online resources for parents of students with special needs	7
Resources (print, audio, electronic) that address parenting issues and child development	48
Resources about disabilities	39
Other	5

Table 8: Services respondents provide for parents of students with special needs

Conclusion

Driving this study was the recognition that school library media programs have an academic and recreational responsibility to students with special needs in equal capacity to students without disabilities. To reiterate, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004 specifies that not only are students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment but also that students should be provided with services that meet their unique needs so that they might be prepared for further education, employment, and independent living (IDEA 2004 Section 300). A commitment to student learning does not exclude those students whose learning is structured around Individualized Education Plans and 504 plans.

With this in mind, the study was designed to address the preparedness of library media specialists to meet students' special needs. In summation, participants' responses indicated areas of need with regard to learning about best practices in special education as well as learning about the specific students enrolled in special education programs in

their schools. A majority of library media specialists reported inadequacy in their knowledge in the area of special education. They noted limited information retrieval from an assortment of sources. To accompany this void in information, their confidence in their own understanding of how to best serve students with special needs would barely earn a passing grade, at best.

Despite the indications of inadequacies, there is hope in respondents' self-evaluation. Judging from their responses, there is a recognized area of need to know more. This realization sets the stage for implementation of programs designed with their preferential responses under consideration. Library media specialists showed a collective preference to have special education professionals serve as their main sources of information about best practices in special education as well as about students enrolled in special education programs. They have pinpointed these education colleagues as to whom they will listen and perceive as experts and credible sources of information. Such identification cannot go unnoticed as future efforts to educate library media specialists are discussed. Coinciding with these results are those that show strong preference for school-sponsored professional development. By combining the two, a foundation is laid for solutions to the problems associated with deficient knowledge of special education practices and student needs. An opportunity to improve student learning is fostered.

With the prospective possibilities in mind, the next consideration is what services and instructional accommodations and modifications are currently being implemented in library media programs, and, correspondingly, which ones are not. While most respondents noted inclusion of low reading level/high interest books in their collections, the study fails to uncover what percentage of the collection these materials constitute and

the degree to which they are circulated among the student population. Is there a need even in this area of frequent implementation to improve the collection and/or the efforts to get the books into the appropriate students' hands? Further investigation is warranted. With regard to some of the services provided to a lesser degree, there is a common relation to physical access, such as computer workstations at wheelchair height, materials on reachable shelves, and computer monitors on adjustable arms. Are students deterred because of their inability to access computers or materials? Being aware of the needs of the students in a school's population helps to begin to assess services such as these, thus reinforcing how knowledge facilitates evaluation of the library media program's services for students with special needs.

In the same manner, knowledge of the needs of students with special needs as well as best practices in instructional techniques for them establishes a course of action for accommodations and modifications to instruction. While most respondents noted that they alter pacing to accommodate varying attention spans, there is infrequency in the other tactics listed, such as something as simple as moving a chair for read-aloud activities so that students do not face a window. Communication between library media specialists and the special education teachers who have honed instructional methods for students with special needs becomes a critical component for success. Transferring what happens in classrooms to support successful learning and behavior into the library media center is both possible and imperative. The least restrictive environment (LRE) outlined in IDEA applies to all learning environments, the library media center included.

The relationship between library media specialists and special education professionals does not stop at communication; it manifests itself in collaborative efforts.

Self-reported collaborative projects provided by respondents offer one of the points of greatest need for additional research. The information gathered by the study only begins to shed light on what is taking place in schools. To build meaning, case studies would be useful to tease out ideas and details from which library media specialists could learn and use as starting points for their own collaborative projects with special education professionals. Both parties are professionals who bring unique expertise to the discussion table, which has the potential to positively impact learning and reading experiences for students enrolled in special education programs.

While this study sets a tone for exploration into the relationships between school library media programs and special education programs, it serves as a cursory look at a complex educational dynamic. It gives credit to those library media specialists who are not only making efforts to provide services and instruction for all students in their schools but who also recognize that they have areas in which they can learn more. However, more efforts must be made to transform the two-dimensional data into information that will improve the field of school library media.

Bibliography

Akin, Lynn and Donna MacKinney. "Autism, Literacy, and Libraries." *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 2.2 (2004): 35-43.

Digest of Education Statistics: 2006 Tables and Figures. Sep. 2006. National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC. 27 May 2008 <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06_048.asp>.

Hopkins, Janet. "Assistive Technology for the School Library." *Library Media Connection* 21.6 (2003): 46.

Hopkins, Janet. "Extending Inclusive Learning: Library and Special Education Collaboration." *Library Media Connection* 23.6 (2005): 17-19.

Hopkins, Janet. "School Library Accessibility: The Role of Assistive Technology." *Teacher Librarian* 31.3 (2004): 15-18.

Jones, Jami L., and Alana M. Zambone. "The Role of the Media Specialist to Improve Academic Achievement and Strengthen At-risk Youth." *Library Media Connection* 26.7 (2008): 30-32.

Jouzaitis, Vida. "Serving the needs of our students with LD in the school library." *School Libraries in Canada* 23.3 (2004): 34-38.

Kaiser, Crystal E. "Is Your Early Childhood Literature Collection Disability-Inclusive and Current?" *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 5.3 (2007): 5-12.

Murray, Janet. "The Implications of Inclusive Schooling for School Librarians." *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education* 49.3 (2002): 301-322.

Noonan, Mary Jo, and Violet H. Harada. "Special Education and Inclusion: Opportunities for Collaboration." *School Reform and the School Library Media Specialist*. Eds. Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Violet H. Harada. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. 131-143.

Paulsen, Kimberly J. "School-Based Collaboration: An Introduction to the Collaboration Column." *Intervention in School and Clinic* 45.3 (2008): 313-315.

Peters, Tom and Lori Bell. "Assistive Devices and Options for Libraries." *Computers in Libraries* 26.9 (2006): 38-40.

Wojahn, Rebecca Hogue. "Everyone's Invited." *School Library Journal* 52.2 (2006): 46-48.

Appendix A

Electronic Survey Questions

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

The following survey will ask you questions about your role as a school library media coordinator[1] and how your role is connected to working with special education programs and the students, teachers, and parents involved with those programs. Your employer will never know whether or not you have participated. Your participation is confidential. No identifying information will be collected in order to protect your anonymity. All data obtained in this study will be reported as group data. The name of your school district will be disguised. No individual can be or will be identified. The only persons who will have access to the data are the Principal Investigator. There are neither anticipated risks should you participate, no anticipated benefits from being involved in the study. However, there will be educational or professional benefit from this study. The information you provide will help identify current practices in school library media program--what is working as well as areas in need of improvement. There is no cost to you or financial benefit for your participation.

I am asking you to generously take 5-10 minutes of your time to complete this survey. You may opt to discontinue the survey at any time without risk of penalty. Also, you may skip any question for any reason.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu. Please reference IRB study #08-1661.

If you have any questions about this research study, you may contact me at klallen@email.unc.edu or my advisor, Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell at smhughes@email.unc.edu or 919-843-5276.

---

[111] In the North Carolina public school system participating in the survey, library media specialists are called library media coordinators.

By continuing to the next screen, you will indicate your consent to participate in this research.

__ Accept
__ Decline

1. How do you receive your information about best practices in school library media? (Check all that apply.)

   __ From the district's school library media supervisor
   __ From other library media coordinators
   __ From professional literature
   __ From professional conferences
   __ Other _____

2. What professional literature do you read on a regular basis?

   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Do you receive information about best practices in special education programs?
   Yes __ No __

4. {If yes} How do you receive information about best practices in special education programs? (Check all that apply.)

   __ From the district's school library media supervisor
   __ From your principal
   __ From special education professionals
   __ From general education teachers
   __ From professional literature
   __ From professional conferences
   __ Other _____

5. How would you prefer to receive information about best practices in special education programs? (Check one.)

   __ From special education professionals
   __ From general education teachers
   __ From your principal
   __ From your district's school library media supervisor
   __ From professional literature
   __ At professional conferences
   __ Through school-sponsored professional development

__ Other _____

6. Do you receive information about the students enrolled in special education programs in your school?
    Yes __ No __

7. {If yes} How do you receive information about students enrolled in special education programs in your school? (Check all that apply.)

    __ From special education professionals
    __ From general education teachers
    __ From your principal
    __ From parents
    __ During Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings
    __ During Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings
    __ Other _____

8. How would you prefer to receive information about the students enrolled in special education programs in your school? (Check one.)

    __ From special education professionals
    __ From general education teachers
    __ From your principal
    __ From parents
    __ During Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings
    __ During Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings
    __ Other _____

9. What letter grade would you give yourself on your knowledge of best practices in special education programs?

    [scale consisting of A, B, C, D, and F]

10. What letter grade would you give yourself on your knowledge of the students enrolled in special education programs at your school?

    [scale consisting of A, B, C, D, and F]

11. What kinds of services do you offer for students with special needs? (Check all that apply.)

    __ Low reading level/high interest books
    __ Audio books
    __ Large-print books

__ Books with accurate and non-stereotypical portrayals of children and youth
with disabilities
__ Print materials suggested by special programs teachers
__ Access to assistive technology devices
__ Guided or individualized instruction on how to use the library media center
__ Wide aisles for wheelchair navigation
__ Computer work stations at wheelchair height
__ Commonly used materials on reachable shelves
__ Computer monitors mounted on adjustable arms
__ Other _____

12. What kinds of accommodations do you make in instruction? (Check all that
apply.)

__ Task analysis
__ Repetition of instruction
__ Adjust pacing for attention span
__ Adjust group size
__ Use visual cue cards or reminders
__ Move read-aloud chair from in front of a window to across from it
__ Present a unit of stories that are related by a common theme or character
__ Pairing students without disabilities with students with special needs
__ Use big books
__ Use picture books that have large, clear illustrations
__ Other _____

13. Do you work collaboratively with special programs teachers?

__ Yes __ No

14. {If yes} Please provide one or two examples of successful collaborative projects.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

15. Do you attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings?

__ Yes __ No

16. {If yes} Do you create IEP goals related to information literacy skills?

__ Yes __ No

17. What kinds of services do you offer for parents of students with special needs? (Check all that apply.)

__ Allowance for parents to check out materials from the library media center
__ Afterschool or evening family reading programs designed specifically for families with students with special needs
__ Direction on the library media center website to online resources for parents of children with special needs
__ Resources (print, audio, electronic) that address parenting issues and child development
__ Resources about disabilities
__ Other _____

18. At what level of school do you work?

__ Elementary
__ Middle
__ High

19. Do you have National Board Certification?

__ Yes
__ No

20. How many years have you been a library media coordinator?

__ 0-5
__ 6-11
__ 12-17
__ 18+