

Witt, D. E. (2003). *An examination of how educational administration programs prepare principals in special education issues*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Abstract

The passage of P.L. 94-142 greatly expanded the principal's role in serving the educational needs of all children. While some insights regarding administrator preparation were gained through the Hirth and Valesky (1991) study completed in 1989, the current status of the preparation of principals on special education issues was not known. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine how university educational administration programs prepare principals in special education issues. Ninety-four department chairs of educational administration programs responded to a web-based survey which was developed for the study. In addition to basic demographic information, participants were asked to respond to a range of questions regarding certification endorsements, course offerings, the perceived degree to which special education issues should be addressed and the degree of effectiveness in addressing them, and current methods for preparing future administrators on issues specific to special education. Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: 1. While department chairpersons value the inclusion of key special education topics in educational leadership preparation programs and perceive their programs to effectively address those topics, there is a perceived "need" for improving the effectiveness of preparing principals in those same special education topics areas. 2. A combination of university-based and field-based experiences is the most common method for addressing student learning in key special education topics. School Law is the primary course used to address key special education topics. 3. Nearly half of all educational leadership preparation programs plan to change the way they address special education issues through a variety of approaches. 4. An average of one-half of all programs that offer administrator certificates or licenses require a general knowledge of special education, which means that one-half of all programs do not require aspiring principals to learn about special education issues. 5. Variables such as faculty size, faculty background in special education, membership in UCEA, and NCATE accreditation are not related to how programs prepare principals in the area of special education. The study's results hold important implications for program improvement to prepare principals in special education issues and further research.