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School Improvement Plan: Making School Accessible

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

This school improvement project details the importance of disability acceptance, accessibility, and inclusion. The project details multiple types of disabilities including physical, learning, speech, and intellectual disabilities. Several studies covering topics such as knowledge and representation of disability, types of disabilities, acceptance and inclusion, and assistive technology were studied for this project. The purpose of this school improvement plan is to educate administration on how to make schools accessible and inclusive for students and staff with disabilities in the future. The project will define the term *disability*, explain some needs students may have due to those disabilities, and guide educators in educating these students appropriately based on those needs by providing strategies recommended by experts in the field to use when teaching students with various disabilities.

Keywords: disability, accessibility, inclusion

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School Improvement Plan: Making School Accessible

Inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities have been a concern in schools for many years. *Disability* is a very broad term. For the purposes of this project, the term *disability* will include learning disabilities such as Dyslexia, blindness, Autism, orthopedic disabilities such as Cerebral palsy, speech and language disorders, and intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome. The problem is that, for students with these disabilities, schools are often inaccessible to them, and or not inclusive of them. Students with these disabilities are impacted daily when they are attending schools that are often inaccessible to them, and or not inclusive of them. This school improvement project will explain the needs of students with disabilities and guide them in educating these students appropriately based on those needs.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to educate administration on how to make schools accessible and inclusive for students and staff with disabilities in the future. Inclusive education must encompass more than just physical accessibility in the school building itself. Inclusive education must also promote positive mental health practices and emotional self-regulation (Lansdown, 2021). Education is needed to make schools accessible and inclusive for students and staff with disabilities in the future. This school improvement plan provides educators with information on disabilities that their students or staff may live with and will guide them in educating these students appropriately based on the needs they have because of their disability.

All twenty of the research articles referenced in this literature review came from the DeWitt Library online and were published between 2012 and 2022. Some articles will include research pertaining to a specific disability such as Dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Autism, speech disorders, Down Syndrome, or blindness. Other articles give information about topics that are

important when working with students with disabilities. Some of these topics include meeting student needs, disability representation and equity, accessibility and inclusion, assistive technology, and training.

Inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities have been a concern in schools for many years. With appropriate education and training for administration, all schools can be made accessible and inclusive for students and staff with disabilities in the future. Inclusion and accessibility for students with special needs is the law. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) states that "…to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, must be educated with children who are not disabled" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para 3).

Not only is inclusion and accessibility for students with special needs the law, but it is important because students with disabilities can look to their peers without disabilities to model appropriate behavior and social interactions in the classroom. Inclusive education is beneficial for students without disabilities as well. Inclusive environments lead to academic and social successes for students with disabilities, as well as empathy and understanding for students without disabilities (Linz O' Laughlin, 2016).

The following literature review categorizes sections based on type of disability, important topics, and additional research information. The types of disability category will include information from research articles about Dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Autism, speech disorders, Down Syndrome, and blindness. The topics category will include information from research articles pertaining to meeting student needs, disability representation and equity, accessibility

and inclusion, assistive technology, and training. The additional research information category will cover information that pertains to the project but is not necessarily a research study.

Review of the Literature

Types of Disabilities

In the qualitative research study by Avakyan & Volikova (2014), a questionnaire was given to one hundred twenty-three children and teenagers. Fifty-seven of the participants were orphaned children between the ages of ten and sixteen. Sixty-six non-orphaned children between the ages of ten and fifteen also completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a Personality Anxiety Scale, a depression inventory, a Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, as well as a School Situations Survey. The questionnaire intended to test the connection between depression, anxiety, school conditions, and fear in orphaned children. The study determined that orphaned children are more likely to be depressed, anxious, and fearful than children living in families. They consider school to be more favorable than children living in families do. It appears that orphaned children describe school as a favorable place to be. This is likely true since these children thrive off consistency, structure, and routine.

In the qualitative research study by Dimitraova-Radojichikj (2015), fifteen students between the ages of six and fourteen were interviewed about their understanding of the concept of color. Each student was blind. The interview consisted of four questions: “What do people use color for?” “How many colors can you name?” “What is a rainbow?” and, “What is your favorite color?” This study found that almost all the participants had a favorite color; five of the 15 participants didn’t know what color is used for; 8 participants could describe a rainbow; all participants could name at least one color. This information is important because it allows educators to be aware of how students who are blind can conceptualize what they cannot see.

In the quantitative research study by Gillies et al. (2017), the standardized assessment scores of three thousand nine hundred forty-four students with a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy were analyzed. The students were in grades three, five, seven, and nine. Researchers wanted to determine if there was a connection between a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy and normal standardized test scores. It was found that in reading, about thirty percent of third, fifth, and seventh graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test; about twenty-six percent of ninth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test. In math, about thirty percent of third and fifth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test; about twenty-four percent of seventh and ninth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test. According to the Eastern Daily Press (2018), Cerebral Palsy is caused by a brain injury that occurs before, during, or shortly after birth. This causes issues with posture, gait, muscle tone, and general movement of an affected person. Cerebral palsy is a physical disability but affected persons can also have intellectual disabilities, as well as other comorbidities. Approximately twenty-five to eighty percent of people with Cerebral Palsy have comorbidities which can include intellectual disabilities, Epilepsy, emotional disturbances, difficulties with communication, and visual impairments (Sigurdardottir, 2018). The study done by Gillies et al. (2017), proves Sigurdardottir's statement that not all people with Cerebral Palsy have intellectual disabilities to be true. As a person with Cerebral Palsy, I am often frustrated by the public assumption that people with the diagnosis *always* have an intellectual disability as a comorbidity. I am very happy to see that there is actual research out there that proves my point, rather than just my own personal experience.

In the quantitative research study by Paola et al. (2018), the reading ability of children both with and without learning disabilities was tested. Thirty children who attended public schools in grades three through six participated in the study. Fifteen of the children had a learning disability, and fifteen of them did not. Each student completed two reading comprehension assessments. It was determined that of the participants with learning disabilities, less than twenty percent were able to read at grade level, about fifteen percent were able to read with difficulty, about thirty-five percent were labeled as "bad readers," and about fifty-five percent were labeled as "terrible readers." The wording used in this study was not very professional. Students who struggle with reading should not be labeled as "bad readers" or "terrible readers." Instead, the findings of the study should have stopped after it was stated that less than twenty percent of students with learning disabilities were able to read at grade level, and about fifteen percent were able to read with difficulty.

In the quantitative research study by Snowling, M.J., et al. (2019), assessments were given to children that covered areas of decoding, spelling, motor skills, and executive functioning. Two hundred fifty children were assessed. These children either had a family risk of Dyslexia, a family risk of Dyslexia that also have a language impairment, a language impairment, or were typically developing. The study found that children who only have a developmental language disorder struggle the least in the assessed areas; children with dyslexia have more trouble; children with both dyslexia and a developmental language disorder struggle the most in the assessed areas.

In the qualitative research study by Koegel, et al. (2014), observations were conducted to determine whether or not interventions be successfully implemented to improve socialization for students with Autism. Paraprofessional who worked with students with Autism who lacked

social awareness and or skills and were employed full time, had little knowledge of interventions, and needed training according to the special education department were observed. Improvements were made in student socialization following paraprofessional training.

In the qualitative research study by Hodgson, et al. (2016), interviews were conducted with caregivers of children with Autism regarding weather or not they preferred to use interventions when managing the behaviors of their children. Fourteen caregivers that have a child with Autism between the ages of three and seven were interviewed. Many, if not all, participants shared that they believed managing repetitive behavior is beneficial and had a positive impact on their families.

In the qualitative research study by Faragher & Clarke (2020), workshops, classroom observations, questionnaires, and assessments were used to develop strategies to use when teaching students with Down syndrome to do math. Fifteen students with Down syndrome and their teachers participated in this study. It was found that when given support, students with Down syndrome can and do learn math.

A qualitative-narrative inquiry was completed by Lyons & Roulstone in 2017. Eleven children with speech and language disorders were interviewed about their experiences as children with speech and language disorders. The study found that many participants described their disorder as a risk to their well-being because it can make relationship building difficult and cause concern about academic achievement.

Since each of the above research studies were studying a different type of disability, they do not research findings in common. What they do have in common, however, are the types of research used in each study and the methods of data collection. The studies conducted by

Avakyan & Volikova, Dimitraova-Radojichikj, Koegel, et al., Hodgson, et al., Faragher & Clarke, and Lyons & Roulstone were all qualitative research studies, and used methods of data collection such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The studies conducted by Gillies et al., Paola et al., and Snowling, M.J., et al were all quantitative research studies, and used methods of data collection such as formal assessments.

Knowledge and Representation of Disabilities

Bernabe-Villodre & Martinez-Bello completed a research study in 2018 that analyzed disability representation in music education textbooks. This study was qualitative in nature. As part of the study, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization completed an image analysis to find stereotypical features of human characters concerning gender, age, disability, interactions, and group composition in Spanish music education books. A correlation between musical instruments played and gender, age, disability, interactions, and group composition was determined. The study found that solitary and mixed age groups were most prevalent; female groups were also considered most prevalent.

A qualitative research study was conducted during the 2017-2018 school year by Oznacar & Erdag. The study focused on physical education classes for students with disabilities. Thirty fourth grade students participated in the study. According to Oznacar & Erdag (2018) the participants have virtually zero knowledge about physical education classes designed specifically for students with disabilities prior to the training that was given as part of the study. . Following the class, about forty-seven percent of the participants reported having some understanding of the value of physical education classes designed specifically for students with disabilities.

A qualitative research study was conducted in 2017 by Bialka et al. Three able-bodied teachers who use a disability-related curriculum in their classrooms participated in the study. They were interviewed about disability related curriculum and were specifically asked why partaking in a disability-related curriculum is important. This study found that teachers who used a disability-related curriculum did so to "…to broaden students' understanding of diversity, increase empathy and provide exposure to disabilities…" (Bialka et al., 2017).

In each of the three above research studies, the participants have some knowledge about disabilities their students may have and or they use a curriculum that provides students with disability representation. In the study completed by Oznacar & Erdag, participants had very little knowledge of disabilities prior to the training that was given as part of the study. Following the training, about forty-seven percent of the participants reported having some understanding of the value of physical education classes designed specifically for students with disabilities. The participants of the other two studies had some prior knowledge of disabilities before the studies were conducted.

Accessibility and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

In the quantitative research study by Hameed, et al. (2020), sixty-seven special education teachers were given a survey about the inequity of special education, specifically in the areas of policy, infrastructure, curriculum, instruction, and transition. According to Hameed (et al., 2020), "The findings of the study reveal that teachers of special education are aware of the various forms of equitable learning opportunities. Their perception about different aspects is relevant to the objectives of the study which highlight the education equality and quality as crucial element to fighting economic and gender inequality."

Ohajunwa, et al. (2014) completed a mixed methods research study that consisted of surveys and interviews. Thirty-five teachers of higher education were asked if they include disability issues in their teaching. It was found that thirty-one of the thirty-five participants include disability issues in their teaching.

A quantitative research study was done by Moorefield-Lang & Dubnjakovic (2020). The study surveyed one hundred sixteen people who run makerspaces at the elementary, middle, and high school levels about the accessibility of said makerspaces. According to the study, all participants seemed to understand the importance of accessibility as a concept, but some were unclear about how to ensure that the activities they present to students are truly accessible for them.

A qualitative research study was conducted by Mpu & O (2021). In the study, three educators were selected from "… private, special and mainstream schools" (Mpu & O Adu, 2021). They were interviewed about inclusive education practices in their schools. The study found that the schools of the participants are not wheelchair accessible, therefore are not inclusive.

Simonson et al. (2013) completed a qualitative research study about the accessibility of Colorado State University (CSU) at the Fort Collins campus. For the study, one hundred sixty-five students with disabilities who attend the college were surveyed about campus accessibility and education quality. "The study found that students with disabilities perceived the campus of CSU to be an accessible one. This shows that the minimum standards set forth by the ADA do serve students' needs. However, there areas that need additional work to better address the

perceptions disabled students have concerning campus accessibility, older and newer building accessibility and quality of education" (Simonson et al., 2013).

About seventy-five percent of the participants in the research studies mentioned above understand the importance of accessibility and inclusion for students with disabilities. The participants in the studies completed by Hameed, et al and Ohajunwa, et al (2014) report having a solid understanding of issues faced by students with disabilities including accessibility and inclusion. The participants in the study conducted by Moorefield-Lang & Dubnjakovic (2020) have a basic understanding of the importance of accessibility but are still somewhat unclear about how to ensure that the activities they present to students are truly accessible for them. The participants in the study completed by Simonson et al (2013) voiced similar concerns. The campus is accessible by the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) but could be better in terms of accessibility and quality of education for students with disabilities. The findings of the study completed by Mpu & O (2021) were that the schools are not wheelchair accessible, therefore are not inclusive.

Assistive Technology

A qualitative research study was completed in 2017 by Karlsson et al. One hundred ninety-four parents and staff of children with Cerebral Palsy were surveyed about assistive technology. They were asked for their demographic information, about their involvement in the assessment and set-up process for the assistive technology devices, and about the care of those devices. The study took one year to complete and found that an average of fifty-five percent of families were involved in the assessment and set-up process for the assistive technology

device(s). It also found that an average of fifty percent of school staff were involved in the assessment and set-up process for the assistive technology device(s).

A qualitative study was conducted in 2019 by Lamond & Cunningham. The study surveyed eight hundred teachers from all fifty states in the United States. The teachers were asked to rate their confidence when helping their students use assistive technology devices on a scale from “no confidence” to “very confident.” Approximately fifty nine percent of teachers reported little confidence in their ability to help their students use assistive technology devices. The study found that teachers were typically most confident when they were able to work collaboratively with more experienced teachers.

Mulliken (2017) completed a qualitative research study about the use of academic libraries by blind college students. Eighteen college students who use academic libraries were interviewed about the issues with assistive technology used by people who are blind, and potential solutions to those issues. It was determined that many participants said that they struggle to independently write bibliographies, as screen readers are not typically meant for that kind of use. A few participants stated that they had help from the disability office to write their bibliography, or even paid a friend to write it for them.

All three of the research studies highlight the importance of using assistive technology for students with disabilities. Approximately fifty to sixty percent of student caregivers and staff report being involved in and comfortable with helping children use their assistive technology devices. As these students become adults and enter post-secondary schooling or the workforce, the ability to utilize assistive technology will become even more important to them. In the study

completed by Mulliken, students reported that they struggle greatly at the collegian level when assistive technology is either unavailable or not functioning properly.

School Profile

Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School educates children beginning in three-year-old preschool and continues through sixth grade. There are one hundred thirty-two students in total. Seventy-seven of them are boys and fifty-five of them are girls. All students receive both breakfast and lunch at no cost.

The school is part of a very small community. The town is a little over one mile wide and has an estimated population of four hundred sixty people (World Population Review, 2022). Parents are generally very involved in the education of their children at this school. This is very evident in their participation with fundraisers. The school holds multiple fundraisers throughout the year including a color run and a book fair. Other fundraisers that do not occur annually but receive a lot of parent involvement when they do happen are the pumpkin painting contest, the Farmer's Market, and sales from the Little Chefs and Grow Getters clubs. These clubs allow students to practice their gardening and cooking skills and sell the things that they grew and or made to raise money for their school.

The motto for the school is "A Great Start Close to Home" (Gilmore City-Bradgate, n.d.). The vision is that all children are readers; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are an important part of education; the community is welcome in the school; students benefit from positive relationships; technology is critical for connection; and children are thinkers, dreamers, innovators, creators, and doers.

The school is housed in an older building. It is three stories and is not wheelchair accessible. The lack of accessibility in the school building is what prompted the author of this study to complete a school improvement project. According to the student handbook, a plan to adapt the building to meet the needs of students or staff with disabilities is on file in the office (Gilmore City-Bradgate Student Handbook, n.d., p. 4). The author was not aware of the existence of this plan.

In general, the learning goals for students are that they will meet the standards for their grade level set by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2022). In the special education setting, the learning goals for students are slightly different. The special education teachers in the school strive for their students to make progress toward their IEP goals and to work towards “closing the gap” that is present between them and their peers, either academically or behaviorally.

This school uses a variety of different curricula depending on the subject being taught. The literacy curriculum is EL Education. The curriculum is a standards-based literacy program meant to be used with students in kindergarten through eighth grade. EL Education promotes positive character, high quality student work, and mastery of knowledge and skills (EL Education, n.d.).

The math curriculum used by the school is called Envision. Similar to EL Education, Envision is meant to be used with students in kindergarten through eighth grade. This curriculum strives for students to gain a conceptual understanding of mathematics through a combination of problem-based and visual learning techniques (Savvas Learning Company, 2022).

Mystery Science is the curriculum the school uses for science. It is a standards-based science program meant to be used with students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Some of the lessons geared toward students in kindergarten through second grade include weather, animal survival, and engineering. Students in third through fifth grades will learn about fossils, animal survival, and tornadoes, among other topics (Mystery, 2022).

The final curriculum the school uses is Teacher's Curriculum Institute (TCI.) This is a social studies program that is meant for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. It is a standards-based curriculum that helps build culturally responsive classrooms and allows students to connect with the world around them. Some of the lessons students will receive as a part of this program include learning about how children in other places live, the basics of American geography and economics, the regions of the United States, and the basics of American history, among other topics (TCI, 2022).

FastBridge is what the school uses for assessments. This program is designed for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. It offers assessments in reading and math, as well as social-emotional behavior. It also offers screenings for Dyslexia and progress monitoring tools (Illuminate Education, 2022). The Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress, or ISASP, is also used by the school to assess student growth and proficiency. This test is aligned with Iowa Core Standards and assesses students in third through eleventh grades in areas of reading, language, math, and science (Pearson Education, 2018).

In terms of professional development, this school follows the Leader in Me program. They strive to teach all students the Seven Habits of Happy Kids and use the language of the program school wide. The first habit is about being proactive. The second habit involves having

a plan. Third, it is important that students know to work first and play later. The fourth habit is that students believe that everyone can win. Listening before speaking is the fifth habit. The sixth habit involves the importance of being together. The final habit is about finding balance (Franklin Covey Co, 2022).

Needs Assessment

Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School needs the most improvement in professional development. The school staff need to be made aware of a variety of disabilities that students may have and how to best support them in the school environment. The school is housed in an older building. It is three stories and is not wheelchair accessible. The lack of accessibility in the school building is what prompted the author of this study to complete a school improvement project. According to the student handbook, a plan to adapt the building to meet the needs of students or staff with disabilities is on file in the office (Gilmore City-Bradgate Student Handbook, n.d., p. 4). The author was not aware of the existence of this plan. Further, the school personnel should have knowledge of disabilities other than only physical ones, such as anxiety, learning and intellectual disabilities, and visual impairments or blindness.

The professional development that staff receives on this topic could be tied to the Leader in Me program and extended to students as well. The school strives to teach all students the Seven Habits of Happy Kids and use the language of the program school wide. According to Franklin Covey Co. (2022), the fourth habit of happy kids is that students believe that everyone can win. The sixth habit involves the importance of being together. Accessibility for and acceptance of students with disabilities can be easily incorporated into these two habits specifically. Staff and students hopefully share the belief that everyone, including students with

disabilities, can win. The successes of children and adults with disabilities could be highlighted while practicing this habit. Staff and students hopefully also share the belief that everyone, including students with disabilities, are important, and can and should be included in times when the student body is together.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above, there are one hundred thirty-two students who are educated at this school; just over seven percent of them have special needs. There are also three staff members with known disabilities as well.

According to Soyer (2016), most school districts in Iowa are not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, as they do not meet the standards put in place by the Act. Many schools were non-compliant in the areas of parking, entrances and exits, as well as restroom accessibility. This means that schools did not have enough accessible parking spaces, there were no curb cut-outs, people who use wheelchairs could not access the building from the front entrance, and restrooms were not accessible to people who use wheelchairs.

The U.S. Department of Justice published the Standards for Accessible Design in September of 2010. These standards state that any building built after March 15, 2010, had to meet the 2010 standards for accessible design in order to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If a building was built prior to that date, it was only required to meet the 1991 standards for accessible design to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (Soyer, 2016).

To meet the Standards for Accessible Design, parking spaces must be a minimum of ninety-six inches wide and should be part of an accessible route to the entrance of the building.

This was true in 1991, as well as 2010. In 2010, it was added that van parking spaces must be one hundred thirty-two inches wide and be clearly marked. In 1991, doors were to have an opening of thirty-two inches with the door opening at ninety degrees. The same was true in 2010. Also in 1991, thresholds for sliding doors were not to exceed three quarters of an inch. The thresholds for other types of doors should not exceed half an inch. This was changed in 2010 so that the threshold of any type of door should not exceed half an inch. In both 1991 and 2010, elevators should be accessible for public use (New England ADA Center, n.d.).

Accessibility in restrooms is a very important issue. Soyer (2016) discussed this issue with the family of an Iowa high school student who uses a wheelchair and is unable to independently use the restroom at school due to inaccessibility. The student's father was reported as saying, "'That's not OK. It's a dignity issue."

The New England ADA Center (N.d.) details in detail the 1991 and 2010 Standards for Accessible Design in public restrooms. This includes areas of concern such as doors, mirrors, toilet stalls, grab bars, flush controls, toilet paper dispensers, and urinals. Restroom doors should not swing into the floor space of any fixture. This was the case in 1991 as well as in 2010. In 1991, it was decided that mirrors should be mounted and be no higher than forty inches from the finished floor. The same was true in 2010, but the standard was amended to include that mirrors hung above countertops should be no higher than forty inches from the countertop. If a mirror was not hung over a countertop, it should be mounted and be no higher than thirty-five inches from the finished floor. In both 1991 and 2010, grab bars that are placed behind the toilet should be thirty-six inches long. It was decided in 1991 that flush controls should be placed on the wide side of the toilet and a maximum of forty-four inches from the floor. In 2010, no height requirements were given. Toilet paper dispensers needed to only be placed "within reach" in

1991. It was added in 2010 that the dispensers should be between seven and nine inches in front of the toilet. Urinals in 1991 needed to only be a maximum of seventeen inches from the finished floor. In 2010, it was added that they should also be a minimum of thirteen and a half inches deep.

Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School was originally built in 1887. The school suffered a fire in 1943 that killed one teacher and destroyed the building. For the next six years, school was held anywhere that was made available: churches, local town buildings, and even the homes of community members. A new school building was completed, and students were welcomed back to school in 1949 (School History).

Since the school was rebuilt in 1949, it must only meet the 1991 standards for accessible design to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (Soyer, 2016). The strengths of the school include that they have accessible parking, and a plan to adapt the building to meet the needs of students or staff with disabilities is on file in the office (Gilmore City-Bradgate Student Handbook, n.d., p. 4). Some of the weaknesses of the school are that they do not have elevators, and the restrooms are not functionally accessible. What this means is that the doors are not wide enough for a wheelchair to enter. Other specifications such as grab bar length or mirror height are unknown to the author currently.

Further assessment could be done to determine the accessibility of the school as defined by the Standards for Accessible Design. The width of the doors, length of the mirrors and grab bars, and height of the flush controls and urinals could be measured and documented.

Action Plan

It is important for teachers and other school personnel to have awareness of and knowledge about various disabilities that students may have. Learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and physical disabilities are three types of disabilities that students may have. These disabilities were chosen because they are the most prevalent at Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), thirty-three percent of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during the 2019-2020 school year had learning disabilities. Six percent had an intellectual disability, two percent had multiple disabilities, and one percent had only a physical disability.

The strategies that teachers and other school personnel to have awareness of and knowledge about will differ depending on the type of disability or disabilities a student has. A qualitative research study was completed by Paola (2018) that tested the reading ability of fifteen students with learning disabilities. It was determined that less than twenty percent of them were able to read at grade level, about fifteen percent were able to read with difficulty, about thirty-five percent were labeled as "bad readers," and about fifty-five percent were labeled as "terrible readers." Strategies for teaching students with learning disabilities can be found in Appendix B.

Utilizing strategies for teaching students with disabilities is part of creating an inclusive education for students. Providing students with this kind of an inclusive education at Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School will foster academically and mentally strong students.

Researcher Gillies (2017) performed a quantitative research study to analyze the standardized assessment scores of three thousand nine hundred forty-four students with a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy. The study found that in reading, about thirty percent of third, fifth, and seventh graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test;

about twenty-six percent of ninth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test. In math, about thirty percent of third and fifth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test; about twenty-four percent of seventh and ninth graders with cerebral palsy scored in the normal range on their standardized test. Appendix B provides strategies that can be used for teaching students with intellectual disabilities (such as a comorbidity of a Cerebral Palsy diagnosis) or physical disabilities (such as Cerebral Palsy). For the purposes of this study, one can assume that students with low assessment scores have an intellectual disability as a comorbidity of their Cerebral Palsy diagnosis.

In summary, it is very important for teachers and other school personnel to have awareness of and knowledge about various disabilities that students may have. This is so that they are better able to create an inclusive and accessible school environment for them. This should foster academically and mentally strong students.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

The author of this project will create a professional development seminar to give teachers information about learning, intellectual, and physical disabilities. Strategies for teaching these students will be offered as well. The resources used for the professional development will come from websites such as the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Council for Special Education, Walters State Community College, and Do2Learn. Information from research studies completed by Gillies and Paola will also be offered to teachers as they may find it beneficial in understanding the needs of their students with disabilities.

In the professional development seminar, the author of this project will ask the teachers to think of one student they serve with either a learning, intellectual, or physical disability. The

student teachers are thinking of might also have some combination of these disabilities. Once they have thought of a student, they should determine if that student as a learning, intellectual, physical, or multiple disabilities. This will allow them to better decide which areas of the seminar will be most helpful to them. One limit that may be present during the professional development seminar is that a teacher may not be able to identify a student with a disability in their class. If this is the case, that teacher should choose a general education student to complete the interventions with and document progress that was or was not made. The professional development seminar will run for approximately one hour and cover information about learning, intellectual, and physical disabilities. Strategies for teaching these students will be offered as well. The strategies teachers can choose from can be found in Appendix B.

After the presentation has been given, teachers will choose two strategies to try with their student. When asked for tips about how to deliver successful professional development, Aguilar (2014) said it is important to offer adults choices. She states that this will allow for fewer opportunities for disengagement. Teachers should commit to using their chosen strategies when working with their students for at least three weeks. Each week, the author of the study, the school principal and the school instructional coach will meet individually with teachers to see how they are using their chosen strategies to work with their students in the classroom. During these meetings, teachers can ask questions, and advice and recommendations can be given if needed. The strategies teachers can choose from can be found in Appendix B.

Also following the presentation, celebrations about the day or week will be shared. Aguilar (2014) encourages facilitators of professional development to end with celebrations because it leaves them with a positive emotional experience. Finally, the facilitator of the professional development will ask the teachers for feedback regarding the seminar. The number

one way to improve professional development is to ask for, listen to, and respond appropriately to feedback from participants (Aguilar, 2014).

Once the three-week intervention has been completed, another professional development seminar will be held to go over the results of the intervention. Teachers will discuss which strategies they chose to work on, what went well, and where they struggled. Teachers will choose another two strategies, and the process will begin again. As a result of teachers implementing these interventions with students, Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School will be a more accessible and inclusive environment for students and staff with disabilities alike.

Conclusion

In conclusion, inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities have been a concern in schools for many years. Students with disabilities are impacted daily when they are attending schools that are often inaccessible to them, and or not inclusive of them. Students will sometimes adopt a negative view of the school environment, or even of themselves because they are not able to fully participate in the school day. In combination with the physical accessibility of the building, Lansdown (2021) stresses that inclusive education must also promote positive mental health practices and emotional self-regulation for students. Providing students with this kind of an inclusive education at Gilmore City-Bradgate Elementary School will foster academically and mentally strong students.

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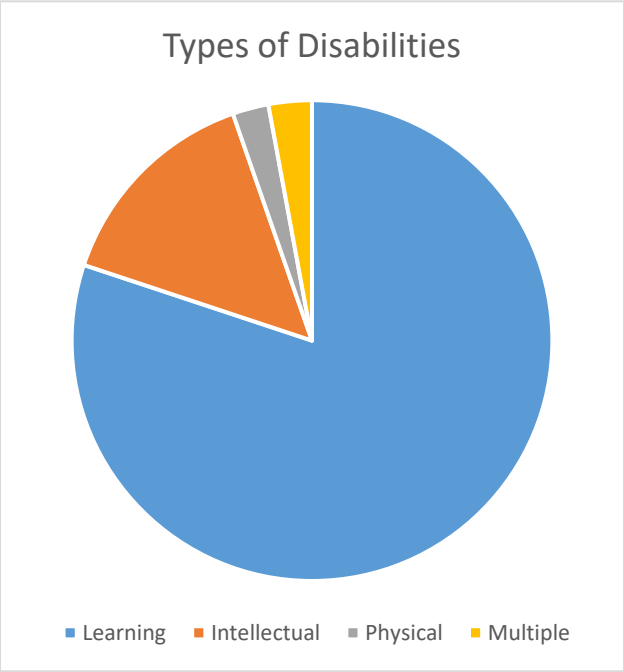
Appendix A


Types of Disabilities
Learning
Intellectual
Physical
Multiple

Appendix B

Learning	Intellectual	Physical

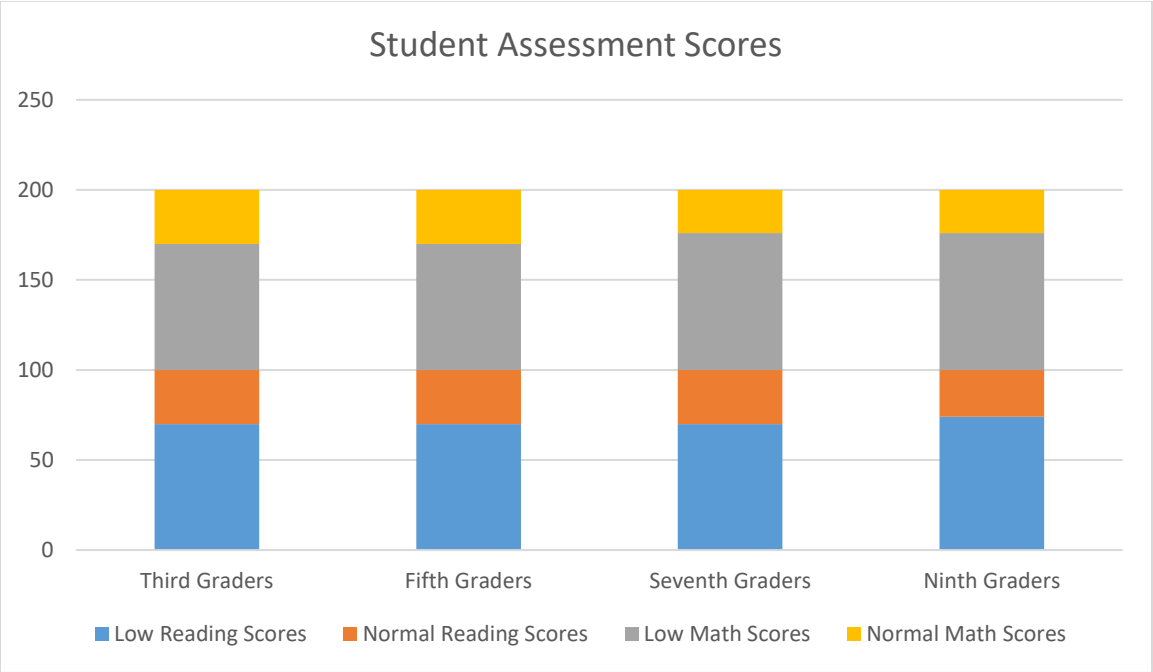
- Encourage students to pre-read (Walters State Community College, N.d.)
- When possible, have students highlight the answers to questions in a text (Walters State Community College, N.d.)
- Ask students to notate main ideas and key details within a text (Walters State

- Use short and simple sentences (Do2Learn, 2021)
- Give explicit directions (Do2Learn, 2021)
- Frequently repeat directions (Do2Learn, 2021)
- Keep distractions to a minimum (Do2Learn, 2021)
- Provide accommodations and modifications as needed

- Remove as many physical barriers as possible (National Council for Special Education, N.d.)
- Be at eye level with students when speaking to them (National Council for Special Education, N.d.)
- Provide accommodations and modifications as needed (Do2Learn, 2021)
- Encourage student independence (National Council for Special Education, N.d.)

Community College, N.d.) • Create checkpoints when reading for students to stop and make sure they are understanding what they read (Walters State Community College, N.d.)	(Do2Learn, 2021)	

Appendix C


Student Assessment Scores
250
200
150
100
50
0
Third Graders
Fifth Graders
Seventh Graders
Ninth Graders
Low Reading Scores
Normal Reading Scores
Low Math Scores
Normal Math Scores