ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: School Administrator Perceptions and the Participation Rates of Special Education Students in Indiana’s Secondary Career and Technical Education Programs

STUDENT: Patrick A. Biggerstaff

DEGREE: Doctor of Educational Leadership

COLLEGE: Ball State University, Teachers College

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Research has found that Career and Technical Education (CTE) participation benefits students with disabilities (Benz, Lindstron, & Yovanoff, 2000; Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Division of Career Development and Transition, 2012; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2016), yet some people believe that CTE enrollment is not always appropriate for special populations (Smith & Bell, 2015). This incongruity begs the question of whether school administrators limit the opportunities afforded to students with disabilities. One purpose of this study was to document the perceptions of high school administrators regarding special education placements within CTE programs as compared to the participation rates of students with disabilities enrolled in advanced-level CTE programs. Another purpose of this study is to determine whether differences exist among enrollment rates given school administrators’ demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, community type, and school location.
The theoretical framework for this study was developed primarily based on the work of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), and to a lesser degree, Schoener and McKenzie (2006) and Bragg (2017). This study employed the Equity Trap construct within the theoretical framework of Equity Gaps in education. Descriptive and inferential analyses were performed using data collected from a researcher-created five-point, Likert-type scale survey and state-level student enrollment data in Indiana. A stratified sample population among seven Indiana Council of Administrators of Special Education (ICASE) districts was utilized consisting of CTE Directors and Assistant CTE Directors, grade 9-12 Special Education Administrators, and high school Guidance Directors. Inferential statistical analyses were performed to test the relationships between administrator characteristics and perceptions and special education participation rates. This research showed that administrators agree that advanced-level CTE programs provide meaningful and appropriate opportunities for students with disabilities. However, students with disabilities are consistently enrolled in advanced-level CTE programs at a lower rate than their general education peers. These findings may serve as a catalyst for secondary school administrators to consider, and address as necessary, the factors affecting the access that students with disabilities have to advanced-level CTE programming.

Keywords: special education, career and technical education, school administrators’ perceptions, Indiana, inclusion of students with disabilities