A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL INCLUSIVE EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS OF NEUROTYPICAL STUDENTS

This dissertation is submitted to the Slippery Rock University Department of Special Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctorate of Education in Special Education.

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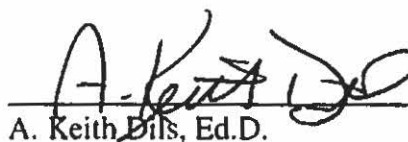
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ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF INCLUSIVE EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES IN NORTHEAST OHIO HIGH SCHOOL: STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVE

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Special educators, school leaders and parents across the nation are exploring the benefits of inclusive opportunities for high school students with and without disabilities. Peer Mediated Intervention (PMI) is a long-standing literature-backed set of teaching procedures and models that promote prosocial development in individuals with developmental disabilities across the lifespan. Although PMI literature includes benefits to typical peers, little to no information exists specific to the high school and young adult population.

The present study gathers qualitative interview data from four parent participants to gain authentic feedback about the takeaways for their typical high school student from their perspective. Many positive implications were uncovered in the thematic coding and data analysis process. Positive implications for peers can be utilized as support for the development and maintenance of future inclusive extracurricular activities in public high schools. Discussion around the findings of the study provide school leaders with clear and concise examples of this support, including but not limited to: increase in personal self-worth and empathy, college and career readiness opportunities, and community acceptance carryover.

Keywords: Inclusive Extracurriculars, Peer Mediated Intervention, History of Inclusion of Special Education Students

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Meaningful inclusion of students with significant disabilities is a goal of public

high school special educators of today. However, as academic expectations of high

school students in our country rise, cynics often ask tough questions: What makes the

inclusion meaningful and effective for both individuals with disabilities and their typical

peers? Are there benefits to neurotypical high school students? Professionals in the field

have utilized Peer Mediated Intervention (PMI) to increase therapeutic outcomes in both

populations. Although PMI is an evidence-based practice and current literature favors

evidence-based educational implications for the developmentally delayed population,

integration of, students with significant developmental disabilities and their neurotypical

peers, the intervention is new to the field, especially with adolescents and young adults.

Reviewing the literature regarding background, the prevalence and evidence-based

practice for both populations helps build a logical direction for the integration presented

later in the manuscript.

Educational Implications & Self Valuation

Adolescents and young adults often struggle with low self-valuation, low

self-esteem and it becomes more and more difficult for them to develop successful peer

relationships (Price & Dodge, 1989). Understanding how to act appropriately and

develop meaningful peer relationships are crucial skills for social and academic success

(Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). High school students often struggle with direction in

life as well as with balancing school, work, family and extracurricular activities.
According to data collected and reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human
Service (2018), high school students spend an average of 8.6 hours sleeping and 6.8
hours in school. This leaves less than half their day for extracurriculars, work, homework
or studying, family, etc. and the academic demands continue to increase ("A Day in the
Life", 2018). The pressure put on young people today is paramount though the media
depict perfect teenagers balancing all of their daily responsibilities. The increase in
mental health awareness nationwide, however, has allowed educational professionals and
society as a whole to realize the importance of effective instruction and experiences to
promote positive self-esteem and self valuation. It is imperative that educators and
families of adolescents find new opportunities for the development of feelings of self-
worth. Additionally, in the changing world of 21st-century learning, adolescents often
struggle to find a direction to guide their future. Neurotypical high school students who
volunteer to spend quality time with their peers who have developmental disabilities are
likely to have an innate sense of empathy and to grow personally by helping others.

In their review of mental health surveillance in 2013, the US Center for Disease
Control and Prevention (CDC) report that up to 20 percent of adolescents struggle with
some type of mental or emotional challenge typically induced by stress or complicated by
anxiety or depression. The CDC also recommends that adolescents get involved in
meaningful extracurricular activities. This allows individuals to create bonds outside of
the high demands of today's academic classroom. These relationships promote higher
self-esteem and self valuation as well as better coping skills when faced with adversity.
Every high school student needs a strong support network that includes family, educators,

and, most importantly, a friend group in which they feel valued. Many districts have

adopted Stephen Covey's seven habits of a highly effective person to address the deficits

in mental health awareness and character education. Paralleling texts have been

developed including *7 Habits of Happy Kids* and *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens,* both

written by Sean Covey. One of the core habits in this curriculum is the win/win concept.

Covey (2004) describes win/win as a synergistic situation from which both parties can

mutually benefit. He cautions that it is twice as tough to go for win/win; you not only

have to be nice, you have to be courageous. You not only have to be empathic, you have

to be confident. The gold standard of Covey's win/win work appears to be the proposed

use of peer-mediated intervention with high school students with developmental

disabilities and their neurotypical peers participating together in extracurricular activities.

This also holds the potential for encouraging outcomes for educational administrators and

communities.

Developmental Disabilities and Peer Mediated Intervention

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth

Edition (DSM-V), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined by deficits in two core

domains: 1) deficits in social communication and social interaction and 2) restricted

repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities. Severity of the disability is based

on the level of the social communication impairments and restricted patterns of behavior

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Historically, individuals with ASD and other

related developmental disabilities are the most difficult to effectively include because of

their social communication and behavioral needs. It is crucial to note, ASD is not the

only disability included in the body of research that presently exists; much of the PMI

literature explains that these skill deficits in communication and behavior often demonstrated by individuals with ASD parallel those of many individuals with other developmental disabilities. Therefore, most studies generalize their results to a population labeled as having a developmental disability or skill deficits in the areas of social communication and adaptive behavior. These other educationally based disability diagnostic categories include: multiple disabilities, other health impairments, visually or hearing impaired or with intellectual disabilities. Medical diagnoses include: down syndrome (or other less common disabilities caused by abnormal chromosomal makeup), intellectual disability or cognitive impairment as well as Tourette's syndrome.

Educational Implications

Students with ASD exhibit undesirable adaptive behaviors, often aggressive in nature, due to their deficits in communication as explained in the characteristics and definition provided. Therefore, it is imperative that this population receive intensive social and behavioral intervention while being included as closely as possible to same age peers exhibiting the deficit behaviors in high volume. Students with autism have low adult independence and employment rates, making meaningful peer relationships exponentially important to their success. When the proposed intervention is presented to educational administrators and community members, the outcomes of these individuals and their level of functioning within the community have become increasingly important. In 2012, John Kasich, governor of Ohio, in alignment with new federal legislation, began an initiative called *Employment First*. Employment First requires that all individuals, regardless of the intensity of their needs, be encouraged and supported in a community employment environment. Funding is no longer being put towards limited outcome and

day programs or workshops for those with developmental disabilities. That means public school districts have taken on a new responsibility and students with developmental disabilities and their neurotypical peers need to develop a sense of community now more than ever. The students with developmental disabilities need to be effectively included in the high school environment and neurotypical students need to gain acceptance, awareness and education of their peers so that both parties can live effectively in the community as adults.

Peer Perceptions on Inclusion

Although the focus of most PMI studies is not the outcomes or implications for typically developing peers, literature focused on unified sports programs speaks to the general perceptions of inclusion from teens and young adults. Townsend & Hassall (2007) explain that discomfort in interactions with persons with disabilities is typically high in the beginning of any intervention that involves pairing individuals with and without disability and the importance of peer perception. One major factor that influences the comfort level is the exposure that peers have had with individuals with disabilities previous to beginning the program. Individuals who have a close friend or relative with a developmental disability tend to be less affected by this initial perception (Sullivan & Glidden, 2014). Perception is an important factor and improving peer attitudes as well as creating positive perceptions of individuals with disabilities and their inclusion as a whole is significant.

Pros and Cons of Peer-Led Inclusive Extracurriculars

As mentioned, public school educators and administrators are often tagged with increasingly high expectations of academic excellence for all high school students. This results in young people leading extremely complex lives in their attempt to balance academic, social and family expectations. The value of a typical high school peer's time is likely the biggest challenge to PMI being presented as an effective intervention for inclusive extracurricular organizations.

Students with developmental disabilities often have adaptive behavior deficits. Some may exhibit violent or aggressive behaviors as a mode of communication or in an attempt to gain access to a desired item, activity or person. This could potentially put typical peers at risk of injury if they are not equipped with specific training from special education professionals who are well versed in dealing with recurring adaptive behaviors. Dependent on individual exposure to individuals with developmental disabilities, students may also experience emotional duress while processing peers' adaptive behavior.

Though these barriers create challenges for implementation of PMI in the public high school extracurricular inclusive environment, there are many favorable potential outcomes. In each of the studies reviewed where PMI was utilized positive outcome in some form was achieved for participants with disabilities. Many existing studies presented benefits to the typical peers as a secondary outcome of implementation. The relationships that have developed have proved to be powerful and have unseen positive implications in communities nationwide.

1.2 Background of the Study

The qualitative interview data collected as part of this study are the result of an

action research initiative which came to the public high school as a result of neurotypical peer interest paired with educational literature in PMI.

The research site is a public high school in Northeast Ohio in an affluent community. It is an excellently rated public school district serving approximately 1600 students. The research site has over 77% participation in advanced prep courses and many of the students participate in a college credit plus program allowing them to earn college credits in high school. The research site also has nearly 20% of students on Individualized Education Plans or IEPs and receiving special education services. Additionally, the research site has a large population of students with developmental disabilities who require more significant support. The number of alternate assessments given identifies students in the State of Ohio who receive significantly modified extended core curriculum.

As part of the action research initiative, the high school added two inclusive extracurricular opportunities to its one existing club. Students and staff worked together to join a national inclusion movement with a cheerleading program called *The Sparkle Effect*. Additionally, a one-of-kind inclusive drama club called *Our Time to Shine* was developed. These two organizations were added to the existing inclusive club called *Project Support* during the 2015-16 school year.

The Sparkle Effect is a national organization of inclusive high school cheer teams. Cheerleaders with and without disabilities cheer at public high school and college events. The organization was founded by high school student Sarah Cronk in 2008 when she started the first inclusive cheer team in the nation at her high school in Iowa. Currently,

the organization provides membership guidelines for an official Sparkle Effect team to ensure the program's teams are run with fidelity and to the level of inclusive standard intended by its founder. However, there is no other connection to the national organization as the teams are organized and run by the local public high school cheerleaders.

The research site is an optimal setting to collect this action research data as demographically community, parents and educators all place high academic achievement and excellence at the forefront of a student's education experience. Additionally, the district has adopted Covey's 7-habit curriculum at the elementary level. Several action research projects were completed in elementary schools 8-10 years earlier. Each of these historical and demographic factors plays a part in making this particular public high school an optimal setting. The limitations to this location will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Finding a class of high school students continuously pressured to achieve academic excellence and prepare for post-secondary education, as well as sowing seeds of character education and PMI at the elementary level, is next to impossible. Guided by the literature review, this exposure will play an important role in the overall success or failure of a longitudinal PMI program. Social norms continue to evolve and change and it becomes more challenging for students with disabilities and their typical peers to maintain meaningful relationships as they age through their educational experience.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. From the parents' perspective, what effects does participation in an inclusive extracurricular group have on neurotypical students attending public high schools?

2. How do these effects impact high school students (neurotypical and developmentally delayed), their families and their communities?

1.4 Summary

The history of peer mediated intervention as an effective tool for use with students with developmental disabilities and their typical peers is paramount to the foundation of the present study. Similarly, literature on inclusive extracurricular activities that exist, though limited, are critical in bridging the gap between systematic PMI research studies and more action research outcomes. Qualitative phenomenology informs thematic analysis of interview data for the present study which builds upon the existing literature of PMI and applies it more specifically to high school students and extracurricular activities. Moreover, the study extends the present literature that exists in this area by focusing on the benefits of the peers involved. This will initiate exploration and literature development in the field, outlined through the research questions in the present study such as what the outcomes of the intervention for peers are, as well as evaluating the impact on students, families and the community where the intervention occurs.

Throughout the history of education, students with disabilities have had increasing opportunities for inclusion. Using the foundations of Peer Mediated Intervention (PMI) has been deemed evidence-based and most effective when it comes to meaningful inclusion in the public sector. It is easy to recognize how these inclusive

opportunities benefit the students with disabilities (i.e. social skills training, increase in friendships, community involvement, etc.). However, educators are often challenged to articulate the benefits to the neurotypical peers. Chapter Two will more closely examine the evidence base that highlights the benefits of PMI for both populations that currently exist. Throughout the literature review, focus will be on examining the history of inclusion, the history of PMI as an evidenced-based practice in special education, and the proposed and current benefits for students with and without disabilities as a result of their participation in a PMI-based program.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Inclusion

Terreno (2012) explains that just a century ago individuals with disabilities were completely uneducated and left out of school life in the United States of America. Between 1850 and 1950, groups of parents of individuals with disabilities began creating their own segregated schools. Education of learners with unique needs began as educators realized the differences in students with disabilities. However, most of these schools and placements served more as residential facilities than true educational placements. In addition, none of these schools provided meaningful inclusion opportunities (Terreno, 2012).

In 1954, when education segregated by race became illegal, parents of children with disabilities continued their fight that children with disabilities deserved and had a right to education. At this time, only one in five of these children were determined "able to be educated." The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, along with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, made much needed changes. This legislation required that all public schools provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to *all* students. The current study is attempting to collect and review all available literature concerning meaningful inclusive extracurricular opportunities. The history of inclusion presented above explains why that pool of information is so minimal. FAPE for students with disabilities, not necessarily requiring any type of meaningful inclusion, was not mandated until approximately 45 years ago. Due to this brief history, parents of adolescents and young adults with disabilities as well as parents of their typical peers

grew up when no meaningful inclusion was present in public education.

IDEA had several updates in those 45 years, each increasing the rights of students with disabilities. In 1997, through IDEA legislation students with disabilities gained access to good education with positive outcomes (Terreno, 2012). In 2004, reauthorization of IDEA mandated that education of students with disabilities be aligned as closely as possible with the general education curriculum and that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE legislation changed the game for individuals with disabilities and their families. Legal action could now be taken if individuals were not receiving education in an environment that was the least restrictive possible (i.e. separate school, separate classroom etc.). As Terreno (2012) explains, in the 1999-2000 school year efforts toward inclusive education were notable as 90% of students with disabilities received services in their public school district nationwide. Of those students, 50% were included in general education classrooms or settings for 80% or higher of their school day. These steps were monumental in regard to the timeline. It had taken almost 100 years of formal education in the United States to include students with disabilities and in just 10-15 years, individuals gained almost full access.

Authors of literature in the field of special education advise caution, explaining that the nation is far from full meaningful inclusive education. However, the increase in literature completed and reviewed on interventions that focus on meaningful inclusion, such as PMI, highlights that the field and our nation are moving toward equality in education for all students.

2.2. Introduction to Peer Mediated Intervention

PMI is based on the principles of behaviorism and social learning theory and peers are explicitly taught skills to engage or shape communication and social behavior (Sperry, Neitzel & Engelhardt-Wells, 2010). PMI has been used with a variety of dependent and independent variables in special education populations. It is often suggested for use to address difficulties with social skills in students with ASD (Rogers, 2000). Students with ASD learn social skills from their peer models through a variety of interventions, including PMI (Rogers, 2000 and Bellini et al., 2007). Although used most frequently with ASD and typical peer early intervention pairs or dyads, PMI can take on many configurations and can be modified to meet the needs of various populations. Hall & Stegila (2003) outline four common components of PMI: training students to roles, student-to-student intervention, teachers acting as monitors and facilitators and addressing academic and social goals. Several common configurations have been studied including dyads of older students with disabilities instructing typical younger students, dyads of like disabilities instructing each other, dyads of typical students instructing each other and dyads of older students with disabilities instructing younger students with similar disabilities (Hall & Stegila, 2003). Each of these configurations of PMI has shown positive outcomes for both partners.

Peer-mediated intervention provides obvious benefits to the student receiving mediation. Several studies have suggested that during peer-led academic or behavioral interventions the mediator also benefits (Dineen et al., 1977). Fowler et al. (1986) completed a study of students who exhibited behavior disorders. Three seven-year-old

boys exhibiting frequent disruptive behavior were assigned a monitoring assignment at recess. All three boys reduced the rate of their own negative behavior when facilitating this role. Although this study is nearly 30 years old, it is the only study with a direct focus on using students without developmental disabilities as peer managers with the main goal of increasing appropriate behavior or action in themselves as the current study is proposing. Though it is known that the intervention labeled now as PMI in pursuit of meaningful inclusion was only introduced in the 1990s, it shows that PMI does have strong roots in Applied Behavior Analysis with a focus on peer modeling. Fowler et al. (1986) is referenced in several current literature studies (Killu & Crundwell, 2008, Tapper & Boulton, 2005).

In a study involving 77 children ages 7-8, and ages 10-11 in a follow-up phase, wireless microphones and video recorders collected peer responses to aggressive behavior (Tapper & Boulton, 2005). Much of the reinforcement provided following aggressive behaviors exhibited by children is socially mediated. Therefore, it is important to understand how peers react to aggression in order to effectively reduce aggressive behaviors (Tapper & Boulton, 2005). The authors collected 76 hours of observational data ranging on average from 40-105 minutes per student. The tapes were reviewed and the data were coded to include the number and type of aggressive acts. The peer responses were coded according to specific criteria developed by the authors as they reviewed the tapes. Results indicated that aggression resulted in peer responses that were likely to reinforce the behavior. Therefore, a procedural implication could be achieved by establishing the expectation with all children that supporting or providing attention to aggression was unacceptable and by rewarding peers who exhibited appropriate behavior

(Tapper & Boulton, 2005).

Another article referencing Fowler et al. (1986) is a list of literature-based interventions focused on developing behavior interventions for students with bipolar disorder. Killu & Crundwell (2008) explain that students aged 8-11 with bipolar disorder had difficulties with antisocial behavior, interpersonal skills and self-management skills. The authors suggested that making impacts on social functioning and giving individuals a socially mediated purpose can be influential in increasing meaningful relationships.

The main suggestion for combatting social, behavioral and academic deficits is establishing a safe inclusive environment with a focus on positive collaborative working relationships without opportunities for feeling inferior or experiencing repetitive failure (Killu & Crundwell, 2008). Therefore, the authors' implications suggest that students without disabilities could benefit from pairing with a peer at a lower cognitive or functioning level to ensure positive, meaningful relationships. This concept will be further investigated in the following section.

Using peers as behavior change agents has become popular in applied behavior analysis; most often, classmates are trained to intervene with children who struggle socially or academically (Fowler et al., 1986). Studies based on PMI interventions involved participants ranging in age from preschool to late elementary/early middle school diagnosed with ASD. For the purposes of this manuscript, however, literature has been filtered to meet the 8-12-year age criterion, which is the oldest population for which a significant amount of literature exists to support the current study. PMI studies use typically developing peers to implement intervention (Goldstein et al., 1992; Harper et al., 2008; Jung et al., 2008; Kamps et al., 1994; Kamps et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2007;

Odom & Watts, 1991; and Trembath et al., 2009). Peers are often selected and nominated by teachers and administrators based on characteristics such as regular attendance, age-appropriate interactions, and willingness to participate and interact with others (Harper et al., 2008; Jung et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2007; Roeyers et al., 1996; and Trembath et al., 2009).

In a research synthesis completed by Wang & Spillane (2009) the authors conclude the PMI studies showed the strongest level of effectiveness; making PMI the strongest evidence-based practice in their review for use with children with ASD. The review accounted for 104 studies published between 1997 and 2008 in peer-reviewed journals and targeted social skills for children with ASD. The other intervention procedures reviewed in the journals and that produced therapeutic outcomes were social stories and video modeling. It should be noted that both are often embedded in PMI, making the intervention's evidence base stronger. Although this synthesis shows support for the use of PMI as an evidence-based practice for teaching students with ASD, all studies reviewed use typical peers as models and none focused solely on peer outcomes.

Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Locke & Gulsrud (2012) also used typical peers as models in their PMI procedure for students with ASD. The study tested two interventions: peer-mediated approach and child-assisted approach. The authors facilitated 12 training sessions over six weeks, focusing primarily on increasing social interactions on the playground. The participants were 6-11 years old and included 60 students with ASD and 815 typical students. The children were assigned to randomized groups and 30 students received each intervention. The peer intervention treatment included direct instruction, 20 minutes, twice per week, of strategies to engage students

with ASD on the playground. During the child-assisted treatment, students with ASD were directly instructed by their teachers and peers were not trained at all in strategies. The results indicate that the PMI treatment yielded consistently higher therapeutic outcomes, which were measured through direct observation, peer, self and teacher reports. In addition, although friend nominations did not increase from students with ASD, the number of nominations among typical peers did increase. Furthermore, the number of students with ASD nominated by typical peers increased, which infers an increase in positive outcomes and meaningful friendships. For the purposes of this study, there is particular interest in the increased recognition the typical peers got from parents, other typical peers and educators rather than the recognition they gave to their peers with ASD.

Sperry, Neitzel & Engelhardt-Wells (2010) provide additional support for the use of PMI procedures in teaching students with ASD. The authors outline steps to implement a PMI program. Students 8-12 years of age increased their understanding of their peers with ASD and exhibited a greater number of therapeutic reactions to the adverse behavior when provided with an explanation of ASD and its implications (Sperry, Neitzel & Engelhardt-Wells, 2010). This is promising for the development of meaningful relationships between students with ASD and their typical peers. Teachers are able to lessen their involvement in the instruction and reinforcement of appropriate social behavior of students with ASD as their peers become increasingly effective at shaping appropriate behavior (Sperry, Neitzel & Engelhardt-Wells, 2010). The decrease in teacher direction (Sperry, Neitzel & Engelhardt-Wells, 2010) and the focus on socially mediated reinforcement of behaviors (Tapper & Boulton, 2005) support for the use of

typically developing peers in shaping the behavior of students with ASD. Their use requires a lower staff-to-student ratio, therefore, decreasing programming costs.

Jimenez et al. (2012) conducted a study using PMI in a science class, pairing students with intellectual disabilities with their typical peers. Peers reported feeling they benefited from the PMI process both socially and academically. The students listed factors for increase including but not limited to: confidence, self-valuation and empathy. By teaching, assisting and guiding their peers with disabilities through the content, typical peers found they learned the content more easily and with better mastery. Students with intellectual disabilities as well as their typical peers improved their academic performance as a result of their participation in the PMI study.

Schileder, Maldonado & Bates (2014) investigated a PMI-based program titled "Circle of Friends." The program was developed to target students with autism and their same-age neurotypical peers. The program is based largely on a social constructivist approach and peers are asked to support individuals with disabilities in natural ways. The authors were able to derive evidence that the neurotypical peers generalized acceptance of peers with disabilities outside of the school setting.

Similarly, Ezzamel & Bond (2017) studied the perceptions of parents, peers and students with autism in relation to their participation in a PMI-based intervention. Positive outcomes for peers included enjoying the group, getting to know each other, learning new skills, increased understanding and acceptance of disabilities in general as well as the known characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The analyzed perceptions supported previous research of increased peer confidence, greater

understanding of diversity, academic and social gains, and satisfaction in helping others. The peers involved in the study explained gains in understanding and acceptance resulted in peers being more inclusive across environments.

In a review of interventions that are most effective in the education of children with autism, Rogers (2000) notes that PMI is likely the most promising intervention to teach social skills to school-aged children with autism. Students with ASD learn quickly and effectively through peer modeling. They access immediate social feedback from same-aged peers in addition to the contrived reinforcement set up by the experimenters or interventionists.

This body of findings from PMI-based studies provides a good foundation for the present study's review of PMI-based programming. However, as described in the next section, there is a large gap in the literature when it comes to defining peer benefits. This shapes the context of the present study to answer the necessary questions: What effects or outcomes does implementation of PMI-based interventions have on typical peers and how do these outcomes effect meaningful community inclusion which is becoming more and more prevalent in society.

2.3. Benefits of PMI to Peers: What does the current literature say?

As mentioned above, the academic and achievement demands on students in public high schools is on the rise, therefore this study and the search focus on utilizing extracurricular time for meaningful inclusion. Terms used in the searches are: 'Inclusive extracurricular' 'Extracurricular students with disabilities' 'Special Olympics unified sports' 'Inclusion special education' 'ability in special education'. The searches led to articles related to the topic and applicable articles derived from reference lists which were

reviewed. Sources used in this review met the following criteria: the focus of the research was on adolescents or young adults who attended public high schools, the research focus was within the past 10 years and the research was published in a peer-reviewed journal. A total of five articles included in this synthesis met the criteria defined above. As mentioned in the introduction, although there is a wealth of literature around PMI, little research exists regarding the benefits to the peer. The present study attempts to explain, from the perspective of parents, the benefits to neurotypical high school students of participation in an inclusive extracurricular activity alongside their peers with ASD or a related developmental disability.

Whitaker (2004) conducted a study of individuals with ASD and their typical peers. Parents in this study reported that there were few to no drawbacks as a result of their children's participation. Additionally, parents predict a causal relationship in their children between increases in maturity and tolerance for siblings to participation in the inclusive program. Sixty percent of parents in the study found there to be many more benefits than challenges to participation for their children. When asked, the neurotypical peers who participated reported that the program was challenging but very rewarding. It would appear that students and families communicate favorable outcomes as a result of participation in the inclusive classroom- based study. Some limitations included the possible distractibility of aversive behaviors of students with disabilities.

2.4. Public High School Extracurricular Inclusive Programs

As mentioned in the introduction, little to no literature exists on the targeted area

of inclusive extracurricular programs at a public high school. In fact, the only search

terms that were successful in deriving applicable results were "unified sports." Unified

Sports is a branch of the nationally recognized Special Olympics Organization. Special

Olympics provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to play a variety of

sports.

Sullivan & Glidden (2014) focused on "Unified Sports" which has in recent years

created countless opportunities for same-aged peers to participate in a variety of

organized sports activities with their peers with disabilities. The inclusive nature of the

teams which contain a minimum and maximum ratio of typical and athletes with

disabilities ensures that the intended vision of the program is implemented with fidelity.

The researchers wanted to find out if cognitive-affective-behavioral intervention that

included equal-status contact and pursuit of common goals would improve attitudes of

college student swimmers towards their peers with intellectual developmental disabilities.

Persons whose attitudes were similar to those of the control group before intervention

showed significant improvement after intervention. In general, discomfort in interactions

with persons with disabilities was high when prior contact with them contact was

minimal. However, reduction of discomfort, which occurred in later weeks of the Unified

Sports swimming program, are essential in improving attitudes.

Sullivan & Glidden (2014) say that for typically developing swimmers who

participated on a Unified Sports team with peers with intellectual disabilities it was

challenging to increase their comfort level for differences without an extended amount of

social contact. The importance of gaining this level of comfort and rapport is critical to

the success of any inclusive program. Individuals with a lot of experience working

alongside individuals with disabilities before serving as peers for the Unified Sports program, found it much easier to acclimate, interact and mentor the individuals. Additionally, the typically developing Unified Sports team members who had previous experience with individuals with disabilities adapted to new experiences and challenges more quickly. This same population was also noted to comfortably solve problems and change behavior based on peer-mediated training that occurred throughout the program than were their counterparts who lacked previous experience with individuals with disabilities.

Townsend & Hassall (2007) analyzed the current data that exists from Unified Sports in relation to peer perception. The purpose of this study was to attempt to highlight demographics of the most effective populations to serve as Unified Sports typical peer athletes. The authors found that their measure, mean attitude score, was higher in primary aged students in comparison with secondary aged students. As the social norms increase and social skills of the individuals with disabilities move further from the norm, typical peers often become more uncomfortable with their peers with disabilities. Additionally, the authors found that females had a much higher attitude score in comparison to their male counterparts. The implications of this study are not simply to select primary-aged females to participate in PMI interventions, but rather, to know and understand the constructs, advantages and challenges that may exist in a population of peers with demographic variety.

2.5. Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

Though individual small organizations and programs may be implementing their

own versions of a PMI, the professional special education and community inclusion research does not yet describe or analyze stakeholders' views on the successes and challenges of said interventions. National organizations that set parameters for inclusive organizations such as Unified Sports and The Sparkle Effect are surfacing and helping to make meaningful differences in creating an inclusive society as a whole.

The gap in research is cause for concern in that we know PMI is one of the most effective and evidence-based practice in treating social, academic and behavioral challenges in individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. One of the confounding variables on which researchers have not focused are the benefits the intervention has with typical peers, especially in the high school population. As mentioned in the introduction, high school students of today are continuously bombarded with increasing academic and extracurricular expectations. High school students and their parents are continually reminded of the high stakes testing and academic achievement necessary to be accepted and successful in their post- secondary option of choice. However, little attention is brought to the social and emotional well-being of high school students which have increasing importance with the rise of mental health needs in adolescents. Additionally, with the focus on academic achievement and post-secondary goals, young people often struggle with developing a sense of self and a direction or career outcome. High school students who are naturally drawn to helping others often find joy in the health and human services field. However this area is often not highlighted by post-secondary institutions seeking high-performing students, parents, and educators in affluent communities.

In the words of Stephen Covey (2008), it truly is a win/win for all involved. The

purpose of the current study is to open the gates to research studies completed and written from a   parents' perspectives for high school students' participation in inclusive activities based in the foundations of PMI. By collecting and analyzing qualitative interview data on the perceptions of parents of this subgroup, researchers hope a base will begin to surround this critical topic in special education and community inclusion. The overarching implications of increasing individuals with developmental disabilities and the nationwide legislation to provide meaningful inclusion of these individuals in their communities as adults are paramount for schools, families, government agencies and businesses alike.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Gürür & Uzuner (2010) demonstrate the effective use of phenomenology as a subset of the Qualitative Interviewing process recognized and utilized in the field of special education. The authors used the data analysis process to review transcripts from which themes and sub-themes were extracted and compared until agreement was reached on the views of educators on co-teaching applications in the inclusion classroom. Phenomenology allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions and then provides a structure for thematic data analysis of qualitative interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In systematically matching an appropriate research study style to a problem, Rubin & Rubin (2005) explain that if current research or approach to solving a problem is not working, the problem may need to be looked at in a different way and that different way can be based on in-depth interviewing and thematic analysis of that data. In this way, qualitative interviewing and phenomenology seem to be a perfect fit for analyzing the effects of inclusive extracurricular activities on typical peers. The research is limited and the parent perspective has yet to be explored.

A systematic review of current literature was conducted to ensure current best practice in the area was utilized in selecting the appropriate data collection and analysis system. The search terms "Phenomenology and Special Education" yielded 181 results while an additional search of "Phenomenology and Special Education and Parents" yielded 72 results. The searches led to articles related to the research method and data analysis and applicable articles derived from reference lists were reviewed. Sources used in this review met the following criteria: the focus of the research was on children or

adolescents with disabilities and their typical peers, the research focus within the past 10 years with the research published in a peer-reviewed journal, the study implemented a qualitative interview process with a key stakeholder and analyzed the data thematically. A total of three articles that meet the criteria defined above are included in this synthesis. As mentioned in the introduction, although there is a wealth of literature around Special Education, qualitative interviewing and phenomenology, little research exists regarding the benefits to the peer from a parental perspective. Many articles had the focus of the parent, and some had the focus of the individual as part of his or her experience in a given intervention; but very few addressed the parent perspective of children/adolescents with disabilities and even fewer meeting both requirements.

3.2. Phenomenology in Special Education

The literature and research base of perceptions of parents of high school students who participated in an inclusive extracurricular project is extremely limited, nearly nonexistent, using phenomenology is an effective approach (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology is defined as the study of patterns in participant responses of data often collected through a qualitative interview process (Sanders, 1982). Parents of typical high school students are expected to reply with candid answers that will likely outline common themes because of their shared experience. Phenomenology allows for a prescriptive coding process to organize and effectively interpret this type of interview data. The goal for this study is to produce general perceptions of the parents interviewed as a sample of all parents of typical peers whose children are currently participating in inclusive experiences. The intended population is very small and the research implications that exist are minimal to nonexistent. Therefore, it is critical that this initial study capture holistic themes and contexts rather than statistical data. A quantitative

study based on interview responses or a Likert scale would be an ineffective addition to the research pool in this area at this time as the intended themes and contexts have not yet been identified.

Additionally, the intended audience of this study is the community of high school level school administrators, community members and parents of neurotypical high school students. The authenticity of the data and themes presented as outcomes of the study is critical. In other words, in order for the implications of the study to be meaningful, the data need to be collected in an unbiased and unstructured manner, making qualitative interviewing and phenomenology appropriately fitting.

Data from many special education-based research studies have been collected using qualitative interviewing and analyzed using the principles of phenomenology. In their study of self-reported well-being of individuals with intellectual disabilities, Boström & Broberg (2018) utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis to determine critical themes and implications. Code metrics, memos, and case summaries were analyzed together and reorganized into a thematic structure. In this study, a quantitative piece was added because some themes in well-being appropriately were already outlined. However, in the current study, because themes of parent perspective within this topic have not yet been formally collected or analyzed, a solely phenomenological process best meets the needs.

Ceylan & Aral (2016) conducted qualitative interviews in an attempt to determine mothers' opinions and perspectives on inclusion for their elementary-aged students with developmental disabilities. Data were analyzed using content analysis; a qualitative data analysis method. Responses were reviewed and organized/interpreted within a framework

of the themes of the study, which included but were not limited to: inclusion, similarities/differences and disability groups. Direct quotes were included and results were interpreted on the basis of those quotes. The foundation of the Ceylan & Aral (2016) study best parallels the current study. The population studied is unique as the present study is targeting students without disabilities and Ceylan & Aral (2016) targeted students with disabilities. However, the interview participants are parents both of direct participants in PMI and of the intended audience of the their study whereas the present study is educators and other parents.

Another inclusion-based qualitative interview study was conducted by Leigers, Kleinert, & Carter (2017). Here the interviewer took field notes to record nonverbal cues to later be transcribed along with audio recordings of the interviews. Thematic analysis to uncover themes was utilized and a data-driven inductive approach without testing prior assumptions was implemented. Open, axial, and selective coding helped to identify emerging themes. The initial codes were identified using HyperRESEARCH qualitative analysis software (version 3.7.2). Then, the authors grouped similar codes into one or more categories to produce more meaningful patterns.

Burke & Goldman (2017) utilized a line-by-line approach to coding in their study documenting the experiences of special education advocates. Constant comparative analysis and triangulation of additional data sources were used to code themes. Credibility and conformability were established by triangulating sources, conducting a negative case analysis, and member checking. Participant responses from initial interviews were used to shape later interviews. The analytical design of this study fits best with the present. During the first round of interviews, the participants were all asked

the same or very similar questions. During the second or follow-up interviews, the

questions were tailored to meet initial themes (if they occurred), possibly rebut an

unintended theme or to align quotes with existing themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.3. Population and Sampling

"The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on

describing the 'essence' of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have

experienced it" (Merriam, 2002, p. 93). Therefore, it was exponentially important to the

validity of this study to select and include relevant participants. By limiting the

participant selection to one particular public high school (with the demographic targets)

in one geographical area and across one common group of people allowed the study to

remain structurally similar in demographics and characteristics. Participant data became

apparent through semi-structured interviews, obtained from a sample of parents of high

school alumni from the selected public high school. Creswell (1998) explains that the

goal of the process is to gain themes of perception of those who are directly involved. It

is the responsibility of the interviewer to collect all the interview responses and then

"eavesdrop" in attempt to gain the essence of the participant's input (Merriam, 2002).

Additional requirements for the participants include: child must have graduated from the

public high school within five years of the interview and child must have participated in

at least one inclusive extracurricular event for a minimum of one entire school year. From

a feasibility standpoint, there were a total of five participants who met all the

requirements identified by the school district employees, but four agreed and were able to

commit to participation in the study. Individual unique and in-depth interview processes

created opportunities for thematic coding and analysis of perceptions of the larger group.

This small sample has potential for generalization both to future parents' perceptions in this district as well as to districts with similar demographics nationwide.

3.4. Data Collection & Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (2007) outlines two major types of phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology and psychological phenomenology. The latter best fits the needs of the current study. "Psychological phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the research and more on a description of the experience of participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Moustakas (1994) has outlined a step-by- step process for this type of data collection.

Moustakas (1994), cited by Creswell (2007), described two descriptive levels of the phenomenological approach. First, data are collected through open-ended questions and dialogue during in-depth interviews with the participants. Next, the researcher carefully reviews the collected data to detect and develop possible common themes and constructs. Through this approach, the descriptive perceptions of parents of neurotypical high school students who participated in inclusive extracurricular activities become apparent within broader outcomes such as self-valuation, career planning, etc. As previously indicated, the primary vision for phenomenological research is to capture the essence of the experience as it was perceived by the persons who have lived it (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) references Moustakas's (1994) processes which are synthesized below:

(1) First, the researcher determines if the problem can best be analyzed using a phenomenological approach and then identifies the phenomenon to study (i.e. anger, professionalism, experience as a wrestler, etc.)

(2) Next, the researcher ensures that his or her own views are "bracketed" out. This process asks that the researcher be reflective about his or her own bias or preconceived constructs around the phenomenon.

(3) Data are collected from the participants using an in-depth interview process. Typically, initial questions include asking the participant about the experiences had in regard to the phenomenon and what possible influences may have been encountered that affected these experiences and beliefs about the phenomenon. Open-ended follow-up questions may be asked, but questions of this type initiate and begin the dialogue.

(4) After transcription of the interviews, researchers go through and highlight "significant statements," a process is called "horizonalization." From there, researchers develop "clusters of meaning" by sorting these "significant statements" into themes.

(5) Lastly, these "clusters of meaning" or themes are used to write a description of what participants experienced. This process is called "textual description." Additional factors, such as structural description or how the setting may have affected participants experience, are commonly recommended. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to include a section about their own experiences and situations that have influenced their experiences.

The steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) align with the research questions, participant

population and research outcome goals of the present study. The Moustakas model was followed with minimal to no adaptation to the process.

In regard to explicitly defined procedures followed for the current study, the data collection procedures have been separated into phases as follows:

Phase One

The superintendent of the targeted school district was contacted and permission was granted to target participants (parents). The participants were contacted via email requesting participation and 4 were willing and eligible agreed to participate. The researcher met individually with each participant and reviewed the prepared informational document which explained the study and procedures. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the consent-to-participate document with each participant. The researcher answered all questions about both documents to ensure that all participants understood all the processes, policies and procedures that would accompany participation in the study. Following the initial meeting, and after participation was agreed upon and the consent form was signed, the participant and the researcher set up an interview day and time.

Phase Two

The initial interviews of all participants served as the second phase in the data collection process. Working with a predetermined interview script, the interviews were audio-recorded as participants were asked very few guiding or follow-up questions. Instead, they used open-ended qualitative interviewing phrases such as "Tell me more about that" or "Describe that experience" to ensure that personal bias of the researcher

was bracketed out at this stage of the data collection.

Phase Three

The initial interview data collected via audio files were transferred into a written transcription. The researcher followed the preceding data analysis steps by reading the full transcriptions and then began the horizionalization process. Key statements and quotes were highlighted and categorized to begin thematic constructs or clusters of meanings.

Phase Four

Follow-up interviews with each participant were utilized to clarify individual experiences and significant quotes as they related to the initial cluster of meaning themes identified by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to better understand the meaning and significance of the participants' motivation to share this information related to their experience.

3.5. Summary and Conclusion

To conclude, the selection and use of a qualitative interviewing process to collect data and the data analysis process of phenomenology to examine and identify themes of experiences of parents of neurotypical high school students in relation to their participation in inclusive extracurricular activities was a comprehensively supported selection based on the individual research questions defined in the present study as well as literature in the field of special education that utilizes qualitative interviewing.

Participants were defined by a non-biased third party (school district) and participated on a voluntary basis. The participants were given a $30 retail gift card to increase the likelihood of prolonged participation in the interview process. All participants met the listed requirements and completed the interview process in full. Responses from the descriptive qualitative interviewing process will be presented in Chapter 4 and analyzed using the transcendental or psychological phenomenological approach as described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

Research participants were interviewed to gain information about their personal perspectives for two guiding research questions. First, from the parents' perspective, what effects does participation in an inclusive extracurricular group have on neurotypical students attending public high schools? Secondly, from their parents' perspective, how do these effects impact high school students (neurotypical and developmentally delayed), their families and their communities?

As described in Rubin and Rubin (2005), data analysis revealed key points or themes that are organized in order of the questions presented to the participants. The interview script which includes the questions asked of the participants can be found in Appendix E. They were developed to capture the participants' perceptions and experiences related to inclusive extracurricular opportunities for typical students in public high schools. As the key points or themes are presented, an interpretive description of these experiences follows, which includes supporting data collected from the interviews. Commentary also provides transition and depth to the supporting key points and themes. At the end of Chapter 4, brief summaries will provide a generalized rendering of the perceptions and experiences of each individual participant as it relates to the major themes found as a result of interview data analysis.

Interviewees are differentiated by the assigned markings of "P-A" (i.e. participant A), through "P-D." Additionally, to increase anonymity for each participant, the personal pronoun *she* will be used throughout the remaining chapters. Using *she* does not signify

the gender of the participants, since gender played no role in the research questions or the participants' eligibility to participate in the study. It merely provides the reader a standard way of accessing the interview data and further protecting the participants' identity.

As Chapter 3 discussed, the research participants provide a meaningful sample of parents whose eligibility was first determined by their son's or daughter's participation in an inclusive extracurricular activity at the selected Northeast Ohio public high school. All eligible and willing participants were interviewed and the diversity in their experiences demonstrates the variability and uniqueness necessary for an effective analysis. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explain that varying demographic factors allow for a more holistic picture of findings obtained by the qualitative interview process. The four eligible and willing parents who participated in the interview process vary demographically in several ways, excluding the geographical location of the district studied. Participants vary in age, family history, occupation, number of children, children with and without disabilities, family members with and without disabilities, number of years the son or daughter participated in inclusive extracurricular activities as well as the type and number of extracurriculars in which they were involved.

The participant introductions that follow, along with Table 1, provide demographic information capturing the data gathered from the participants during the initial stage of each interview. Participants were asked to share this information as qualification to participate and to reiterate it during the interview process.

The following paragraphs will provide specific information shared by participants in relation to occupation and number of children as well as more detailed information

about the participation of the child in question in inclusive extracurricular activities and the time they attended the public high school this study correlates.

Participant A (P-A) has two daughters, both of whom attended the public high school. One has graduated, one is currently a high school senior. The second is the child who participated and about whom she responded to the interview questions. However, P-A has a unique situation in that her elder daughter has a disability and also participated in the inclusive clubs. P-A's inclusion in the study was pivotal for that reason alone. P-A's daughter is currently 18 years old and participated in the inclusive extracurriculars for one year. P-A is currently a stay-at-home parent though she previously worked in the retail and business realm. She is married and resides within the community/city limits. She is college educated and has always been involved heavily in her daughters' school experiences.

Participant B (P-B) has a son and daughter. Her son attended a private high school because he experienced some social struggles in public school. He is currently attending law school. Her daughter is the participant about whom she responded to the interview questions. P-B's daughter is a junior at college and is 20 years old. She attended the public high school for four years and participated in inclusive extracurricular programs for two years. P-B holds undergraduate and masters degrees in education. She stayed at home with her children while they attended school. She currently works for a design firm as an administrative assistant. When her daughter graduated from high school, P-B and her spouse moved out of the community to a neighboring area. She has no immediate family members or friends with disabilities.

Participant C (P-C) has four children, three daughters and a son. All four children attended the public high school. Her son participated in inclusive extracurricular activities and is the individual about whom she responded to the interviewer's questions. P-C's son is currently 21 years old and completing his junior year of college out of state. P-C is college-educated and both she and her spouse work in the accounting and business field. She continues to reside in the community. She discloses she has a few close family friends with disabilities but no immediate family members. P-C's son attended the public high school for four years and participated in inclusive extracurricular activities for one and one-half school years.

Participant D (P-D) has three sons, as well as a niece, to all of whom she refers during her interview. P-D's first son is 19 years old and a college sophomore out of state. He attended the public high school for four years and participated in inclusive extracurricular activities for one year. P-D's second son is 17 years old. A high school junior, he has attended the public high school for three years and participated in inclusive extracurricular activities for two years. P-D's third son currently attends the district's middle school. Finally, P-D's niece, a 20-year-old junior at an out-of-state college, attended the public high school for four years and participated in inclusive extracurriculars for two years.

Table 1 provides a visual snapshot of several significant demographic features described by the participants. However, specific information described throughout the interview analysis will likely be more important to the potential input and biases of each participant. Qualitative interviewing is an attempt to capture the experiences of

individuals and, in this way, Table 1 provides an overview, but not a full experiential picture.

Table 1: Demographics of Interview Participants

	Number of Children	Child Age/ Education Stage	Years Child Attended Public High School	Years Child Participated in Inclusive Extracurriculars	Number of Inclusive Extracurriculars in which Child Participated	Currently Resides in Community	Level of Education
Participant A	2	18 HS senior	4	1	3	Y	College Grad
Participant B	2	20 College junior	4	2	4	N	Graduate Degree
Participant C	4	21 College junior	4	1.5	4	Y	Graduate Degree
Participant D	3	19 college soph	4	1	1	Y	High school graduate
		17 HS junior	3	3	1		
		20 college junior (niece)	4	2	3		

4.2. Description of Data and Findings

The remaining section of this chapter will follow a prescribed format that follows a structural outline of the nature of the interview itself. Each participant was asked a total of 14 questions related to her experiences and perceptions of effects on her typical child as a result of his or her involvement in inclusive extracurricular opportunities at the public high school. Each question is scripted, followed by an overview of the question and the specific themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. The themes derived from each question are often directly related to the question or follow-up question and therefore are best presented through the lens of the question for initial

review. However, Chapter 5 will attempt to summarize and meld these themes to create

the study's main takeaways. Block quotations are intentionally used to provide the reader

with an authentic sense of the participants' voices. If the data were presented out of

conversational context, it would lack holistic perception of the participants' thoughts

relative to each question. Additionally, sometimes the interviewer's follow-up question is

included to ensure appropriate meaning is derived from the interviewee's response.

Question 1: What specific activities (i.e. weekly practice, athletic events, community
outings, individual community experiences, etc.) did your child participate in?

In their responses to question 1, participants gave answers that began to build

structure for two of the overarching themes that came from data analysis. First, their child

spent more time with individuals with disabilities outside of the school day than they

otherwise would have. For the purposes of this manuscript and analysis, reference made

to this theme is denoted as *Community Exposure or Theme 1*. Secondly, the demand

placed on today's high school student requires a balancing act; reference made to this

theme is denoted as *Time Management and Scheduling or Theme 4.*

P-A noted that her daughter committed weekly during her involvement in participation in

the inclusive drama club and the peer collaboration program.

> She went to weekly practices for *"inclusive drama club"* and helped at the actual
> show doing backdrops and set construction. She also went shopping in the
> community with Peer-Collaboration group weekly *(P-A).*

Similarly, P-B noted that her daughter participated in events for three of the

inclusive clubs weekly. All participants noted increased exposure to a new group of

friends as a direct result of their child's experience. P-C explains the importance of

inclusion prior to high school for her son's experience.

> He did "Our Time to Shine", "Sparkle", and soccer. He attended weekly practices for both organizations and athletic practices during the seasons. He's been exposed growing up to a family member with special needs. In high school, he was in inclusion classes from time to time and in grade school *(P-B)*.

On the contrary, P-D reported her sons were far less involved in extracurriculars during high school; in fact, she shared that the inclusive drama club was one of their few extracurricular commitments. All participants noted a theme of increased exposure to a new group of friends as a direct result of the experience. P-C explained the importance of inclusion prior to high school for her son's experience. Though this question was in most part demographic, thematic data defined later in the study is introduced and themes 1 and 4 began to take root.

Question 2: What specific organizations/clubs was your son/daughter a part of or is currently a part of?

Question 2 responses were also demographic in nature. Here the participants were asked to list the organizations in which their child took part. This would allow for outcome information about each participant's perspective on time management and the demands on adolescents of today as discussed in Chapter 1. Additionally, it provided background information for future questions. As can be reviewed on Table 1, P-A's child participated in three organizations but she reportedly spent less time than other participants. P-B and P-C describe their children's participation as extensive in all four inclusive groups the high school offered. P-D describes her sons' participation as only in

the inclusive drama club as limited and her niece's participation, spanning three of the four organizations, as extensive. While there was not room for expansion in most cases, hints of *Time Management and Scheduling or Theme 4* could be noted in all participants' descriptions of their student(s)' involvement.

Question 3: Before they began participating in the club/organization, what was their involvement with peers with disabilities? At school? In the community/home?

Participants gave consistent and clear thematic feedback in response to Question 3. All four responded that experience with their peers with disabilities was limited, in most cases, to the academic setting and mainly in elementary school. This collected information supports the literature that as the gap widens academically between typical students and their peers with disabilities, educators are often challenged with effective ways to continue meaningful inclusion. P-A noted that her daughter's involvement with peers with disabilities was high only because she has a sister just three years older with a disability. By the nature of family get-togethers, many family friends also have individuals with disabilities. However, the daughter was not exposed much outside of the home setting. In school, P-A reports she may have had some inclusive classes. P-B's response aligns, commenting that she felt her daughter had little to no experience or exposure prior to her involvement in the inclusive extracurricular activities. P-C reiterates the classroom exposure in her response.

> Pretty much in the classroom settings for the most part. There were a couple of kids that he had interaction with that had special needs through their siblings but other than that it was limited *(P-C)*.

P-D concurs, explaining that her sons always felt individuals with disabilities were "part of the group" in the district and they had positive inclusive classroom experiences in

elementary school, but beyond that it was limited. She comments that nothing seemed to extend to the community prior to the inclusive extracurricular programs. A clear recurrence of *Community Exposure or Theme 1* was coded in participants' responses to this question. All four participants described limited exposure before participation in the program(s) in comparison to after participation in the program(s).

Question 4: What was the motivation or reason behind your child joining club/organization?

P-A and P-D made reference to the influence of family members as motivation behind joining the inclusive organization(s). P-A explained the programs allowed for her two daughters to participate in something together or at least as a shared experience, which would not have happened otherwise. For example, it would not have happened if competitive sports teams were the only extracurricular option. P-D describes her niece's passion for individuals with disabilities as her sons' motivation to join the inclusive drama club. She mentions the club became "part of the family." The reference to family influence and the impact that has on the community concretely support *Theme 1*. However, in addition to the recurrence of this prevalent theme, another arises. P-B explains her daughter's journey:

> I don't really know what motivated her. I know that teachers and advisors were a huge influence on her for what she did. She completely changed her career and everything. I think she has always been the kind of person and the kind of kid that wants to put good in the world. Before this she was involved in the interchurch group doing the Habitat for Humanity kind of thing and those sorts of things. She has always wanted to do things that puts good into the world and when she found this little niche, it was something for her to excel and honestly it gave her an avenue that she really did not have. She really didn't do much at the school. But now she was finally involved in something *(P-B)*.

The family influences, as well as feeling a part of something at school, interweave to

provide the foundation for *Sense of Belonging or Theme 2*. In the cases of P-B and P-C, parents describe their child's motivation to participate as meaningful and felt it perfectly paralleled the children's innate wish to help others. P-C explains her son's motivation:

> He has a passion for helping kids like that. I think he gets such a high out of helping those kids and seeing them and their lives transform. Because of his ADD, I think he has some level of understanding of just working with those challenges *(P-C)*.

P-C mentions her son's own challenges with attention deficit disorder and the empathy and compassion that occurred for individuals with significant disabilities because of those challenges. P-A brings up another important point in her follow-up response to this question. She explains that her daughter was influenced by other typical peers that were already involved in the inclusive extracurricular organization(s):

> It may have been a comfort level because her sister (with a disability) was doing it but I think it was more because some of her typical friends were in it *(P-A)*.

The positive peer pressure for involvement directly supports *Sense of Belonging or Theme 2*. Whether students were motivated to participate due to family influence, friend influence or their innate ability to make positive change, all align with being a part of something bigger and feeling that sense of belonging.

Question 5: What were your initial thoughts about their participation in the club/organization?

Responses to Question 5 brought about insight of participant perspective regarding their feelings about their child's participation in the inclusive organization. Unanimously, all four participants responses were positive. Each of the interviewees described her child's

participation as "great" and "happy they were a part of something like this." Specifically, P-B described her stark difference of emotions as a result of her daughter's participation in this experience compared to cheerleading in years past:

> I was very glad. Her only activity was cheerleading and there was a lot that went along with that was not so positive. So we were not having a great experience in high school and then this came along and it was like our life support. It really helped her and it gave her a personal self-worth *(P-B)*.

All four parent responses clearly provide additional evidence for Theme 2 or recognizing an increase in their child's *Sense of Belonging*. They each described their initial and ongoing reaction to participation in the inclusive extracurriculars as positive and meaningful. P-B's interview excerpt above also begins to build foundation for *Change in Personal Character Traits or Theme 5* when she describes her daughter's increase in self worth as a direct and immediate result of her initiation of participation in the inclusive activity. The response is both supportive to the themes listed for purposes of this research and also very powerful on a personal level as P-B describes her daughter's involvement as a "life line" in her high school experience.

Question 6: What other high school commitments did/does your child have (i.e. honors classes, other clubs/organizations, arts, athletics, etc.)?

In the introduction and literature review chapters of this manuscript, there was mention that high school students of today are expected to maintain balance while participating and completing an extensive list of home, school and community commitments. Several of the participants supported the literature by describing their child's commitments in high school. P-C describes a typical busy year- round schedule from her son's perspective as a high school student:

He played soccer for the high school but he also played Club Soccer, which was a big time commitment. He also did lacrosse through different parts of high school. He did take a number of honors courses. It was pretty much always soccer season at our house. He would start with high school soccer sometime in July. They would start with pre-season conditioning and things like that and then they would go throughout the summer. As soon as the school year starts, it's every day after school, with two games at least a week. Those commitments usually take you from after school until about anywhere from 9-11 o'clock at night if it's an away game or not. That's the high school season and runs through November. As soon as high school would stop, he would pick up Club Soccer. Club Soccer is at least two practices a week and tournaments would start on the weekends. Typically, we had tournaments out of town starting on Fridays and going through Sunday and be gone most weekends. His team would run with the postseason championship kind of thing and that would take us until July. In regards to homework, he probably had anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours most nights. He did do some in study hall *(P-C)*.

She explains that her description aligns with that of many student athletes at the public high school featured in this study. The other three participants, though their descriptions were not as detailed, said their child did not have as many commitments, but listed part-time work, other clubs and organizations; specifically in the arts as well as academic course demands and an average homework load of 2-3 hours per night as expectations related to their school day. The level of commitment and expectation for these young people to achieve balance while maintaining excellence supports a recurring theme in all four responders; that is, *Time Management and Scheduling or Theme 4* is both necessary and supported in the case of these six high school students.

Question 7: What other commitments outside the school sector did/does your child have (i.e. family, church, volunteer, part time work etc.)?

All four participants referenced their responses to Question 6 when responding to Question 7. That is, school commitments took precedence over commitments that occurred outside of school for their student. P-A added that her daughter participated in

modeling, with practice twice per week, as well as a part-time job and spent time with her

boyfriend. P-B noted church involvement as another contributing time commitment for

her daughter:

> She joined her own church and so she did a lot up there. She did the
> "Appalachian Service Project." Throughout the year she did things with that.
> And she also worked with the special-needs kids at the church pre-school on
> Sundays. She worked during the summers but during the school year she did not
> work *(P-B)*.

P-C described part-time work and church group as additional commitments outside of the

school setting for her son.

> He worked at a ski board shop. He would work there during the winter season.
> He also did Young Life Church Group, one or two nights a week, depending on
> what he was doing and what his other activities were. He would probably work
> 15-20 hours a week at the ski shop, mostly on the weekends *(P-C)*.

Likewise, P-D listed part-time work as a commitment for her son, approximately 10

hours per week. She shared that her niece participated in many activities outside of the

school day:

> She was involved with the Young Actor's Studio. She also did the regular theater
> at school. She did equestrian, taught Sunday School at the church, and the Impact
> Group once a week *(P-D)*.

Question 7 responses added to the reality that adolescents of today are charged

with working diligently to effectively manage time in order to fulfill all of their

commitments in and out of the school setting. The responses provide additional support

for the prevalence of *Theme 4 or Time Management and Scheduling.* Although the

participants' responses varied in specifics, all four shared that all six individuals in

question had commitments to organizations and people in and out of the school setting.

Question 8: Was there concern about "fitting" the inclusive extracurricular activity into your teen's day? Please explain.

In reference to facilitating effective time management through additional or increased involvement, P-D explained her sons' experiences:

> From a school standpoint, they both have a lot of AP classes. They were able to juggle it. It wasn't too bad. Typical homework load would probably be three hours *(P-D)*.

When asked if she was ever concerned about her sons "fitting in" in the inclusive activities P-D responded:

"No. I think that by having some of that stuff actually makes you more effective."

She, as well as P-B, alluded that asking young people to manage more, to a reasonable extent, actually improves their ability to manage time effectively. Although participant responses to questions 6 and 7 provide evidence to support the time management and scheduling theme, participants unanimously declared there was no concern for "fitting" the inclusive extracurricular activity into their busy schedules in their responses to Question 8. Therefore, at least for the scope of this project and the participants studied, the takeaway is that heavy involvement facilitated better time management in their high school student.

Question 9: Before they began participating in the club/organization, what was your view of high school staff and administration expectations for students?

Question 9 required further explanation from the interviewer when it was posed to three of the four interviewees. For clarification the participants were asked to speak about their perception of the staff's view on inclusion of individuals with disabilities prior to

their student's participation in the inclusive extracurricular program.

All four participants responded that the high school staff's view of inclusion was positive before the initiation of the inclusive extra curriculars. However, they also noted that the addition of the inclusive extracurriculars further solidified the importance and positivity of authentic inclusive opportunities.

> I would say these two clubs, especially "Our Time to Shine," has raised so much awareness and the students that are involved in it are pretty excited. I think they have good peer models and hopefully it will continue to grow *(P-A)*.

When asked to explain why she thought changes to the staff views on inclusion was a direct result of addition of the inclusive extracurriculars, P-B explained the changes she saw in the staff as well as the general population of typical students at the high school:

> Yes, I definitely think so. You would see that they were a part of this and you could see a tender side of them that you wouldn't normally see. A lot of the moms were saying how they did not really think that it was going to be something that their daughters liked and they really ended up enjoying that piece of it. I think it was good all around for everybody. It was my daughter's best moment doing those things *(P-B)*.

As an aside, before several participants asked for clarification of the question described above, they responded explaining their perspective of staff's expectations of the high school student in general. Although this was not the intended meaning of the question, it became a powerful follow-up question. It provided an example of the rich information exchange that occurs as a result of the conversational nature of the qualitative interview process. The information provided by the participants provides additional support and evidence that their students were held to high expectations across facets of their school experience. Pointedly, P-C describes her perspective of the

expectations for her son and his peers by mentioning both academic achievement in the way of advanced placement courses and standardized tests as well as extracurricular activity involvement in the way of sports and the arts. Similarly, P-A describes generally high expectations for their students:

> I think staff in general at the high school has high expectations of their students but my daughter doesn't always meet it (P-A).

In addition to supporting managing time effectively or Theme 4, this section of the interviews also provides evidence that students who participated gained or grew a specific personality trait or character. In this case, P-C and P-A suggest their students were supported by the high school staff to show resiliency and dedication in maintaining very full daily schedules. In Question 8, P-D reminds us that from her perspective, a full schedule for a high school student facilitates personal growth in effectively managing time and stress that may accompany this skill. The personal growth theme develops further in participant responses to Question 10.

Question 10: Did you notice a change in your child's empathic responding or other character traits after participation in the club/organization? Please explain. Was there a specific experience or moment where this occurred?

Participants were asked in a more direct way to explain the potential character trait changes in their student as a result of participation in the extracurricular activity. All four participants shared that their students experienced a positive change in a given character trait. P-B defines self-worth as her daughter's largest area of growth:

> Not so much as it being empathy but her self-worth and her sense of belonging. Of course, it was on all aspects such as having influential staff as mentors. Those things really helped boost her self-worth up, I feel (P-B).

It is notable that P-B reiterates "sense of belonging" in her response. Another example of the benefits of the conversational nature of the qualitative interview. Although this was not the intention behind the question, it provides support for another theme, *Feeling a Sense of Belonging or Theme 2*, from a holistic sense.

P-C adds that her son gained empathy through participation:

> I think that my son always has had a little bit of a protective personality toward kids that might be struggling with things like that but I think he definitely became even more empathetic towards what someone else might go through. For example, the language barriers and the social skills and things like that that they struggle with. I don't know if there was a specific moment for him. I think just getting involved on a daily basis and going and hanging out in that classroom was truly a life-changing experience for him *(P-C)*.

P-D echoed the above response, adding a specific scenario where increased empathy was demonstrated:

> Absolutely. Yes. I noticed their interactions with the kids; whereas before my son might have just walked by his peer with a disability, not noticing or acknowledged her but now he would sit down with her and talk to her *(P-D)*.

Each of these responses drew a clear thematic analysis line to *Change in Personal Character Traits or Theme 5*. From a parent's perspective, the participants unanimously observed and reported notable increase in positive traits to further solidify the positivity of her daughter's experience, P-B added to her response describing the year where her daughter became heavily involved in inclusive extracurricular activities:

> It was really her senior year that she would just come home and be so much happier than she was in the years before. Before this she did not want to do anything. Then when this came about she was just so excited about school. She was excited about being a part of everything. I think it was that senior year that it all took hold. It was just amazing *(P-B)*.

In addition to the description of increasing positive personality traits in their

children, one participant also described a contrary argument for one of the potential challenges presented in the literature. It is hypothesized that parents of typical students may have a fear of their child being injured as a result of physical aggression that often occurs in students with significant developmental disabilities and communication needs. Although none of the participants responded with this fear, P-D elaborated on her response to this question explaining that her son was more comfortable because he was exposed to this type of adverse behavior:

> They both (participant's two sons) have said to me at separate times, "You know they are kids just like us." One day when a group member with a disability had a total meltdown, I remember talking to my son afterwards, and I was like "Oh my Gosh! Oh My Gosh!" and he was like, "Yeah, that happens and we just let him go into a room and calm down." He was so "matter of fact" about it like it wasn't a big deal. It was a bigger deal to me than him *(P-D)*.

> This response supports both the increase in positive characteristic traits or Theme

5 as well as the increase in comfort around individuals with disabilities following exposure or Theme 1.

Question 11: What did your son/daughter say about their experience when they began the club/organization?

Participants' perspectives differed greatly in response to this question and it seemed to be dependent on their individual student. One recurring theme present in the responses was the increase in comfort given exposure or Theme 1.

> He didn't always talk about it at times. I initially didn't hear about it. All of the sudden he was spending a lot of time starting to do things after school, like doing the "Time to Shine" and things like that. He was really excited about it *(P-C)*.

P-D explains her son's thoughts and willingness to share information about his experience changed over time. Her perspective of her son's eventual feeling towards the

experience aligns with the other three participants. P-A and P-B responded that their daughters were filled with excitement both at the initial stages and throughout their participation. Similar to P-C, P-D explains there was some wariness for her sons at initiation and then positivity prevailed:

> At first there was little bit of craziness of getting it started and having to deal with the chaos that comes with it. It's kind of chaotic even with typical kids but when you're dealing with the non-typical kids, it took them a little bit of time to adjust to that. They did and it was fine. They were excited overall *(P-D)*.

Question 11 responses strongly support increase in positivity or adding something to the lives of typical peers correlating with Theme 5. P-B adds to her response, reiterating her daughter's experience with finding a new sense of belonging or Theme 1:

> She just talked on and on about all of the girls and what her disability was and how they were able to compensate. It was almost as if she had all of these new friends. Her social world opened up with all of these new people that she added in, that she truly loved *(P-B)*.

It is also noteworthy that P-B explains from her perspective her daughter also gained the ability to see her peers with disabilities through a lens that focused on their abilities rather than their disabilities. Part of being a leader in an inclusive cheer squad meant thinking creatively and maintaining dedication to inclusion when challenges arose.

Question 12: What do you feel is the most valuable skill(s) gained from their participation in the club/organization?

Initially, each participant responded uniquely to this question. That is, it seemed, based on responses, that participation in the inclusive extracurricular provided something different for each of the individual participants, from a parent's perspective. P-A who has a daughter with a disability and a typically developing daughter who was the target of the interview, provides insight specific to her situation:

I think that probably for her it made her realize, I hope, that her sister (with a disability) is very much accepted and so are the other students by their typical peers and that when you have a group of people accepting another group it kind of grows *(P-A)*.

This response supports community inclusion through exposure or Theme 1. P-A described a direct effect she observed in her daughter as well as the school as a whole. P-B and P-D (when describing her niece's gains) both share that their students developed their leadership skills from the opportunity to lead both within the extracurricular activity and to promote meaningful community inclusion:

I think leadership. She really never took on any kind of leadership role. I think leadership and self-confidence would be the two areas that I saw the most improvement for growth *(P-B)*.

My niece got a lot of leadership skills out of it, a lot of communication, a lot of being in the public eye. Through this whole program and developing it, it has increased her self-confidence as far as getting up and speaking and the way she carries herself with more confidence *(P-D)*.

P-B's and P-D's responses support development or change of a personality trait or Theme 5. Increase in self-confidence and an opportunity to lead were positive changes in the lives of both these female students from the perspectives of their parents. P-C and P-D (when describing her sons) alike described empathy as their students' biggest gain as a result of participation in the program:

Empathy, absolutely. It just makes you a better person *(P-D)*.

Having that compassion and that empathy for other people. To recognize that not everyone is healthy nor have the ability to participate in sports or anything that they want to physically. That just isn't the case for everyone *(P-C)*.

Undoubtedly all four participants align when responses were analyzed thematically. Their responses support the concept that students gained or changed a personality trait as a direct result of their participation in the inclusive extracurricular

activity or Theme 5.

Question 13: What quality/character trait do you feel developed most in your child as a result of this experience?

Similar to Question 12, Question 13 elicited specific positive personality traits that grew in the young adults from their parents perspective. An increase in empathy was repeated related both to the individuals with disabilities and towards diversity and differences in the world.

> A better understanding of the world in general. She really did not have a lot of diversity as far as her life; an understanding that the world is made up of many different kinds of people *(P-B)*.

P-D lists empathy, acceptance and inclusion as traits of increase for her sons, while P-C adds some depth and description to her son's perceived gain in empathic responding:

> I definitely think the empathy for him as a student. I think having something he felt passionate about completely changed his approach to school. His compassion and empathy towards kids who are born with challenges *(P-C)*.

A clear thematic connection can be made to questions 12 and 13 as well as the participants' responses to the questions respectively. Theme 5 or a notable increase or change in a personality trait shows up again.

Question 14: Was there a specific peer with a disability that your child connected with? If yes, what do you think your student gained from the friendship?

Each participant was able to identify at least one peer with a disability with whom their child developed a meaningful and authentic friendship. The follow-up questions

which focused on their perspective as to what their child gained from the friendship

allowed for a more detailed thematic analysis.

P-B's response aligned concisely with Theme 2 or having a sense of belonging in

a meaningful and philanthropic organization.

> She had somebody to eat (lunch) with every day. I was really grateful for that because she didn't have to sit with those girls who did not have a seat for her at their table. There is nothing worse than your kids telling you that, they said they didn't have a seat for me at the table." *(P-B)*.

Unlike P-B's response, P-C's response supported Theme 1 understanding individuals

with disabilities better and providing exposure to the community. Later in the interview,

P-C explains that the more knowledge her son gained about his peers with disabilities,

their differences and unique strengths and challenges, the further his decision to enter the

field of special education solidified. Therefore, clear thematic ties to Theme 3 or career

influence are evidently budding in this response:

> I think he has gained an understanding of what those kids go through such as the social skills that they struggle with and how it's difficult for them to interact socially. Some of the things are obvious when you see a physical disability but when you experience or try to understand what it is like for that child to not be able to just interact and do things socially that he/she really wants to do. We don't recognize all of those things just through typical interaction *(P-C)*.

Comparably, when asked how she felt this experience or exposure has changed

her daughter's thinking, she also identified the solidification of career direction in her

daughter's life:

> I think just to have a direction in her life is probably the most important thing for her. It's where she finds her self-worth *(P-B)*.

From the perspective of P-D, her son benefited from the bond made by being part

of something meaningful, Theme 2 or the sense of belonging to an organization that is

making positive change through action. Additionally, her response supports that along with the sense of belonging comes feelings of accomplishment and pride in the organization and what it represents.

> One of his peers was non-commutative. I remember my son came home from school one day and he was like, "Oh my gosh, mom! he said, 'Hi' to me in the hall." Because my son would walk by and often say "Hi" to his peer and one day when my son wasn't looking, the peer with a disability said "Hi" to him. That was a huge and memorable moment for my son *(P-D)*.

When speaking about gains from a friendship her daughter had with a peer with a disability, P-B shares a powerful experience; defining further Theme 2 or sense of belonging as well as constructs for implication of future community exposure, Theme 1, and authentic inclusion opportunities that carry over directly from the program.

> I think that is more of an authentic friendship. Truly, my daughter has spent more time socially with her peer than any other kid. They go to lunch, shopping, all over. I know she would be open to maintaining any of those relationships that she has made *(P-B)*.

In addition to answering all 14 interview questions, all interviewees provided additional information when asked to either clarify a response or if they had anything meaningful to add to the study. Although some of these responses fit logically within the question-by-question analysis, much of this additional information will be shared in the theme-by-theme overview analysis that follows. The analysis of this information separately from the direct question responses increases the strength of the recurring themes made evident in the question-by-question analysis.

A theme-by-theme summary will follow in an attempt to organize and connect, for the reader, the themes across multiple questions and participants. Theme analysis

provides more depth to the analysis of data. Five major thematic points were coded after intensive data analysis of the raw interview dictations and are outlined in the table below. The coding process mimicked the one referenced by Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) in Chapter 3: Methodology. First, the researcher reviewed the dictated interviews in their entirety. Next, the researcher began to highlight the recurring "significant statements" or repetitive phrases throughout the interviews. This process is called "horizonalization" From there, the researcher began to develop "clusters of meaning" by sorting these "significant statements" into themes, using a unique color for each new theme identified. All the potential themes were listed on a separate document, each with its corresponding textual evidence from the dictated interviews. Finally, these "clusters of meaning" or themes were developed into the written description below or theme-by-theme analysis giving an overarching picture of what participants experienced. This process is called *textual description* (Creswell, 2007). Several constructs developed to support each of the themes. Table 2 below provides a visual summary of these constructs which will be further described in the theme-by-theme analysis.

Table 2: Thematic Summary and Correlating Constructs

Theme	Descriptor Used	Constructs
Theme 1	Community Exposure	• Programs in question increase typical high school students' exposure to their peers with disabilities. • Longitudinal effects can be predicted beyond the high school programs based on experiential evidence.
Theme 2	Sense of Belonging/Meaningful Participation	• Typical peers find a peer group where they experience a positive sense of belonging socially. • Typical peers reap positive personal traits (related to Theme 5) through their involvement in a philanthropic organization or an organization that promotes the greater good.
Theme 3	Career Influence	• Students are exposed to the possibility of a future in the health and human services field related to individuals with disabilities (i.e. Special Education; Speech; Occupational, Physical or Behavioral Therapy; Mental Health Support, etc.) • Students with an interest in the field are able to further solidify or refute their proposed interest by experiencing supporting those with disabilities as high school students. • Students with an interest in the field often experience the satisfaction and reward of celebrated accomplishments of their peers with disabilities.
Theme 4	Time Management	• Students are tagged with high expectations for participation in academics, extracurriculars, part-time work, family obligations and community organizations, leaving little free time. • Parents find their students manage their time better with a busy schedule and high expectations for participation. • Sports, arts and other extracurricular activities can get in the way of consistent participation in inclusive extracurriculars if a student is participating in both.
Theme 5	Change in Personal Trait	• Parents noted an increase in self-worth as a direct result of participation in the program(s). • Parents noted an increase in confidence as a direct result of participation in the program(s). • Parents noted an increase in empathy and empathetic responding as a direct result of participation in the program(s).

In order to qualify and remain a thematic key point, extensive coded evidence to support the theme needed to be found across all four interviews. Other thematic key points were a part of the initial analysis but were later eliminated as evidence did span broadly enough across interviews and questions.

Theme 1

Exposure to peers with disabilities may be the most transparent theme that presented itself in the study. Students are exposed to time with their peers with disabilities in an environment that would likely not occur in the absence of the inclusive extracurricular organization. The easily anticipated benefit from the parents' perspective was that it allowed for personal student growth in experiences with a diverse population. P-A describes it from the perspective of her older daughter with a disability:

> I would say that the community as a whole is pretty receptive. Every time we have a performance there are more people in the audience. I haven't heard many negative comments at all from parents of typical kids. We came here when my daughter with a disability was three and I think it was the best move we could have made. This could be a needed community characteristic for success- a community who is receptive *(P-A)*.

A more covert construct outlined by interviewees was that longitudinally, the exposure and interaction facilitated by the inclusive extracurricular organizations in high school would have effects on the community where their students would likely live and work as adults. When asked as a follow-up question, "Do you think high school experiences and programs have any effect on the community and bring about more awareness about people living with disabilities? Do you think it is a positive or negative outcome?" P-A responded with affirmation and an unexpected connection to long-term outcomes:

> I would say it would be positive. You figure all the kids that they went to school with and for as much inclusion as we have had, this and the next generation are going to be our managers, our CEOs, our shop owners, and I think they are going to be receptive to hiring our kids that have different needs because they have been exposed to it *(P-A)*.

Both constructs, immediate outcomes and delayed outcomes related to the community to which the high school belongs, were supported by multiple interviewees. When asked to share any specific moment that was memorable for her son, P-C explained a community inclusion opportunity that occurred outside of the inclusive extracurricular organization:

> When we went over and did dance pictures at the family home of one of the peers; just watching him with those kids, interacting, and they were all taking pictures together. It was a really cool moment (P-C).

This moment portrays both generalization of benefits initiated by the program to events in the community outside of the programs as well as describing inclusion in an authentic state for the peer with a disability and the typical peer. It was evident in all four interviews that from the parents' perspective, community generalization was both achieved and extended by the organizations in question.

Theme 2

P-C's explanation of dance pictures that closes out Theme 1 support provides a natural connection between themes 1 and 2. Theme 2 focuses on the construct that parents felt their students gained a sense of belonging and meaningful philanthropic participation as a result of their participation in the inclusive organization. In P-C's dance picture response, it could easily be identified that from her perspective, her son felt both a sense of belonging and one of being a part of something bigger than himself. In a previous comment, P-B provides support for this theme as she describes the stability in

friendship that from her perspective was gained from participation in the organization. P-D explains her own perspective as well as the inferred benefits to her sons as she describes the sense of belonging that comes with sharing success of individuals with physical disabilities:

> The mentor's (typical peer's) friends will come to see the shows. It's not just the parents. I would cry watching a specific student with a physical disability standing there and doing it without being in the (wheel) chair. They just melt your heart when overcoming these challenges *(P-D)*.

To further emphasize this construct, P-D explains that she feels utilizing personal experience with an inclusive drama club as the focal point for his or her college entry essay shows character and commitment to something outside of self. P-D points out that in belonging to an inclusive organization there is so much more than participation in a more common extracurricular activity:

> If a typical peer, like my sons for example, participate in an inclusive drama club and write their college entrance essay about the impact that it had on their life, that is huge; more so than "Oh yeah, I played basketball with a bunch of kids that did drugs and got in trouble *(P-D)*.

Theme 2 also bleeds into Theme 5 or developing a personality trait or quality based solely on participation in the organization. The distinction in analysis was difficult in several transcripts. However, interview responses that focused on the outcomes themselves (i.e. sense of belonging, feel good emotions that come with meaningful participation to a philanthropic goal) were categorized in Theme 2; whereas, interview responses that spoke to the longer term outcomes that developed into a character trait or increase (i.e. self-worth) supported both Theme 2 and Theme 5. A pointed example from

P-C follows:

> I think any time you have that opportunity, I think it is great for high school students because kids that age tend to be very self-focused and any time you have an opportunity to work with somebody who is truly struggling with life problems and get outside yourself, I think that helps them to shift that self-focus. I think that is just a really important thing that happens through growing and maturity. But for those kids to get a chance to do that in high school, it really helps them to make that shift in maturity to realizing that there is so much more than how everything is affecting me. I think it is just a great opportunity for those kids *(P-C)*.

In further support, P-D describes self-worth increasing in her daughter as a long-term outcome on several occasions. Each of these responses is notable in the thematic analysis of both Theme 2 and Theme 5.

Theme 3

Theme 3 takes a different feel and develops a distinctive construct; some students that participated in inclusive extracurricular organizations were exposed to career options in the health and human service field. Through participation in the organizations and working alongside their peers with disabilities, some students who were previously interested in these fields were further solidified in their particular field or area of interest. While for others, the experience was an introduction to the possibilities of the field as a career path. Still a third subset of study participants felt their students' participation had little to no effect on either choosing or not choosing to go into the field. From the perspective of P-C, her son was in the second subset mentioned above; he had not previously identified the health and human service fields related to working with individuals with disabilities as a possible or preferred career path.

It is kind of interesting because I would not have seen him on that path but once he got involved it just seemed like such a natural fit for him. I don't think my son would have thought of those careers had he not had the opportunity to kind of get immersed in that. I don't think it would have been on his radar *(P-C)*.

P-B relates her perspective of her daughter's exposure in a paralleling nature:

She was going to an interior design camp up at a local university. She was set on attending that same local university for Fashion Merchandising and then after getting involved with this she changed her future major. It totally changed her career path *(P-B)*.

On the contrary, from the perspective of P-D in regard to her sons, it is critical to note that not every participant will follow that career path and that their participation can still be meaningful in regard to other constructs identified in the study. P-D also describes the third subset; solidification of career path for students that have already identified this as an interest area in regard to her niece.

It did not drive them (sons) to go into education or special needs or anything like that. But it was still a positive experience. My niece knew she wanted to go in to education but this solidified the going down the special needs path *(P-D)*.

In all three levels of future career influence, all participants' responses were indicative that their child had a positive experience. Likely the most powerful was the closing statement from P-B which summarizes her daughter's experience and the effect on her future career from a mother's perspective:

I thought it was wonderful. I am so glad she was able to do that and I hope that she again will be able to, as a teacher, do those programs again *(P-B)*.

This closing comment demonstrates the power of influence that extracurricular inclusive activities can have on typical high school students. It also makes a distinct connection back to Theme 1. That is, if P-B's daughter utilizes her experience and exposure from this high school experience to further drive and develop her career as a

special educator, she will, in turn, pass on positive experiences and exposure to the next generation of typical peers. The theme of growing community exposure and authentic engagement is prominent in this full circle example.

Though career influence was not present in all of the participants' experiences, the parents whose students were impacted described the experience as life-changing, making it an essential theme for inclusion in the outcome of this study. It is also notable that of four participants selected by the study selection process described in the methods section, two of the participants described a high level of impact from the program on their children's career path. This is powerful information, given the sample. Additionally, implications can be made later on in regard to the characteristics and personality traits that may serve as the optimal typical peer for inclusive extracurriculars; perhaps the same traits can be found in individuals who pursue careers in the health and human services fields.

Theme 4

One area of interest addressed primarily in the analysis of questions 6, 7 and 8 posed an opportunity for participants to share their perspective on "fitting inclusive extracurricular activities into the day of busy high school students." Question 8 specifically was structured to facilitate negative or challenging outcomes from a parental perspective if there were any to uncover. Literature in Chapter 2 identified "fitting extracurriculars in" as a potential barrier for typical peers' participation in inclusive extracurriculars. Therefore, it was imperative that the study set out to identify and analyze these potential challenges from the perspective of the parent participants.

First, it is important to note that none of the participants brought the theme or topic up when they were asked to add any additional information. Therefore, there is minimal information to analyze beyond the initial responses to questions 6, 7 and 8. From that initial analysis, it was inferred that the targeted high school was a perfect setting to assess this challenge because participants defined it as high-performing academically. Participants also reported they felt the district administrators and staff held their students to high expectations for academic, family, community and extracurricular participation. P-C explains this construct concisely as part of her response when asked a follow-up to Question 9: What is your perspective on the expectations of the administration and staff at the high school for students' participation and involvement?

> I think that the district sets a pretty high standard. Clearly, when you talk about the Standardized Tests, they tend to score in the higher numbers. Most students will go to college from here, I'm thinking it is somewhere around 98%. They (district) also push extracurriculars like band, sports, and all those kind of things. I think the typical student in the district has a pretty full schedule *(P-C)*.

Based on the analysis of responses of questions 6, 7 and 8 and overall constructs collected throughout the interviews, all four participants agreed on the major outcome of this theme. From a parent's perspective, the expectations of their typical high school student were very high; however, their participation in the inclusive extracurricular did not in any way negatively affect other commitments or expectations. Peers became better time managers and were motivated to fit the activity into their tight schedules. Although the motivation for involvement was unique for each peer as described in the analysis of Question 4, (What was the motivation for your student to join/participate in the extracurricular inclusive activity?) each peer managed time effectively to participate fully in the inclusive organizations of their choice. Time management is a skill the literature

identifies as imperative in the development of our typical high school students, making this theme paramount to this study's overall implications. One of the major purposes of this study is to outline and define systematically the perspectives of parents of typical peers so that administrators and special educators will have clear constructs around which to base possible future inclusive programming.

Theme 5

To nearly every question, at least one participant responded with an area of growth or increase in a character or personality trait she observed in her child. Perhaps the general perspective of a proud parent focuses on growth of his or her child, however, there is no more reliable or important judge of this theme than the parent. When asked to share any additional information or follow-up information at the closing of the interview, P-C responded with this quote:

> I think any time you have that opportunity, I think it is great for high school students because kids that age tend to be very self-focused and any time you have an opportunity to work with somebody who is truly struggling with life problems and get outside yourself, I think that helps them to shift that self-focus. I think that is just a really important thing that happens through growing and maturity. But for kids to get a chance to do that in high school, it really helps them to make that shift in maturity to realizing that there is so much more than how everything is effecting me. I think it is just a great opportunity for those kids. I know it was great for my son. *(P-C)*

P-C connects with Theme 5 as she describes her perspective of her son's personal growth to Theme 2 where participants outlined a sense of belonging in "something bigger than themselves." Arguably, students gaining empathy, compassion, and self-worth from the perspective of parents is the strongest and most impactful theme discovered as a result of this study. In the field of education, whether from parent, school or community

perspective, it is difficult to argue that this character growth in students is not the single most valuable accomplishment in the overall development.

To summarize the constructs of this theme, analysis of responses from participants to questions 10 and 12 note an increase or development in their children of characteristics and personality traits of empathy, diversity, acceptance, inclusion, leadership, communication, self-worth and self-confidence. As an additional data point, a word count analysis of all interview transcripts was done. The table below shows the total frequency of reference to each trait across participants and interviews.

Table 3: Most Common Traits Found in Interview Dictations

Personality Characteristic or Trait	Frequency of Occurrences (Most to Least)	Percentage of Participants Who Responded
Empathy (empathetic)	10	75%
Inclusion	9	100%
Self-Worth	5	50%
Leadership	4	50%
Self-confidence	3	50%
Communication	2	25%
Acceptance	2	50%
Diversity	1	25%

As evidenced by this visual representation, empathy was the single most identified characteristic or personality trait for growth and development in the peers from the perspective of their parents. Inclusion came in a close second, though it is noteworthy that some instances of "inclusion" were specific to community inclusion and the peers' active role in promoting that, not necessarily that they developed more or increased inclusive tendencies themselves. The numerical analysis provides another support for

positive outcomes for peers from a parent's perspective. Similar to Theme 4, the constructs identified in Theme 5 will be important to the overall purpose of the study; bringing light to common outcomes of participation in inclusive extracurricular activities for typical peers from the perspective of the most important stakeholders: their parents.

4.3 Summary and Conclusion of Data Analysis

The dual qualitative interview analytical method which began with a question-by-question analysis followed by a holistic thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive analysis of all constructs detected by the researcher during the interview process. The question-by-question description and commentary allow for an authentic feel for the progression of each of the interviews.   The thematic analysis more concisely defines the constructs within each identified theme and provides an opening for the content of Chapter 5: implications, limitations and future areas of research in consequence of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 will serve three unique purposes. First, there will be a reflection on the major areas revealed in Chapter 4 and implications made as a result for school leaders and special educators. Next, the limitations of the study will be identified and the effects these limitations may have on the study's results and implications. Finally, recommendations for further research in the area of defining outcomes on typical peers from their participation in inclusive extracurricular activities in public high schools, while also making extensions into areas related to PMI and its use in public schools.

Responses to research questions defined in Chapter 1 and data analysis that followed drive the intended purpose of this study and are listed for review.

Research Question 1: What effects do participation in an inclusive extracurricular group have on neurotypical students attending public high schools from their parents' perspective?

After completing interviews with four identified participants and a dual analysis, five major themes clearly arose. Each of these themes outlined an effect that participation in an inclusive extracurricular activity had on a neurotypical high school student from the perspective of his or her parents. The intent of this study allowed the interviewer to remain neutral in asking initial and follow-up questions of the participants. Most thematic implications, defined later, center around positive outcomes for the typical peers,

however, several possible limitations to the study and the intervention were also highlighted in the interviews. The implications, as well as the limitations, directly correlated to identified themes will be discussed respectively.

Research Question 2: How do these effects impact high school students (neurotypical and developmentally delayed), their families and their communities?

Increasing the depth of the study, the researcher asked interview questions about how the participants though their student's personal effects may impact the effects on the community as a whole. Four of the five identified themes have implications to this research question whereas one theme would apply only to the initial research question. Effects on the community are intended to be a tertiary outcome of the research study.

The interview process and data analysis were completed effectively and with fidelity while protecting the confidentiality of the interview participants. The depth and breadth of themes and corresponding constructs described in the data analysis provide a comprehensive view of the possibilities of this new body of literature in the field of special education.

5.2. Implications of Themes Revealed

Theme 1 or *Community Exposure* implies that peer participation in an inclusive extracurricular activity allows for an overall increase in acceptance of individuals with disabilities in the high school's community. All participant responses included a noted increase in exposure of individuals with disabilities to both the high school community and the greater surrounding community. With increasing importance of school leaders partnering with local commercial organizations for financial and structural support,

Theme 1 has direct positive implications for school leaders and their development of inclusive extracurriculars in their public high schools. Additionally, all four participants valued effective community exposure and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Each one recognized and articulated the change, explaining that community exposure when they were young contrasted starkly with the community exposure and acceptance that their children are currently experiencing.

Theme 1 derived another important indirect implication for public school special educators and school leaders. High school students and young adults with disabilities will be recognized readily as productive and working members of society in their local communities. Implications for better use of federal and local funds related to employment and independent living of adults with disabilities are heavily affected by this growth in community exposure. Although individuals with disabilities were not the intended primary target of the study, school leaders are tasked with the challenge of successfully preparing and transitioning young adults with disabilities to effective employment and independent living in their community. The legislation and government funding around this population is in constant change and disarray, often leaving the future of individuals with disabilities unpredictable.

Implications derived from Theme 2 or *Sense of Belonging and Meaningful Participation* center around the importance of mental wellness of both high school students and Americans in general. Current literature described an astronomical increase in mental illness among American teens. Participant responses supported the construct that involvement in an inclusive extracurricular activity gave their students motivation to go to school that combatted the social anxiety and pressure that exist for teens in public

high schools. The constructs of Theme 5 or *Change in Personal Character Traits* imply that the experience developed positive outcomes for each of the participants' children. Participants unanimously described an increase in empathy as a core trait. Constructs of Theme 5 also identified making the high school community and surrounding community a better place to live and work. School leaders can utilize these implications to further support development and maintenance of extracurricular inclusive opportunities. School leaders can also include this construct in their required mental wellness plan as a research-backed option for peers to access mental wellness opportunities and supports. The benefits to peers in PMI-based studies are well defined in the literature review; however, the present study implies that these benefits can be generalized to typical high school-aged students, specifically from their parents' perspectives.

Theme 3 or *Career Influence* highlights an additional correlating construct that has implications for another common task challenging school administrators. The focus on career development and postsecondary education goals are critical as an increasing number of college-educated young adults are without jobs. School leaders have been tasked with working on exposure to careers in demand and tied to student interest earlier in the high school experience. Legislation and federal funding have increased around this expectation. Public high school leaders are expected to collect and analyze career preparation data on a regular basis. Leaders and teachers are looking for innovative and cost-effective ways to increase exposure to careers in demand. The data analysis implies that of the four participants, two stated that their children's participation directly and positively impacted their career path. Both participants identified the authenticity of the process. Inclusive extracurricular activities could be the first exposure to the field of

special education or a related service field (speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavior therapy, recreational therapy, social work or school/medical psychology and counseling) or help to solidify a career path for a young person with an interest in this area. In the field of special education, post- secondary programs are working to get students authentic experiences in the field early in their educational career (i.e. freshman or sophomore years of an undergraduate program). However, if students gain this authentic experience in high school the probability of successful completion of their post-secondary program increases exponentially. From a typical peer's parent's perspective, this increased probability of success and confirmation of career path direction for their child may be one of the most valuable positive implications.

Theme 4 or *Time Management* has direct connections to the implication that school leaders can promote mental wellness and life balance through the program. The literature explains that mental wellness or lack thereof is often impacted by the ability of the student to manage time effectively. It is also critical that students have a balance between expectations focused on academic success and expectations focused on their character development. The balance creates a structure for that teen to remain mentally healthy. The participants unanimously identified high expectations and busy schedules for high school students whether or not that was the specific case for their child. Time management was identified as a positive programmatic outcome. However, one prominent limitation related to the schedules of typical high school students will be discussed in the limitation section.

In summary, the following implications help support the development and

maintenance of inclusive extracurricular activities in public high schools from the perspective of neurotypical students' parents, school leaders and special educators.

- Exposure and acceptance of authentic inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the high school setting increase.
- Exposure and acceptance of authentic inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the community setting increase.
- School leaders can promote positive mental health through peer participation in the organization facilitating a sense of belonging and overall contributions to the greater good.
- School leaders can promote positive mental health through identified growth of positive personal traits or characteristics of peers.
- School leaders can promote a positive school culture as a result of this growth.
- School leaders can promote authentic peer career exploration in the health and human service field and collect corresponding data for reporting.
- Parents are pleased with these career exploration opportunities that ensure their child's successful completion of a post-secondary program that fits his or her interests and allows access positions in demand.
- School leaders can promote effective time management in their typical high school students while maintaining high academic expectations.

5.3. Limitations

Though many powerful implications were derived from the data analysis of the

interviews, three major limitations were identified. First, participants identified that although time management or Theme 4 provided benefits for their children, it also posed a real problem. Participants reported that their students often felt stress and pressure when an inclusive extracurricular commitment overlapped with an existing commitment and they were faced with making a decision. They explained that it was burdensome if the students felt they had "no choice" but to attend a mandatory academic event as they were letting down their peers with disabilities that likely meant the most to them. It was noted by the participants that involvement in sports and the arts made it very difficult for some students to consistently participate in the inclusive extracurricular. The expectations of high school students will likely continue to increase, making this limitation more prominent in future research studies.

Secondly, one participant identified an isolated instance which occurred early in her child's school career, unrelated to the inclusive extracurricular. Inclusion of students with disabilities who demonstrated maladaptive or disruptive behaviors interrupted full access to education for their students and other typical peers. She explained that from her perspective that one of her son's elementary teachers focused an unreasonable amount of attention on a student with a behavior need. She mentioned that inclusion is most often a positive experience for both parties, but that it can be limiting when the entire class of typical peers' education begins to be compromised. She explained this situation was isolated and easily rectified by giving that student more individualized support staff. However, it is a notable possible limitation for inclusive extracurricular activities.

Finally, two of the four participants hypothesized that the targeted high school benefited from a healthy district-wide budget. They noted that the inclusive

extracurricular programs were incredible experiences for their children, however, they guessed it would be difficult for other districts to replicate it, given the constant funding cuts for education and extracurriculars specifically. District leaders tend to look for fringe programs or services outside the core educational state-required programming when attempting to trim shrinking budgets. In order to maintain local tax-generated funding for school districts it is imperative that inclusive opportunities are a core value of all community members. District financial officers are tasked with being detail-oriented and transparent when it comes to the school budget. If inclusion isn't a core community value, eliminating it will likely be viewed as a money-saving opportunity.

In addition to the limitations detected through data analysis, there is one multifaceted limitation identified by the researcher that relates only to the structural and procedural guidelines of the present study. This information is critical when determining the generalizability of the implications on other settings and populations.

In connection and repetition of the participants' hypothesis around district financial status impacting effective development and maintenance of inclusive extracurricular programs in their public high schools, it should be noted that the targeted high school is within a community classified as upper middle class. The median household income in the targeted community is $126k, compared with the national average of $59k (dataus.com). In addition to local tax dollars funding a higher total budget for the district in comparison with neighboring districts, several other correlating factors of influence exist.

Due to the nature of the demographics of the targeted community, the level of

education is higher than the national and local averages. The education level and access to post-secondary education have many implications. An implication critical to this study is the increased likelihood of acceptance and inclusion of individuals with disabilities because the general population has more knowledge, and in turn, likely has more acceptance. Members of communities where individuals on average are not educated to this same level, may not have the same exposure to acceptance and understanding. Making this assumption is a sweeping generalization and should be analyzed with caution; however, it does present a potential limitation for communities and districts with different demographics.

Participants were asked to share their views on the school administration of the targeted district and their outlook on student expectations for involvement, academic and otherwise. Interview responses aligned clearly to develop a construct that the targeted district had academic excellence, specifically four-year college preparation, at the forefront of their values. One participant estimates that 98% of the targeted high school seniors attend a four-year college. This parent made a very accurate guess. According to the school district's website, 97% of students attend four- year undergraduate programs in comparison with the national average of 69.7%.

Although the demographics of the studied community and school district present some glaring limitations, data collected and analyzed from interviews tell an important story about individual experiences which arguably could be applied in communities and districts with differing demographics.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Areas of Research

A description of the present study, as well as the current literature around the topic were presented in chapters 1 and 2. A clear gap in the literature was defined. Peer-mediated intervention used with typical public high school students and their peers with disabilities had not yet been explored. The present study, data analysis and implications provide a groundwork for filling this gap. The study adds a framework with which replication could provide similar information regarding other school districts in other locations nationwide.

The limitation of unique community demographics in the present study drives a need for future qualitative interview and phenomenological research studies to be completed in communities and school districts with varying demographics. If replication of the present study is implemented in multiple school districts in northeast Ohio that have established inclusive extracurricular programs, implications made as a result of this study may generalize to a wider audience.

Replication of this study in a variety of school districts and communities -- first in northeast Ohio, then expanding to other geographic locations -- is pivotal in the continued evidence collected to support development and maintenance of inclusive extracurricular programs. Action research studies that focus on how to set up and develop said programs is another critical area of future research. A few national organizations mentioned in this manuscript have specific procedural guidelines and processes; however, as relayed by the interviewees, sometimes the most successful and influential inclusive extracurricular programs are those developed by typical peers. Action research studies following the development of such programs from start to finish would provide a valuable and cohesive

training guide to parallel the outcome research initiated by the present study.

PMI methodology and procedures were loosely mentioned throughout the study. However, as mentioned, action research completed on the specifics of inclusive programming in the public school sector would give way to the unique training protocols and methodology defined in the literature utilized in these programs. The use of PMI principles should not be limited to extracurricular activities in public high schools. Future research could target the effects of PMI in an academic setting with twice exceptional students (students with ASD and giftedness) in public high schools. Additional populations could include athletes with and without disabilities, elementary school recess interventions and students with and without learning disabilities in the academic setting. The possibilities of applying the principles of PMI in public schools are limited only by the creativity of educators and school leaders.

Speaking to the specificity of the training protocols utilized, another future area of research could build upon Theme 3 or *Career Influence.* Future research teams could develop a training course eligible for high school or college credit for individuals interested in the health and human services field. The content would focus on introduction to disabilities, psychology, applied behavior analysis and scripted use of PMI. Students mentioned in the present study received a volunteer hour credit for their participation in some cases; however, a brick-and-mortar course paired with onsite meaningful fieldwork would give public high school educators and leaders a dual advantage. School leaders would provide an educational option in an area where professional positions are increasing to typical students participating in the class. This would involve creating both course variety and meaningful career exploration. Second,

the school leaders would be meaningful PMI-based inclusive opportunities to students with disabilities. Students taking the class could also help collect and analyze the data from the action research with the support and oversight of a professional.

Participant perspective is of the utmost importance in a phenomenological study. The interviewer attempts to capture the participants' story while gaining insight into their perspective on the targeted research questions. Therefore, interviewing typical peers themselves would allow for deeper understanding of their individual and unique perspectives. The focus of the present study was to highlight the perspective of arguably the most important stakeholder, the parent. However, gathering perspectives from the source itself would also add value to this body of research.

There are countless future directions for this budding body of research in special education literature. The possibilities of the use of PMI on newly paired populations and probable outcomes that follow are exciting. The goals of this initial research study: (1) to determine if any clear outcomes existed as a result of typical high school students participating in inclusive extracurricular activities and (2) utilize this information to guide the future use of Peer Mediated Intervention, have been achieved. Outcomes were clearly defined from the parents' perspective through the qualitative interview process and phenomenological analysis. The outcomes were positive in nature and posed clear benefits to the participants. It is the hope of the researcher that this study is replicated nationwide in high schools varying in demographics and geographic locations. If meaningful replication occurs, that would provide stronger evidence for financial support and development of PMI initiatives in public high school inclusive extracurricular programs. Just as the thematic analysis of the present study inferred, increasing these

programs has a positive correlation with what is likely the single most important goal of special education today -- developing programming that produces effective citizens with disabilities who thrive in their communities socially and vocationally.

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Appendix A

INFORMATIONAL LETTER FOR THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL INCLUSIVE
EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS OF
NEUROTYPICAL STUDENTS

Principal Investigator	**Co-Investigator**
Dr. Toni Mild	Rachel Pasquerilla
toni.mild@sru.edu	rap6120@sru.edu
724.738.2454	330.402.4158

1. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY AND WHAT YOU WILL DO AS A PARTICIPANT:

The purpose of this study is to examine the benefits of neurotypical high school student participation in inclusive extracurricular organizations or programs in a public high school. The research study is attempting to thematically analyze parent perception on this participation. The participants will be 3-7 parents of neurotypical high school students or high school alumni that participated in an inclusive extracurricular organization at public high schools. As a participant, the researcher will ask you to respond to a series of questions during an interview session. The interview session will last approximately one hour. You must also be at least 18 years old to participate.

2. INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS – TO PARTICIPATE, DECLINE, OR WITHDRAW:

Participation in this research study is on a voluntary basis and you are not obligated to respond to every question during the interview session. You also have the right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties or consequences.

3. CONTACT INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If at any time throughout this study, you have questions or concerns about the process, the interview questions, the data, or how to report a problem, please contact the principal investigator or the co-investigator.

Principal Investigator   **Co-Investigator**

Dr. Toni Mild   Rachel Pasquerilla
    toni.mild@sru.edu   rap6120@sru.edu

724.738.2454   330.402.4158

Slippery Rock University   Slippery Rock University

Please contact the Institutional Review Board at Slippery Rock University at 724.738.4846, via email at irb@sru.edu, or send a letter to Slippery Rock University, 1 Morrow Way, 008 Patterson Hall, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania 16057 if you have concerns about your rights as a participant, or would like to register a complaint.

This informational letter is designed to share details about the research study with perspective participants. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your participation. Thank you for your interest in participating in this educational study.

Appendix B

Interviewee/Participant Invitation Email and Communication

From: Rachel A. Pasquerilla and Dr. Toni Mild
Sending: (Participants)

Subject: Effects of Inclusive Extracurricular Activities on Your High School Student or Alum

I am writing to you to request your participation in an interview process which will serve as the paramount of my doctoral dissertation. The project is attempting to get more feedback about your experiences with inclusive extracurricular programs at a public high school as well as discuss the effects it had on your son or daughter. Your responses to these interviews will help us evaluate the effectiveness of the offerings so that we can disseminate the information gained about the effects of these programs to interested parties nationwide.

The interview process will be moderately extensive in that the study is based truly on the content of our conversations. I plan to interview each participant at least three times for 45 minutes to one hour. There may also be follow-up sessions or questions needed.

Your participation in this interview process is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses to any reports of these data. The SRU Institutional Review Board has approved the interview questions and process.
Should you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me at rap6120@sru.edu or 330.402.4158. Attached is an informational letter with details of participation.

Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your feedback is of the utmost importance to this project.

Sincerely,

Rachel A. Pasquerlla, EdS   Toni Mild, Ed.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Assistant Professor Department of Special
Education

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL INCLUSIVE
EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS OF
NEUROTYPICAL STUDENTS

Principal Investigator	**Co-Investigator**
Dr. Toni Mild	Rachel Pasquerilla
toni.mild@sru.edu	rap6120@sru.edu
724.738.2454	330.402.4158
Slippery Rock University	Slippery Rock University

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is known as a Consent to Participate in Research form. On this form, you will
find pertinent information about the study. The consent form will provide you with the
information you need to know before making a decision to participate in this particular
study. You will read about the purpose of the study and why you are being invited to
participate. This form will also provide details about the duration of your involvement
and the tasks you will be asked to complete.

Please read the information carefully in order to make an informed decision about
participating in this research study. You are encouraged to ask questions about the study
at any time. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this form.
If you decide to voluntarily participate in the study, you will receive a copy of this signed
consent form for your records.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

The eligible participants will be parents of current or alumni neurotypical high school
students that do attend or did attend the target high school and participated in an
inclusive extracurricular opportunity. Each of the participants selected must be at least
18 years old to participate.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research study is to examine from a parent's perspective how the

effects of participation in an inclusive extracurricular in a public high school influences a neurotypical high school student. The study will be conducted with parents of students or alumni of the targeted public high school in Ohio. The participants' responses will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The interviews will be conducted on the district's campus and will take approximately one hour to complete. Each participant will participate in 1-3 interviews based on the responses and conversation that follows. All interviews will be completed by December 2018.

5. WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to respond to a series of interview questions about your child's involvement in inclusive extracurricular opportunities and your perceptions based on that involvement.

6. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

The participants will have the opportunity to share their beliefs about inclusive extracurricular opportunities at public high schools. Additionally, you may learn more about these opportunities and their influence from this research study. The general population, especially those in the educational field, will have the opportunity to learn more about your perspective as a parent as well as the influence these opportunities can have on neurotypical public high school students.

7. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal and every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality. The participants may encounter the risk of breach of confidentiality during their participation in this research study. This is a possible risk for the participants if the researcher does not take measures to keep the data confidential and secured in a safe location. Breach of Confidentiality - The participants' responses will be coded throughout the study and will remain confidential. The data collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

8. HOW WILL YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

In order to protect your personal information and the study data, the following procedures will be utilized: As the researcher, I will transcribe the interview responses and code the information. All of your responses, written and digital, will be kept confidential and in a secure location. I will keep the written records in a locked filing cabinet and the electronic data (interview responses and transcriptions) will be password-protected.

9. WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS THROUGHOUT THE STUDY?

Please feel free to ask questions before the study, during the study, and after the study has been completed. If you have questions about this research project, or if you have a research-related issue, please contact the principal investigator (Dr. Toni Mild) at 724.977.5899 or the co-investigator (Rachel Pasquerilla) at 330.402.4158. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Slippery Rock University's Instructional Review Board at 724.738.4846 or via email at irb@sru.edu.

10. ARE YOU ABLE TO DROP OUT OF THE STUDY?

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you agree to be a participant in the study, but change your mind at a later date, you may contact the researcher to withdraw your participation. There are no consequences or penalties if you decide to withdraw from this research study.

11. WHAT IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS RELATED TO BEING A PARTICIPANT?

If you experience problems related to being a participant in this research study, the researcher will assist you; however, Slippery Rock University is not responsible for compensating research participants for complications or injury related to human subjects research.

12. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO IF I WOULD LIKE TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

Please be sure to read this consent form and ask questions about anything you may need to have clarified about the research study. If you chose to participate in this research study, you will need to sign this consent form. If you sign the form, you are agreeing to

voluntarily participate in the study.

I have had the opportunity to read this form, to ask questions, to have my questions clearly answered, and to have the information explained to me in my native language. I am also aware that I can decline participation and withdraw at any time and a signed copy of this consent form will be given to me for my records.

By signing below, I am agreeing to voluntarily participate in this research study.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Signature   **Print Name**   **Date**

By signing below, I am giving the researchers permission to audio-record my responses to the interview questions; however, the responses will be kept confidential.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Signature   **Print Name**   **Date**

By signing below, I am indicating that the participant has read and understands the information detailed in this document, to the best of my knowledge. The participant also received a copy of this signed consent form.

_____   _____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Print Name**   **Date**

Appendix D

Audiotape Release Form

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL INCLUSIVE
EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS OF
NEUROTYPICAL STUDENTS

Dr. Toni Mild   Rachel Pasquerilla
Principal Investigator   Co-Investigator
toni.mild@sru.edu   rap6120@sru.edu

We request the use of audiotape material of you as a part of our study. We specifically
ask your consent to use this material as we deem proper, specifically, for news releases,
professional publications, websites and pictorial exhibits related to our study. We also
emphasize that the appearance of these materials on certain media (websites, professional
publication, news releases) may require transfer of copyright of the images. This means
that your image may be used by other individuals. Regarding the use of your likeness in
audiotape, please check one of the following boxes below:

☐ I do

☐ I do not

Give unconditional permission for the investigators to utilize audiotapes of me.

_____   _____   _____
Participant Signature   Print Name   Date

PLEASE NOTE: Even should you choose not to allow your image or voice to be used,
we can still benefit from your inclusion as a research study participant.

Appendix E
Interview Script

Hello participant. Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of my study. Before we begin, I'd like to take some time to review the informed consent document and answer any questions you may have about the study, identifying information to be shared or the proposed intent of the study findings. Please read the letter of consent. Let me know if you have questions and if you'd like to proceed with the interview based on the contents of the letter. (Participant will read and sign letter, investigator will answer any questions.)

To begin, please state a pseudonym for your child as well as the current age/ educational stage (i.e. high school, post-secondary, etc.) years attended the target high school and inclusive extracurriculars participated in/length of time participated.

Question 1: What specific activities (i.e. weekly practice, athletic events, community outings, individual community experiences, etc.) did your child participate in?

Question 2: What specific organizations/clubs was your son/daughter a part of or currently a part of?

Question 3: Before they began participating in the club/organization, what was their involvement with peers with disabilities? At school? In the community/home?

Question 4: What was the motivation or reason behind your child joining club/organization?

Question 5: What were your initial thoughts about their participation in the club/organization?

Question 6: What other high school commitments did/does your child have? (i.e. honors classes, other clubs/organizations, arts, athletics etc.)

Question 7: What other commitments outside the school sector did/does your child have? (i.e. family, church, volunteer, part time work etc.)

Question 8: Was there concern about "fitting" the inclusive extracurricular into your teen's day? Please explain.

Question 9: Before they began participating in the club/organization, what was your view of high school staff and administration expectations for students?

Question 10: Did you notice a change in your child's empathic responding or other character traits after participation in the club/organization? Please explain. Was there a specific experience or moment where this occurred?

Question 11: What did your son/daughter say about the experience when he or she began the club/organization?

Question 12: What do you feel is the most valuable skill(s) gained from participation in the club/organization?

Question 13: What quality/character trait do you feel developed most in your child as a result of this experience?

Question 14: Was there a specific peer with a disability that your child connected with? If yes, what do you think your student gained from the friendship?

Appendix F
Permission to Contact and Building Use

Superintendent Permission Communication

From: Rachel A. Pasquerilla and Dr. Toni Mild
Sending: Superintendent (Target School District)

Subject: Effects of Inclusive Extracurricular Activities on Your High School Student or Alum

I am writing to you to request your permission to utilize contact information from parent/guardian of students of your high school gained through their participation in extracurricular programs. I am hoping to conduct parent interviews which will serve as the paramount of my doctoral dissertation. The project is attempting to get more feedback about their experiences with inclusive extracurricular programs at a public high school as well as to discuss the effects it had on their son or daughter. The responses to these interviews will help us evaluate the effectiveness of the offerings so that we can disseminate the information gained about the effects of these programs to interested parties nationwide.

The interview process will be moderately extensive in that the study is based truly on the content of our conversations. I plan to interview each participant up to three times for 45 minutes to one hour. Participation will be offered to parents selected by high school faculty based on student involvement. Pseudonyms will be utilized to protect each family's identity; however, basic demographic and geographical information about the district will be communicated in the dissertation allowing the research to be generalizable. For convenience of participants and the potential positive light this research will have on the district, it is my hope that the interviews can occur at the school buildings.

Parent participation in this interview process is completely voluntary and all of their responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with their responses to any reports of these data. The SRU Institutional Review Board has approved the interview questions and process.
Should you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me at rap6120@sru.edu or 330.402.4158

Thank you for your time and cooperation. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,
Rachel A. Pasquerilla, EdS   Toni Mild, Ed.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Assistant Professor Department of Special Education