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What's Special? Special Education in Lutheran Schools

By Linda S. Hensel

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Introduction

Lutheran education has always been special, but how can we make it exceptional?

Is it time to do some serious reassessment in your school and invest in special education? In my humble opinion, the answer is “yes”! Give me a few minutes and I will tell you why. This article will:

- 1) Make the case why you and your school should consider investing in some sort of special education programming if you haven't already.
- 2) Tell you about the challenges and opportunities every Lutheran school will experience in the pursuit of a special education ministry
- 3) Provide the latest research on special needs ministries already taking place in Lutheran schools.

It has been over 45 years since the passage of the first federal law that outlined the educational rights of students with disabilities. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), as it was known at the time, ensured that all children, regardless of ability, would have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The act has been reauthorized a number of times over the years, with the name changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1986. The most recent authorization occurred in 2004. While the intent of the law was to ensure that all children with disabilities enrolled in public schools received FAPE and the schools received funding to support the mandate, **nothing in the law precludes private, faith-based schools from educating students with disabilities or doing it well.** So, what services exist for students with disabilities in faith-based, and specifically Lutheran schools? What's special about special education in Lutheran K–8 schools? Is there a need for special education in our Lutheran schools? If so, how is it possible to serve students with special education needs within the walls of our Lutheran schools? The purpose of this monograph is to address these questions and stimulate your interest in special education in Lutheran schools.

In the fall of 2019, I took to the road to answer the question, “How are students with special needs being served in Lutheran K–8 Schools?” Fourteen Lutheran K–8 and PK–8 schools in five midwestern states took part in this research study. I interviewed 15 administrators and 17 special educators, and I observed 16 teachers. The interview protocol asked administrators and teachers to describe what motivates them to serve students with special needs, the successes they have had in doing so, the challenges that they have previously faced and currently face, and what they would want to tell others about serving students with special needs. In addition, I asked teachers to describe their professional practices in four areas identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) as foundational for serving students with special education needs: collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavior practices, and instruction (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017). Observations were used to document teaching practices in the four areas (collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral practices, and instruction) as well as observed challenges and successes.

The sample used in this research study was small but varied. The schools involved have been formally serving students with special needs anywhere from 4 to 33 years. Teacher experience with students who have special educational needs was also varied with a range of 1 to 34 years and a mean of 13.7 years. Ten of the 17 teachers had full time teaching positions at their schools, while the other seven were part time. All of the teachers held teaching licenses, with 14 of the 17 having specific special education licensure or endorsement. All schools were located in Midwestern states in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The size of schools varied with the total school population ranging from 116–389. The percentage of students in each school building being served by the special education teacher(s) ranged from 7 to 22 percent with a mean of 13 percent. Five schools hired their special education teachers through Lutheran Special Education Ministries (LSEM), three hired through LASE Specialized Education (LASE), and six hired their teachers independent of a Lutheran special education agency.

The students who were served by the special education teachers in these buildings included students with diagnosed disabilities as well as students who did not have a disability label but needed some additional intervention in academic subjects, usually language arts and/or mathematics. Teachers reported that the students they served had a wide variety of diagnosed disabilities. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Speech and Language Disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) were the most prevalent. All students were general education students in the PK/K–8 schools and received additional services from the special educator. All special education teachers employed a pull-out model of serving students with special needs, wherein they worked 1:1 or with small groups of students in their resource rooms to deliver specialized instruction to them. Some teachers referred to this as “direct teach.” Five of the 17 teachers also described some form of co-teaching

with general education teachers, either Parallel Teaching or One Teach, One Assist (Friend, 2015).

Why We Serve Students with Special Needs

Teachers and administrators described what motivates them to serve students with special education needs in their schools. The teachers' responses fell into two broad categories of Christian mission and Christian service. Their mission focus included a desire to share the love of God with their students and families, and the personal sense of calling on their lives to be teachers. Five teachers directly talked about their desire and opportunity to share the gospel with their learners. A teacher who previously worked in a public school, said, I "want them [students with special needs] to have the opportunity to learn about Jesus. I appreciate [the special education] opportunities at public schools, but I don't see why we can't provide that at Lutheran schools." Another teacher stated:

A big motivating factor [for me] now is that I love being able to talk to my kids about the gifts that God has given them. [I can] speak directly about God in those instances, to talk to kids about how they are blessed.

The opportunity to provide learners with an excellent education while also providing for their spiritual needs stood out as a big motivator for these teachers.

Another teacher summed up her Christian calling as a special educator by stating, "This is all I have ever done. I could not love my job more. This is my safe place and a safe place for students. This is totally my ministry and calling."

In addition to mission, the majority of the teachers had an altruistic reason to teach students with special education needs. They expressed a deep sense of service to children and their families in a variety of ways. Some teachers explained how their own personal or family experience with disability motivated them:

I initially got into this career because it was hard for me to learn as a kid. Kids can overcome if they are given the right tools and have someone that believes in them. I wanted to be that person for them.

Other teachers mentioned they wanted to be the teacher who helped students who struggled and be an advocate for them, as expressed by a teacher who said, "I've always had a heart and genuine love for kids who struggle academically, socially, emotionally, physically. Wherever their abilities are, I want to help them to grow in whatever manner I can and build their confidence and skills." Finally, teachers talked about the relationships they built and the learning that takes place when they can work with students one on one or in small groups:

I like working with kids in smaller groups, In general education, it was hard to connect with kids. I get to meet with my kids on a very individual level, meeting their needs. You have those bigger successes and ah-ha moments.

The motivation these teachers had for serving students with disabilities and other learning needs can be summed up by this quote, “I love to watch students learn, especially those who think that they can’t or it’s going to be too hard for them. I love it; that is my passion.”

I conducted interviews with a variety of administrators. They included principals, assistant principals, and administrators working with LSEM and LASE. They also described what motivated them to have a special education program and serve students with special needs. Similarly, their responses fell into the two broad categories of mission and service. Administrators specifically mentioned that they were motivated by the desire to tell students and their families about Jesus, such as the administrator who said, “Our purpose is to keep these kids in Lutheran elementary schools so they hear about Jesus every day. The most important thing is that they hear about Jesus every day.”

The unselfish desire to serve others stood out as an extremely motivating factor for these administrators. Service to others was expressed as serving the students and families in the school and surrounding community, and serving their general education teachers in the school. A general commitment to serve the community was summed up by this statement, “Like every other Lutheran school, we are a ministry to the community. Not just to serve our own members, but to reach out into the community. Special education allows us to meet needs of more students.” The deep sense of service to the families of the congregation and school was also evident. One principal said, “I work hard to make sure all children in our school have access to the help they need to be successful learners.” A number of administrators expressed that the future outcomes and successes of their students motivates them presently. “[We] eventually want them to get back on track so that they don’t show a [special education] need. We are trying to prepare them for high school as much as possible.”

Some administrators additionally stated that they were driven by the desire to support their general education teachers as they teach a diverse population of students. Remarks that spoke to this included the following: “It is to help the general education classroom teachers, because they cannot meet all the needs by themselves in their classrooms” and “My heart goes out to ... teachers who don’t have the time serve all the kids the way they want to and differentiate the teaching.” The motivation to serve students, families, and the communities by offering special education services at their schools, was summed up by one administrator who said, “Why would you not help those students? We are *called to serve God’s people* [emphasis added].”

The Challenges We Face

Serving students who have special education needs comes with its challenges in any private or public school setting. Teachers and administrators described their

past and present challenges of having a special education program in their school. Teachers expressed more than eight specific challenges they face, falling into two broad categories: 1) limited resources and 2) failing to meet needs. As one might predict, resources are limited in Lutheran schools, and teachers described the limitations they face in four areas: scheduling, finances, time, and caseloads. Scheduling intervention time for students with special needs was a challenge expressed by teachers in nearly half of the schools visited. Being the last priority when it comes to scheduling frustrated teachers, as expressed by the teacher who said:

We are low man on the totem pole when it comes to the schedule. Everything else gets scheduled first. If we had more say, it might be better. Our program is not regarded as the highest priority. We don't have the say in the schedule.

Financial and material resources are limited in these schools and classrooms. At least one school involved in this study charges additional tuition dollars for children to receive resource room support. The teacher in this building felt that charging extra tuition punished parents for having a child with special needs. In other buildings tuition is the same for all families and the money needed to support the resource room comes out of the general fund. Because of this, one teacher stated that her school's budget did not allow her to acquire the most up to date instructional resources needed by her students.

An additional challenge is the time required to provide for every child's needs as well as completing the necessary paperwork. "With the amount of students on my caseload, it's very easy for me to work long hours into the night and stay at school for a while. The balance between home life and work life is real," is a remark that speaks to the twin challenges of lack of time and large caseloads. Five teachers mentioned large caseloads as a primary challenge. As mentioned earlier, caseloads of teachers in this study ranged from 7 to 22 percent of the school population with a mean of 13 percent. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), in the 2019–2020 school year, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services in public schools was 14% of all students. The teachers in this study whose caseloads hover around the 13% mean face a challenge similar to their public-school colleagues nationwide. However, caseloads in the upper teens and low twenties present an added challenge for some of the Lutheran special educators. The high caseloads stem from a desire to assist all students presenting academic delays and needs and/or from a lack of personnel, both of which present a daily challenge for the teachers.

Teachers said that failing to meet the needs of students was another challenge. They mentioned both academic and social/emotional/behavioral needs. Teachers said that difficult behaviors, such as meltdowns or outbursts, presented a challenge as they either didn't have the training for managing them or the problematic behavior pulled them away from their other teaching obligations. In some cases, trying to meet the academic needs of all of the students on their caseloads was also a challenge as teachers served students in multiple grades with

multiple needs. “We have a lot of kids with high needs” is a comment that sums up this challenge.

A final challenge for some teachers was working with the parents of their students. In many instances, parents were supportive and grateful for the services the teachers provided, but five teachers expressed a challenge in working with parents, especially when parents disagreed with the services their child received or did not give permission for evaluations or special education services.

Although interviewed separately, the responses from administrators fell into the same two categories of limited resources and failing to meet needs. It probably comes as no surprise that finances were the most cited challenge of administrators. They discussed the difficulties that come with a lack of funding for their special education programs, such as outdated resources and lack of personnel. Several expressed that they would like to hire an additional teacher or special education aide, or increase the current teacher’s position to full time, but they did not have the budget for it. Somewhat related to budget, a few administrators additionally expressed that their special education teacher’s caseload was too high and it was a challenge to balance the needs of the students in their building with realistic expectations of teachers. “We have to be careful not to overextend [special education teacher] because it is so easy. I’ve told her not to take on more than she can handle. You have to have boundaries,” said one principal.

Administrators expressed that meeting the needs of all students with disabilities was a challenge. Many make difficult decisions about which students with disabilities they can adequately serve in their buildings and have had tough conversations with parents to inform them that they can’t or are no longer able to serve the needs of their child. “We can’t always say ‘yes’ to a family, and that breaks my heart,” is what one principal said. However, learning who they can serve and prioritizing services is an important lesson to learn and leads to a more successful special education program. “We do our best to find out [before the student enrolls] if we are equipped to meet their needs. There’s no benefit to the student and family to decide later that this is not a good situation for them.”

Administrators described what they have learned by overcoming challenges. Their responses centered around the two main ideas of communication and prioritization. **Communication with various stakeholders is important for the success of any special education program. Communicating well within the school building, with the local public-school district, and especially with parents are essential components to the success of the special education programs in this study.**

Public schools have an obligation to students with disabilities enrolled in private schools primarily in two ways. They are required to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities in the private schools located in their jurisdiction, and they are required to spend a proportional amount of their Federal IDEA funds to

provide special education and related services to students with disabilities who are enrolled in private schools voluntarily by their parents (Eigenbrood, 2010). According to Eigenbrood (p. 396), “This information is not widely known, and there is confusion about the rights under IDEA of students with disabilities who are enrolled in faith-based schools.” The administrators interviewed for this study knew the rights of students with disabilities in their buildings; however, the needed communication and collaboration with the local public-school district did not always happen. They have learned how to be intentional about reaching out and communicating with public school district personnel:

We have had times when we didn't follow through or the school district didn't follow through and nothing was happening for that child. If we didn't initiate the conversation again, it wouldn't happen. Communication and partnership is [sic] really key.

Communication with parents is also key, as some administrators said they learned from past challenges:

We have learned over the years to keep the avenues of communication open and strong. We have learned to be partners with our parents in accessing learning help for their children while partnering with the public schools to gain that help.

Parents need an understanding of their child's unique learning strengths, needs, and challenges, and they need knowledge about what services can and cannot be provided within the walls of the Lutheran school. In order to have a clear understanding, communication from the school needs to be clear, open, and strong.

Administrators discussed how they learned to prioritize services and communicate their priorities. Several mentioned early mistakes they made by not deciding which students with disabilities or learning needs could be adequately served within their special education program. In some cases this involved students with disabilities that were not getting all of their needs met. “We have had to ask some students to leave because we were not servicing them well. Parents were on board, but we couldn't provide enough services, especially for behavior.” In other situations, decisions had to be made to limit how many students could visit the resource room to get academic help:

If we don't set parameters for who qualifies and who doesn't [for special education services], there is a lot of misconception about what a child needs for help and what becomes entitlement. In the end [we are] enabling a child to do less than what they are capable of.

Allowing too many students to receive resource room help was done out of the kindness of their hearts, but administrators and teachers alike realized that this led to frustrated teachers who had unreasonable caseloads and unhappy parents who were not satisfied by the amount of help their child received. Prioritizing which students are eligible for services based on data is a way schools have solved this past challenge.

The Successes We've Had

This study looked at successes in two ways in: 1) Practices were compared to the high-leverage practices in special education (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017); and 2) Teachers and administrators discussed their successes during interviews. Teachers described and observations documented the high-leverage practices in the four areas of collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral practices, and instruction. Data from the interviews and observations were combined to present a picture of which high-leverage practices teachers were using successfully in their special education programs. All teachers were either observed to or stated that they used the following eight practices, which include at least one from each area:

- Collaborate with professionals to increase student success (Collaboration).
- Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs (Assessment).
- Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment (Social/Emotional/Behavioral Practices).
- Provide scaffolded supports (Instruction).
- Use explicit instruction (Instruction).
- Use flexible grouping (Instruction).
- Use strategies to promote active student engagement (Instruction).
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning (Instruction).

In addition, 78 percent or more of teachers utilized the following five practices, as measured by the interview and/or observation:

- Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services (Collaboration).
- Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes (Assessment).
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' behavior (Social/Emotional/Behavioral Practices).
- Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals (Instruction).
- Use assistive and instructional technologies (Instruction).

To sum up, 78 percent or more of the teachers used more than half of the 22 high-leverage practices as part of their teaching practices, as well as using two or

more practices from each area. Four additional practices were used by 50 percent or more of the teachers with only five practices used by 29 percent or fewer of the teachers. This indicates a multitude of research-based strategies being used to serve students with special needs in these Lutheran schools. The recent publication of the high-leverage practices assumes that the majority of teachers would not have learned about them in their teacher preparation programs. Yet, they know and utilize the practices to benefit the students they serve.

Teachers described additional factors contributing to the success of their special education program. The factors they described mostly fell into the categories of: 1) support; 2) collaboration; and 3) communication. The support of others was very important to the success of the special education programs in this study. More than half of the teachers described support of others as important. To be successful, teachers needed support from their administrators, other teachers in the building, parents of their students, and the local public-school district. Seven teachers mentioned that the support from their principal and, in some cases, assistant principal was key to their success, as exemplified by the teacher who said, “The biggest success is the shared philosophy that I have with the principal and assistant principal. I don’t have to fight battles since I have support from administration.”

Equally important to the success of the special education program was the support teachers received from parents. While working with some parents can be challenging, when parents support the work of the teachers it adds to their success:

It is known in the community that we have a good special education program here. There are parents who bring their kids to [our school] just for our program. Along with that, most of our parents are very supportive and think very highly of our program. When we tell parents this is what your child needs to work on, these are the goals, we don’t really get any disagreement from parents. Parents are supportive of what we do here. Parents trust that we know what is best for kids and we will do the best for their kids.

Support from other teachers in the building and the support of the local public-school district also led to success of the program. Local public-school districts are required by law to collaborate with the private school and provide resources to their special education program (Eigenbrood, 2010). “I have good support from [Public] School District. They like what we are doing here. They sent me to training. They invite us to conferences over the summer” is what one teacher had to say about her local public-school district.

In addition to the support they receive, teachers cited collaboration with others as contributing to their success. Just as with support, collaboration with administrators, teachers, parents, and the local school district were all cited as vital to their success. Most of the teachers involved in this study stood alone as the only special education teacher in their building, but eight schools had an

affiliation with either LSEM or LASE. The partnership with these organizations allowed teachers to collaborate with other special educators within their organization, which they found beneficial to their success.

A final component to the success of their special education program for teachers was good communication. Just like support and collaboration, communication with administrators, teachers, parents, and the local school district were all part of the success that teachers had. When asked what contributes to her success, one teacher included all of these in her response, stating, “A lot of communication and collaboration. There are a lot of people that support this room; students, teachers, parents, principal.”

Administrators described the successes of their special education program and the factors that contribute to that success. Many of them talked about the success of individual students, including past and present students. They also praised their special education teacher(s) and attributed the success of their program to the excellent work of the teacher(s). Finally, they mentioned the success of partnering with the local public-school district.

In describing the success of their special education program, over 60 percent of administrators cited the success of individual students who have overcome learning challenges. You could hear the joy in their voices as they discussed seeing students meet and overcome challenges, learn to love learning, seeing the “light bulb” come on, and students who were dismissed from services they no longer needed. “We have seen students grow throughout their years here—students with significant social/emotional needs when they came. We have seen tremendous growth, where they have learned to manage and relate with others socially and have academic success” is a comment that summarizes what many of the administrators had to say about their students. Quite a few administrators also talked about former students and the success that they found in high school because of the support they received in their PK/K–8 school. They were proud of the success the students had in high school without any special education support and excited that they were going to Lutheran high schools to continue their faith-based education. One principal remarked:

Kids who have been in our program are doing extremely well in high school. They find a way where they can learn or we teach them how to do that. [They] graduate from our program and don't need any services any more. That is a huge success.

Many of the principals interviewed praised the work of their special education teacher and attributed the success of the program to that teacher. They described these special teachers as *top notch, wonderful, dedicated, impressive, personable, empathetic, experienced, and a joy*. Any of these teachers could be hired by a public school district where they might receive more material benefits, but they are dedicated to their calling to serve students with special needs as they live out their vocation in their Lutheran school.

Perhaps surprisingly, the partnership that the Lutheran school had with the local public-school district was a factor repeatedly mentioned as contributing to the success of special education in the private school. Changes to IDEA in 2004 regarding parentally placed private school students emphasized better collaboration and consultation between public and private school officials, with the responsibility placed on public school officials to consult with their private school counterparts, including faith-based schools (Eigenbrood, 2010). In the case of many of the schools taking part in this study, this consultation is happening and benefiting the students with special needs who are enrolled in the Lutheran schools.

How Can You Serve Students with Special Needs?

Are you interested in adding special education services to your school? Are you considering how you could serve students with special needs in your building? Read on for some advice from the experts who participated in this study.

The special education teachers interviewed for this study wanted readers to know that they provide exceptional special education services to students in a caring, Christian environment. “People on the outside look in and often assume that we don’t provide what the public school does. But we can and we do” is the way one teacher put it. The ability to provide more one on one and small group instruction, to individualize instruction, to promote inclusion, and to provide an accepting atmosphere were all things that teachers stated they were able to do as well as or better than their local public schools.

Beyond the services they provide, many of the teachers touted their faith-based and Christ-centered environment as one that attracts families and provides learners with a holistic learning approach that addresses spiritual and academic needs. Whether parents were looking for a specific Lutheran focus to their child’s education or just wanting a safe, loving setting for their child to learn in, they found it here. “Parents come here because they want their kids to be safe and cared for, not necessarily for the Christian education. [They are] wanting special education in a caring Christian environment whether they are churched or nonchurched” said one teacher. “We are a caring, loving, safe environment. The environment feels safe in general. It is Christ centered,” said another. This might be what we would expect from adults at a faith-based school, but that safe, loving atmosphere also radiates from other students, illustrated by the teacher who remarked, “The student climate here is so welcoming. Kids, even those on the [autism] spectrum, are not targeted. [It is a] welcoming environment, peer wise.”

A final piece of advice for teachers who want to lead a special education program at their school is to take advantage of all of the professional development opportunities that come their way and engage in life-long learning. A teacher

hired through LSEM had this to say about the professional development (PD) opportunities that LSEM provides: “They do a great job of PD—making sure you keep up with PD. [They] give you opportunities to go out and learn new things and go down a passionate path.” Other teachers take advantage of the training opportunities the local public district provides, as some districts use their IDEA flow-through funds to provide training for private school employees (Eigenbrood, 2010). Whether it was provided to them or they sought it on their own, continued growth and development is important for successful special education teachers. “Continue with lifelong learning if you want to be a special educator” is sound advice.

Administrators discussed what they would want other administrators to know about serving students with special needs. Their answers were as varied as the individuals and schools themselves, but some common themes emerged. Administrators wanted others to know that they should and can serve students with special needs in their schools. They gave these reasons:

- 1) They cannot afford not to.
- 2) It adds value to the school community.
- 3) It is an opportunity to share the gospel.

One administrator, who was very passionate about the special education program in his school, pointedly said, “I would lead with this question: *Why have you not been doing this?* [emphasis added]. There is a need.” He and others spoke about the need to serve the students in their schools, support the families in their community, and assist the general education teachers who often have to work with a wide variety of student needs without additional support. Another administrator said:

If we value our Lutheran schools, we have to continue to think out of the box. If we want them to stay around and be a viable option in our area, we have to do things differently. We have to have these programs [specialized instruction] and be better at them. We need programs for students who excel as much as we need them for students who struggle or learn or think differently.

In addition to staying viable as a school, administrators talked about the value that having a special education program added to their school. The value is for students, families, and school staff alike. “Everyone benefits. Children in class will benefit from stronger appreciation for the differences in people, they are going to learn tolerance and empathy. They benefit from [the] diverse population,” was one poignant comment. Another principal eloquently put it this way:

It’s a blessing. We are blessed to have students who struggle academically or emotionally or just learn differently. We’re blessed to have that diversity. God’s family is diverse. It’s a blessing to see those kids learn, grow, and achieve just like it is a blessing to see any student learn and achieve.

The blessing goes several ways. The students who have special needs and their families are blessed to receive a faith-based education, the teachers and administrators receive encouragement, other students learn important lessons about the diversity of God's family, and the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with others abounds. The value, the benefits, and the chance to witness were summed up best by the administrator who said:

It [a special education program] is a great value to one's school. The more times you can say "yes" to a perspective family, the more likely they will come to your school. And then we can share the gospel with them [emphasis added]. Special education is a big, big "yes" for many families.

A concluding piece of advice that came from both teachers and administrators, but most strongly from the administrators, was the importance of partnering with the local public school district. As mentioned previously, local public-school districts have a legal and financial obligation to support students with disabilities in private schools within their district boundaries, including faith-based schools (Eigenbrood, 2010). The partnership can be weak, adequate, or strong, but the message heard clearly through this study was that a strong partnership leads to greater success for the students, families, and staff at the private school. A principal at a school which has seen a greatly improved relationship with their local public school stated:

[Public School District] is not afraid to say that they might not be the best fit for a child. They will tell parents to come and talk to [us]. [Public School District] will say that we might be a better fit.

What an incredible opportunity that Lutheran school has to serve the community and share the love of Jesus when students are being sent their way by the public school!

Conclusion

Serving students with special education needs in Lutheran schools is not without its challenges. However, in the 14 schools that took part in this study, the administrators and teachers interviewed would unequivocally say the rewards well outweigh the challenges! To a person, I do not believe a single teacher or administrator regrets the decision to serve students with special needs or would want to terminate their program. There are certainly improvements to be made and more that could be done given more resources, but to not serve students with special needs? No way!

Where does this leave you? Should you add or strengthen a special education program? Did this article give you something to ponder? If so, reach out to a colleague in a school that has a special education program and find out how to get started. Become well versed in the IDEA law and understand the legal rights of both your students and your school. Find out what is unique about the special

education law in your state. Get a mentor to assist you along the way. Pray about God's will for your school. And jump in! You won't regret it.

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