MEETING THE NEEDS OF EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED (ED) STUDENTS IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS
TWO HIGH SCHOOLS’ PERSPECTIVES

A Doctoral Thesis
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Dr. Chris Unger
Advisor
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to identify and document the perspectives of two urban public high schools as they relate to meeting the needs of Emotionally Disturbed (ED) students. The researcher followed a qualitative design for the multi-case study and obtained data through interviews with District Directors of Special Education, Principals, and focus groups with special education teachers and students. Eleven participants from the two urban school districts were interviewed and the study initially yielded two sets of findings. The first set of findings was comparable to the current literature on the practice of educating ED students. While, the second set of findings appeared to fall below the standards of current practice when educating the ED population. In turn there were three key findings discovered in this study: (1) Two urban public high schools are attempting to better meet the needs of ED students through stronger identification of students with ED, as well as through increased inclusion opportunities for ED students. (2) The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED students in the two urban public high settings. (3) The need for applicable staff training and hours that increases each teachers, assistant teachers and paraprofessionals knowledge when working with and attempting to meet the needs of ED students. The key findings could potentially have implications on schools and educators currently educating ED students and policy makers as decisions are made to meet the needs of ED students.

Keywords: Placement, Supports, Emotionally Disturbed (ED), Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS).
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## Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 3
Chapter One: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 9
  Research Statement .............................................................................................................. 10
  Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 10
  Context & Background ..................................................................................................... 10
  Significance ...................................................................................................................... 14
  Positionality ..................................................................................................................... 14
  Defining the Emotionally Disturbed Population ............................................................... 15
  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................... 17
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................... 18
  Summary .......................................................................................................................... 25
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................................ 28
  Law & Regulations .......................................................................................................... 29
  Supports for Placements .................................................................................................. 30
  Appropriate & Valid Testing ........................................................................................... 34
  Contributing Factors to Placements & Supports .............................................................. 37
  Educational Leadership .................................................................................................. 40
  Implications & Critique .................................................................................................... 41
  Summary .......................................................................................................................... 43
Chapter Three: Methodology ................................................................................................. 45
  Research Design .............................................................................................................. 45
  Research Tradition ......................................................................................................... 46
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................. 51
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 52
  Coding & Thematic Analysis ............................................................................................ 54
  Presentation of the Findings ......................................................................................... 54
  Protection of Human Subjects ....................................................................................... 55
  Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................... 56
  Limitations ...................................................................................................................... 57
Appendix J: Interview Guide for Administration .......................................................... 146
Appendix K: Interview Guide for Teachers ...................................................................... 148
Appendix L: Interview Guide for Students ................................................................. 149
Appendix M: Interview Protocol Form for Administration .............................................. 151
Appendix N: Interview Protocol Form for Teacher Focus Group ................................. 153
Appendix O: Interview Protocol Form for Student Focus Group ................................. 156
List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Themes According to Research Questions
Table 2. Two Sets of Research Findings
Chapter I: Introduction

Scholars and practitioners have studied, examined, and researched emotionally disturbed (ED) students’ trajectories for over seventy-five years (Bower, 1990 & Doroshow, 2016). Despite expanded interest in this area of research, much remains to be learned about the ED student and how public schools are, or are not, adequately supporting them in their educational environment. The purpose of this multi-case study is to investigate how public high schools are meeting the needs of ED students. Further, the study will aim to make sense of the experiences and challenges that district and school administrators, along with teachers, face in providing an appropriate education for the ED student population. Finally, I propose to capture the perspectives and stories of the ED students themselves to capture their perspective on the degree to which their school is meeting their academic, behavioral, and social needs. Data obtained from this research is intended to inform administrators, teachers, and ED students’ perspectives, with the goal of informing educators’ decisions and how they can strengthen and enrich an ED student’s time in high school, especially during periods of challenge and distress. This study will utilize a qualitative multi-case study approach in order to explore the topic.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of research related to ED students in order to provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed next, along with positionality to draw connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. Next, the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.
Research Statement

Currently, empirical and scholarly literature reveals that public schools are having extreme difficulty meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students. These school facilities are placing ED students in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports (Bateman, 2009). The findings vary regarding a lack of supports for public schools. However, there is invaluable information on the lack of social opportunities provided in restrictive settings; the framework for supports; the debate on testing applications for ED students; and the lack of support for the reintegration of ED students into the general education classroom in relation to teacher, peer, and parent acceptance (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Helton, 2011).

Research Questions

The three research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How are two urban public high schools attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving this student population in their schools?

2. What are the challenges of effectively serving their school’s ED population, as perceived by administrators and teachers at the school?

3. How do the ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs?

Context and Background

According to Doroshow (2016), by the early twentieth century, the child saving movement had begun. Reformers turned their focus on improving the health and welfare of dependent and neglected children by ending child labor, promoting progressive education, and creating a multitude of agencies designed to help dependent children. One such agency was the
U.S. Children’s Bureau, which was founded in 1912. Reforms for child welfare also emerged, such as the provision of financial assistance to single women with children in the 1910s and 1920s, and continued under the 1935 Social Security Act as Aid to Dependent Children. However, it was not until the 1940s and 1950s when professionals from residential treatment centers (RTCs) identified a new group of children whom they deemed “emotionally disturbed” that this population mustered any attention. Moreover, these children exhibited behavior (e.g. severe aggression, self-injurious behavior, property destruction, and elopement) so strange or disruptive at home, at school, and in the community, that most of the time the adults around them had thrown up their hands in defeat. Parents, guardians, and teachers did not understand the behaviors of these children and had given up trying to manage or help them (Doroshow, 2016).

According to Bower (1990), in the early 1950's word began to spread and teachers, school administrators and legislators became aware of a group of students who were emotionally and behaviorally challenged. With the viewpoint of including handicapped children in public education on the rise, states and communities were beginning to search for ways to help emotionally disturbed children. Unfortunately, our country was not prepared to handle or educate such a population. In 1954, twenty-nine states reported having no teacher certification for special education instruction (Scheuer, 1966). The movement to improve special education continued when congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 to address the inequality of educational opportunities for underprivileged children. The landmark legislation provided resources to help ensure that disadvantaged students had access to a quality education. In the 1970s, two cases were pivotal catalysts in the improvement of special education for change: Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PARC) and Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia. PARC dealt with the exclusion of
children with mental retardation from public schools. Mills involved the practice of suspending, expelling, and excluding children with disabilities from the District of Columbia Public Schools. These two cases prompted Congress to launch an investigation into the status of children with disabilities. Findings revealed that millions of special needs children were not receiving an appropriate education. Moreover, statistics provided by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped estimated that there were more than 8 million children with impairments requiring special education, and only 3.9 million of these children were receiving an appropriate education. In addition, 1.75 million handicapped children were receiving no educational services at all, while 2.5 million handicapped children were receiving an inappropriate education (Wright & Wright, 1999).

The final two pieces of intertwined legislative law to assist in providing special needs students the education to which they are entitled is The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was designed by Congress to ensure all children with disabilities would have the right to education, and to establish a process by which state and local educational agencies would be held accountable for providing educational services to all handicapped children. Further, Congress included an elaborate system of legal checks and balances called “procedural safeguards” that were designed to protect the rights of children and their parents. Congress has amended and renamed the special education law several times since 1975. The reauthorization took place on December 3, 2004, and the statute is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 or IDEA 2004. In reauthorizing IDEA, Congress increased the focus on accountability and improved outcomes by
emphasizing early intervention and research-based instruction and by requiring that special education teachers be highly qualified (Wright & Wright, 1999).

Even with these laws in place, the ED student population continues to struggle, and public schools in the United States appear to exacerbate their struggles by not providing them with an appropriate education. For example, in 2002 the US Department of Education reported that, in the 1999–2000 school year, 51.4% of students identified as emotionally disturbed dropped out of school. In the 2000–2001 school year, there were 286,900 adolescents in the United States identified as in need of special education as the result of an emotional disturbance, which is almost twice as high as the next highest category, specific learning disabilities (Bartick-Ericson, 2006). Even more appalling is how schools are failing to address the needs of the ED population. According to Gresham (2005), schools have been slow to recognize the educational needs and demands that ED students pose to themselves, to the major social agents (parents and teachers) in their lives, and to society at large. Estimates indicate that almost 20 percent of the school-age population could qualify for a psychiatric diagnosis using criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Moreover, scholarly literature reveals 22 percent of school-age children have mental health problems severe enough to require attention, treatment, and supports. There is also a significant disparity between the percentage of children and youth needing mental health services (20+ percent) and those who actually received special education services under IDEA (Gresham, 2005). According to Walker, Ramsay, & Gresham (2004), reasons for this underservice appear to be primarily philosophical and fiscal in nature. Philosophically, schools have a long history of believing that they are not responsible for the mental health needs of students. Moreover, the cost for providing ED students with necessary supports is significant (as cited in Gresham, 2005).
Public schools are resisting providing services to ED students and, as a result, literary findings suggest a significant lag time between first symptoms diagnosis, referral for services, and overall treatment of ED students (Duncan, Forness, & Hartsough, 1995).

**Significance**

The significance of public schools meeting the needs of ED students can be seen at all levels. The problem of proper placement with the necessary supports continues to escalate at both a state and national level. Close to 77,000 students who have been diagnosed with ED are currently being educated in separate day treatment or residential settings. This is a dramatic increase within the past 10 years (Gagnon & Leone, 2005). Furthermore, these students are 2.5 times more likely to be moved than their peers without ED, and may experience up to four placements in three years (Helton, 2011). Through the information and data provided, educators should clearly see the need for change in this area of education. By requiring supports such as a modified curriculum, support staff, behavioral interventions, therapy, and counseling, the problem could be eradicated as there is a failure to recognize the general education classroom with supports as the ultimate appropriate finish line in the process (MacLeod, 2001).

**Positionality**

My current educational position on this topic is a result of my experiences and first-hand knowledge in the field, as I have worked with emotionally disturbed (ED) students for more than ten years, both in the public and private sector of education. During my time as an educator, I have seen these students struggle both academically, behaviorally, and socially because schools and educators have not been providing these students with the supports that are necessary for them to succeed. From professional experience the struggle for these students is most profound
in the public sector as oppose to private as public schools appear to be lacking the financial capabilities with respect to supports and staff training in order to meet the needs of ED students.

I come from a middle social economic class and a higher educational and professional background level. With that in mind, I might have a difficult time understanding the struggles of ED students with respect to their background and emotional difficulties. On the contrary, I feel that I will be able to understand the challenges that both administrators and teachers face when trying to meet the needs of ED students.

I do, however, note some obstacles that I might encounter in regards to this topic. Scholarly literature and professional practice both show that the majority of students diagnosed with emotional disturbance are minorities. Because I am a white male, participants may not be as willing to open up and answer questions during an interview session. In relation to my race and gender, I am aware that ED students whom I interview may not answer my questions truthfully or wholeheartedly because they are of a different race, and therefore do not feel comfortable around me. My own misconception could lead to my own apprehensiveness when engaging the participants. In turn, I could miss a pivotal piece of the students’ responses when questions are asked. Due to my work in education, I have thorough knowledge on meeting the needs of ED students, as I have witnessed some behavioral, academic, and social applications for ED students’ work, while I have seen others fail. Therefore, when interviewing educators, the overall scope of my work should serve as an asset throughout the entire interview process.

This study is imperative, as many children and youth who might otherwise qualify for special education and related services under the category of ED are not identified as such and therefore do not receive the most appropriate education. The degree of underservice for the potential ED population is huge, with less than 1 percent of students’ nationwide being served as
ED. Despite this, over 20 percent of the school age population has emotional and behavioral difficulties severe enough to qualify for psychiatric diagnosis. (Gresham, 2005).

**Defining the Emotionally Disturbed Population**

According to Gresham (2005), the IDEA (1997, 2004) definitions of ED state, that ED is a condition characterized by one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and adversely affects educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Moreover, there are contributing factors to the definition of an ED child, such as biological, family, school, and community.

According to Quinn et al. (2000), certain biological conditions have been associated with emotional disturbance and behavioral problems, as there appear to be genetic links to depression and schizophrenia and some neurological conditions. The home environment can either help or hurt healthy development, just as a child’s behavior can have both negative and positive influences on other family members as well. There are also certain elements within a child’s family that may increase his or her risk for developing emotional disturbance or behavioral problems (physical abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment have all been associated with “troubling behaviors” in children). Students with emotional disturbance and behavioral problems tend to underperform in school. Learning problems put them at a disadvantage in the school environment, particularly since many of these students have not developed adequate social skills by the time that they enter school, and poor social skills may
result in social rejection by both peers and teachers. This rejection leads to further disinterest in
school and even greater underachievement and failure. In the community, children are often
exposed to stressors. Exposure to crime and gang violence has often been linked to a tendency to
behave in ways associated with emotional disturbance and behavioral problems.

**Key Terms**

**Assessment and Planning:** Techniques used to identify and determine placement of
children in special education programs. Assessment is done using a variety of methods and
measures. Planning for a student assessed and identified with a disability includes the
development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Emotionally Disturbed (ED):** A condition exhibiting one or more of the following
characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's
educational performance:

A. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health
   factors.
B. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers
   and teachers.
C. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
D. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
E. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school
   problems.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A written document that is developed for
each public school child that is eligible for special education services.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): A student with disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate.

Placement: Location of educational setting for a student.

Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS): A proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional, and academic success.

Self-contained special education: Full-time placement in a special education classroom, in which a special educator (and teacher’s aides, when available) provides intensive, structured academic and behavioral support and supervision.

Special schools: Non-residential programs that provide a full-day educational program for children within a setting that is separate from the regular school.

Supports: Plans, devices, or educational and medical professionals that assist the student in his or her academic career.

Residential schools: Often located outside a child’s home community, residential schools stress educational achievement for students with emotional and behavioral problems.

Resource rooms: A setting within the general education school where students with disabilities may receive educational services from a special education teacher (and teacher’s aides, when available) for one or two instructional periods each day.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study is the Social Model of Disability. There are two premier seminal authors of this theory, Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes (2012), two disabled academics that helped refine the disability model and present the model with a sociological approach. The authors’ primary focus was on the removal of both societal and
environmental barriers, which serve to exclude and disable people, rather than assist with their impairment (Watson, 2012). Moreover, Oliver (1990) takes the argument a step further in that disability arises as a result of the way that society is organized, and that social relations are paramount in constructing the experiences of disabled people (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 194). Both of these arguments relate directly to meeting the needs of ED students, as the population is being removed from their original classroom environment and then rejected when attempts are made to place them back into their original setting (Panacek & Dunlap, 2003; Coleman, Webber & Algozzine, 1999). Oliver and Barnes (2012) lead the way in the effort to eradicate discrimination and prejudice against individuals with disabilities, and help to form the guiding tenets of the disability model.

There are four major tenets of the Social Model of Disability, which include: inaccessible physical environments; communication barriers; discrimination; and information provided in inaccessible formats. Inaccessible physical environments are extremely prevalent in daily life – ramps and elevators are not always available for individuals in wheelchairs, while braille is not always available for a blind person to read when looking at a menu in a restaurant or at a book in a library. This limitation applies directly to the ED population, as the majority of these students are removed from their original classroom setting because the school is not applying the proper supports in order to meet their academic, behavioral or social needs (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012). Further, according to Siebers (2001), in a society of wheelchair users, stairs would be nonexistent, and the fact that they are everywhere in our society appears as an indication that most of our architects are able-bodied people who do not think seriously about accessibility for others. Inaccessible physical environments clearly create restrictions for the disabled, and Thomas (1999) states that people
with impairments may face some restrictions of activity as a consequence of their impairment. She argues that these restrictions do not constitute disability, and has introduced the term “impairment effects” (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 196). According to Watson (2012), impairment effects dramatically reduce a disabled individual’s ability to access major aspects of our society, ranging from daily routines, social activities, and education. From the literature provided, “impairment effects” directly correspond to ED students as their routines, social opportunities, and education are severely impeded by their disability. Their daily routines are interrupted when they are removed from their classroom. As a result of being removed from the classroom, social opportunities are lost and their education is brought to a halt (Coutinho, & Oswald, 1996; Landrum, et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2007).

Inaccessible physical environments are not the only barrier separating individuals with disabilities from our society. Communication barriers directly impact the daily functionality of these individuals in ways that the majority of people do not comprehend. As Thomas (1999) states, there are individuals who experience psycho-emotional trauma, which employs to define disabling situations that can arise through the actions of close family members, professionals, or other individuals with whom disabled people have direct contact (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 196). The inability of an individual with social and emotional disorders (ED students) to communicate is often overlooked and misunderstood in our society. However, the Social Model of Disability developed by Oliver and Barnes (2012) captures the voice of the disabled, and strives to provide power to these individuals, so that they may be heard and accepted.

Unfortunately, the disabled face more than just these barriers with respect to their disabilities. Discrimination is another prevalent barrier that disabled individuals face throughout their lives. Moreover, discrimination is constructed and formed not just through one individual
lens, but also through cultures, societies, and institutions. ED students and their disabilities are no exception to discrimination, as scholarly literature clearly shows teachers and their peers are extremely reluctant to work with the ED population (Benner, et al., 2010; Coleman, Webber & Algozzine, 1999; Kaufman & Wong, 1991). Further, and according to Siebers (2001), disability means that the disabled body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed and that social attitudes and institutions determine far greater than biological fact, the representation of the body’s reality. If perceptions and views establish the body of disability, it becomes imperative for the Social Model of Disability to eradicate these forms of discrimination. Further, one learns from Thomas (1999) that individuals with disabilities experience being excluded and are made to feel inferior, which results in the most compelling emotional damage (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 196). ED students have and continue to be excluded from their classroom setting and made to feel inferior, as teachers and peers reject them because of their emotional disability, which one concludes only exacerbates the emotional damage of the ED student due to his or her unique disability (Bateman, 2009; Benner, et al., 2010; Hardman, 2012; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012). Exclusion is a form of discrimination, and the Social Model of Disability helps to expose these unfortunate acts and potentially minimize or prevent them from continuing.

There is one more compelling principle that helps shape the Social Model of Disability. Information not in accessible formats is the last major principal of the model, and it is evident throughout our society. The blind are not provided with braille in numerous locations throughout the public setting. The deaf are not provided with closed captioning at the movie theater. Ramps and elevators are often not present for people confined to wheelchairs. The proper educational tools are not provided to children with disabilities. ED students are no exception, as they are not
provided with the proper educational tools or supports when they are removed from their classrooms because of their disability (Coutinho, & Oswald, 1996; Landrum, et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2007). The major tenets of the Social Model of Disability help to form and strengthen the model. However, the historical foundation for the model is what provides it with its greatness significance.

Scholarly practitioners provide the historical trajectory and significance of this theory. According to Watson (2012), the Social Model of Disability was first developed in Britain as a political tool by disability activists and the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation, founded in 1976, to explain disability in social terms and used the theory as the basis for their political campaigning. Further, the Social Model of Disability has been extremely important, not only to the development of disability studies as an academic discipline, but also to the development of the Disabled People’s Movement in the United Kingdom. Further, the model has influenced numerous European policies and is contained in United Nations’ documents such as “The Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”. Moreover, the model has enabled the identification of a political strategy, namely the removal of barriers, and it has formed the basis of the case for anti-discrimination legislation (Watson, 2012). Siebers (2001) provides insight into the significance of the theory, as disability studies have embraced many theories such as the Feminist and Queer theories because they provide a powerful alternative to the Medical Model of disability. The Medical Model situates disability exclusively within an individual’s body and strives to cure him or her by particular treatment, isolating the patient as diseased or defective. However, the Social Model of Disability makes it possible to see disability as the effect of an environment hostile to some bodies and not to others, requiring advances in social justice rather than medicine. The history of the Social Model of Disability continues to
evolve, as contemporary scholars have and continue to make significant contributions in applying this theory.

Siebers (2001) makes a significant contribution to the Social Model of Disability, as he shows the relation of the theory to social constructionism. Siebers (2011) states, social representations determine the nature of the disabled body and the forms of self-knowing attached to it, providing a convincing example of the explanatory power of the Social Construction Model. Watson (2012) shows how disability is highly complex, variable, and multi-dimensional, cutting across the range of political, social, and cultural experiences. Further, there are many particular subgroups, all of which experience disability in different ways. Preston (2010) provides a simplistic but compelling way in which to view the overall goal of the Disability Theory. He refers to the movie “Finding Nemo”, where the young sea animal characters acknowledge their differences, and accept those differences in stride, creating an atmosphere free of disability. Preston (2010) goes on to provide multiple ways in which students can be engaged in critical thinking about disability. Through the use of movies and guided discussion, students can be exposed to and develop an understanding of individuals with disabilities and, in turn, eradicate discrimination that takes place. Preston (2010), Watson (2012) and Siebers (2001) make significant contributions to the Social Model of Disability and have therefore provided me with justification for the use of this model throughout my study.

There is significant justification for using this theoretical framework in this study, which focuses on a lack of supports for students with emotional disorders. First, throughout our history, one has seen the consistent need and continued revision of educational and disability laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind, along with schools being required to place students in least restrictive environments. Further, these laws and
requirements service individuals with disabilities and help to serve as a foundation for the tenets used in this model: communication barriers; inaccessible physical environments; discrimination; and information not in accessible formats. Moreover, an assessment of other theoretical frameworks has been conducted on this topic and according to Siebers (2001) the disabled body seems difficult for the theory of social construction to absorb: disability is at once its best and most significant counterexample. Moreover, scholars have begun to insist that strong constructionism either fails to account for the difficult physical features faced by people with disabilities or presents their body in ways that are conventional, conformist, and unrecognizable to them (Siebers, 2001). Further, the Social Model of Disability is founded through other social theoretical models such as Women’s, Racial, Gender, and Queer studies and does not serve the direct purpose as the Social Model of Disability does for a student with emotional disturbance. Significant justification has been provided using the Social Model of Disability in this study, but the theoretical framework does come with its individual strengths and weakness.

According to Watson (2012) a perceived weakness of the Social Model of Disability is its simplicity. One could argue that it would be better suited for the political arena as radical rhetoric for a movement, rather than as the basis for an academic model. Another perceived weakness is offered by Garland-Thomson (2002), who believes that disability studies do a great deal of wheel reinventing since the majority of issues surrounding the theory are precisely the issues that feminist theory has been grappling with for years. Although there are evident weaknesses to the theoretical framework proposed for this study, there are significant strengths that encompass this model. The strengths of the Social Model of Disability lie in the major tenets, creating the foundation for and stability of the model. According to Garland-Thomson (2002), the field of disability studies has moved out of the applied fields of medicine, social
work, and rehabilitation to become a vibrant new field of inquiry within the critical genre of identity studies. This field encompasses portions of the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s, Racial, Gender and Queer studies. The tenets, coupled with how the model encompasses numerous other models, provide the model with its greatest strength and significance. The Social Model of Disability’s strong tenets align with the other major portions of this study.

The problem of practice aligns directly with the theoretical framework, as the study looks to improve the conditions of ED students in public school settings. The Social Model of Disability theory focuses on the same issue, and according to Preston (2010), the focus of the disability study is not in fixing the person with the impairment, but rather how society can improve its integration of people as they are. Integration is one of the major objectives of this study, as more and more ED students are being removed from their public school settings and place into private and residential schools. The research questions also have a direct correlation to the theoretical framework proposed for the study, as the questions look to determine what supports could improve an ED student’s education. The disability model serves the same purpose as Torgesen (1986) discusses the current and future state of the Disability Theory and states, how one aspect of the model – behavioral research – has repeatedly shown that children with learning disabilities can improve their performance if they are provided with incentives. As one can see, the theoretical framework selected for this study is glaringly appropriate as the problem of practice and research questions align directly with the Social Model of Disability. Moreover, the research conducted shows there is currently only one theory that justifies this study.

Summary

The theoretical framework will inform and shape the study from the very beginning, as Barnes & Mercer (1997) state, a potential research project by the Social Model of Disability is to
measure disability by investigating disability barriers. This statement encompasses the entire study and serves as its foundation, as the study looks to determine what barriers in the public school setting hinder ED students’ performance. The framework will continue to shape the study as one looks to educate the masses concerning the lack of supports for ED students. Further, Preston (2010) states that the more enabling the view of disability that students receive in classrooms from a sophisticated critique of cultural text, the greater the potential in transforming how people with disabilities are treated within the larger community. Educating and informing is just one way the framework will help shape the intention of the study. The major component will be how the disability model requires one to carefully and strategically plan the study. For example, Torgesen (1986) states that researchers who study learning disabilities need to spend considerable theoretical effort in formulating the procedures they use to select their samples. Further, researchers must develop their own set of procedures for identifying samples that have theoretical coherence with their particular point of view about the problems these children experience. Through education, planning, informing, and investigation, the Social Model of Disability will create a foundation and compass for the study to continuously follow.

The problem of practice created from empirical and scholarly literature reveals a lack of supports for emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public schools. These facilities are placing ED students in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports. In turn, the problem of practice serves as a catapult for the major research questions, which are based on their overall experiences in determining what supports are lacking for emotional disturbed students in the public school system. These research questions are directly supported by the major tenets of the theoretical framework – inaccessible physical environments; communication barriers; discrimination; and information not in accessible formats. The principals are a direct reflection of
the major strengths and weaknesses of this framework, as they are intertwined with one another. The major weakness of the theory is that is seems to be a reinvention of other models such as the feminist approach, but the primary strength is how the model encapsulates numerous frameworks such as the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s, Racial, Gender and Queer studies, which fortify the model and make it imperative to implement for this study.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This review presents a comprehensive examination of the current state of literature on public schools meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students. These public schools appear to be placing ED students in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports. The findings vary and are limited regarding a lack of supports for public and private schools. However, there is invaluable information on the lack of social opportunities provided in restrictive settings; the framework for supports; the debate on testing applications for ED students; and the lack of support for the reintegration of ED students into the general education classroom in relation to teacher, peer, and parent acceptance. This information provides a conclusive argument for expanded research on meeting the needs of ED students in the public school sector.

The information provided throughout this literature review discusses the major contributing factors on the difficulties public schools are facing when attempting to meet the needs of ED students. Study and research shows significant deficits in the areas of social interaction, lack of acceptance by teachers and peers, and inadequate agreement on testing practices for the population (Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). All of these factors contribute to the fact that public schools are not meeting the needs of ED students by placing the students in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003). This problem significantly and negatively impacts students, teachers, parents, and educational facilities - ED students do not receive the proper services in order to succeed, while parents of ED students become frustrated and lose faith in the school system. Often, teachers’ time is apportioned improperly and funds distributed to the school for classrooms are no longer implemented for the proper function. All of these negative factors create the need for
continued research on the problem in question. The literature examined consists of both quantitative and qualitative studies, broken down and organized under laws and regulations; supports for placement; appropriate and valid testing; and contributing factors to placement, supports, and leadership.

**Law & Regulations**

The majority of this study focuses on meeting the needs of ED students and with that comes placement, which refers to the decision to service a student with impairment or disability in an educational setting where instruction should meet the student’s academic and behavioral needs to create long-term positive results (Marthur & Jolivette, 2012). Moreover, by law and according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Education Law and Regulations, placement is determined at the team meeting once an Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been developed. The team then considers the identified needs of the student, services required, and whether the services should be provided in a general education classroom with supplementary aids and/or services, or in a separate classroom or school setting (Education Laws and Regulations, 2011). More importantly, the team considers all aspects of the student's proposed special education program, and if an in-district placement or an out-of-district placement is the most appropriate based on the types of related services that are to be provided to the student, and the types of settings, location, and service providers that are to be provided as well. In addition, the placement should be the least restrictive environment consistent with the needs of the student, and consideration must be given to any potentially harmful effect on the student or on the quality of services that the student requires (Education Laws and Regulations, 2011). In support of state regulations, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that the placement – whether it is a
particular class or separate facility – should be derived from goals found in the student’s IEP. Under IDEA requirements, the placement should provide the necessary supports that meet the educational criteria found in the IEP (Marthur & Jolivette, 2012).

Moreover and according to Quinn et al (2000), at the basic level IDEA has addressed many classroom concerns that have arisen over the years. The new statute, in fact, includes provisions designed to improve services for all students with disabilities including those with emotional disturbance and behavioral problems, address their problem behaviors, and foster an effective learning environment for all students. However, are these students being provided with the supports they need, such as modified curriculum, support staff, behavioral interventions, therapy, and counseling? All of these systems need to be considered when attempting to determine appropriate placement for an ED student and meet the overall needs of the students. Furthermore, as recent research and scholarly literature make very apparent, ED students will eventually fail without the proper support systems in place (Gagnon, & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012 Helton, 2007; Kaufman, 2005).

Supports for placements

The analysis of a case study on a 1983 class action lawsuit in Rochester City, New York reveals that self-contained classrooms for ED students had, in the past, been set up similarly to general education classrooms, with the only difference being a class size of 10, rather than 25 (Schneider, 1985). More importantly, the school had no accommodations to meet the emotional needs of these students, nor did it have a modified curriculum to provide the proper academic services. In addition, support staff members (i.e. paraprofessionals) were not in place to assist in the self-contained classroom, and outside class supports such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists were also lacking. Since students in this classroom were not given the proper
supports, they were seen as unable to function in the general education public school setting, and therefore referred to a more restrictive placement (Schneider, 1985).

Schnieder’s (1985) research leaves one to scrutinize the integrity of the district and the school for not providing appropriate supports for these students. In addition, one also questions whether or not Schnieder (1985) explored the reasons for the lack of such supports. Did the school lack the funding to support this population, or was negligence an issue? In some cases, schools have valid reasons for not providing supports. In their case study, Whaler, Rasch, Slivec and Hilsenroth (1992) conclude that outside placement could not be determined because a great deal of adequate supports and proper instruction were missing from the general education classroom environment as a whole, and such supports might have provided ED students the opportunity to succeed in that classroom. Additionally, Batemen (2008) reveals that an ED student being required to modify his behavior on his own without any positive intervention or support is detrimental. Bateman (2008) concludes that when the district tries to remove the student from his current setting for behavioral outbursts, they fail because a proper behavioral plan had not been put into place, which could have reduced the undesired behaviors. These case studies show that, overall, schools were lacking the proper supports to service ED students. However, within these case studies, Whaler et al. (1992) and Bateman (2008) could have more readily explained how the missing supports would have enhanced student success, thus allowing for further discussion and support on the issue. Another analysis, which is not apparent in the studies, is the professional opinion of staff members. Staff member statements would further validate how better supports for ED students were needed, but could also provide justification for the school not being the appropriate placement for the student for other behavioral and academic reasons.
More importantly, within the body of literature, there is a growing concern that more ED students are being referred to restrictive settings or placements. Singer, Butler, Palfrey, & Walker (1986) state that these settings may provide certain benefits that general education classrooms lack, such as smaller class size and support from paraprofessionals and teachers who are trained to teach social skills and modify curriculum. Meadows, Neel, Scott, & Parker (1994) go on to explain that such settings also provide behavioral and therapeutic support, which is usually not found in the general education setting. However, these restrictive settings do not expose students to general education classes such as art, music, and physical education (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005). By not providing exposure to these classes, students are also denied exposure to social interactions with peers in the general education setting. As a result, the likelihood of improving social skills is decreased. Since social skills are considered a major deficit for the majority of these students, this is a significant loss. Further evidence suggests that the justification for ED students being placed in restrictive settings is based on their major behavioral and academic deficits, but the review of literature finds no empirical testing to support this theory (Lane et al., 2005). Panacek and Dunlap (2003) show further evidence proving that ED students do not have the opportunity for social interaction. Through their research, Panecek and Dunlap (2003) discover a group of colleagues who had visited over 500 schools and found a severe lack of exposure to social opportunities for ED students within classroom environments. In some cases, ED students went through the entire school day without one positive social interaction (Steinberg & Knitzner, 1990).

By not including this important social interaction in students’ daily schedules, schools are restricting access to a very critical support piece that students need for success and growth. Also, given this information, one can reasonably assume that general education students have a lack of
interaction with and exposure to ED students, and therefore may reject them as a population. The consensus in literature on the subject of providing ED students the opportunity for social interactions continues to grow. A study conducted by Simpson (1999) focuses on alternative schools and how it is clear that these schools offer limited support for social integration and creation of acceptance for ED students within the general education setting. This eliminates the opportunity to shape and nurture relationships among all students, and dissolves potential support for the ED student through peer acceptance. Supports within the educational placement continue to be the underlying reason why ED students are unsuccessful.

Muscott (1997) provides a solid framework for schools and districts to follow when incorporating ED students back into the general education setting and providing the proper supports. First, the student needs to be prepared to integrate back into the setting. This is done by making the student aware that he will be responsible for adhering to certain behavioral standards (Muscott, 1997). By making the student aware of the requirements, the school has created built-in support for the student. Also, it is important to ensure that general and special educators and other faculty members are trained not only to handle the student, but also to understand the student’s behavioral needs. Most importantly, within the framework, is the critical component of designing individualized instruction and supports that involve both student and family, regardless of placement (Muscott, 1997).

An example of an effective individualized support is a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) Plan, which has a three-tiered approach. The first is a school and classroom-wide intervention to support all students. The second is targeted interventions for at-risk students. The third is an intensive, individualized intervention created for students with the most severe behaviors (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010). These levels of instruction
and behavior prevention include behavior assessments, data collection, analysis for decision-making, and de-escalation (Benner, et al., 2010). The final piece to properly meet the needs of ED students is psychological treatment. According to Cullinan & Epstein (1986), this includes counseling, guidance, and psychotherapy as a legitimate related service for ED students as long as nonmedical personnel provide it. In addition, in some cases drug and alcohol detoxification programs, along with sensory integration and cognitive development therapies, have been determined to qualify as related services for this population.

However, based on the comprehensive literature review, this framework appears to be lacking in public schools, but needs to be implemented not only by educational facilities, but also by the community as a whole, since research, studies, and literature continue to show that the leading outcome for ED students is dropping out of school (Benner, et al., 2010; Helton, 2007; Landrum, Katsiyannis, & Archwamety, 2004; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003). Another aspect of supports for ED students is found in possible testing methods for these students. Although there is continued discussion concerning whether or not testing is valid and appropriate for the ED population, one should consider the possibility that testing ED students early for their disability would be beneficial to their future success.

**Appropriate and Valid Testing**

The body of literature on ED students does not provide sufficient information on when students are identified as being emotionally disturbed. If emotional disturbance has any correlation with other disabilities, one could assume that early intervention would be a key component in the student’s academic and behavioral success (Trout et al., 2003). Further, communication between public schools and mental health agencies appears to be at an impasse. According to Burns, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Sondheimer (1994) there are a variety of difficult
issues that have been identified regarding the interface between school and mental health services. Foremost is the problem of diagnosis and eligibility for services. Not only do agencies use entirely different diagnostic and eligibility guidelines, but there frequently appears to be little to no concordance between psychiatric diagnoses as determined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM; American Psychiatric Association) and eligibility for special education in the category of ED as determined by IDEA (Duncan, Forness, & Hartsough, 1995).

Testing and coordination between the two parties would ensure that the student receives appropriate supports and services. These supports and services could potentially result in the student remaining in the proper setting because that student’s needs will be met. Moreover, testing continues to be critical when determining placement, as it helps to identify the disability and allows one to consider proper supports for services. Further support for testing continues, as found by Oswald, Cohen, Best, Johnson and Lyons (2001). Oswald et al. (2001) study group implemented the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS). This test provides a measure of the individual strengths of children on a 52-item scale used to rate a student’s positive behaviors and emotions (Oswald et al., 2001). The data reveals a relationship between placement and behavioral strengths of children, showing that children who are in home-like settings have higher social involvement and intrapersonal strengths than those who are not (Oswald et al., 2001). This information could be used to provide needed supports to ED students displaying social deficits.

However, after further research, one can see a debate forming among scholars regarding testing. As is seen in research done by Whaler et al. (1992), one might consider testing irrelevant. At first, Whaler et al. (1992) suggests that a psychologist must assess the child’s behavioral tendencies, but must also evaluate his emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal
functioning. All of these factors become imperative when determining placement and supports. However, such an evaluation might be unnecessary – research suggests that the category of ‘emotionally disturbed’ is ambiguous both in terms of definition and measures to identify. Kaufman (2005) states that there is no test for this disability. Kaufman (2005) continues to argue that the ambiguity in definition and identification should further strengthen our resolve to adopt proven scientific methodology to reduce ambiguity.

With appropriate and valid testing for ED students continuously in question, educators have turned to preventive interventions, but when these measures are not working, public schools will initiate a formal referral. In turn, teachers will present concrete information describing the student’s behavior, the situations in which that behavior occurs, and any interventions that may have already been tried (Quinn et al, 2000). Moreover, careful evaluation of a child suspected of being emotionally disturbed involves an assessment of the student’s behavior if his behavior interferes with either his learning, or the learning of others. Districts and states should have established procedures for student evaluation and assessment that ensure compliance with IDEA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Once such procedures are established, the evaluation of students with emotional disturbance should include: classroom observations by evaluators; results of all interventions, interviews, checklists, and questionnaires completed by teachers, family members, and psychological or psychiatric evaluations; previous academic evaluations, including work samples; and a review of the child’s school history (Quinn et al, 2000). Unfortunately, scholarly literature does not support these detailed assessments or evaluations being preformed by public schools on ED students (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012; Helton, 2007; Katsiyannis, & Archwamety, 2004; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003).
Determining appropriate and valid testing for ED students will continue to be a debate among scholars and educators, as meeting the needs of these students continues to be a challenge. In addition to testing, assessments, and evaluations, there are numerous other factors and variables that contribute to placement and meeting the needs of ED students.

**Contributing Factors to Placement and Supports**

Least restrictive environment (LRE) states that a school district shall ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who do not have disabilities, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with special needs from the general education program occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Education Laws and Regulations, 2011). With this regulation in place, one could assume that schools would provide the necessary supports needed to keep ED students in a general education setting. However, research has shown that emotionally disturbed students are more likely to be placed in restrictive settings than any other student with a disability (Coutinho, & Oswald, 1996; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Landrum, et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2007). Close to 77,000 students who have been diagnosed with ED are educated in separate day treatment or residential settings, signifying a dramatic increase within the past 10 years (Gagnon & Leone, 2005). Furthermore, these students are 2.5 times more likely to be moved to another classroom than their peers without ED, and may experience up to four placements in three years (Helton, 2011). It has recently been discovered that ED students are moved for administrative and policy reasons, whether it is due to the closure of foster homes or care facilities, a lack of funding, or a move to lower level care (Barth et al., 2007). Within this study by Barth et al. (2007), other peers were not specified, which would have contributed to the
validity of the results on ED placement. Also, Barth et al.’s (2007) study does not disclose an actual total of ED students being removed from facilities, which would have enhanced the findings as well.

Other literary work on ED students provides credibility to the previous study mentioned, by indicating that these students are removed from their general education setting in response to emergencies and put into “holding positions” until a permanent placement can be found (Sempik, Ward & Darker, 2008). The holding position can, at times, become the setting in which the student ends up residing for a much longer period of time (Sempik, Ward & Darker, 2008). The result of this placement is not due to proper consideration for appropriate supports, but instead is based on outside placement being the only program willing to accommodate the student with ED. This is a failure on the part of the school district for not providing the proper setting based on the student’s needs under IDEA.

Reintegration also serves as barrier for ED students with relation to both placement and proper supports. Literature suggests that both public and private sectors see separate special education classrooms as the end point in the process of servicing a student with disabilities (Bateman, 2009; Benner, et al., 2010). There is a failure to recognize the general education classroom as the ultimate appropriate finish line in the process (Kaufman, 2005). There are also contributing factors to the barriers in place. These factors may include parental reluctance to relinquish the protective environment and services within the substantially separate setting; schools’ reluctance to mainstream some students; and a lack of highly-qualified teachers that are properly trained to handle student needs (Benner, et al., 2010).

From the information and analysis provided, one might further insist that special education classrooms are not the last stop in the reintegration process, as can be seen in
Muscott’s (1997) study. In this study, Muscott focuses on determining if there is a behavioral
difference among four types of special education settings. The investigation reveals little
behavioral difference among the four settings, which draws one back to the reintegration process
and why some consider it to be the final frontier of inclusion (Muscott, 1997). Contributing
factors to placement and supports for integrating ED students into the general education setting
are the students’ social and behavioral characteristics. In fact, Kaufman & Wong (1991) indicate
that teachers perceive students who demonstrate aggressive, acting-out behaviors as the most
difficult to teach and state that ED students are rejected and therefore not liked by their peers.
Further, teachers and peers generally perceive these attributes negatively, and even with
continued training in this area, both groups continue to reject these students (Coleman, Webber
& Algozzine, 1999). The information provided shows the inability of educational communities to
recognize a critical support for these ED students – acceptance. Educational communities need to
be aware that rejection of ED students is not an option, and that inclusion will become a core part
of these students’ educational growth.

When looking at opportunities for the inclusion of ED students, the consensus in
scholarly literature continues regarding the need to improve the attitudes of both teachers and
parents. Lewis, Chard and Scott (1994) find that teachers who are less tolerant of behavioral
noncompliance are also the most effective. However, these teachers are more reluctant to have a
child with disabilities in their classroom (as cited in Walker & Rankin, 1983). Teachers need to
be made aware that, through experiences of cooperation in a respectful environment with other
students, ED students eventually realize that laws and rules are mutually agreed upon social
constructs that allow society to function fairly and harmoniously (Hardman, 2012).
Unfortunately, the issue is made more complicated as parents of ED students have tried the
reintegration or inclusion process before and have found little to no successful results, as their child either continues to act out or is rejected by peers and teachers. According to Hardman (2012), the child may continue to act out because he perceives the classroom as harsh and uncaring, feels like an outcast, and must therefore fend for himself.

**Educational Leadership**

Teachers should play a significant role in determining placement and providing ED students with the necessary supports. Coutinho and Oswald (1996) report that teachers perceive a lack of support from every faculty member involved in servicing a student with ED. Teachers continued their discontent with faculty and administration by stating that they had not been fully included in the placement decision-making process (Coutinho & Oswald, 1996). Coutinho and Oswald’s (1996) findings are concerning. Teachers are valuable assets to the placement decision-making process, due to their observations of and experience working with the student. If the teacher is left out of this process, one can reasonably assume that the probability of the student with ED being placed in a setting lacking the proper supports will increase. Further, if teachers are not part of the collaboration process, then the built-in supports to service these students are lost. More importantly, the school would not be adhering to the student’s IEP, which is a direct violation of IDEA.

In addition to the lack of teacher involvement in the evaluation and assessment of ED students is the insufficient experience and training provided for teachers in preparation and when working with the population. According to Schwartz, Wolfe, & Cassar (1997) inexperienced teachers appear to be sensitive to the issue of classroom control, especially when working with ED students. Further, their opportunity for experience is further curtailed as the teachers attempt to meet the challenges provided by the student. However, with specific training and intervention,
these issues can be eradicated. Another study by Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas (2012) on the United States Midwest School District revealed only 17% of teachers at the elementary levels had received some in-service training on ED students. Further, neither the principals nor directors of special education had communicated adequately with the classroom teachers in order to support the needs of the ED students. However, after specialists initiated assistance and education on ED students with school personnel such as principals, counselors and teachers, specific strategies and interventions did indeed offer concrete evidence of positive outcomes (Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas, 2012). Overall, the literary evidence shows educational leaders clearly lack in providing support and training for teachers with ED students. In turn, all of these factors continue to hinder public schools in meeting the needs of ED students.

**Implications & Critique**

The implications of the literature review consist of a need for improved supports within the public school sector. Based on the case study evidence, schools and districts as a whole have been lacking the proper supports for ED students since the beginning (Bateman, 2009; Benner et al., 2010; Coleman et al., 2000; Coutinho & Oswald, 1996). Within these case studies, thorough and detailed information on the supports needed were not consistently stated, which would have added value to the research and validity to scholarly assertions. Also, services in the areas of social interaction and opportunities for social engagement for ED students need to be implemented throughout the public and private sectors. Research has shown that strong social skills are a major component of the success of an ED student, but a lack thereof typically yields a significant deficit for the population (Lewis et al., 1994; Panacek, & Dunlap, 2003). Particular methods and strategies for orchestrating the social skills component were not found in the
majority of research. As a result, this is a weakness when considering the scholarly knowledge pertaining to the topic.

The most appropriate and valid testing methods for ED students need to be determined before a child is even considered to be emotionally disturbed. The implications go far beyond the scope of supports for a student. The results of the testing have a direct psychological effect on the child’s overall self-esteem and self-concept. If the testing method currently in place has no validity, it needs to be removed immediately from the evaluation process, not only for the student’s psychological frame of mind, but also to reduce error in placement and supports. Further, educational assessments and evaluations need to be detailed and followed according to the educational law set by the United States. Moreover, the reintegration process for ED students needs to be evaluated and improved based upon the literary findings (Hardman, 2012; Kaufman & Wong, 1991; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003; Simpson, 1999). Also, public schools need to make a collaborative effort to ensure that ED students are able to handle the rigor of the general education classroom, and that they have the proper social foundation to create built-in supports through peers.

Within the integration process, public schools must instill a culture of acceptance for ED students, eliminating teacher and student rejection. Without acceptance, it is highly unlikely inclusion will be successful in school system. The literature reveals the need for acceptance among teachers and students regarding the ED group (Coleman et al., 2000; Kauffman, Mock & Simpson, 2007). Even though previous trainings have failed to create this concept amongst schools, having the scholarly opinions on potential techniques that might work would have been beneficial to the reader. In this way, the reader would know that further research is needed in order for this area to improve. Also, educational leadership with respect to teacher training and
support needs to be improved in order to sufficiently meet the needs of students with ED. However, more literary information on this issue would have further established the validity of these findings.

A few of the major gaps found during the review of literature is an outline of what proper supports for ED students should look like. For example, are behavior plans, counseling, support staff, and safety rooms all necessary forms of support that classify one school as being the proper placement for an ED student over another school? Although a few studies do provide evidence of positive reinforcements being implemented and successful in schools, more research needs to be conducted in order to determine what supports are effective for this population of students.

Overall, the body of literature provides understanding of the supports needed for ED students, possible solutions, and the growing concern over restrictive placement (Bateman, 2009; Benner, et al., 2010; Coleman et al., 2000; Coutinho & Oswald, 1996; Kauffman et al., 2007; Landrum et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 1994). However, research needs to continue on this subject. Further research needs to be conducted to fill in the gaps related to behavior modification, as well as peer, teacher, and other professional perspectives on ED students in the classroom. These issues will become more apparent as the population of ED students in need of special education services continues to grow. In 2002, the number of children diagnosed with ED was 500,000. Based on this statistic, one could accurately assume that the number has only increased over the past decade (Benner, et al., 2010).

Summary

In review, the problem of public schools meeting the needs of ED students is apparent based upon the literary findings, case studies and information collected (Bateman, 2009; Benner et al., 2010 Coleman et al., 2000; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012; Kauffman et al.,
2007; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012; Panacek & Dunlap, 2003). Moreover, the information on supports within educational placements was limited in the body of literature reviewed. What is clearly significant with regards to the findings is the limited literature on supports that help the ED population in academic settings as well as the growing population needing proper supports in order to receive an education. A few of the key findings that warrant discussion are the current attitudes of students and teachers toward ED students, and the trend of placing ED students in more restrictive rather than the least restrictive settings. The next steps include continued study and analysis in the areas of effective procedures and supports for ED students; uncovering proper social interaction opportunities for ED students; reintegration of these students in public and school settings; support and training for ED teachers; and a model for acceptance of ED students amongst both teachers and peers. The application of these studies will further enhance one’s understanding of the deficient components relating to meeting the needs of these students in public schools, and will potentially improve the factors already in place.
Chapter III: Methodology

Currently, empirical and scholarly literature reveals possible deficits in supports for emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools. These school facilities may not be meeting the needs of ED students by placing them in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports (Bateman, 2009). The findings vary regarding supports for ED students in public high schools. However, there is invaluable information on the lack of social opportunities provided in restrictive settings; the framework for supports; the debate on testing applications for ED students; and the lack of support for the reintegration of ED students into the general education classroom in relation to teacher, peer, and parent acceptance (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Helton, 2011). The purpose of this doctoral thesis was to explore how two urban public high schools are meeting the needs and supporting ED students in public high schools. Therefore, the primary research questions guiding this inquiry were based on the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students: How are two urban public high schools attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving these students in their schools? What are the challenges of effectively serving the ED population in each school, as perceived by administrators and teachers of the school? How do the ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs?

Research Design

The research design used within the thesis was a qualitative multi-case study approach as I looked to explore a particular idea, namely how public high schools are supporting the academic, behavioral, and social needs of emotionally disturbed ED students in public high schools. During the process, I interviewed an administrator at the district and school level; a
group of teachers working directly with the ED student population; and ED students who have experienced the phenomena that I discussed throughout this thesis. Hearing about the experiences (challenges, successes, and difficulties) of all parties with respect to supporting ED students, then comparing, analyzing and determining major themes from the data provided from all two schools selected for the study, aligned and justified the primary research questions and supported the use of the multi-case study approach. The sampling consisted of two urban public high schools, with an administrator at the district and school level, a group of teachers working directly with the ED population, and ED students represented from each school. The data collection method performed for the particular study was through the interview process of district and school administrations, along with a group of teachers and ED students from each public high school setting. The questions and format for the interviews were semi-structured rather than structured, as it offered sufficient flexibility and the ability to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection. This format worked well for interviews, as the researcher interviewed diverse groups of the education population. The data analysis broke down the collection of interviews into units of meaning, or themes, to determine if there was consensus amongst the schools in regards to meeting the needs of ED students. Further, the researcher had independent reviewers examine the interview data with respect to the themes established, in order to establish validity and creditability.

**Research Tradition**

In todays scholarly research, case studies take on two key approaches that guide case study methodology; one proposed by Robert Stake (1995) and the second by Robert Yin (2003, 2006). First, both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm (as cited in Baxter, P., & Jack, 2008). Further, both seek to ensure that
the topic of interest is well explored, and that the essence of the phenomenon is revealed. Even though the methods have similarities, there are some differences between the two scholars. Stake (1995) believes that the most important role of the case study researcher is that of interpreter. The vision he had for the role was not of a discoverer of an external reality, but as a builder, providing a clear view of the phenomenon under study, through explanation and descriptions (as cited in Brown, 2008). However, Yin’s (1984), contention was that case study as a research approach could be incorporated under many paradigms. Moreover, in later writings he developed the distinction between case study strategy and qualitative research by acknowledging that a case study strategy could also be used with quantitative evidence (as cited in Brown, 2008).

The philosophical underpinnings of the case study approach are apparent throughout the past centuries, and continue into the present day along with the scholarly debate on whether or not the case study approach is the proper methodology for a qualitative study. According to Rosenberg & Yates (2007), after the Second World War logical positivism dominated the philosophy of science, and the social sciences favored positivism and quantitative methods. Surveys, statistical methods, opinion polls, experiments, and quasi-experiments were considered scientific, and qualitative case studies were criticized for being non-scientific. Moreover, the argument related to case study and the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies have been debated in a number of academic disciplines. In sociology, Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) considered case study to be an extraordinarily useful and imperative strategy for social analysis, while Hamel (1992) spoke of the conflicted meanings of case study and Ragin (1992) argued that the different conceptions of the term ‘case’ are central to the enduring gulf between quantitative and qualitative social science (as cited in Brown, 2008). The criticism over the case study method continues as Noor (2008) states that the methodologies lack
scientific rigor and reliability and they do not address the issues of generalizability. However, there are some strengths of case study. For example, it enables the researcher to gain a holistic view of a certain phenomenon or series of events and can provide a fuller picture, since many sources of evidence were used. Another advantage is that case study can be useful in capturing the emergent and immanent properties of life in organizations and the ebb and flow of organizational activity, especially where it is changing very fast. Case studies also allow generalizations as the result of findings using multiple cases can lead to some form of replication (Noor, 2008).

Even though there is a debate over the use of the case study method, there are three profound scholars of the case study method. According to Brown (2008) case study as a research strategy has been explored in depth by three writers in particular, Merriam (1998), Yin (1981, 2003a, 2003b, 2005), and Stake (2005, 2008). These divergent thinkers are seen as the three foundational methodologists in the area of case study research whose methodological suggestions largely impacted educational researchers’ decisions concerning case study design. Moreover, Baxter & Jack (2008) state previous work on case study detailed the design, introduction, and application of case study methodology for a broader audience of novice qualitative researchers (as cited in Yazan, 2015). Further, Merriam presented a balanced, pragmatic approach, while Yin was highly methodical and logical, and Stake was like an artist or poet, creating and crafting meaning. However, Yin’s appreciation of the interpretive aspects of case study methodology is now more apparent, while Stake has acknowledged the value of case study in quantitative research. These shifts mirror the positions of other voices in the field of case study (Brown, 2008).
These divergent thinkers were clearly and directly associated with establishing the foundation of the case study approach. However, empirical literature also shows that the greatest contrast in opinion over the case study approach was between these three scholars. For example, Merriam (1998) believes that case study does not claim any specific data collection methods, but focuses on holistic description and explanation. However, Yin (2003) contends that case study strategy has five components – the study’s questions; its propositions that reflect on a theoretical issue; its units of analysis (the event, entity, or individuals noted in the research questions); the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (as cited in Brown, 2008). The debates over proper procedures for the case study method persist, as Yin (2003) argues for the exact planning for every step of the inquiry, Stake (1995) argues that there is no particular moment when data collection begins, since data collection can lead to some fundamental alterations in the inquiry process (Yazan, 2015).

These divergent thinkers are clearly identified in the scholarly literature, and there are similarities and differences among them, with respect to how the study should be carried out and what the most pertinent roles are for the researcher. However, these scholars all recognize that the entire process of the case study methodology needs to be diligently covered in order for one to present an accurate case study. The first step in the case study process, according to Creswell (2013), is determining the focus of the study and developing an in-depth description and analysis of the case(s). This particular study was a multi case study consisting of two urban high schools with a focus on real-life, contemporary context or setting over a period of time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, a few of the methods for acquiring data for the study were through observations and interviews (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the study consisted of current, real-life cases that were in progress so that accurate
information could be gathered and not lost by time. Further, multiple cases were identified so that they could be compared. The reasoning for selecting multiple cases is supported and determined appropriate through Yin (1993) as he argues that multiple-case studies should follow a replication, not sampling logic, which means that two or more cases should be included within the same study precisely because the researcher predicts that similar results will be found. Further, the development of consistent findings, over multiple cases, can then be considered a very robust finding (as cited in Noor, 2008). The literature provided by Yin creates justification and reasoning for the use of multiple cases within this study.

However, after one finalized the focus of the study, one must then determine the type of problem best suited for design, which was done by providing an in-depth understanding of the cases (Creswell, 2013). In order for one to be able to provide an accurate, detailed, and thorough depiction of their study, one must have become the interpreter of their study. These thoughts are supported by Stake (1995) as he has stated, the most important role of the case study researcher is that of the interpreter with not only a commonplace description, but a thick description and provision of integrated interpretations of situations and context (as cited in Brown, 2008). Being the interpreter allowed one to determine what the case will (and, therefore, will not) look like.

One of the common pitfalls associated with case study is that there is a tendency for researchers to attempt to answer a question that is too broad or choose a topic that has too many objectives for one study. In order to avoid this problem, several authors have suggested that placing boundaries on a case can prevent this explosion from occurring. Suggestions on how to bind a case include: time and place, time and activity, and definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Providing a clear, accurate, and detailed view of the multi case study through the lens of an interpreter was my primary aspiration and intention, and although the discipline background does
not draw directly from the areas of psychology, law, political science, or medicine, there are imperative educational laws, which created the foundation for this study. Moreover, there was also the Social Model of disability, which provided this study with its framework for focusing on high schools meeting the needs of ED students.

The next imperative step that was in this multi case study methodology was determining a unit of analysis, whether it be studying an event, program, activity or more than one individual (Creswell, 2013). Further, Yin (2009) elaborates on what a researcher could potentially select for his study, whether it be specific case, an individual, a small group, an organization, or a partnership. At a less concrete level, it may even be a community, relationship, or even a decision process (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Based on the information provided by scholarly literature, two urban high schools and how they meet the needs of ED students was the phenomenon selected for this study.

Data Collection

Data collection was the next stage in the methodology process. Using multiple forms of collection appeared to be the most accepted method among the scholars and divergent thinkers of the case study method. One can use interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts in order to collect the necessary data for one’s study. Moreover, and according to Brown (2008), the data collection process focuses on the skills of the investigator, which includes the ability to ask questions, listen actively, adapt to unforeseen circumstances that may arise, grasp the issues being addressed, and identify personal biases. Further, in Yin’s (2003) view, rigorous data collection follows carefully articulated steps: the use of multiple sources of evidence; the creation of a case study database; and the maintenance of a chain of evidence. The use of multiple sources of data enables the researcher to cover a broader range of issues, and to develop
converging lines of inquiry (as cited in Brown, 2008). The tools and steps provided by these scholars for the data collection process allow one to formulate a precise and in-depth plan for data collection. For this particular study, interviews were selected as the main method of data collection. The questions and format for the interviews were semi-structured, as it provided sufficient flexibility and the opportunity to approach the variety of educators and student respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection. Administrators, teachers, and students were interviewed for the purpose of maintaining a large enough sample to draw pertinent insight. Subjects were informed about the potential of researcher bias before questions were asked. All interview transcripts were stored on the researcher’s personal computer. Pseudonyms were used to discuss all participants, and nobody other than the researcher had access to the material. According to Brown (2008), the use of a case study database is recommendation for the study because the database creates the opportunity for one to place notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives, creating one central location for data and enabling the researcher to organize and maintain raw data, and in turn increasing the reliability of the case study. For this particular case study the researchers computer was the main database for data collection and storage.

Data Analysis

Forming a data analysis strategy was the next phase in the case study methodology process. According to Creswell (2013) analyzing data through description of case and themes of the case, along with cross-case themes, is the most common way of analyzing case study data. However, Yin (2003) proposes three general strategies for data analysis, which is one of the least developed and difficult parts of doing case studies. First, the theoretical propositions that lead to the case study must be followed to help focus attention on certain data. Second, rival
explanations must be considered. Finally, a descriptive framework for organizing the case study must be developed. Further, Yin suggests specific analytic techniques that include pattern-matching (finding patterns and building an explanation of these patterns), utilizing time-series analysis (the ability to trace changes over time), and logic models (as cited in Brown, 2008). The data analysis for this particular study consisted of a thematic analysis for each site, using a computer program (Microsoft Excel) to code and determine major themes from the interview transcripts. The thematic analysis process served to triangulate purported themes that were found and helped establish the findings.

The majority of literature regarding qualitative research methods determines that analysis is an ongoing process that continues throughout the length of the study (Bogdon & Belkin, 2003; Creswell, 2013). Throughout the research process, the researcher organized data in a fashion that highlighted occurring themes. The information collected during the interviews served as the central source to conduct the analysis for themes. Coding the data into thematic units served as the primary method to support and provide meaning to the conclusions of the research. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher began the task of transferring the interview recordings to the company Rev in order for transcription of the interviews and any of the researcher’s notes to take place. However, Stake (1995) indicates that qualitative data analysis is an ongoing and reflexive process that begins immediately, even if all data is not collected. With that in mind, one was prepared to make adjustments in order to explore developing themes that arose throughout the data collection process. After completion of all the interviews, the data formed an aggregate collection of information for the researcher to triangulate forming themes and descriptions.


**Coding and Thematic Analysis**

Once interviews are concluded, the transcripts were analyzed using a multi-step coding process, which began with an initial reading of the transcripts and collected documents. The purpose of this exercise was for the researcher to become familiar with the wealth of data collected. The transcripts were then sent to the company Rev for precise and accurate transcription. Next, coding of data began with open “In Vivo Coding”, followed by Pattern Coding. In Vivo Coding allowed the researcher to use interview transcripts as a method of attuning oneself to participants’ perspectives, which was imperative throughout the process as their perspectives created the foundation of the findings in this study (Saldaña, 2015). In the second step, pattern coding was utilized for categorization of the coded data as an initial analytical strategy (Saldaña, 2015). These codes were applied to each interview transcription and the researcher’s notes, as the researcher attempted to discover common themes from each school and then across the two schools with relation to meeting the needs of ED students.

**Presentation of the Findings**

After completion of the data analysis and coding the presentation of the findings was completed through a written report. According to Creswell (2013), a written report provides a detailed analysis of one or more cases, which is performed through an exhaustive description of the case(s) studied. Moreover, the descriptive case study utilizes a linear-analytic, comparative, chronological, or un-sequenced structure for reporting. If the un-sequenced choice is made, as it often is in the descriptive case study, the researcher must ensure that all topics are covered, or there will be a concern about bias (Brown, 2008). For this particular study, two high schools were analyzed on meeting the needs of ED students with interviews being the primary component for data collection in determining major themes. A thorough, detailed, and
descriptive written report was completed to present the imperative findings from each school, and all information was thoroughly analyzed to determine common themes. A comparative structure of reporting was provided to display the challenges, successes, and difficulties each school encounters when attempting to meet the needs of ED students.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Particular ethical considerations were taken into account during the research endeavor. While this study did not cause any discomfort or injury to participants, Creswell (2013) describes several ethical issues that researchers should be mindful of throughout the research process. Procedurally, the researcher sought approval from the IRB and complied with the guidelines related to the protection of participants, including taking every measure possible to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants involved in this study. In addition, qualitative researchers must be aware of the power they have during the research process, and of the imbalances and cultural separations that influence interactions during data collection. Creating a comfortable and unbiased environment for participants was important to reduce these barriers. Another consideration was participants (administration and teachers) in this study may feel vulnerable or ashamed as they have struggled and possibly failed to meet the needs of their students. It, therefore, became imperative to build trust and a rapport between the researcher and the participant. The same conditions and parameters applied when interviewing ED students, as creating trust, confidence, and building a rapport was crucial to the discovery and learning process. In the end, the opportunity to openly discuss and reflect upon their struggles was a beneficial learning experience for some participants.
**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is another vital component during the data collection and analysis process. While the majority of the data for this study was gathered during an in-depth interview, some additional data was collected during the follow-up email portion with teachers and administrators. In turn, participants had the opportunity to share their experiences during two separate interactions and using at least two different platforms. Using multiple sources of data created a comprehensive understanding of each participant’s perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Another opportunity to check-in will occurred during the data collection phase, when the researcher presented the interview transcript to the participants. Feedback provided by participants was incorporated into multiple drafts in order to produce the most authentic and comprehensive representation of the participant’s views. During the data analysis phase, the researcher enlisted an external reviewer to evaluate and highlight the researcher’s conclusions and identify inconsistencies or major themes, which warrant further consideration. The researcher included pertinent and detailed information about the participants, setting, and other relevant information so readers could make informed decisions about transferability.

Potential research bias was another aspect addressed during the study. The researcher’s interest in this topic was grounded in his professional practice having taught ED students directly for over ten years. As such, the researcher was professionally invested in supporting ED students and understands what is required in order to meet the needs of ED students. In this case, it was important to recognize that the researcher was sympathetic towards both teachers who have struggled to work with this population, as well as ED students who have not been provided with proper supports. Nevertheless, as a researcher, one hoped to expand their knowledge of the topic
and remained steadfast in committing to maintain an open outlook on perspectives that were not considered.

Limitations

There were a few limitations found in this case study. The first was a comprehensive mandated outline, crafted by professional educators, on what proper supports for ED students should look like. The second was the mandated education and training each educator is required to receive before and when working with this population of students. Also, the experiences of these participants may not be transferable to other types of schools that work with this population, nor to ED students that have different educational backgrounds or experiences. Finally, whether it is educators or students, participants had different levels of comfort discussing their challenges, difficulties, or successes, and to some extent, how much they have reflected on their circumstances and experiences. Therefore, the depth and quality of the interview data collected differed and was a challenge in identifying cross-case themes.

Summary

In summary, this study explored meeting the needs of ED students in public high schools. Case study methodology was utilized to provide a voice to and decipher the participants’ accounts, along with in-depth interviews. Standard case study procedures were followed to collect and analyze data in a predominantly structured manner. Deductive references to the Social Model of Disability (Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes, 2012) were made only after the data was analyzed. Given the active role of the researcher in the qualitative research and case study, precautions were taken to control bias and create trustworthiness. Overall, the strength of this case study resided in its ability to reveal the struggles, challenges, and successes administrators and teachers encountered when attempting to meet the needs of ED students, so
educators can better understand and support them and potentially improve the overall education of ED students.
Chapter IV: Report of the Research Findings

The main purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to examine and document the perspectives of two urban public high schools attempting to meet the needs of their ED students. The researcher documented the perceptions of district administrators, principals, teachers, and students across two urban public school districts in the state of Massachusetts, both of which serve high populations of ED students. The chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) a summary of the findings in each urban public school district; and (2) a presentation and discussion of the emergent themes, based on the researcher’s interviews with District Directors of Special Education, principals governing schools dedicated to servicing the needs of ED students, and teachers and students across two school districts as they pertain to the research questions.

School District #1

The first public school examined in this study will be referred to as District #1. District #1 is a public school district located in a higher socio-economic urban area in Boston, but the majority of the student population is from a very low socio-economic urban area. There are a total of four schools in this district serving ED students; along with private institution contracted out by the district to service these students in times of crisis. A total of two interviews and one focus group were conducted in District #1. The research conducted an individual interview with the district director of special education and another with the principal overseeing the three schools exclusively serving ED students. Finally, the researcher conducted a single focus group with three of the high school teachers working directly with the ED students.

District Director of Special Education. The first interview conducted in District #1 was with the district director of special education. The first question asked to the director was ‘What
does it mean to service the ED population at an administrative level?’ The director’s answer was as follows:

As an administrator and in the role I'm in now, they are the most important population to me. I think there are students that we are misidentifying most often, in that we are conflating trauma disability with emotionally disturbed, and with that we are underserving this population. So, I think that their potential, of all the disabilities areas that we service, I think that these students are the ones that we're missing getting them to their fullest potential.

This perspective was repeated as the director was asked about some of the challenges when working to meet the needs of this population and the director referred to the trauma piece again with respect to not being part of a child’s emotional impairment. The director of the district went on to clarify the challenging issue when the interviewer asked, “Trying to separate the two”, the director explained the misconception society in general has on identifying students as ED because the student has been traumatized from an outside environmental and this is inaccurate and a major misconception. From the interviewer’s perspective, this line of questioning needed to continue, as it appeared to have a direct effect on the total population in District #1. The interviewer asked if the area in which the students reside is exacerbating the issue of over-identification of ED students in the district. The director responded, “By the environment? Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely.”

The interviewer wanted to dive deeper into this topic by asking the director whether or not she finds it challenging for Boston to distinguish between the two. The director responded:

One of the biggest challenges ... So, there's also the Enenber Report from two or three years ago from Brown University around black and brown boys being over identified in
emotional impairment. One of the biggest challenges, and why I enjoy this work as much as I do—especially around emotional impairment—is because I think that special education is a socially constructed phenomenon within public education that perpetuates the marginalization of students. So we use the education system, in my opinion, to continue to keep people of color, to restrict their access to college education. Emotional impairment is how it happens. So, because a lot of our students of color are coming out of neighborhoods that have a lot of trauma in them, and the way the district has operated for a really long time...I think this is all with good intention, this isn't malicious, it's just this is how it's been. We provide services to students, but we disable them to get them services because we know that their is money in special education, so that's why it becomes even harder to disentangle what trauma is, versus emotional impairment, because the money is in special ed.

From these words, one can see how race is still intertwined with the ED population and how environment severally impacts the emotionally stability of a child. Further, with the environment causing traumatic emotional impairment to the child, one can see how the misdiagnoses of children with ED could take place because there is no accurate testing for determining ED for a child, which is a major part of the literature review in this dissertation.

The District #1 director of special education was then asked about supports that should be required to meet the needs of ED students. The main points that the director felt were important included the following: 1) a social worker for every school; 2) a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) for every school; and 3) proper staffing (low ratios) to allow for small group instruction. The director also believes that continuous reflection by staff on best practices for ED students is imperative for the development of these students: “I believe that the best schools I've
seen, when teachers have a high level of self-reflection in the adults, that are focused around self-reflecting to be able to better the education of their students.”

From the director’s perspective, one can see the emphasis placed on continued teacher development, which is directly correlated to leadership with administration being responsible for the continued professional development of teachers working with the ED population. With regards to what supports should be mandated by the state and federal government for ED students, the director emphasized having a stronger focus on the social emotional learning part of an ED student’s education before educators place an extreme focus on reading, writing and arithmetic. In summary, this director believes that a major focus should be on improving and adopting an educational practice that has a dedication to social emotional skills and opportunities. With respect to the supports offered by the schools the director didn’t answer the question directly, but instead discussed the process that occurs for a student to acquire supports. The student first needs to be labeled as having a disability. This diagnosis, however, does not necessarily guarantee that the individual will receive the supports needed, because all disabilities in the district are weighed differently. However, the director also stated: “If a person knows how to get to me, they're going to get what they need, and so they're usually successful.” One can assume from this statement that, if a family does not know how to get in touch with the director of the school, the student may or may not receive services that ensure his or her success. However, the director went on to state:

For every person that can find me, there are at least 15 to 20 that can't. We're all about making sure kids are getting services they need, if we know about it, and that's a challenge, because there's such a large population and so few of us. That's why we're taking a lot of individual cases and trying to expand them to make sure that it's not
happening to other kids. But, we have to go based on that data that we have. We don't get all of the necessary data, so that's the biggest challenge. We don't have a proper system up yet for kids.

This implies that the district is attempting to identify and meet all the needs of ED students, but needs a more proficient system and technology in place in order to meet and address the needs of ED students in the district. The director was then asked about outside influences that might affect and challenge decisions made by a district administrator servicing this population. The director referenced the “Garrity Order,” which prompted the desegregation of busing in Boston, and how families still have the perception of racism being prevalent in Boston. The director also went on to state how confusing the IEP process is for even the most educated parent and that accessibility to the district must be improved. With regards to what successes the district has had over the years, the director referred to reducing the isolation of ED students and providing the population with more resources with the end goal being inclusion for these students.

The director went on to state how test scores from one school that has an ED student population had the highest state test scores among the district. This is astonishing, given the size of the district and the fact that the majority of students with ED usually do not perform well academically. During the interview, the director informed the interviewer that almost all students with an ED diagnosis are educated in sub-separate schools, and the number of these students transitioning into inclusion is very low. However, the director did not agree with the current placement of the population and, as of now, the district is pushing for at least partial inclusion, if not full inclusion, for all special education students. The director also commented on how critical it is for the district to allocate funding to professional development (PD), so that teachers might
be better able to understand and educate the ED population. Currently, these teachers are only looking for behavioral compliance from students, not true educational growth. The director was then asked how often emotionally disturbed students are removed from the classroom and placed in other schools, either in or out of district. The director did not have data on this available, but indicated that the numbers were low for temporary placement in district. However, for out of district placement, the director stated: “We have about 4% of our students out of district. There are about 487 right now. Of that, I'd say a good solid 250 have emotional impairment as their diagnosis.” Regardless of the total number of ED students currently in the district, the number of out of district placements seems high, given the financial resources of the district and the fact that there are currently four schools dedicated to servicing this population.

**District #1 Principal.** The second interview conducted was with the principal of three schools primarily focused on educating and servicing the ED population. The principal has one vice principal and one director of special education dedicated to each of the three schools. The principal was first asked, “What does it mean to you to service the ED population at the administrative level?” The principal’s response was broad in focus as she spoke about having a global view and working with the central office to develop budgets for different initiatives and programs that have the greatest impact on improving both the academic and social emotional outcome for ED students.

The principal was then asked about challenges faced when trying to meet the needs of this population. The principal indicated that educating teachers and staff on the multiple diagnoses of these students is imperative for their success. The principal stated:
“We have kids who are autistic, Asperger's, kids who are on the spectrum and have emotional disturbance. The biggest challenge, really, is building the capacity of my staff to truly understand those different diagnoses that may impact their ability to have success.”

These remarks echo that of the district director, with respect to PD and training for teachers. When the principal was asked about what supports are necessary to meet the needs of ED students, the principal cited student to teacher ratios, as the majority of the ED students are three to four years behind academically. To bring these students up to grade level performance, direct 1:1 academic instruction is necessary. On the question of which supports should be made mandatory, the principal again focused on the training of teachers, especially when it comes to cultural diversity. The principal was then asked about both positive and negative experiences when trying to meet the needs of ED students. The principal spoke about getting the family and collateral agencies, on the same page so they're implementing the same strategies, structures and supports in order for the student to be successful. The negative would be the families that are tired of the process and time it takes to receive services and have basically given up.

As far as the school’s successes with their ED students, the principal could not provide actual numbers, but spoke about her students passing the state mandated tests. This correlates with comments made by the District #1 director from the previous interview. The principal then spoke about the placement process for ED students and how all the ED students were in a sub-separate program and not inclusion. The reasoning is based on the fact the ED students have not been able to have success in either an inclusion or a sub-separate setting. Further, the principal believed the placement of substantially sub-separate for these students was appropriate, with the goal being to slowly incorporate our ED students back into the mainstream setting, and least restrictive environment as soon as possible.
The district director and the principal’s comments are similar in that they both believe the end goal should be full-inclusion for all of the ED students, also the principal spoke about, her school being the last location for ED students within the district. However, students are sometimes referred to the district’s outside agency for a 45-day placement for severe safety concerns. Overall, the majority ED students in the district are stepping down into the district school from private placement, so that they can be reintegrated into a regular school setting as soon as possible. The last question asked was how many students at the school are placed out of district. The principal did not have exact numbers, but estimated that less than 3% of students are removed from the school each year.

**District #1 Teachers (Focus Group).** The third round of interviews consisted of a teacher focus group, which included two male teachers each having taught 10 and 15 years in the school, respectively, and one female teacher who had taught 18 years in the school. The first question posed to the group was, “What does serving the ED population mean to you as a teacher?” For the purpose of confidentiality, each of the teachers will be referred to by pseudonym. Responses were as follows:

Male Teacher 1: I would say this - I look at each kid that I work with as gold and you have to basically mine for gold. There's a lot of dirt around them. These are the gold nuggets that were thrown out. If I can get gold out of these kids, I really feel accomplished because a lot of people are confused as to how to approach these kids. These are the kids who are often discarded because the perception is they cannot learn and produce. To me, it means the world. It feels like I'm doing the "impossible". For myself, I was a special education student with an IP coming from a mother who is an immigrant. I know what it's like to feel ... not valued, so it means a lot to me.
Female Teacher: To me, as a teacher, you think academics, but when our students walk through the door, before you can even focus on the academics, you need to make sure they feel safe. When they walk into the room, everyone's goal looks different. Someone's goals may be just being physically present in the room after not being in school for a long period of time. I think it's just making them feel safe, so then they can start to take the risks academically.

Male Teacher 2: I guess for me, I feel like it's almost a ministry in a sense…in the sense that we're here trying to help kids on every level of their own being. It's rewarding for me, and I think for a lot of us because we feel like what we are doing is almost life or death. These kids are so at risk that I feel like we have to be there and present for them. It really matters. I don't know how else to put it.

From the information provided by the teacher focus group of District #1, the responses to the questions seem much more personal when compared to those of the District #1 administrators, as teachers were directly involved with students on a daily basis. As the interview continued, the teacher focus group from District #1 was asked about some of the daily challenges faced when trying to meet the needs of the ED population in the classroom. The group of teachers informed the researcher about the major lack of consistent attendance by the population, along with the students outside environment having an empowering influence on their lack of attendance and buy-in to how school is relevant to their current situations. From these interviews, one can see how profound the challenges are for these teachers when trying to meet the needs of and educate these students. The echoing point here is that these students are extremely impacted by their environment. External factors either impede their education when they are in school, or prevent them from attending school at all. The teacher focus group was
then asked about the types of supports they think are necessary to meet the needs of ED students and the teachers’ responses to this question focused on supporting students, whether it is through counseling, therapy, positive behavior support/incentive plans, or developing a positive relationship with the students. Teachers were then asked what supports should be made mandatory because they are imperative for ED student success in the classroom as a whole. The following responses were provided by the teacher focus group:

Male Teacher 2: There's a certain amount of natural talent that comes into it, but professional development…good professional development, led by people with experience that show you data and concrete things, so that somebody who is willing can actually get the skills necessary to work with this population. Just seeing data about how kids learn to read, different math approaches, different materials, and different complex literature that we can connect to students with.

Male Teacher 1: Certainly therapy should be mandatory. Offer free therapy for all kids. I think there should be ‘calming rooms’, for lack of a better word. We don't really have [this] ... ideally, we need a new school where the rooms look calming rather than cement bunkers that we refer to as ‘calming rooms’. The one that we use has no windows, you know what I mean, that kind of stuff. I think it would be nice to have a space for counseling and things of that nature. That would be really beneficial.

From these responses, it is apparent that professional development that directly benefits ED teachers and, as a result, their students, is a necessary element needed for success. Therapy, along with the hopes of school renovations with better student spaces to benefit this population, appear to be two other important components. Next, teachers were asked if their schools offered these supports to the ED population. Both male teachers spoke about having to create their own
initiatives in order to introduce cultural capital to students. Further, the professional development is irrelevant to teachers working with ED students. From the teachers’ responses, it seems as though there are limited supports offered to these teachers when working with the ED population. There is a lack of PD relating to the population they are instructing, as well as limited funding and support for vocational, athletic and academic endeavors. As a result, the needs of ED students are being left solely in the hands of the teachers. The next question was not part of the original line of questions for the interview, but it seemed imperative to ask given previous responses from the focus group. Participants were asked whether or not they believed that financial decisions made by the school and/or school district effectively supported their students. In response, Male Teacher 1 stated, “You have to do your own fundraising. You have to form relationships with people everywhere.” And Male Teacher #2 stated, “No. There is none. I mean zero. I've gotten zero dollars this year and I put in money.”

The teachers’ responses confirmed that there is little to no financial backing provided to support extracurricular activities that the teachers believe to be an integral part of the success of their students. With the lack of financial backing and supports from administrative staff, another question not originally on the questionnaire became important to ask: What are some of the tools that a new, inexperienced teacher would need in order to be successful in an ED classroom? The responses of the teachers were as follows:

Male Teacher 2: “They need a mentor. They need an experienced assistant, because we all have assistants. I think if I were a new teacher, I'd like someone who's been established so every aspect of the school isn't brand new.”
Male Teacher 1: “I think having someone take you under their wing informally and then have a formal mentor and then have somebody in that classroom that's had some experience because there are things you cannot know until you've learned them.”

Female Teacher: “I agree with both statements.”

The statements from the teachers clearly indicate the need for a mentor when one begins working with ED students, along with an experienced assistant. However, neither of these teachers was provided with these necessities when they began teaching. The focus group was then asked to describe any overall successes they have had with ED students. All three teachers spoke about improving students’ social emotional and academic skills, along improving the students’ ability to function in their respective community. Further, the teachers revealed that there have been some success stories over the years with individual students, but if the teachers received the appropriate professional development training, and financial and staff support required to meet the needs of all of the ED students, one could assume there would be larger amount of success stories for this population. The next question for the focus group was concerning the type of school in which the ED student resides. All teachers responded that their school is overall substantially sub-separate, with every student being on an IEP and the school not being allowed to harbor a general education classroom because of the title 4 designation it is currently under.

The focus group of teachers were then asked about the current placement of the students, and whether or not they agree with the students’ placement. The teachers’ responses were all very similar in nature, as all three responded with an admit “Yes”, and spoke further about the population exhibiting behaviors that clearly showed the students belonged in substantially sub-separate school. Teachers were then asked how many students are placed back into a less
restrictive environment or general education setting. Teachers stated that one to two students per year are placed into a less restrictive setting, with maybe a total of fifteen over the course of their tenures. Given the three teachers’ years of service to this population, one would think there would be a larger number of their students transitioned into a less restrictive setting. Questioning then continued, with teachers being asked how often students were removed from the classroom:

Female Teacher: “We try and limit the removal of students from the classroom. Maybe 4 to 5 a month because they don't learn outside the classroom.”

Male Teacher 1: “We can't throw them out. When you do address them and you address them forcefully and you address them straightforward, sometimes it's too much for them to handle and then they get upset and leave.”

Male Teacher 2: “We're trying our best to limit that. At one point it was a very commonly used thing. Lately I've had to use it a little more with a few kids out of necessity, but in general I was sending out a kid maybe once a week.”

It appears these teachers are doing their best trying to keep students in the classroom on a daily basis, unless it becomes a safety issue for the student, other students, or staff members.

Lastly, teachers were asked how many of their students have left this school and gone to another district because the school was no longer able to meet their needs. The overall response by the focus group was that one to two students were removed from the school each year because their behaviors were so intense (aggression, self-injurious behavior, or destruction) that the school was not equipped to handle them. After reviewing scholarly literature, and through professional experience, this number is fairly low when compared to other schools throughout the country.

**District #1 students.** Multiple attempts to schedule interviews with ED students in District #1 were made with numerous email exchanges and phone calls between the researcher
and the principal of the District #1 School. Unfortunately, availability and willingness to participate where the primary reasons why no interviews were conducted with the ED students of District #1.

**Summary of district #1 findings.** District #1 administrators and teachers all appear to be on common ground with respect to teachers needing the appropriate professional development in order to properly instruct the ED population. The administrators and teachers also appear to agree that these students are currently in the appropriate placement, with the district director of special education believing that eventually every student should be part of inclusion. Even though the teachers reported a fairly low number (1 to 2) of ED students either leaving the district or being removed from their school each year, the district director of education reported that over 250 ED students are currently being educated out of district. Although administrators and teachers appear to agree that professional development needs to be improved, there are differing opinions concerning the type of PD that should be provided. Administrators believe that PD should be geared toward how to teach in general, while the teachers servicing ED students would rather have PD addressing specific strategies and methods on how to work with ED students. Further, teachers reported the need for more financial allocation toward serving the ED students, whether it is for academic, behavioral, or social needs. Moreover, the teachers have an overarching belief that they are on their own with respect to supporting and educating ED students. Overall, when comparing administrators’ statements towards teachers, their philosophical believes tend to differ in meeting the needs of ED students.

**School District #2**

The second public school examined in this study will be referred to as District #2. District #2 is a public school district located in a lower socio-economic urban area, southwest of
Boston. The majority of the student population is from a very low socio-economic urban area. There are two schools currently serving ED students at the high school level, one of which is the high school offering inclusion opportunities for these students in the general education setting, while the other is completely substantially separate. Currently, if the student is unable to be serviced in either of the two schools, then the student is placed in an out of district setting. A total of two interviews and two focus groups were conducted in District #2. The district director of special education and the principal of the school serving the high school ED students were each individually interviewed. One focus groups conducted was with high school teachers working directly with ED students, and the other focus group was conducted with two of the ED high school students enrolled at the school.

**District director of special education.** The director was first asked what the significance was of servicing the ED population at the administrative level. The director stated the following:

I consider emotionally disabled kids one of the hardest populations to serve. When you have students who are physically disabled or that "look disabled," people are much more compassionate. Students who have emotional disabilities look like a typically developing kid, and it's really hard for teachers to look at those kids and think there's a problem. But those kids are some of the most difficult kids in our district. I am very committed to that population. We cleaned out the programs, because they were kind of a dumping ground for kids, so our programs are truly for students who have emotional disability and struggle in the general education population, and we give them as many supports as we can.
The director appears to be extremely supportive of serving this population, and is in the process of improving the district’s services for the ED population. The director was then asked about some of the challenges faced when trying to meet the needs of the population. The director revealed there is a lack of funding (low salaries) for teaching assistants and paraprofessionals who work with population. Further, finding and training staff members who are willing to work with the ED students at the high school level is consistent challenge. Moreover, the director revealed that maintaining consistent assistant staff members is extremely problematic. Further, the administration and teachers attrition rate is usually high if there is no prior experience in working with ED students. However, the director is attempting to expand the program at the high school level, and realizes that every staff member needs training in order to meet the needs of this population. As a result, efforts are being made for overall improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. Overall, the director seems aware of the challenges and improvements needed to better the education of ED students in his district. Next, the director was asked about the types of supports needed for this population of students. The director spoke about every class having a licensed special education teacher and each teaching assistant having a college degree. Further, two paraprofessionals are assigned to each substantially separate classrooms, along with two therapeutic support staff per room. Moreover, if a general education teacher gets certain resources, the special education classroom also gets those resources, which was not the case years ago, until the new superintendent stepped in and provided the ED students with an appropriate facility and more resources. Now, the director is looking to expand and make the school K-12.

From the information provided by the director the amount of staffing does not appear to be the issue, with a total of at least three staff members being in the classroom for ED students.
However, the educational experience of staff members attempting to educate them may well be an issue, as the assistants are not required to have a degree in education. Further, the low wages and no tuition reimbursement more than likely contributes to the district and school’s difficulty in finding and retaining quality assistants. The lack of no full-time therapeutic staff more than likely hinders the ED students’ development, as scholarly literature has shown that ED students benefit from this type of support. However, efforts to improve the ED students’ overall education appears to be underway, with the movement of the students to a new facility, a possible increase in staffing, and a possible increase in the number of grade levels in the building. The director was then asked what supports should be mandatory for this type of population, in order to increase their rate of success. The director informed the researcher that she would like to see therapeutic support staff be mandated for each classroom and made full-time, which is currently not the case at this time, but the director has requested the full-time staff for next year.

The major piece taken from this response was the need for a therapeutic staff member to be included in every classroom on a full time basis. Currently, this is not the case at the District #2 school due to financial constraints. The director was then asked to describe a few experiences at the administrative level when trying to meet the needs of ED students. The director spoke about receiving the approval and financial capacity to create a 45-day placement school for educators to be able to determine the proper location for ED students having extreme difficulty in their current class or school. Currently the child remains in their current placement until a team meeting is conducted, which is not ideal for student or staff safety and learning. Further, having the placement eradicate this current situation and allow the student to be evaluated properly, while educators make the most appropriate decision for the students.
The most salient point taken from the directors’ response was the need for a 45-day placement for students who may be ED or who are already diagnosed with the disorder. Further, if the facility was created, although it may be a financial burden at first, in the long term it will save the district money and will therefore allow funds to be allocated elsewhere. With respect to some of the successes the school and district has had in trying to meet the needs of ED students, the director said precise numbers were not available, but that about three to four students usually make it into the inclusion program at the high school. In addition, the sub-separate school has students that are graduating and going on to attend college and gain employment. The director also stated:

“I've hired a facilitator to go out and get these kids jobs. I'm hiring one to one job coaches and paying their wages for a couple of months, and then have the employer pick up the wages to get these kids employed.”

The greatest take away from the director’s response to this question was the improvements District #2 is attempting to make with the hiring of a facilitator and job coaches to potentially provide these students with jobs. One of the greatest areas of need for these students is the social and vocational piece, and the ED students will receive both with these services. The interview then continued with a multi-part question: “Are the ED students in a sub-separate, self-contained, part or full-time inclusion classroom, and is this a school or district decision? Do you agree with this decision?” The director provided the following information as she spoke about inclusion opportunities for students, being a team decision process and how the district is currently attempting to create a sub-separate class in the high school level. Moreover, the director spoke about changing the culture in the high school as staff and students need to be accepting of these students because currently there is a lot distain for the population being
integrated into the school. The director also informed the researcher that during the districts coordinated program review through the Department of Ed, the district was cited for not having a sub-separate program in the high school.

The most salient point taken from the director’s response was that District #2 is out of compliance with state regulations because the district does not have a sub-separate program at the high school. However, the district continues to work on this, as they plan on sending at least eight students to the high school in the coming year. The director was then asked how often emotionally disturbed students are removed from their classroom and placed in other schools. The director then spoke about how she facilitates that; no students go out of district, without going through her first and through the team process. Further, the department heads that supervise the emotionally impaired classrooms meet with teachers and their therapeutic support staff on a monthly basis to perform student case conferencing. Moreover, the district provides a separate program for students with felony charges and it runs from 3:30pm to 6:30pm, five days a week. The students also receive individualized tutoring by a special education teacher and a specialized mentoring program. They go there until their felony charges are expunged. It's been very successful and once their felony charges are expunged, they are allowed to come back.

The district appears to go through a fairly thorough process when making the decision to remove a student from a classroom permanently, with standard protocol in place before a final decision is made. Further, all students with pending felony charges are removed from the school setting and provided with daily tutoring services for three hours every school day. The next question for the District #2 director of special education was in regards to the students that have been removed from the district, and whether or not they ever return to the district. The director provided the following response:
For emotionally impaired [students], no, because there are out of district schools that will take kids that have assaulted staff or brought weapons to school. Also, any emotionally impaired student who has any type of sexualized behavior or sexual charges against them, they go right out. I don't even have them come. They're out, because I'm not going to put other kids in jeopardy because of their behavior.

The director was then asked if this was a policy mandated by the school district or whether it was her decision to do this. Her response: “I'm not really sure if it's a policy or if it's something I just do. I presented it to the school committee and they ask me who's out of district, because of financial constraints and I say in a very nice way that it’s students that are sexual predators or have committed sexual assault. Do you want them to come back and be in your neighborhood schools? I don't, and I'm okay with my decision to send those kids out.”

The information provided by the director regarding this question was interesting. The director appears to be making decisions without first checking district, state, or federal regulations regarding the policies on removing ED students from the least restrictive setting. In reflection, further questioning should have taken place in regards to those rules and regulations, and whether the district is bound to those regulations or has autonomy concerning placement of ED students in a more restrictive setting. The director was asked one final question about how many ED students were currently placed out of district. The director spoke about only having three or four ED students being placed out of district in the past few years and that was after going through the districts sub-separate programs, and going to the day school. However, the biggest financial implication is when a student comes in during the middle of year and is currently being placed out of district. When that takes place the district is automatically responsible for the fees, regardless of the placement.
The response from the director on this question was informative. The majority of educators are unaware how common it is for an ED student to come into the district during the school year, and the financial responsibility rests on the new school district to pay that student’s out of district services. Overall, the interview with the District #2 director of special education was extremely informative, as her district appears to be attempting to improve services to meet the needs of ED students. This will happen through inclusion opportunities in the high school; plans for a sub-separate classroom in the high school; a job coach; and opportunities for employment. However, the district was out of compliance for not having a sub-separate classroom in the high school, and the question on removing students from their current setting and placing them in a more restrictive setting without first checking district, state, or federal regulations is questionable.

**District #2 Principal.** The second interview for District #2 was with the principal of a high school with a population solely made up of ED students. The principal has been working at the school for several years, and has over 10 years of experience working with the ED population. The first question for the principal during our interview session was ‘What does it mean to you to service the ED the administrative level?’ The principal stated:

“I take this as a critically important job where I’ve always been interested in representing the under-represented. I think that a lot of times these kids are the ones that are cast aside and we go for the kids that are ‘easier’, or typically developing.”

The thoughts of the principal are comparable to the director of District #2, as both of these administrators view the job of servicing this population as critically important. They are also both cognizant of the challenges that come along with these students. The principal was then asked about the challenges he faces when trying to meet the needs of these students. The
principal talked about changing a negative school culture to one that focused more on student-centered goals and initiatives to meet these students’ needs. The principal was also asked about the types of supports required to meet the needs of his ED students. The principal was emphatic about recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors on a consistent basis, and using that practice as the foundation for student success at the school. Upon reflection, asking the principal for more examples would have been enlightening, as scholarly literature has shown ED students require more supports than just positive reinforcement and rewards in order to be successful. When asked about mandatory supports for ED students, the principal stated that being fully staffed was critical, as students exhibit severe behaviors ranging from aggression, property destruction and self-injurious behavior, all of which become even more problematic when short staffed. The principal’s school has both staff members that monitor the hallways, as well as ‘cool down areas’ with staff in place to supervise these students. These are helpful strategies, but the school is a work in progress, and is looking to make even greater improvements from a therapeutic standpoint.

The interview continued, and the principal was asked to describe a few experiences, positive or negative, when trying to meet the needs of this population. The principal again spoke about changing the negative culture of the school, where the mantra of the past had been “When in doubt, kick them out”. Now, positive reinforcement and rewards are being utilized, and removing students from the room is a last resort. The principal also stated:

“I developed a mission and a vision statement to get all the teachers on board. I got about 75% of them on board, and lucked out with specific retirements and was able to bring some of my own people in. Also, every student that started the year passed the MCAS, and we graduated every single kid that has started the year.”
From the information gathered, the principal at the sub-separate school for ED students has had relative success with respect to improving both the school’s culture and graduation rates. Further, the principal acknowledged the overall supports that students receive, whether they come from the school or the district. When asked about the school setting, the principal said the school is self-contained for ED students, and is the most restrictive school in the district. When asked about the number of students from the school that go into a less restrictive environment in a given year, the principal spoke about the students appreciating the atmosphere, the support they receive, and boundaries provided in a smaller environment. Further, there may be one or two students a year going back to the general education setting, but the students are always told We when they come into the school the staff are willing to support them in whatever they want to do. If they want to go back to the general education school, they will be supported, but the students have to follow a certain set of rules.

Although the numbers of ED students going back into an inclusion or general education setting appear low, the school does offer inclusion opportunities if the students meet a certain criteria. With respect to students being removed from the classroom and placed in other schools or out of district, the principal informed the researcher that depending on the year, it may be zero or two or three students, but its for aggressive behaviors, felonies or sexual misconduct. Moreover, it’s a process for removal and the school puts behavior plans into place before removal. However, for the aggressive students, removal takes place immediately because of safety reasons.

The numbers of ED students placed out of district appear low, as the principal considers the school to have the necessary supports in place to support the population. However, removing students for aggressive and sexual behaviors without attempting to reduce the behavior could
potentially be out of compliance with state and federal regulations. Overall, the principal has made changes to meet the needs of ED students by changing the school's culture, establishing a positive reinforcement system, and having the appropriate staffing to properly support the ED students’ behaviors.

**District #2 teachers.** The focus group with teachers included two male special education teachers who have over fifteen years of experience working with ED students. The first interview question for the special education teachers was ‘What does it mean to you to service the emotionally disturbed population?’ Both of the teachers spoke about making a difference in these students’ lives and being a good role model and somebody they can look up to because their home lives are tough. Overall, the teachers want the school to be a safe learning environment where the kids like to show up. Teachers were then asked about the challenges they face when trying to meet the needs of ED students. The teachers stated:

Teacher 1: “A lack of home support and attendance is a huge issue, trying to get mom or dad, or stepmom on board with what we're doing here. A lot of what we see is they go home and mom doesn't care about what's going on in the classroom. Why are the kids going to care about what they do? So they get a bad report card and they don't really care because nobody at home really cares. It's hard for people in general, but really hard for our teenage kids that don't have many supports at home.”

Teacher 2: “I would say the consistency from day to day. My best student one day can be the worst the next day. So I'd say that really is a daily challenge from day to day.”

Answers thus far from Teacher 1 echo past responses from teachers, in regards to the outside environment having a profound effect on student performance in and attitude toward school. In regards to discussion on the types of supports needed in order to meet the needs of the
ED students, a few major issues were presented. These issues included better-trained staff, as “new teachers come in and have to learn as they go”, as well as time to meet, plan, and implement the correct procedures. Currently, before the school year starts, teachers only receive one planning day before students arrive. As the interview continued, the teachers were asked about supports that should be mandatory for ED students in the classroom. The teachers’ responses were similar to the previous question regarding supports for ED students in the classroom, with the need for staff training and planning time in order to be properly prepared to meet the needs of ED students. Further, both teachers spoke about the need for a reading specialist and an English Language Specialist because the majority of their ED students are either behind on grade level reading or have a first language that is not English.

The interview with the two special education teachers continued, with teachers being asked to describe experiences, either positive or negative, meeting the needs of the ED population. The teachers spoke about how frustrating it is to be working with a student and trying to get the student to buy in to earning an education, but having no parental support as the parents won’t show up for IEP meetings, parent consults or other student events to support their children. From the teachers perspective the lack of parental support has a dramatic impact on the students’ willingness to invest themselves in their academics when their parents show little to no support.

With respect to positive experiences, the teachers spoke about the students feeling comfortable with them and confiding in them. Further, the majority of students do not like vacations, as the students would rather be in school than in the home environment. Also, the teachers stated that many students who have graduated come back and visit. Overall, students
appear to feel comfortable in their school setting and look forward to going back to school after vacations and graduation.

Teachers were then asked about the placement of the ED students in a self-contained school and whether or not they agree with the placement. Both teachers agreed that the majority of students attending the school belong in a self-contained classroom, but there is a need to raise expectations by having more students take part in the inclusion opportunities offered in the general education high school setting. Also, when the teachers were asked about how many students in their school go back full or part time into the general education setting, the response was usually maybe one student a year does this. With respect to the how often students are removed from their classrooms, the teachers stated:

Teacher 1: “Behavior [is the reason] they're asked to leave. We have a system set up where they get a specific amount of warnings, and then they're asked to step out, and if they can't be successful there, they're asked to go down to what we call our planning center.”

Teacher 2: “We have a lot of kids that walk out, too.”

According to teachers, students leave the classroom weekly, but the teachers and school appear to have a sufficient system in place for students leaving the classroom. The final question in the interview asked teachers how many students are removed from the school and placed in another districts. The response from both teachers was that two to three students a year are removed. Overall, the interview with the two special education teachers was informative. It was apparent that the major obstacles teachers faced was a lack of parental involvement and the students’ environment outside of the school severally impacting their attitude toward attending
and participating in their education. Further, there appears to be a need for a reading specialist and ELL teacher to better meet the needs of ED students in their current setting.

**District # 2 students.** The focus group included two eighteen-year-old female students that have been diagnosed with ED and who attend the school. The interviewed started with the following question for the two students: “What are some of the challenges you have faced during your time in school?” The two students stated:

Student 1: “Depression and anxiety, especially when there are a lot of people around and I don't really know them.”

Student 2: ”Yeah, probably anxiety too. Because when in relationships with boys, and sometimes just functioning in everyday tasks, it makes me shut down completely.”

Both students mentioned anxiety and coping with it during different situations to be a major obstacle. The students were then asked to discuss some of the successes they have had while in school. The students were proud of making the honor roll. They were also proud that their attendance had increased, and that they had gained some positive social experiences while attending their school. With respect to how the school can help them succeed, both students spoke about how the teachers already do a lot to make classes interesting and help each student learn based on their individual learning style. Also, both students recognized they were in a special education class, and spoke about embracing the school because of how understanding the staff members are with respect to students’ emotional issues. In previous place (general education) the students would usually just shut down because there was little to no understanding from educators.

The level of comfort both students have attending their school is very apparent, as both expressed feeling comfortable in their school environment and knowing their teachers
understand their behavioral issues. Further, both students’ level of comfort have aids them both academically and socially, as the students have improved in these areas. In addition, when students were asked whether or not they receive enough academic support at school, both students stated that they did receive enough support, which shows how well teachers and other staff support them. Students are also given social opportunities everyday, during “activity group”. This group occurs before lunch and then on the last period of every Friday. Students interact by playing sports, board games, or doing art projects. The school appears to provide some social opportunities for these students, but is limited to just the regular school day hours as no after school sports or social opportunities are available.

When the students were asked if either of them had been removed from the classroom for behavioral issues, both students said they had been removed once, and that they were each in another school before attending their current school in District #2. From the information gathered during the interview, both students appear to enjoy their current placement with teacher support being apparent, along with multiple social opportunities for the students. The students did not speak about the reinforcement system in place, but this may be because of their own behavioral success and lack of need for the system personally.

**Summary of district #2 findings.** The District #2 administrators both agree that meeting the needs of ED students is a very difficult challenge. Further, both administrators see the need for quality educators who are invested in working with ED students. The District #2 director would like to get quality educators by increasing salary and benefits for paraprofessionals, teachers, and behavioral therapists. The principal of District #2 is trying to do this as well, by bringing in his own paraprofessionals and teachers who are committed to working with ED students. The greatest concern expressed by the teachers in District #2 was that the students’
outside environment has a severe impact on their motivation to attend and perform well in school. Further, the teachers were critical of the lack of time allocated in preparation for the year, and the amount training given to them and paraprofessionals that work with ED students. This is in stark contrast to the opinion of the special education director of District #2, as the director mentioned multiple times that staff members receive numerous training opportunities on working with ED students. However, all staff members, from administrators to teachers, appear to agree on their students being in the appropriate placement – a self-contained school consisting of only ED students. There were a few issues with compliance. In District #2, as there was not a self-contained ED classroom in the high school, and the director may be out of compliance for not permitting students with sexual offenses in the district. The district does, however, appear to be making efforts in meeting the needs of ED students, as the special education director is attempting to increase the salaries and benefits for staff members working with the population, hiring job coaches for the students, and connecting with local business owners in order for the students to gain employment. Further, the director is in the process of ensuring a self-contained classroom is instituted in the general education high school setting in order to maintain state compliance. It is, however, an issue that there appears to be limited inclusion opportunities for students, as teachers and the principal are hesitant about sending students to the general education high school because of potential failure and further rejection.

**Emergent Themes**

A detailed summary of the methodological approach derived for this study was presented in Chapter Three. The researcher implemented a multi-case study methodological approach to critique two urban school districts servicing ED students in the Boston area. The researcher interviewed primary stakeholders, which included four groups: Director of Special Education for
the district; principal of the school servicing ED students; teachers working directly with ED students; and ED students from one district. The researcher first assigned codes to District #1’s interview transcripts and then repeated this cycle for District #2. The second cycle of coding involved two phases, with the first phase including the researcher scanning for patterns and themes within each individual school district, followed by cross-checking prior to naming a pattern. Next, using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, the information was tracked with pattern codes within the individual school districts so that the interrelations among codes could be seen. Mapping the pattern codes within the individual school districts followed, as the researcher took part in a cross-case synthesis, which was examining the results of each individual interview and recognizing the patterns that occurred across interviews.

During this thematic analysis process, the researcher looked for patterns between the two public school districts. Table one displays the themes across District #1 and District #2 and in relation to the research questions. In the subsequent presentation of themes, representative data collected during interviews is used as evidence of consensus among participants across the two school districts.
Table 1

Themes According to Research Questions

How are two urban public high schools attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving this student population in their schools?

Theme 1. ED Students are placed in sub-separate placements with limited Inclusion Opportunities.
Theme 2. Both districts currently have behavioral systems in place to support ED students.
Theme 3. There appears to be a lack of teacher support between the two districts.

What are the challenges of effectively serving their school’s ED population, as perceived by administrators and teachers at the school?

Theme 4. Teachers from both districts are requesting appropriate and sufficient staff Training in relation to working with ED students.
Theme 5. Financial support appears to be lacking in areas that are needed to support ED students.
Theme 6. The outside environment appears to have a direct impact on ED student attendance.

How do the ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs?

Theme 7. ED students from District #2 clearly show a level of comfort and success in their current placement.

Research Question 1: How are two urban public high schools attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving this student population in their schools?

Theme 1: Sub-separate, Placement with Limited Inclusion Opportunities. During interviews and focus groups, participants were asked where ED students are being placed and how often students receive the opportunity to be part of the inclusion process. Currently, both schools place their ED students in a sub-separate high school, and all of the administrators and teachers agreed with the students’ placement being in a sub-separate facility. The only administrator not in agreement was the special education director for District #1, who said,
“Every student should be part inclusion.” However, both districts appear to have very limited inclusion opportunities for ED students. Part of this is because all staff members for both districts agree with the placement of the students. As teachers, principals, and directors have stated: “We are in agreement with the placement” and “The students eventually show their true colors”. There also appears to be a low-tolerance policy in both districts when these students are placed into the general education setting, as teachers and principals have stated: “We want to be sure they can make it” and “We don’t want them to get sent back”.

**Theme 2: Behavioral Systems.** Currently, both districts have behavioral systems in place for their ED students, with positive reinforcement being the main focal point in assisting ED students in their behavior and overall education needs. However, both districts’ teachers have stated that there is a “lack of training” for both teachers and paraprofessionals in the elements of behavioral systems that support ED students. Further, both districts appear to handle their positive reinforcement programs differently, as District #1 uses more of a parental support system. Using this method, teachers get to know their students and speak with them directly when the students are having trouble. One teacher from District #1 said that they were “parental figures” to the students. District #2, on the other hand, uses positive reinforcement more stringently, with the implementation of incentives and rewards for good behavior. The behavioral systems continue at each district, with the ED students from both districts receiving therapeutic support. However, the therapeutic support in District #1 is only weekly, and appears to be conducted in groups, not individually. In District #2, the therapists are not full time or dedicated toward one classroom, which makes their caseloads extremely high. Moreover, there appears to be a discrepancy in both districts, as the administrators and teachers speak differently about the training that staff members receive for behavioral systems and supports. Both administrators
from District #1 and District #2 stated that “staff receive extensive training”, but both teacher focus groups have either asked for more training related to the population they work with, or an increased amount of training with respect to working with ED students.

**Theme 3: Teacher Support.** Another major theme with respect to research question 1 was teacher support across both districts. District #1’s most significant issue with respect to teacher support was funding for extra curricular activities or field trips. Teachers from the district stated they receive “no financial support” for either of these types of activities. The teachers further stated they receive “no support” in the classroom unless there is a major behavioral issue. District #2 has support issues with respect to the quality of staffing, as turnover rates are high for paraprofessionals and staff members are overall “underpaid”, according to the director of special education. Further, training for paraprofessionals and teacher assistants appears to be lacking, as teachers in District #2 continually spoke about their staff “not being properly trained”. Both districts have paraprofessionals and therapeutic staff to support them with academic and student behavior, but the therapeutic staff in both districts have extremely heavy case loads and are not dedicated to a single classroom.

**Research Question 2: What are the challenges of effectively serving their school’s ED population, as perceived by administrators and teachers at the school?**

**Theme 4: Staff Training.** One of the most apparent commonalities found during this research study was staff training. First, both special education directors for District #1 and District #2 spoke about the “extensive and continuous training” staff members receive when working with the ED population. However, both teacher focus groups from District #1 and District #2 made it extremely apparent that the training staff was receiving was not enough or did not apply when working with ED students. The teacher focus group from District #1 stated, “The training we have received does not apply to us and has not for the longest time”. The District #2
teacher focus group echoed the same thoughts when it came to staff training not applying to them, but also stated “The amount of preparation time at the beginning of the year was insufficient” when preparing staff and team members to work with ED students for the year.

**Theme 5: Financial Support.** Another major theme found in this study is the lack of financial support in both districts. In District #1, the financial allocation for teachers to establish field trips, vocational training, or after school activities for these students is obsolete, as teachers have to use their own money for these activities. In District #2, the major problem with respect to financial support is in the area of staff salary, as the paraprofessionals and teacher assistances are underpaid. This creates a high attrition rate and, in turn, staff with less experience. Further, these staff members receive no tuition reimbursement in a profession that requires them to continue their education if they want to receive a promotion. Moreover, the therapeutic staff is part time, is required to work year round, and receives a salary below the teacher minimum. This salary, when averaged out over the course of the entire year, is at or below the amount a paraprofessional receives in District #2.

**Theme 6: Outside Environment-Attendance.** One of the more critical themes found during the research process was student attendance, with respect to how the outside environment impacts an ED student’s attendance rate and overall performance. The District #1 and District #2 teachers’ focus groups spoke consistently about this issue throughout their interviews. The District #1 teachers first talked about the outside environment and how it impacts a student in the classroom, stating “These students are more worried about getting jumped or shot than school, so how or why does an education apply to them?” The teachers from District #1 also spoke about “just getting the students to attend school, come to class, and stay for the duration of the day”. Further, the female teacher from District #1 spoke about “students showing up to class whenever
they want”. The sentiments from the District #2 teachers’ focus group are similar with regards to the outside environment impacting student attendance. Both teachers from District #2 spoke about the students’ home environment having a severe impact on their attendance and their attitude toward school. The teachers from District #2 stated: “The students are like ‘why should I care, when my parents don’t show up to meetings, help me out at home or care about my grades’”. Moreover, both teachers spoke about just having the students come to school as a “victory”. As one can see, an ED student’s outside environment has a tremendous impact on attendance and overall educational performance.

**Research Question 3: How do the ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs?**

**Theme 7: Comfort & Success.** Although only one group of students could be interviewed during the research process, the researcher thought it was imperative for the students’ information to be presented, based on the findings and the fact that both of the students’ responses to the interview questions were similar. From the information gathered by the two District #2 students, there appears to be an extreme level of comfort both students in their current school. Student 1 and 2 both stated, “I feel like I can be myself”. Further, Student 1 spoke about how the teachers are “understanding” of their behavioral or emotional conditions. Moreover, both students have reached academic success at their current school and are able to make the honor roll.

**Summary**

Chapter four has presented the data and information, collected and critiqued by the researcher, of two urban school districts that are trying to meet the needs of ED students. The collected information is from the perspectives of district administrators, principals, teachers, and ED students. Both districts were described thoroughly, followed by detailed descriptions of each
of the interviews and focus groups with district educators and students. In total, nine educators and two students were interviewed over the course of several meetings. Upon providing detail on each of the urban school districts, emergent themes were articulated. The seven emergent themes were provided with quotes showing consensus across the two school districts.

All of the themes were considered in comparison to the research questions. The first research question addressed how two urban public high schools are attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving this student population in their schools. Three overarching themes emerged, first within each of the districts and then through cross case analysis of the two districts. These themes were sub-separate placement with limited inclusion opportunities, behavioral systems, and teacher support. The second research question addressed the challenges of effectively serving the ED population, as perceived by administrators and teachers at the school. A total of three themes emerged, which included staff training, financial support, and the outside environment with respect to attendance. The final research question addressed how ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs. Although only one group of students could be interviewed during the research process and numerous unsuccessful attempts were made in order to interview students from District #1, the researcher thought it was imperative for the students’ information to be presented based on the findings and the fact that both of students’ responses to the interview questions were similar during the interview process.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

Chapter five will discuss the major findings of the study, in relation to meeting the needs of ED students in public high schools. The researcher will present conclusions based on the findings, and explore implications for meeting the needs of ED students with respect to practices, policies and for future research in the field. In addition, key findings will be discussed in relation to the literature and theoretical framework. Lastly, this chapter will address the study’s limitations and conclude with the researcher’s personal reflection.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Scholars have examined and researched ED students’ trajectories for over seventy-five years (Bower, 1990 & Doroshow, 2016). According to Doroshow (2016), by the early twentieth century, the child-saving movement was underway. Reformers turned their focus on improving the health and welfare of dependent and neglected children by ending child labor, promoting education, and creating agencies designed to support dependent children. One such agency was the U.S. Children’s Bureau, which was founded in 1912. However, empirical literature reveals that public schools are having extreme difficulty meeting the needs of ED students. These school facilities are placing ED students in settings that lack adequate behavioral supports (Bateman, 2009). It was not until the 1940s – when professionals from Residential Treatment Centers (RTAs) identified a new group of children that were deemed “emotionally disturbed” – that this population garnered any attention. The movement to improve special education continued when Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 to address the inequality of educational opportunities for underprivileged children. Statistics provided by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped estimated that there were more than 8 million children with impairments requiring special education and that only 3.9 million of these children were
receiving an appropriate education. In addition, 1.75 million handicapped children were receiving no educational services at all, while 2.5 million handicapped children were receiving an inappropriate education (Wright & Wright, 1999). The final two pieces of intertwined legislative law to assist in providing special needs students the education to which they are entitled is The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. The EAHCA was designed by Congress to ensure that all children with disabilities would have the right to education, and to establish a process by which state and local educational agencies would be held accountable for providing educational services to all handicapped children. Although, the findings vary regarding a lack of supports for public schools, there is important information on the lack of social opportunities provided in restrictive settings; the framework for supports; the debate on testing applications for ED students; and the lack of support for the reintegration of ED students into the general education classroom in relation to teacher, peer, and parent acceptance (Bateman, 2009; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Helton, 2011). This qualitative multi-case study examined two urban public high schools attempting to meet the needs of ED students. The over arching goal of the study was to identify and document the practices as they relate to ED achievement, so that other public high schools could implement these useful practices and potentially create a framework for ED growth and achievement.

Discussion of the Major Findings

There were a total of seven themes that arose after analyzing data from the interviews with the District Special Education Directors and Principals of each self-contained ED high school, and the focus groups with teachers and students. The researcher also examined each one of these themes and further questioned how urban public high schools are attempting to meet the
academic, behavioral, and social needs of their ED student population; what challenges arise when trying to effectively serve their school’s ED population; and how ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs. The analysis and critique of the research provided two sets of findings: (1) findings that apply to meeting the needs of ED Students, and (2) findings that show the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED Students.

Table 2

Two Sets of Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings that apply to meeting the needs of ED students</th>
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<td>Theme 2 Behavioral Systems</td>
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<td>Theme 7 Comfort &amp; Success – District #2 students only</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Findings that show the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1 Sub-separate, placement with Limited Inclusion Opportunities</td>
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<td>Theme 3 Teacher Support</td>
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<td>Theme 4 Staff Training</td>
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<td>Theme 5 Financial Support</td>
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From across the two participating districts, the findings present a glaring need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. Further, scholars and practitioners have also provided pertinent and plausible literature showing the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. Given this information, the researcher drew on the findings that show the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students in order to determine the three key findings for this research:

- Two urban public high schools are attempting to better meet the needs of ED students through stronger identification of students with ED, as well as through increased
inclusion opportunities for ED students.

- The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED students in the two urban public high settings.
- The need for applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with ED students.

Each of these are discussed below.

**Two urban public high schools are attempting to better meet the needs of ED students through identifying and determining if the student is ED and increasing inclusion opportunities.** The District Directors of Special Education were the first educators to be interviewed in each urban school district. From the beginning of each interview, the directors from both districts spoke about the need and current attempt to improve their districts’ services in order to meet the needs of ED students, especially in the area of better identification of ED students.

Comments from Directors of Special Education interviews displayed a culture of change and improvement needed for identifying ED students. Examples include:

- Just because you've been traumatized does not mean you are emotionally impaired
- Over-identification in this system happens because there is a lot of trauma in this city, a lot of neighborhoods that experience trauma on a daily basis
- There are out of district schools that will take kids that have assaulted staff, brought weapons to school
- Any student emotionally impaired who has any type of sexualized behavior, sexual
charges, they go right out

Comments for improvement continued with the need for inclusion opportunities for ED students.

- Three ED students to the High School for inclusion, and all three students did not make it. I have eight students transitioning next year, so improvements to the program is imperative because it provides the students with what they need and these kids have a right to be there
- We have emotionally impaired inclusion programs. It's not done well; I need to provide training to the deans, general education teachers
- Our District is working on the transition from sub separate to inclusion
- The district is pushing for at least partial inclusion if not full inclusion for all special education students

The district special education director’s sentiments were echoed as the researcher moved forward and interviewed the principals from each district who are responsible for sub-separate high schools servicing ED students. The principals from each district also highlighted the need for improvement through better identification of ED students and increased inclusion opportunities. Example comments include:

- The biggest challenge is building the capacity of my staff to truly understand the different diagnoses
- We have two programs that will allow us to incorporate our kids back into a mainstream setting, and that's our ultimate goal
- If our students want to go back to the Gen Ed School, we'll support them, but they have to follow a certain set of rules.

Although evidence from the research and interviews has shown that each district has
deficits in meeting the needs of ED students, administration from each district appears to be on a unified front in the attempt to improve their services to ED students in the areas of properly identifying ED students and developing more inclusion opportunities for these students. The district directors of special education have clearly communicated to their principals the overarching goals of their respective districts in the areas of ED student identification and providing inclusion opportunities for this population.

**The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED students in the two urban public high settings.** The second key finding unveiled through the research study was the need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for ED students. At both the district and the school level, administration, teachers, and students advocate for funds to improve the education of ED students. Comments from administrators reflected a desire to improve in the areas of increased staff salary and provide social opportunities for ED students: Example comments include:

*Salary Staff Issues*

- It is hard for them to be able to afford to go back to school because the salary is terrible
- The turnover rate is high because of the low salary
- Therapeutic staff are currently part time
- The pay is terrible, I just negotiated a new contract with the superintendent and proposed to have them work 10 months, with at least the starting teachers salary
- They work 12 months and maybe received $44,000 a year. That’s not even a first year teacher's salary, and they're working with our neediest kids
**Social Opportunities**

- The district has hired a facilitator to go out and help these kids acquire jobs.
- We have hired one to one job coaches to assist them socially.
- We are emphatic about recognizing and rewarding positive social behaviors on a consistent basis and that is the principal foundation for the students success.
- The social emotional learning part is not only social workers, it's gym, it's P.E., it's making sure kids are getting physically active.
- It's making sure they're getting and learning good social skills and coping mechanisms.

As one can see, administrators from both districts have recognized staff salaries and providing social opportunities as a critical component of meeting the needs of ED students. Further, administration is in the process of taking the necessary steps to improve in these areas that are so important to the success of an ED student. Teachers from both districts also recognized that the social component of an ED student’s education is a vital cog in meeting their needs and creating a successful foundation for them to succeed. However, their comments vary with respect to the support they receive with this function of an ED student’s education.

Example comments include:

**Social Opportunities**

- That's number one, create a positive experience in the classroom and positive relationships.
- We have an excellent guidance councilor who can guide them and lead them.
- Individual teachers have been doing it. Creating initiatives to introduce cultural capital to kids.
• Everything is done through us. It's up to individual driven teachers
• After a year, this student was socializing more with students
• He was non-verbal, but by the time he left, you couldn't get this kid to stop talking

_Funding for Social Opportunities_

• Space for kids for being counseled and things of that nature would be really beneficial
• You have to do your own fundraising
• There is none. I mean zero dollars this year and teachers put in their own money

The teacher commentary from both districts clearly shows how the teachers are making an effort to provide social learning opportunities for their ED students. However, there appears to be a fairly wide range of opinion on who is actually delivering the services and financially supporting the social opportunities when one compares the administrators’ comments to that of the teachers. Although administrators and teachers opinions differ with respect to who is providing social opportunities and finances for the endeavors, students from District #2 appear to support both administration and teachers when it comes to social opportunities at their school. Example comments include:

• Socially a positive experience while attending this school
• I embrace it's very understanding here
• I'm never embarrassed about feeling some type of way, or showing my emotions in front of people
• Students are given social opportunities every day called “activity group”
• Friday each student is allowed to make a social choice to interact with peers playing sports, board games or doing art projects
The key findings on staff salary issues begin at the administrative level, as administration is responsible for handling budgetary issues and staffing obligations. There definitely appears to be room for growth and improvement in the allocation of funds for staff with respect to meeting the needs of ED students. The social component can be easily seen across districts and intertwined from administration to teachers and down to students. Administration appears to making strides to improve the social component for their respective districts, but the information has not been delivered down to the teachers. However, the consensus from the ED students from District #2 is that their social opportunities are enjoyable and very apparent.

The need for applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with ED students. The final and third key finding is the issue of applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers and paraprofessionals who work with ED students. These finding appear to be the most glaring, as all staff members for each district commented on the issue of training. Administrators from both districts have said that they are attempting to improve training for staff members that work with ED students. Examples from administration include:

- The director also thought that continuous reflection by staff on best practices for ED students would be imperative for the development of these students with respect to training
- The money needs to be allocated toward professional development (PD) in order for teachers to be probably trained to teach and educate the ED population
- We have ED kids who are also autistic and have Asperger’s, building the capacity of staff through training, to truly understand those different diagnoses will have positive
impact on their education

• The principal again focused on the training of teachers, especially when it comes to cultural diversity

• We do a lot of training in our programs for our teaching assistants and paraprofessionals, and we encourage them to go back to school to get their license

• I need to provide training to the deans, general education teachers and I need to provide training to the teacher because she's struggling up there

From the information provided, one can see a clear need for training for educators working with ED students. Administration from each district may have different opinions on what type of training is need for these educators, but both show how imperative that training is. Teachers from both districts also brought up training, PD and the hours needed in order to prepare and have the necessary knowledge to work with ED students. The teachers’ comments from both districts are not directly in line with administration, but their desire for relevant professional development and training is very apparent. Examples from teachers include:

• What we don't have professional development that is relevant, not for the last 15 years or 17 years

• The bottom line is the professional development we get is for other teachers

• Teachers need a formal mentor and then have someone in the classroom with experience because there are things you cannot know until you've learned them

• We need better-trained staff, as “new teachers come in and have to learn as they go” and no time to plan, meet and implement the correct procedures

• Teachers only receive one day of planning before the students arrive

• We need staff training and planning time in order to be properly prepared to meet the
needs of ED students

From this, one can easily see the need for increased training and preparation time when working with the ED population, as well as training relevant to the ED population. Currently, the training in each district appears to be too short and not relevant to academic, behavioral and social needs of ED students.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The Oliver & Barnes Model of Social Disability was the theoretical framework best suited to decipher the data for this qualitative multi-case study. This is because the model’s primary focus is to remove any societal or environmental barriers, which serve to exclude and disable people, rather than assist with their impairment (Watson, 2012). Further, Oliver (1990) states that disability arises as a result of the way that society is organized, and that social relations are paramount in constructing the experiences of disabled people (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 194). Therefore, the Oliver & Barnes model is a extremely accurate and justifiable way to analyze how two public high schools are attempting to meet the needs of ED students faced with societal, environmental and social barriers. The model states and scholarly arguments relate directly to meeting the needs of ED students, as the population is being removed from their original classroom environment and then rejected when attempts are made to place them back into their original setting (Panacek & Dunlap, 2003; Coleman, Webber & Algozzine, 1999). Moreover, the three key findings are viewed through the lens of the four major tenets within the Oliver & Barnes model, which include: inaccessible physical environments; communication barriers; discrimination; and information provided in inaccessible formats.

The four major tenets for the Social Model of disability give the model true meaning, and are weighed equally with respect to the model. The four tenets relate directly to the study and
findings as “Inaccessible Physical Environments” are extremely prevalent in daily life – ramps and elevators are not always available for individuals in wheelchairs and, according to Watson (2012), impairment effects dramatically reduce a disabled individual’s ability to access major aspects of our society, ranging from daily routines, social activities, and education. From the literature provided, “impairment effects” directly correspond to ED students, as their environment becomes inaccessible when they are removed from their substantially separate classroom. The second tenet, “Communication barriers” directly relates to the study and findings, as communication barriers impact the daily functionality of ED students in ways that the majority of people do not comprehend. As Thomas (1999) states, there are individuals who experience psycho-emotional disablism, which employs to define disabling situations that can arise through the actions of close family members, professionals, or other individuals with whom disabled people have direct contact (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 196). The inability of an individual with social and emotional disorders to communicate is often overlooked and misunderstood in our society. The third tenet, “Discrimination”, is another prevalent barrier that disabled individuals face throughout their lives. Moreover, discrimination is constructed and formed not just through one individual lens, but also through cultures, societies, and institutions. ED students and their disabilities are no exception to discrimination, as scholarly literature clearly shows teachers and their peers are extremely reluctant to work with the ED population (Benner, et al., 2010; Coleman, Webber & Algozzine 1999; Kaufman & Wong, 1991).

“Information not in accessible formats”, is the fourth and last major tenet of the model, and it is evident throughout our society. The proper educational tools are not provided to children with disabilities. ED students are no exception, as they are not provided with the proper educational tools or supports when they are removed from their classrooms because of their disability
These four major tenets of the Social Model of Disability align directly with the key research findings:

1. Improve in better meeting the needs of ED students through stronger identification of students with ED, as well as through increased inclusion opportunities for ED students.

2. The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED students in the two urban public high settings.

3. The need for applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with ED students.

Relationship to the first finding: Improve in better meeting the needs of ED students through stronger identification of students with ED, as well as through increased inclusion opportunities for ED students. The tenet of inaccessible physical environments directly correlates to this key finding, as all administrators and teachers validated the fact that ED students are placed not only in different classrooms, but also entirely differently schools. Further, the findings revealed that in both districts there are limited inclusion opportunities for these students, with only 1-3 students a year being placed back or given the opportunity to go back into their general education setting. Moreover, this finding has a direct connection to inaccessible physical environments as Thomas (1999) states that people with impairments may face some restrictions of activity as a consequence of their impairment. She argues that these restrictions do not constitute disability, and has introduced the term “impairment effects” (as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 196). According to Watson (2012), impairment effects dramatically reduce a disabled
individual’s ability to access major aspects of our society, ranging from daily routines, social activities, and education. From the findings and scholarly literature, one can clearly see how ED students are being denied their original environment because of their impairment.

Increasing inclusion opportunities for ED students also applies to the tenet of discrimination within the Social Model of Disability, as findings have shown both districts place their ED students in sub-separate facilities, with limited inclusion opportunities whether it be educational, social or athletic the findings clearly show ED rarely part of the process when the general education population is involved. Moreover, the literature with respect to the theoretical framework and findings show ED students have and continue to be excluded from their classroom setting and made to feel inferior, as teachers and peers reject them because of their emotional disability, which one concludes only exacerbates the emotional damage of the ED student due to his or her unique disability (Bateman, 2009; Benner, et al., 2010; Hardman, 2012; Mathur & Jolivette, 2012). With respect to identifying ED students, both districts have provided evidence showing these students come from difficult backgrounds and environments, which could impact their behavior and, in turn, provide a false diagnosis. With that in mind, all four tenets apply to this finding as the student is being provided with an improper diagnosis and is therefore potentially being labeled as needing accessible physical environments, communication tools, and information provided in accessible formats. Further, the student could potentially be discriminated against due to the diagnosis of ED, as the scholarly literature, findings, and Social Model of Disability have clearly shown.

**Relationship to the second finding:** The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED students in the two urban public high settings. The main tenet
that applies to more financial allocation in the area of staff salaries is Discrimination, as District #2 has shown a severe lack of funding of salaries for staff working with ED students. If these staff members are not provided with the proper compensation, they will look elsewhere for employment. This has a direct impact on the education of ED students. Furthermore, as recent research and scholarly literature make very apparent, ED students will eventually fail without the proper support systems in place (Gagnon, & Leone, 2005; Hardman, 2012; Helton, 2007; Kaufman, 2005). As a result, ED students are discriminated against and suffer because the staff that work with them are not given proper financial allocation. In regards to financial allocation for social opportunities, the tenet from the model applying directly to this finding is Communication Barriers. The findings from District #2 clearly show a lack of funding for ED students in the area of social opportunities and, from the literature, one can see how communication is imperative to an ED student’s potential education and social growth. As Preston (2010) indicated, the focus is not in fixing the person with the impairment, but rather how society can improve its integration of people as they are. Integration is one of the major goals for ED students, but if they are not being provided with opportunities to socialize with their peers, then their needs are not being met, and a communication barrier is created that these students cannot overcome. Further, if districts do not provide the necessary finances to support these students’ social opportunities, educators will continue to impede the process of informing others of the inability of an individual with social and emotional disorders (ED students) to communicate, as it is often overlooked and misunderstood in our society (Thomas 1999).

**Relationship to the third finding:** The need for applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with ED students. The third key finding, which concerns
staff training, is intertwined through all four tenets of the Social Disability Model. Beginning with the tenet of discrimination, training for teachers of ED students is not seen as necessary because the education of ED students is not seen as a priority. Further, from the literature provided on discrimination with respect to the social disability model, discrimination is constructed and formed not just through one individual lens, but also through cultures, societies, and institutions. ED students and their disabilities are no exception (Benner, et al., 2010; Coleman, Webber & Algozzine 1999; Kaufman & Wong, 1991). Given this information, one can conclude that educational institutions – including both of the districts in the study – do not see the need to provide the proper training to teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals in order for them to be better educated in the instruction and care of ED students. This is a form of discrimination. With educators being unprepared to meet the needs of ED students because of this discrimination barrier, inaccessible physical environments becomes another tenet linked to the finding. Educators are unable to advocate for their students because of a lack of training and knowledge to know that ED students should be included in their original classroom setting, if possible. Communication barriers also falls in line with this finding as, again, educators are not aware of the correct types of communication devices needed or social situations appropriate due to a lack of appropriate training. The last tenet in the model, information in accessible formats, is another aspect of the theoretical framework that would apply to this key finding. Educators should know how to appropriately deliver information to students with impairments, whether it be through a communication device or in a certain context. The educator will be unaware of this aspect of education if not properly trained.
Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The data analysis revealed two sets of findings. One set applies to meeting the needs of ED students, while the other set shows the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. The research shows that findings are limited with respect to the two districts meeting the needs of ED students. However, within the two districts, the findings present a glaring need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. Further, scholars and practitioners have provided pertinent and plausible literature showing the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. With this in mind, the researcher analyzed the second set of findings. However, in relation to the literature, it is imperative to critique both sets of findings with respect to the literature as both resonant and reaffirm previous research findings.

Findings that apply to meeting the needs of ED students. The first set of findings included the following two themes: (1) Behavioral Systems and (2) Comfort & Success (District #2 Students Only). These themes correlate with the literature. Behavioral Systems correlates, as both districts provided behavioral supports for their students so that they could be successful in their educational environment. Within the literature, one example of an effective individualized support is a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) Plan, which has a three-tiered approach (Benner, Beaudoin, Chen, Davis, & Ralston, 2010). During the interview process, District #1 revealed its use of PBIS as a method of support for ED students. District #2 used positive reinforcement through the use of social opportunities as rewards. As Batemen (2008) has shown in the literature, and as both districts have realized, if an ED student is required to modify his behavior independently without any positive intervention or support, it is detrimental to his success. Besides providing different forms of positive reinforcement for their ED students, each district also provides some form of psychological treatment, whether it be a counselor or
therapist. Both districts’ use of these services directly correlates with the literature. As Cullinan & Epstein (1986) reveal, counseling, guidance, and psychotherapy are appropriate related services for ED students.

Another aspect of the literature that relates to the findings of behavioral systems is found through Muscott (1997). Muscott provides a solid framework for schools and districts to follow when incorporating ED students back into the general education setting and providing the proper supports. First, the student needs to be prepared to integrate back into the setting. The school or district accomplishes this by making the student aware that he will be responsible for adhering to certain behavioral standards. By making the student aware of the requirements, the school has created built-in support for the student. This is a piece of scholarly literature related directly to the finding of behavioral systems, as the District #2 principal revealed that his school is more than willing to work with ED students with respect to transitioning back into the general education setting. Each student, however, must meet certain criteria in order to be eligible for the process to even begin. Moreover, ED students eventually realize that laws and rules are mutually agreed upon social constructs that allow society to function fairly and harmoniously (Hardman, 2012).

The other finding that applies to meeting the needs of ED students is Comfort & Success. Although only one district (District #2) could allow the researcher to interview two ED students, the students’ information was pivotal to the overall research and eventual findings of the study. Currently, the literature suggests that a student may continue to act out because he or she perceives the classroom as harsh and uncaring, feels like an outcast, and must therefore fend for themselves (Hardman, 2012). However, the findings reveal that the two interviewed students from District #2 are extremely comfortable in their current school setting because staff members
are so understanding and because the students feel like they can be themselves. Further, when comparing the literature to the students’ comments, one sees the opposite taking place as teachers and staff members are accepting of these students because they have experience in working with them. However, Kaufman & Wong (1991) indicate that teachers perceive students who demonstrate aggressive, acting-out behaviors as the most difficult to teach and state that ED students are rejected.

The students’ comfort and success at their District #2 school continues with consistent social opportunities and interaction with their peers, as students informed the researcher about their daily social opportunities and extended social times on Fridays. In comparing these findings to the literature, one can see a glaring difference. Panecek and Dunlap (2003) discovered a group of colleagues who had visited over 500 schools and found a severe lack of exposure to social opportunities for ED students within classroom environments. In some cases, ED students went through the entire school day without one positive social interaction (Steinberg & Knitzner, 1990). Another drastic difference when comparing the findings to the literature is that even though these students are in a sub-separate school, they are still provided with enrichment opportunities. However, the literature reveals that restrictive settings do not expose students to general education classes such as art, music, and physical education (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005). By not providing these classes to students, they are denied exposure to social interactions with peers. As a result, the likelihood of improving social skills is decreased. Since social skills are considered a major deficit for the majority of ED students, this is a significant loss (Lane et al., 2005). Fortunately and contrary to the literature, the ED students from District #2 are supported by experienced and understanding staff. Moreover, these students are also being
provided with numerous social opportunities even though their education is taking place in a sub-separate setting.

**Findings that show the need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students.**

The second set of findings included the following themes: Sub-separate placement with Limited Inclusion Opportunities, Teacher Support, Staff Training, and Financial Support. The majority of these themes clearly align with the literature. Sub-separate placement with Limited Inclusion Opportunities aligns, as both districts place their ED students in sub-separate classrooms with usually only one to two students a year even being considered for placement back into their general education settings. This practice clearly aligns with the recent literature, as close to 77,000 students who have been diagnosed with ED are educated in separate day facilities, signifying a dramatic increase within the past 10 years (Gagnon & Leone, 2005). Furthermore, these students are 2.5 times more likely to be moved to another classroom than their peers without ED (Helton, 2011). The literature also suggests that both public and private sectors see separate special education classrooms as the end point in the process of servicing a student with disabilities (Bateman, 2009; Benner, et al., 2010). There is a failure to recognize the general education classroom as the ultimate appropriate finish line in the process (Kaufman, 2005). Again, these pieces of literature directly align with both districts as every faculty member interviewed except for one (District #1 Director of Special Ed) agreed that their ED students were in the correct placement, a sub-separate school. Another aspect of the literature that aligns with this key finding is placement of ED students in the most restrictive setting. For both districts, the most restrictive setting is being in a substantially separate school, which is where all of the ED students in these districts are currently placed. This finding aligns directly with the literature, as research has shown that emotionally disturbed students are more likely to be placed
in restrictive settings than any other student with a disability (Coutinho, & Oswald, 1996; Gagnon & Leone, 2005; Landrum, et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2007). Further, as each district provides limited access for ED students into their general education setting, the literature becomes even more closely related. A study conducted by Simpson (1999) focuses on alternative schools and how it is clear that these schools offer limited support for social integration and creation of acceptance for ED students within the general education setting.

The second theme that clearly aligns with the findings in the literature is Teacher Support. Teachers from both districts spoke about a lack of staffing, financing and administrative support with respect to working with ED students. The lack of teacher support directly aligns with the literature, as Schneider’s (1985) study reveals that schools had no accommodations to meet the emotional needs of ED students, nor did they have the proper academic services. Support staff members were not in place to assist in the self-contained classroom, and outside class supports such as counselors were lacking. Since students in this classroom were not given the proper supports, they were seen as unable to function in the general education public school setting, and therefore referred to a more restrictive placement. The teachers’ dissatisfaction with administrative support is further supported by the literature, as Coutinho and Oswald (1996) report that teachers perceive a lack of support from every faculty member involved in servicing a student with ED. Teachers continued their discontent with faculty and administration by stating that they had not been fully included in the placement decision-making process. Further, neither the principals nor directors of special education had communicated adequately with the classroom teachers in order to support the needs of the ED students (Coutinho & Oswald, 1996).

**Findings that relate to the need for staff training.** The third theme that resonates with the literature is Staff Training. Teachers from both districts spoke about the lack of proper
training in order to meet the needs of ED students. As the literature has shown, it is imperative to ensure special educators and other faculty members are trained not only to handle the student, but also to understand the students’ behavioral needs. Most importantly, within the framework is the critical component of designing individualized instruction and supports that involve both student and family, regardless of placement (Muscott, 1997). The teachers’ lack of quality and applicable training is again reinforced through the literature. A study done by Naraian, Ferguson, & Thomas (2012) on the United States Midwest School District revealed that only 17% of teachers at the elementary levels had received some in-service training on ED students. This piece of literature directly relates to the theme and findings, as teachers from both districts spoke about the lack of training available for working with ED students. The lacking of training becomes exacerbated when new teachers start working with ED students. As Schwartz, Wolfe, & Cassar, (1997) convey, inexperienced teachers appear to be sensitive to the issue of classroom control, especially when working with ED students. Further, their opportunity for experience is curtailed, as the teachers attempt to meet the challenges provided by the student.

However, with specific training and intervention, these issues can be eradicated. This aspect of the literature resonates with the theme. Teachers from District #1 spoke about how new teachers who work with ED students need training, a strong teacher mentor, and interactions with experienced support staff. Overall, Staff Training appeared to be one of the most glaring findings in relation to the literature. It is also a finding that could be linked to training, as both districts brought forth information revealing a lack of Financial Support, whether it be for social or vocational skills and even funding for staff salaries. Literature on financial support shows that ED students are mainly moved for administrative and policy reasons (Barth et al., 2007). Examining the literature with respect to both sets of findings uncovers both similarities and
differences on meeting the needs of ED students in public high school settings. The first set of findings shows schools meeting the needs of ED students and implementing new practices to assist ED students academically, socially, and behaviorally. The second set of findings is in line with current literature, and presents new information about schools not meeting the needs of ED students, which could lead to further research.

**Implications of the Findings**

The primary groups that will benefit from the findings of this qualitative multi-case study are other urban or rural public school districts, along with private placements that currently work with the ED population. The findings have implications on both the micro and macro levels. On a micro level, urban, rural, or public schools and private placements may decide to use these findings as a framework for meeting the needs of ED students. Further, these institutions may use the findings as a tool to help districts not meeting the needs of ED students, to ensure that their respective school does not fail to appropriately meet the needs of ED students. On a macro level, local, state, and federal policy makers may use these findings to assist in creating policy and implementing guidelines that will best serve public school districts and private placements in meeting the needs of ED students.

The first implication for public schools or private placements pertains to addressing the two sets of findings, revealing that urban public schools are meeting the needs of ED students, while the second displays the two districts not meeting the needs of ED students. If other public schools or private placements were to use these findings to implement a model of success in their districts, they would first consider the findings on meeting the needs of ED students. These findings include the use of the districts’ use of behavioral systems such as positive reinforcements, behavioral plans, and counseling for students. Other public and private
placements should also take into account the success and comfort students felt while attending the sub-separate program in District #2. Students from the district spoke about feeling accepted and comfortable in the program because of the understanding of staff. Students also felt as though they belonged because other students had similar issues. Moreover, the students spoke about their academic successes as a result of this comfort level.

With respect to the second set of findings on the two districts not meeting the needs of ED students, both public and private institutions should try to ensure that these aspects of an ED student’s education are thoroughly addressed so that their needs are appropriately met. The findings show a need for improvement in the area of sub-separate placement with limited inclusion opportunities, as this was found in both districts. All ED students in both districts were placed in sub-separate programs, with only 1-2 students being eligible or offered inclusion opportunities for the year. Teacher training is another imperative aspect that both public and private schools should consider when trying to meet the needs of ED students. Teachers from both districts reported a lack of adequate and appropriate training for meeting the needs of these students. The third portion that both public and private schools should be aware of is teacher support. Teachers in both districts spoke about a lack of proper staffing, administrative help and financial assistance when trying to meet the academic, behavioral and social needs of their students. Last, school systems should realize the financial needs when working with ED students and budget appropriately. Appropriate budgeting was not apparent when speaking with the two districts.

On a macro level, the two sets of findings could have implications for policy makers at multiple levels. As detailed and described in the previous sections, the majority of the findings confirmed what is already known in the literature. However, the first finding, Behavioral
Supports, is not represented sufficiently enough in the literature. The current information could assist in the creation of future legislation for supporting ED students. There is only one clear piece of legislation currently in place to support ED students, IDEA 2004. IDEA focused only on improving accountability and improved outcomes by emphasizing early intervention and research-based instruction and by requiring that special education teachers be highly qualified (Wright & Wright, 1999). Policy makers could potentially add to the current legislation in place and mandate certain behavioral supports be put in place to meet the needs of ED students.

Another finding, which is currently found in the literature and is important to policy makers, is the current sub-separate placement of the majority of ED students. These sub-separate programs provide limited inclusion opportunities as the research clearly shows. With the past and current information in place, policy makers could potentially implement or adjust legislation that would improve the current conditions and opportunities for ED students. The final finding that could have implications at the macro level is Teacher Training. Both District #1 and District #2 provided sufficient and compelling information in the request for appropriate and applicable training. If policy makers at their respective levels were to mandate appropriate and yearly training for teachers working with ED students, then the issue of having teachers ill-prepared to work with ED students would be eradicated.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to identify and document urban public high schools attempting to meet the needs of ED students. The study’s primary intention was to uncover and reveal practices for educating ED students in urban districts, so that these practices may be applicable to other urban or rural districts or private placements that are also working directly with ED students. Three main questions guided the study:
1. How are two urban public high schools attempting to meet the academic, behavioral, and social success of their ED student population, as perceived by the administrators and teachers serving this student population in their schools?

2. What are the challenges of effectively serving their schools’ ED population, as perceived by administrators and teachers at the school?

3. How do the ED students perceive their school as adequately and effectively serving their needs?

The researcher followed a qualitative design for the multi-case study and gathered data through interviews with District Directors of Special Education, Principals, and focus groups with teachers and ED students. The researcher interviewed eleven participants across the two school districts. The researcher analyzed data from the transcripts from the interview and focus groups in order to identify overarching themes and capture participants’ perspectives on meeting the needs of ED students in their respective urban school districts. The study initially produced two sets of findings. The first set of findings was applicable to meeting the needs of ED students, while the second set of findings displayed a need for improvement in meeting the needs of ED students. The second set of findings displayed a glaring need for improving the practice of meeting the needs of ED students. Therefore, the researcher selected from the second set of findings to present and discuss three key findings:

(1) Two urban public high schools are attempting to better meet the needs of ED students through stronger identification of students with ED, as well as through increased inclusion opportunities for ED students.

(2) The need for more financial allocation in the areas of staff salaries and social opportunities for the ED population, both of which will help to meet the needs of ED
students in the two urban public high settings.

(3) The need for applicable staff training and professional development hours that increase the knowledge of teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with ED students.

The three key findings could potentially serve as an ED program framework for other urban or rural public schools or private placements to use in working with ED students. In addition, both sets of findings have the potential to inform policy at the local, state, and federal levels of special education.

Limitations

Recognizing the limitations of this study solidifies and establishes trustworthiness. The first limitation was directly related to the fact that only two urban public school districts were examined for this study. Although a sincere effort was made by the researcher in the purposeful sampling process to identify numerous socio-economic urban public school districts attempting to meet the needs of ED students, only two districts were selected. Therefore the practices and experiences of the participants may not be transferable to other urban institutions, as each educational institution operates as its own entity, and practices on working with ED students may differ. Using more urban schools may have led to more relevant findings with respect to meeting the needs of ED students.

The second limitation of the study was that it only focused on urban districts. Incorporating rural or suburban districts or private placements may have also generated applicable findings with relation to meeting the needs of ED students. Moreover, the findings would have more relevance to these institutions, as their respective areas were being represented with respect to socio-economic backgrounds and possible similarities.
The third limitation of this study is that some key stakeholders – namely, paraprofessionals who work with ED students and the ED students from District #1 – were not interviewed. The perspectives of both groups could have provided valuable insight into what is relevant and potentially pertinent in meeting the needs of ED students. From a constructivist perspective, the researcher sought the insights of educators and students to gain an understanding of how public high schools were attempting to meet the needs of ED students. A multi-case study methodological approach was implemented. Future studies may examine multiple urban, rural, suburban and private schools, with the inclusion of the perspectives of paraprofessionals and a greater number of ED students.

**Future Studies**

One limitation of this study was not interviewing paraprofessionals and a larger number of ED students during this research. As a result, future studies should attempt to include both parties, as their insight is critical in determining the appropriate needs of ED students. Future studies may also include the use of multiple urban public schools in order to gain a richer understanding of the needs of ED students educated in urban areas. Rural, suburban, and private schools should also be incorporated in order to gain knowledge on how these areas attempt to meet the needs of ED students.

**Personal Reflection and Recommendations**

Public schools have a tremendous responsibility in assisting ED students with their academic, social and emotional development. Academic achievement among ED students has suffered, even with the implementation of IDEA 2004 and a concentration on early interventions, qualified teachers, and research-based instruction. Further, reports from the US Department of Education in 2002 show a 51% dropout rate for this population. This is based on the fact that
schools have failed to recognize the educational and social needs of ED students. The reasons for this underservice appear to be philosophical and fiscal in nature. Philosophically, schools believe that they are not responsible for the mental health needs of students. More importantly, the cost for providing ED students with necessary supports is significant. In turn, public schools are resisting providing services to ED students and, as a result, there is a severe lack of overall treatment of ED students (Barlick-Ericson, 2006; Duncan, Forness, & Hartsough, 1995; Gresham, 2005; Walker, Ransay, & Gresham, 2004; Wright & Wright, 1999).

Initially, I set out on this research endeavor because I have worked and taught ED students directly for over 11 years. Over the years, I have witnessed the challenges, struggles, and successes of these students, but mainly I realized that these students were not only deserving of more, but needed more supports in order to succeed academically, behaviorally and socially. When I first embarked on the doctoral journey, I attempted to research information available on ED students in any type of school setting, as I have worked in both private and public institutions. Through the review of numerous scholarly articles and literature, I found there was limited documentation on public high schools servicing ED students. Further, the literature that did pertain to ED students at the high school level was mainly in the private sector of education. With this in mind, I decided to research the perspectives of stakeholders who are attempting to meet the needs of ED students in public high schools. This would help me gain an understanding of the successes, challenges, and ongoing issues they face working with this population.

The findings of this multi-case study examined practices in two urban public school districts. Throughout my eleven years working in special education and with the ED population, I have experienced similarities and differences when comparing my own professional experiences to the study I have recently conducted. For this study, the first district I selected was
the one in which I conduct my current professional practice, due to the district’s size, demographics, and large special education population when viewing the numbers on the Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) website. I did not view researching this district as a conflict of interest because I currently have no contentions or affiliations with the school or stakeholders where the research took place. The second district selected for this study fell directly in line with my reasons for selecting the first district as its size, demographics, and large special education population was comparable. Overall, I wanted to gain knowledge and understanding of how some of the largest school districts in the state are attempting to meet the needs of such a diverse and challenging population of learners.

The commonalities between my own professional experiences and the findings are present and very apparent. First, I have experienced the enormous difficulties when attempting to meet the needs of ED students, especially when working with inexperienced staff. Inexperienced staff members are often frightened of students who exhibit aggressive or self-injurious. With respect to the diagnosis of students with ED, I have many times questioned whether a student is actually ED or has instead experienced some form of trauma that has led to a false diagnosis. Moreover, the frustration of not having a proper standardized test that assists determining this classification has been extremely frustrating. In turn, I have witnessed an over-identification of ED students because these tools are not available to educators. State and federal policies have also not been put into place to assist districts and schools in determining the most appropriate way to service students who are not ED, but instead have experienced some form of trauma in life. Further, if the two (ED vs. Trauma) populations were separated then each individual would and eventually could receive the proper supports needed in order to improve their overall education. ED students could receive the multitude of behavioral supports they need and
traumatically impacted students could receive the counseling they need in order to assist them with the experiences they have endured. I have agonized over trying to decipher whether or not ED students should be provided with more opportunities for inclusion, as the literature and findings do not support inclusion as the best practice for this population. However, state and federal policy requires districts to provide every student with the least restrictive environment, leading districts to encourage inclusion for all. The findings that are new to me were mainly in the area of districts meeting the needs of ED students, as the literature on these practices is scarce. However, there were a few findings not in this area that should and will be discussed, as both will play an imperative role in shaping my future experiences as a special education teacher and aspiring administrator, because I will make recommendations based upon these findings.

The findings of this study could also potentially shape other educational institutions that work with ED students. Schools whether public or private, along with policy makers, have the opportunity to gain insight from the two sets of research findings. Recommendations for schools who are currently working with the ED student population should include adherence to the findings that meet the needs of ED students. Everyone involved in the education of ED students should be highly trained in the area of behavioral systems, along with educational and social strategies that assist ED students in improving their overall performance. Further, theses educators should be provided with theses opportunities during new teacher training and in house professional development sessions. These trainings should also be ongoing, as teachers require refresher courses, along with new and improved strategies being developed to enhance an ED student’s education. Schools should also allocate funds for social and extended school opportunities, as students from this study have clearly shown a level of comfort and success when being provided with opportunities and incentives to engage with their peers. Finally, public
school administrators should collaborate with their staff members in order to ensure that proper training and support is being provided.

This study can also serve as a basis for recommendations for policy makers. Policy makers should provide school districts with guidelines on how to properly determine whether or not a particular student is ED or suffering from an environmental trauma. Further, with respect to inclusion for ED students, empirical evidence clearly shows that guidelines on how an ED student can appropriately and safely return to the general education setting for inclusion opportunities are lacking. This is prohibiting a clear understanding of whether or not inclusion is appropriate for ED students. Policy makers should establish a set of guidelines to ensure clarity.

As a special education teacher and advocate for students with disabilities, it is my overall goal to help improve the education of students with disabilities. It is my hope that this study will assist educational leaders, policy makers, and teachers in implementing equitable educational practices for ED students, and will ensure that the educational, behavioral and social needs of ED students are being meet in the school setting.
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Appendix A

**Social Model of Disability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inaccessible physical environments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>including buildings, transport, poor design, etc.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information not in accessible formats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. plain language, Braille, tape, large print, disk, accessible website, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Communication barriers</th>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. few sign language interpreters, no induction (hearing) loops or alternatives to telephones, assuming everyone communicates in the same way</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Disabling World</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. attitudes, stereotyping, assumptions, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Discrimination</th>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. inflexible or unfair systems in organisations</td>
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Figure 1. Example of The Social Model of Disability (Michael Oliver & Colin Barnes, 2012)
Appendix B

Recruitment Email (Superintendent of School District)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Michael Cushing requests your participation in a study on meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Dear, [Superintendent of School District]

My name is Michael Cushing and I am currently a grade 5-6 Special Education teacher at the Joseph Lee School in Dorchester MA, for the Boston Public Schools. I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking your approval to conduct my study at one of your schools servicing ED students.

I am conducting a multiple case study of two urban public schools that are attempting to meet the needs of ED students in public high schools. Historically, the concentration of ED students is located in urban classrooms; however, the ability to meet their academic, social and behavioral needs remains a challenge. In turn, examining ED practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ED students.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators, teachers (focus group) and ED students if possible. The time commitment for administrators and teachers will be 1 - 1.5 hours over the course of two interactions, one through email correspondence and the other in-person. The total time for each student should be no more than 1 hour.

I truly appreciate your openness to assisting me in this study. Please let me know if you will permit your district and eventually a school to participate by contacting me at my Northeastern University student email below. Do the same if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon

Sincerely,
Michael Cushing
cushing.m@husky.neu.edu
Appendix C

Recruitment Email (Targeted Message to Principals)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Michael Cushing requests your participation in a study on meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Dear (Principal),

I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University and am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking your permission as a research participant, for which your Superintendent has already given approval.

I am conducting a multiple case study of two urban public schools that are attempting to meet the needs of ED students in public high schools. Historically, the concentration of ED students is located in urban classrooms; however, the ability to meet their academic, social and behavioral needs remains a challenge. In turn, examining ED practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ED students.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators, teachers (focus group) and ED students if possible. The time commitment for each participant should be no more than one hour in an individual interview or focus group.

I truly appreciate your openness to assisting me in this study. Please let me know if you will permit your school to participate by contacting me at my Northeastern University student email below. Do the same if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Michael Cushing
cushing.m@husky.neu.edu
Appendix D

Recruitment Email (District Directors of Special Education)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Michael Cushing requests your participation in a study on meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Dear, [District Director of Special Education]

My name is Michael Cushing and I am currently a grade 5-6 Special Education teacher at the Joseph Lee School in Dorchester MA, for the Boston Public Schools. I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am conducting a multiple case study of two urban public schools that are attempting to meet the needs of ED students in public high schools. Historically, the concentration of ED students is located in urban classrooms; however, the ability to meet their academic, social and behavioral needs remains a challenge. In turn, examining ED practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ED students.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators, teachers (focus group) and ED students if possible. The time commitment for administrators and teachers will be 1 - 1.5 hours over the course of two interactions, one through email correspondence and the other in-person. The total time for each student should be no more than 1 hour.

I truly appreciate your openness to assisting me in this study. Please let me know if you are interested in participating by contacting me at my Northeastern University student email below. Do the same if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon

Sincerely,
Michael Cushing
cushing.m@husky.neu.edu
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form (Administrators & Teachers)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Meeting the Needs of Emotionally Disturbed (ED) Students in Public High Schools
Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Chris Unger, Student Researcher, Michael Cushing

Purpose: We are inviting you to take part in a research study. The study will explore the challenges, struggles and successes of meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools. You are being invited to participate in this study because you either oversee or work directly with ED students or are an ED student in a public high school. This study will involve two points of contact with the researcher, one in person and one either in person or via email. The first point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The second point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher, either by phone or via email. You can elect to hold this meeting in person (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The purpose of this study is multi facet as one attempts to understand the challenges, struggles and successes encountered when attempting to meet the needs of ED students in the public high school setting.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews if you are an administrator or student. Teachers will be placed in a focus group. As noted above, we will have two points of contact: one in person and one either in person or via email. For in person interviews, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your struggles or challenges when having worked with ED students. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to work with and provide services to the ED population. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for ED students in Public Schools.

Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the
information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating, “pass or no comment.”

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
No

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

**Contact Person:** Please contact Michael Cushing at (781) 291-9217 or via email at [cushing.m@husky.neu.edu](mailto:cushing.m@husky.neu.edu) or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Chris Unger who is overseeing my research at [c.unger@neu.edu](mailto:c.unger@neu.edu) if you have any questions about this study.

**If you have questions about your rights as a participant,** you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: [irb@neu.edu](mailto:irb@neu.edu). You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

__________________________  __________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part                  Date

__________________________  __________________
Printed name of person above                                  Date
Appendix F

Recruitment Email (Targeted Message to Teachers)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Michael Cushing requests your participation in a study on meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Dear (Teacher),

I hope you are doing well!

As you may know, I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am conducting a multiple case study of two urban public schools that are attempting to meet the needs of ED students in public high schools. Historically, the concentration of ED students is located in urban classrooms; however, the ability to meet their academic, social and behavioral needs remains a challenge. In turn, examining ED practices in high performing districts such as yours has the potential to propel practice, pedagogy and legislation forward to ensure an equitable education for all students, including ED students.

I will primarily gather data through qualitative interviews with administrators, teachers (in a focus group) and ED students if possible. The time commitment for your participation in a focus group should be no more than 60-70 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

If you wish to volunteer for this study, or have any questions, please email me at cushing.m@husky.neu.edu. You will not be contacted by me again regarding this research. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Michael Cushing
cushing.m@husky.neu.edu
Appendix G

Informed Consent Form (For Students over the age of 18)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools
Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. Chris Unger, Student Researcher, Michael Cushing

Purpose: I am inviting you to take part in a research study. The study will explore the challenges, struggles and successes of meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools. You are being invited to participate in this study because you either oversee or work directly with ED students or are an ED student in a public high school. This study will involve two points of contact with the researcher, one in person and one either in person or via email. The first point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The second point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher, either by phone or via email. You can elect to hold this meeting in person (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The purpose of this study is multi facet as one attempts to understand the challenges, struggles and successes encountered when attempting to meet the needs of ED students in the public high school setting.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews if you are an administrator or student. Teachers will be placed in a focus group. As noted above, we will have two points of contact: one in person and one either in person or via email. For in person interviews, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your struggles or challenges when having worked with ED students. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to work with and provide services to the ED population. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for ED students in Public Schools.
Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating, “pass or no comment.”

Will I be paid for my participation?
No

Will it cost me anything to participate?
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

Contact Person: Please contact Michael Cushing at (781) 291-9217 or via email at cushing.m@husky.neu.edu or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Chris Unger who is overseeing my research at c.unger@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________________ ___________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part Date

____________________________________________________ ___________________
Printed name of person above Date
Appendix H

Recruitment Letter (Targeted Message to Parents of Students Under the Age of 18)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Michael Cushing requests your participation in a study on meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Dear (Parent or Guardian),

I hope you are doing well!

I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am conducting a study of two public high schools that are working with students who need behavioral assistance. Most of these students also need assistance with meeting their academic, and social needs. In turn, examining a school such as the one your child attends has the potential to eventually enhance the education for all students, including ED students.

I plan to do individual interviews with student volunteers. They will take about 50-70 minutes. There is no pressure for your child to participate. Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary.

Please review the attached informed consent form, and if you and your child wish to volunteer for this study, please sign and date the attached consent form and have your child return it to the Principal of his/her school. Even if you consent, your child will have the decision whether or not to participate. Please be assured there will be no consequences for your child if you do not volunteer, or if he or she decides not to participate.

If you should wish to contact me regarding any questions or further clarification about the study, please do not hesitate to call me on my private cell phone # at XXX-XXX-XXX or email me at cushing.m@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Cushing
cushing.m@husky.neu.edu
Appendix I

Informed Consent Form (For Parents of Youth Under 18)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools

Principle Investigator (PI): Michael Cushing

Purpose: I am inviting your child to take part in a research study. The study will explore the challenges, struggles and successes of meeting the needs of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in public high schools. Your child is being invited to participate in this study because he or she has been identified as an ED student in a public high school. This study will involve two points of contact with the researcher, one in person and one either in person or via email. The first point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The second point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher, either by phone or via email. One can elect to hold this meeting in person (approximately 30 minutes) or the student can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The purpose of this study is multi facet as one attempts to understand the challenges, struggles and successes encountered when attempting to meet the needs of ED students in the public high school setting.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews if you are an administrator or student. Teachers will be placed in a focus group. As noted above, we will have two points of contact: one in person and one either in person or via email. For in person interviews, one may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for your child. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information provided in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which one may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort one may feel discussing their struggles or challenges when having worked with or being an ED students. The researcher will respect your child’s boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide your child with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to your child for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to be, work with and provide services to the ED population. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for ED students in Public Schools.
**Confidentiality:** Your child’s part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about him or her. If you decide you would like for your child to participate, he or she will be able to select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect their identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your child’s age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. He or she can still decide whether or not to participate, even if you sign this form. No harm will come to your child if he or she does not participate or if he or she quits even after we have begun.

**Will my child be paid for my participation?**
No

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

**Contact Person:** Please contact Michael Cushing at (781) 291-9217 or via email at cushing.m@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Chris Unger who is overseeing my research at c.unger@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to allow my child to take part in this research.**

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<th>Signature of the parent agreeing to take part</th>
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<th>Michael Cushing, Student Researcher</th>
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Appendix J

Interview Guide (Administration)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. **What does it mean to you to serve the ED population at the Administrative level?**
   *Possible prompts:* Budgeting, staffing, legal, ratio’s with relation of staff to student

2. **What are some of challenges you have faced when trying to meet the needs of the ED population?**
   *Possible prompts:* financial, qualified staff, professional development

3. **What types of supports are required in order to meet the needs of ED students?**
   *Possible prompts:* financial constraints, parental involvement

4. **In your opinion which supports should be made mandatory because they are imperative for their success?**
   *Possible prompts:* staffing, behavior plan, and social opportunities

5. **Does your school or schools offer these supports to the ED population? If so, which ones?**
   *Possible prompts:* Financial allocation, calm rooms, staff training, behavioral supports

6. **Can you describe a few experiences you have had at the administrative level when trying to meet the needs of ED students?**
   *Possible prompts:* Direct or indirect involvement, speaking with parents, teachers, administrators, IEP meetings, Suspension or mediation hearings,

7. **What are some of the successes the school or district has had when attempting to meet the needs of ED students?**
   *Possible prompts:* Outside agency assistance, community, Behavior, social or academic improvement, acquiring a support them

8. **Are your ED students in a sub-separate, self-contained, part or fulltime inclusion classroom and is this a school or district decision and do you agree with this placement?**

9. **Do you know how often ED students are removed from their classroom and placed in other schools, whether it be in or out of district? If at all, where are they placed and what is protocol for removal and placing them back into their original room?**
   *Possible prompts:* Safe room, time out room, behavior support plan

10. **Have any ED students been placed in schools out of district? If so do you know how many?**
    *Possible prompts:* Private day placement, residential, psychiatric
Appendix K

Interview Guide (Teachers)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. **What does it mean to you to service the ED population as a teacher?**
   *Possible prompts: in what capacity*

2. **What are some of the daily challenges you have faced when trying to meet the needs of the ED population in your classroom?**
   *Possible prompts: financial, lack of supports, behaviors, administrative support*

3. **What types of supports do you need in the classroom in order to meet the needs of ED students?**
   *Possible prompts: academic, behavioral, social*

4. **Which supports should be made mandatory because they are imperative for ED student success and the classroom as a whole?**
   *Possible prompts: staffing, behavior plan, and social opportunities*

5. **Does your school or schools offer these supports to the ED population? If so, which ones?**
   *Possible prompts: calm rooms, staff training, behavioral supports*

6. **Can you describe a few experiences you have had when working with or trying to meet the needs of ED students whether it be academic, behavioral or social?**
   *Possible prompts: Direct or indirect involvement, speaking with parents, teachers, administrators*

7. **What are some of the successes you have had when attempting to meet the needs of ED students?**
   *Possible prompts: Behavior, social or academic improvement, acquiring a support them*

8. **Are your ED students in a sub-separate, self-contained, part or fulltime inclusion classroom? And do you agree with this placement?**

9. **How often are ED students removed from their classroom for behavioral reasons? If at all, where are they placed and what is the protocol for removal and placing them back into their original room?**
   *Possible prompts: Safe room, time out room, behavior support plan*

10. **Have any ED students been placed in schools out of district? If so do you know how many?**
    *Possible prompts: Private day placement, residential, psychiatric*
Appendix L

Interview Guide (Student)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. **What are some of the challenges you have faced during your time in school?**
   *Possible prompts: academic, behavioral or social*

2. **What are some of the successes you have had while in school?**
   *Possible prompts: academic, behavioral or social*

3. **How can your school help you succeed? Could they provide you with anything that might improve your education?**
   *Possible prompts: Social opportunities, 1-1 instruction, reward system*

4. **Are you in a special education classroom? If so how does that make you feel?**
   *Possible prompts: comfortable, isolated*

5. **Do you receive any academic support?**
   *Possible prompts: 1-1 instruction, extra time, tutoring*

6. **Do you receive any behavioral support?**
   *Possible prompts: Reward system, incentives*

7. **Do you receive any social support or opportunities to interact with classmates?**
   *Possible prompts: social skills class, inclusion opportunities to work and play with peers*

8. **Do you find it difficult to make friends? If so why and what do you think would help?**

9. **Have you ever been removed from your classroom or school for behavioral issues?**
   *Possible prompts: aggression, non-compliance, elopement*

10. **Have you ever been placed in another school? If so how many?**
    *Possible prompts: Private, residential*
Appendix M

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Administration

Interviewer: Michael Cushing

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experience of meeting the needs ED students in public high schools. This research project focuses on identifying school success with a particular interest in understanding how a school attempts to meet the needs of ED students academically, behaviorally and socially. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how public high schools service the needs of ED students on a daily and yearly basis. Hopefully this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and use of resources that can be recommended for replication at other underperforming schools.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audiotape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).
We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview M

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Michael Cushing and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also a special education teacher at the Joseph Lee K-8 School in Dorchester Ma, under the Boston Public School system. I have been teaching now for over 10yrs and have worked with ED Students for over 5yrs.

Interview:

1. **What does it mean to you to service the ED population at the Administrative level?**
   
   Possible prompts: Budgeting, staffing, legal, ratio’s with relation of staff to student

2. **What are some of challenges you have faced when trying to meet the needs of the ED population?**
   
   Possible prompts: financial, qualified staff, professional development

3. **What types of supports are required in order to meet the needs of ED students?**
   
   Possible prompts: financial constraints, parental involvement

4. **In your opinion which supports should be made mandatory because they are imperative for their success?**
   
   Possible prompts: staffing, behavior plan, and social opportunities

5. **Does your school or schools offer these supports to the ED population? If so, which ones?**
   
   Possible prompts: Financial allocation, calm rooms, staff training, behavioral supports

6. **Can you describe a few experiences you have had at the administrative level when trying to meet the needs of ED students?**
   
   Possible prompts: Direct or indirect involvement, speaking with parents, teachers, administrators, IEP meetings, Suspension or mediation hearings,

7. **What are some of the successes the school or district has had when attempting to meet the needs of ED students?**
   
   Possible prompts: Outside agency assistance, community, Behavior, social or academic improvement, acquiring a support them

8. **Are your ED students in a sub-separate, self-contained, part or fulltime inclusion classroom and is this a school or district decision and do you agree with this placement?**
9. Do you know how often ED students are removed from their classroom and placed in other schools, whether it be in or out of district? If at all, where are they placed and what is protocol for removal and placing them back into their original room?

Possible prompts: Safe room, time out room, behavior support plan

10. Have any ED students been placed in schools out of district? If so do you know how many?

Possible prompts: Private day placement, residential, psychiatric
Appendix N

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): Teachers-Focus Group

Interviewer: Michael Cushing

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experience of meeting the needs of ED students in public high schools. This research project focuses on identifying school success with a particular interest in understanding how a school attempts to meet the needs of ED students academically, behaviorally and socially. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how public high schools service the needs of ED students on a daily and yearly basis. Hopefully this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and use of resources that can be recommended for replication at other underperforming schools.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audiotape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).
We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview N

B. Interviewee Background – My name is Michael Cushing and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also a special education teacher at the Joseph Lee K-8 School in Dorchester Ma, under the Boston Public School system. I have been teaching now for over 10yrs and have worked with ED Students for over 5yrs.

Interview:

1. What does it mean to you to service the ED population as a teacher?
   Possible prompts: in what capacity

2. What are some of the daily challenges you have faced when trying to meet the needs of the ED population in your classroom?
   Possible prompts: financial, lack of supports, behaviors, administrative support

3. What types of supports do you need in the classroom in order to meet the needs of ED students?
   Possible prompts: academic, behavioral, social

4. Which supports should be made mandatory because they are imperative for ED student success and the classroom as a whole?
   Possible prompts: staffing, behavior plan, and social opportunities

5. Does your school or schools offer these supports to the ED population? If so, which ones?
   Possible prompts: calm rooms, staff training, behavioral supports

6. Can you describe a few experiences you have had when working with or trying to meet the needs of ED students whether it be academic, behavioral or social?
   Possible prompts: Direct or indirect involvement, speaking with parents, teachers, administrators

7. What are some of the successes you have had when attempting to meet the needs of ED students?
   Possible prompts: Behavior, social or academic improvement, acquiring a support them

8. Are your ED students in a sub-separate, self-contained, part or fulltime inclusion classroom? And do you agree with this placement?
9. How often are ED students removed from their classroom for behavioral reasons? If at all, where are they placed and what is the protocol for removal and placing them back into their original room
   *Possible prompts:* Safe room, time out room, behavior support plan

10. Have any ED students been placed in schools out of district? If so do you know how many?
    *Possible prompts:* Private day placement, residential, psychiatric
Appendix O

Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name): ED Student

Interviewer: Michael Cushing

Date: ________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________________

Previously attained background information (assume this has already been collected)

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about their educational experience in a public high school. This research project focuses on student and school success with a particular interest in understanding how one’s experiences led and contributed to this success or concerns. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into how the school meet you’re academic, behavioral and social needs. Hopefully this will allow us to identify actions, strategies, and use of resources that can be recommended for replication at other schools.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. A transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audiotape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).
We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Michael Cushing and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I am also a special education teacher at the Joseph Lee K-8 School in Dorchester Ma, under the Boston Public School system. I have been teaching now for over 10yrs and have worked with ED Students for over 5yrs.

Interview:

1. What are some of the challenges you have faced during your time in school?  
   Possible prompts: academic, behavioral or social

2. What are some of the successes you have had while in school?  
   Possible prompts: academic, behavioral or social

3. How can your school help you succeed? Could they provide you with anything that might improve your education?  
   Possible prompts: Social opportunities, 1-1 instruction, reward system

4. Are you in a special education classroom? If so how does that make you feel?  
   Possible prompts: comfortable, isolated

5. Do you receive any academic support?  
   Possible prompts: 1-1 instruction, extra time, tutoring

6. Do you receive any behavioral support?  
   Possible prompts: Reward system, incentives

7. Do you receive any social support or opportunities to interact with classmates?  
   Possible prompts: social skills class, inclusion opportunities to work and play with peers

8. Do you find it difficult to make friends? If so why and what do think would help

9. Have you ever been removed from your classroom or school for behavioral issues?  
   Possible prompts: aggression, non-compliance, elopement

10. Have you ever been placed in another school? If so how many?  
    Possible prompts: Private, residential