

**A PLACE IN THE CHOIR:  
INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION**

by

Elizabeth Rivera

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Music in Music Education with Distinction

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Elizabeth Rivera

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Duane Cottrell, D.M.A.  
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Suzanne Burton, Ph.D.  
Committee member from the Department of Music

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Laura Eisenman, Ph.D.  
Committee member from the Board of Senior Thesis Readers

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michelle Provost-Craig, Ph.D.  
Chair of the University Committee on Student and Faculty Honors

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	vii
1 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	1
IDEA and the Music Classroom.....	1
Strategies for Inclusive Music Education.....	3
Teacher Preparation.....	5
Teacher Competencies.....	6
2 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS .....	8
Research Questions .....	9
3 METHODOLOGY .....	10
Observations .....	10
Survey 1 .....	10
Survey 2.....	12
Survey Distribution .....	14
Limitations.....	14
4 RESULTS.....	16
Observations .....	16
High School 1 .....	16
High School 2 .....	17
High School 3 .....	18
High School 4 .....	20
High School 5 .....	20
Trends and Issues Noted.....	21
Survey 1 .....	22
Survey 2.....	26
5 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	29

Conclusions .....	29
Level and Extent of Inclusion.....	30
Adaptations.....	31
Artistry versus Education .....	31
Accepted Framework.....	32
Implications for Practice.....	32
Class Culture and its Effects.....	33
Working with Stakeholders .....	33
Accepted Framework.....	33
Suggestions for Future Research .....	34
REFERENCES .....	36
 <a href="#"><u>APPENDIX</u></a>	
A SURVEY 1 .....	39
Survey Text .....	39
B SURVEY TWO.....	43
Survey Cover .....	43
Survey Text .....	43

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	Number of Students with Disabilities Included in Choirs.....	23
Table 2	Levels of Participation.....	24
Table 3	Adaptations Used.....	24

## **ABSTRACT**

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 and its renaming and re-authorization in the 1990s, the inclusion of students with special needs in the educational mainstream has become a legal mandate as well as an ethical obligation. Because of this, many such students have been included in music classes. The topic of inclusion in music is blooming, with many contributions from scholars such as Hammel, Adamek, Darrow, and Hourigan. However, the topic of inclusion in choirs in particular is not as explored, aside from smaller pieces of literature that mostly contain practical tips.

This research seeks to expand upon the current body of literature by discovering current practices in inclusive choral music education, then outlining a framework for success in inclusive choral classrooms. Using a combination of observational and survey-based research, this literature ultimately reveals a complex current state of inclusive music education. By and large, students with disabilities are included in choral classrooms, and teachers use a variety of adaptations to facilitate this inclusion. However, there are many inconsistencies from teacher to teacher and classroom to classroom. Despite these differences, teachers agree on several key points, which represent the beginning of a framework of inclusive choral music education.

## **Chapter 1**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **IDEA and the Music Classroom**

In the middle of the twentieth century, Americans began seeking fairness in public life, including in public education. First, in 1954, children of all races were given the right to be educated together through the verdict of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which made segregation based on race illegal in schools. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act took this concept a step further, by seeking to improve the quality of education for students who were economically disadvantaged. Educational reform finally reached students with disabilities in 1975, with the passage of Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142), which was the first law that required public schools to educate all students regardless of ability or disability. This law has since been amended several times, including in 1990 when it was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In its current form, IDEA has six principles that all teachers must follow when educating students with special needs. These principles make inclusion a legal requirement, as well as an ethical one. The first of these principles is zero reject, which states that no child can be denied a public education, despite any disabilities. The principle of nondiscriminatory evaluation requires that students who may be in need of special education services be assessed by a team of experts who will determine the services, if any, for which they qualify. The principle of a free and appropriate public education is similar to zero reject; it states that all students are

entitled to such an education. Because of this statement, it is law that every student receives an education that is individualized; this is drives individualization in special education. The principle of least restrictive environment is a major force for inclusion; it states that every child be educated in the most inclusive possible environment. Finally, the principles of procedural due process and parent involvement exist to ensure that the parents of students with special needs have their voices heard as members of the IEP team in a fair way.

In 1997, IDEA was amended and clarified. This new amendment further promoted inclusion by stating that students with disabilities should have access to the general curriculum. It is also law that valid reasons must be given in the IEP document if a student is not fully included. These revisions also clarified that funds allocated for special education could be used to provide supports for students with special needs in general education classrooms (Rudd, 2002).

These principles were a radical departure from the policies that preceded them. In the decades before the passage of PL94-142, children with disabilities could be institutionalized, placed in bleak basement special education classrooms, or, most frequently, denied an education. Of course, there are still barriers in the way of students with disabilities. Parents or groups of parents have taken legal action against in several cases against schools and districts to secure the services that their children need and are entitled to under the law. Even in the best case, the school, teachers, and parents must work together in earnest to ensure that all children are taught in the ways that they can best learn.

Research on how to best include students with disabilities began immediately with the passage of PL 94-142 in all fields of education, including music education.

Nocera (1971), Graham and Beer (1980), and Atterbury (1990) all published books intended as “how-to” guides for music educators working with students with special needs. They each included descriptions of different disability labels, and useful suggestions for how to work with students with different disabilities. Resources that give such suggestions abound in literature; recently, Hammel and Hourigan (2011) published a book that explains the “label-free” approach to inclusive music education. This book is aligned with current research and best practices in music education. There even exist some articles that are specific to choral settings, such as Freer's article on students with attention deficits in the choral rehearsal (1997) and VanWeelden's “Tips for Success” in choral inclusion (2001).

### **Strategies for Inclusive Music Education**

From these resources, a number of practical strategies for inclusive choral music education can be found. Many general music strategies are applicable in choral music education.

The foremost suggestion that many authors have is compliance with IDEA, which includes awareness of and adherence to the suggestions in a student's IEP (Ritter, 1995; Hagedorn, 2000; Hammel & Hourigan 2011). In addition to awareness of the IEP, these authors advocate for teachers to become active participants in the IEP process by attending meetings, including musical goals and adaptations in the IEP document, and developing relationships with special education teachers. This sort of involvement can guide the music teacher towards other adaptations that may be successful.

These adaptations are sometimes reiterations of best teaching practices. Techniques such as utilizing modeling and repetition to assist students who learn

through different modalities (VanWeelden, 2001; Debrot, 2002) are helpful to typical students as well as students with disabilities. Many other possible adaptations fall into this category, and can be implemented by teachers easily, perhaps even unknowingly. VanWeelden (2001) calls for consistency in rehearsal routines, assigned seats, and a clearly displayed rehearsal plan. These adaptations can be helpful to students with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), who often feel more comfortable with a sense of routine. They are also beneficial to students with mobility impairments, as they create a consistent sense of if and when they will be asked to move around the room. Students with mobility issues also need an easily accessible classroom (Hammel & Hourigan 2011), and might benefit from using assistive technologies, such as standing aids (McCord, 2002). Assistive technologies can also benefit other students, especially including students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Many students without disabilities who struggle with reading music could also benefit from aural instruction and the creation and distribution of rehearsal tracks (VanWeelden, 2001). These strategies are helpful to students with visual impairments, as well as to students who have difficulty following along in the score due to intellectual or learning disabilities.

Since many students with disabilities struggle with reading complicated choral scores, VanWeelden (2001) and Debrot (2002) both suggest that teachers might want to simplify, enlarge, or highlight scores for students with disabilities, so that the important information of their part is easier to follow.

In some circumstances, the direct assistance of others besides the teacher can be beneficial to students with disabilities. This can include the assistance of a paraprofessional, preferably one who has some knowledge of music (Hammel, 2002)

or can be a peer helper, tutor or mentor (Darrow, 2003). Darrow advocates for the usage of peer leaders in inclusive choirs, but asks teachers to try to give every student to be both a leader, so that students with disabilities are not always followers.

Finally, it is important that teachers in inclusive settings differentiate their instruction as often as appropriate (Debrot, 2002).

### **Teacher Preparation**

Clearly, there are many strategies that teachers can utilize to successfully include students with disabilities in choral settings. However, these strategies are not implemented universally. This is, in part, due to differences in the education of music teachers. In her 2010 study, Salvador researched the ways that music education programs addressed the topic of teaching students with disabilities. This research revealed that there is much variation between different schools of music. Some schools do offer specific classes on including students with disabilities in the music classroom, while others offer only general education classes about inclusive education. Some universities require music education majors to take such classes, while others do not. Additionally, some university music education programs attempt to weave the topic of inclusive music education throughout the curriculum.

Hammel (2001) conducted similar research, surveying music teachers on the level of experience that they had with students with disabilities as preservice educators. She found that teachers had often observed or discussed teaching students with certain disability types, but did not have as much experience actually teaching students with them. Overall, her research found that music educators felt unprepared or inconsistently prepared to teach students with disabilities. Music educators also report feeling unfamiliar with assistive technologies that can help their students,

despite knowing that these technologies are important. Their lack of knowledge makes it impossible to advocate for procurement of these potentially helpful technologies (McCord, 2004).

### **Teacher Competencies**

Because of these gaps in education, educators approach inclusion with different knowledge bases and experience levels. This is unfortunate, because Rudd, a parent and educator, asserts that successful inclusion requires support, belief that it will work, teacher planning, and teacher training (2002).

Hammel (2001) developed a more comprehensive set of requirements for facilitating inclusion in music class with the publication of her fourteen essential teacher competencies. After surveying elementary school teachers and college music education professors, interviewing elementary music teachers, observing students with special needs in music class, and reviewing syllabi from college music education classes on the subject of teaching students with special needs music, she found that elementary school music teachers need the following competencies to successfully implement inclusion:

1. Acquaintance with various handicapping conditions
2. Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
3. Knowledge of music teacher's role on evaluation team
4. Ability to develop and use informal assessment procedures
5. Ability to monitor the learning process of all students
6. Ability to evaluate program effectiveness for specific learners
7. Ability to identify areas of particular difficulty for a student

8. Ability to modify, if necessary, the instructional program to accommodate special learners
9. Knowledge of how to modify the physical environment of a classroom for special learners
10. Ability to encourage appropriate social interactions among all students
11. Knowledge of effective classroom management techniques
12. Knowledge of appropriate materials for diverse learning abilities and styles
13. Ability to adapt material to provide for individual differences
14. Ability to communicate effectively with support personnel

This list of competencies may very well also apply to choral directors, but unfortunately, detailed research on this topic does not yet exist. Without a common framework, it is difficult to outline the qualities that make an inclusive choral classroom successful. This research will attempt to discover such a framework.

## **Chapter 2**

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS**

Simply stated, the goals of this research are to discover what current practices are in inclusive choral music education and to develop a framework for teachers' success in providing such education.

Because literature on the topic of inclusive choral music education is not abundant, it was important to first establish what current practices are. To that end, this research has sought to determine the extent to which students with disabilities are included in choirs, first by establishing the number of students with disabilities that participate in individual choirs, and then by determining the extent to which students were included in said choirs. Next, it was important to research the adaptations that were commonly made for students with disabilities, and the challenges and benefits that teachers in inclusive choral settings reported as a result of inclusion.

Once all of this information was obtained from the literature and from Survey 1, it became clear that choral music educators lack a common framework from which to understand inclusive choral music education. Because of extreme variation in the amount of preparation current teachers have received to work with students with special needs (Hammel, 2001), teacher approaches to inclusive choral music education differ widely. Without a clear understanding of what inclusion should look like, how can teachers know what to work towards? Developing a common framework to help conceptualize success in inclusive choral music education is, therefore, an important goal of this research.

## **Research Questions**

1. How often are students with disabilities included in choral classrooms?
2. To what extent do these students participate in choir?
3. What adaptations to choral teachers use to facilitate inclusion?
4. What challenges and benefits do teachers report as a result of inclusion?
5. What is a common framework that outlines successful inclusive choral music education?

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Observations**

To begin to explore the answers to my research question, I conducted observations and interviewed teachers at five public high schools in two mid-Atlantic states. These teachers were self-selected from a larger group of teachers who were contacted by email and asked to host an observer. Hence, they represent a convenience sample. To uncover common trends and issues in inclusive choral music education, the size of each choir, the number of students with disabilities and severity level of said disabilities, the layout of the chorus room, the teacher's awareness of students IEP content, the levels to which students were included, and the presence of any aides or paraprofessionals were noted. Adaptations seen at each school were also noted.

Each observation also entailed an interview with the teacher. This interview included questions about what I saw or would see in rehearsal, and about their overall philosophy of inclusive choral music education. All five schools were public schools with an enrollment between 800 and 1500 students. To protect confidentiality, all schools and persons will be referred to using pseudonyms.

#### **Survey 1**

After taking all observations, interviews, and literature into account, I developed an electronic survey using SurveyMonkey to distribute to choral directors across the United States. This initial survey essentially addressed the first four

research questions. Teachers who responded provided their ZIP codes and stated what grade level they taught. Teachers were also asked to report how many students with disabilities participated in their choir in the past year, and then were asked to describe how often students with disabilities participated in different facets of the choral program. In observations, students with disabilities participated in these aspects of class to varying degrees. Teachers rated the level of participation by students with disabilities in the activities below as always, frequently/most students, Infrequently/fewer students, or never.

- Participated in written assignments
- Auditioned
- Stayed for the full duration of each rehearsal
- Participated in concerts
- Sang during rehearsal

Next, teachers were asked to select all of the adaptations that they used to help students with disabilities in their classrooms from a list. These adaptations were taken from the literature, as well as from adaptations seen in observations. This list included the following choices:

1. A paraprofessional or inclusion aide attended class with the students.
2. I consulted with special educators about each student's abilities and needs.
3. I gave the student(s) simplified, highlighted, or enlarged musical scores.
4. I familiarized myself with the content of students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
5. I became involved in IEP meetings.

6. A peer mentor or tutoring system was utilized.
7. I displayed a rehearsal plan where it was clearly visible.
8. I chose a classroom setup that allowed students with physical challenges to access their seats easily.
9. Students were given assigned seats.
10. I followed a consistent rehearsal routine.
11. Assistive technology (positioning or seating aids, assistive music software, etc.), was utilized for students whom it could benefit.
12. I taught students who could not read music their parts aurally.
13. Rehearsal tapes were made or obtained for students who needed extra aural practice.
14. Differentiated modes of instruction were incorporated into every lesson.
15. I utilized modeling and/or repetition to reinforce lessons.

Teachers were also given the option to report any other adaptations that they utilized. The final question was a free-response question, asking them to list the challenges and benefits of inclusive choral music education.

## **Survey 2**

The final research question was added in response to analyzing this survey. It became clear that educators were approaching inclusive choral music education from a wide variety of perspectives, and that a common framework was needed. This second survey was intended to give voice to the expertise of current teachers and create a common framework of inclusive choral music education as a community. Its format is largely inspired by Hammel's fourteen teacher competencies for inclusive elementary

general music education (2001). Teachers were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements, then give their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing:

1. Each school should have an entry-level ensemble that welcomes students of all ability levels, musical and otherwise.

2. Choral directors should understand and comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes full knowledge of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans of all of their students with disabilities.

3. The teacher should have awareness of common adaptations that are made for students with disabilities in music classes.

4. All involved should understand that the school choir's function is primarily educational, secondly artistic.

5. Inclusive music education can only take place in a safe space; bullying must not be tolerated and supportive class community should be encouraged.

6. The choral director must be supported by the school administration and special education teachers, and must communicate regularly and clearly with them.

Finally, teachers were asked to give any other statements that they thought should be part of the framework of inclusive choral music education.

I piloted this survey with three music graduate students at the University of Delaware who had experience in the classroom. Their advice propelled me to make the format more user-friendly, and to move this survey from SurveyMonkey to Qualtrics, which had a format more conducive to style of questions being asked.

Because of the relatively low number of respondents to my first survey, which did not allow for tracking any patterns across teachers of different age levels, the decision was made not to include demographic information on this survey.

### **Survey Distribution**

Initially, attempts were made to distribute the first survey by contacting professional organizations, including the American Choral Director's Association (ACDA) and the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), and asking for it to be emailed to their members. However, this was not successful due to low responses, though one email to the Delaware chapter of ACDA yielded a few responses. In the end, it was more successful to distribute the survey via social media. I posted links to the survey in the ACDA and NAfME Facebook pages, and on ChoralNet, the online ACDA network. These methods were more fruitful, and they were repeated for the second survey, additionally posting a link to the Facebook advice group "I'm a choir teacher."

### **Limitations**

This research is limited in several ways, which must be disclosed. First, the survey respondents were self-selected from among unknown numbers of people who viewed posts by me on various social media pages. Therefore, the samples are not necessarily representative of choral directors as a whole.

Secondly, on Survey 1, the questions referred to students with disabilities as "students with developmental disabilities."<sup>1</sup> This definition was intended to mean a

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., "How many students with developmental disabilities participated in your choirs in the past year?"

cognitive or physical disability that appears in childhood and is likely to continue into adulthood (AAIDD 2013). However, for some this term is evocative only of intellectual disabilities, and so it may have confused respondents.

Because teachers were self-reporting on their experiences, there is no guarantee that teacher reports of their own experiences are accurate. Additionally, success is not defined, so teacher standards for successful inclusion may have varied.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Observations**

Since the observations that conducted at the beginning of this research informed the rest of the process, they must be disclosed first. I observed at five different high school choirs, each of which illuminated a very different perspective.

At each high school, note was taken of the size of each choir, the number of students with disabilities and severity level of said disabilities, the layout of the chorus room, the teacher's awareness of students IEP content, the levels to which students were included, and the presence of any aides or paraprofessionals.

#### **High School 1**

High School 1 was a public high school with an enrollment of 873 students. These students were ethnically very diverse; about one third of the students were white, one third Hispanic, and one third African-American. The school was 73 percent low income, and 20 percent had special needs.

At High School 1, I observed the Women's Choir, which was an intermediate-level ensemble with about 15 students. The classroom was laid out in a semicircle, with the teacher, Mrs. Harp, sitting at a piano in the center. All the students were female except for the two students with disabilities in the class, who were both male. At the request of the special education teachers, these two students were both brought in for choir specifically from a classroom that served students with severe disabilities,

each accompanied by an a separate paraprofessional. One of the students with disabilities, Jim, was in a wheelchair and was nonverbal. The other student, Alan, who had cerebral palsy, was able to move without the use of a wheelchair, but was also quite reserved. Neither student was given music or expected to completely participate, but Mrs. Harp did engage each student verbally and encourage any participation. Jim did respond a great deal, usually in a sort of random response reminiscent of a person in the acculturation stage of music acquisition. These responses included singing the resting tone, moving to show phrase, mouthing some words, and clapping when the other students sang a piece successfully. All of these responses were encouraged and respected by Mrs. Harp and the other students in the class. Mrs. Harp explained that the goals of including students with disabilities in her choir were socialization for them and the other students and exposure to music, not full inclusion. This goal seems to have been met; the entire class had a strong sense of community and acceptance.

## High School 2

High School 2 was not very diverse; 79 percent of the students were Caucasian. About 9 percent of the students at High School 2 were classified as special education students.

The Women's Choir at High School 2 was a larger ensemble, with 76 members, all of whom were female. This ensemble was the entry level choir in a large, successful choral program. There were seven students with disabilities in the choir, each with individualized levels of inclusion and adaptations to facilitate their experience. One student, Anna, only moved to the beat, and another, Jenna, only sang when the class sang Happy Birthday to another member of the class. However, other students who had more of the requisite skills participated more fully, including some

students who could not read, but were able to learn all or most of the music through rote memorization. Two students had physical disabilities; both were assisted cheerfully by other members of the class in moving around the room. The observation of this ensemble occurred on the day of their concert, so a lot of movement was taking place as the students moved from the chorus room to the auditorium, then practiced getting on and off of the risers. The students who were able to participate without drastic modifications were placed on the risers according to voicing, while the four students with more severe disabilities were in the front left corner, within easy access of their aides. One aide, known at High School 2 as an “inclusion helper,” was there for Celia, a student who had mobility and reading impairments; another assisted three students with more severe cognitive disabilities.

Inclusion seemed to be successful at this school in large part because the teacher, Mrs. March, was very invested in it, and reported that her school had a strong inclusive focus. She was aware of the IEP contents for each of her students, and was willing to make adaptations, including creating resources and alternative assessments for students with disabilities. Because this inclusion took place in an entry level ensemble, it was also logical for the teacher to maintain a strict schedule and to privilege rote learning, which was also beneficial to some students with disabilities. Perhaps because of this inclusive school culture, and because of the demeanor modeled by Mrs. March, other students in the class were accepting of and helpful to their peers with disabilities.

### High School 3

High School 3 was a public high school with an enrollment of 839 students, about 11 percent of whom had special needs and 67 percent of whom were low

income. A large portion of the students, 57 percent, were African American, 24 percent were white, and 13 percent were Hispanic.

High School 3 had a very small choral program that did include a considerable amount of students with disabilities under the direction of Mrs. Sanchez. Observation took place during the only full-fledged choir class, a group of about 30 students. There was another ensemble available, but due to low enrollment, that had become a sort of voice lab for students preparing to join choir. In choir, there were about 30 students enrolled, about ten percent of whom had attention, behavioral, and learning disabilities, as identified in their IEPs. One student was in the process of receiving supports for a previously undiagnosed autism spectrum disorder. These students were included without any aides or paraprofessionals into a very unique classroom. Because of the high prevalence of students with learning disabilities, the teacher chose to teach students their parts primarily by rote. Additionally, to accommodate students with attention difficulties, Mrs. Sanchez allowed a loose classroom environment, in which students could freely move around the room and speak without permission. Many distracting behaviors were simply ignored by the teacher and most other students, though they did affect the pace of rehearsals, and some other students in the class expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount the group could musically accomplish as a result. Repeating instructions was an important tactic for Mrs. Sanchez, as was the use of student leaders to facilitate small group practice time, thereby varying the rehearsal.

Mrs. Sanchez reported that she was currently working with a student in her voice class who had intellectual disabilities. She intended to place this student in choir

the following year, after working with him to develop his singing voice and musical skills.

#### High School 4<sup>2</sup>

High School 4 had an enrollment of 1,283 students. 68 percent of these students were white, 11 percent were Hispanic/ Latino, and 17 percent were African-American. 48 percent of these students were from low-income households, and 15 percent received special education services.

High School 4 hosted two choirs; one student with autism was included in the larger of the two, which had about 50 students. Mrs. Coolidge has worked with this student extensively. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, he needed a paraprofessional to come to chorus class. By the spring, when the observation took place, his paraprofessional no longer came and a student buddy to check that he was singing correctly during class. Mrs. Coolidge, a member of the student's IEP team, planned for him to be a member of her more select ensemble in the following school year.

#### High School 5

High School 5, had an enrollment of 1,696. In the 2013-14 school year, about 62 percent of the students at High School 5 were from low income households, and 13 percent received special education services. Ethnically, the students were 54 percent African American, 33 percent white, and 8 percent Hispanic or Latino.

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<sup>2</sup> My observations of this school took place during the other section of choir due to a scheduling conflict. The information I have about inclusion at High School 4 is from the teacher, who I interviewed.

High School 5's two choirs were both inclusive of students with disabilities. While students with severe intellectual and physical disabilities were included in the 75-member Concert Choir, students with learning and attention disorders were in both this ensemble and the 25-person Select Ensemble. The teacher at this school, Mr. Walters, informed me that the students with severe disabilities in Concert Choir were brought into class with their paraprofessionals for socialization and to listen to music; they were not expected to participate in class in any way. However, students with learning and attention disabilities were expected to participate fully in both ensembles, and were accommodated with modifications from their IEPs. Mr. Walters informed me that in years past, he has included students with disabilities such as Downs Syndrome in his concert choir with a peer mentor, though he expressed concerns about the effects of this student on overall group sound.

#### Trends and Issues Noted

All of the high schools observed were extremely different, which highlighted something gleaned in the literature review: due to school and teacher differences, there is no uniform picture of inclusive choral music education. It is possible that socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographical factors all affect inclusive choral music education.

In schools 2, 3, 4, and 5, aural instruction was a major component of inclusion, as several students with disabilities struggled with literacy. Peer acceptance and assistance was also a common theme; in all the schools I observed, neurotypical peers interacted positively with students with disabilities. In schools 2, 4, and 5, specific peer mentors were chosen for students with disabilities.

Most of the students with disabilities that were observed were included in chorus due to interest in music and desire to sing. However, in several cases, students with disabilities were placed in chorus in a way more reminiscent of mainstreaming than inclusion.<sup>3</sup>

### **Survey 1**

The first survey had 54 respondents, 52 of whom had ever included students with disabilities in their choirs. These respondents were asked to state whether they taught elementary school (grades K-5), middle school (grades 6-8) or high school (grades 9-12). Many of the respondents reported teaching more than one level; twenty-five percent taught elementary, fifty-eight percent taught middle school, and fifty-five percent taught high school. Teachers were also asked to report the ZIP codes of the schools in which they taught, which were varied.

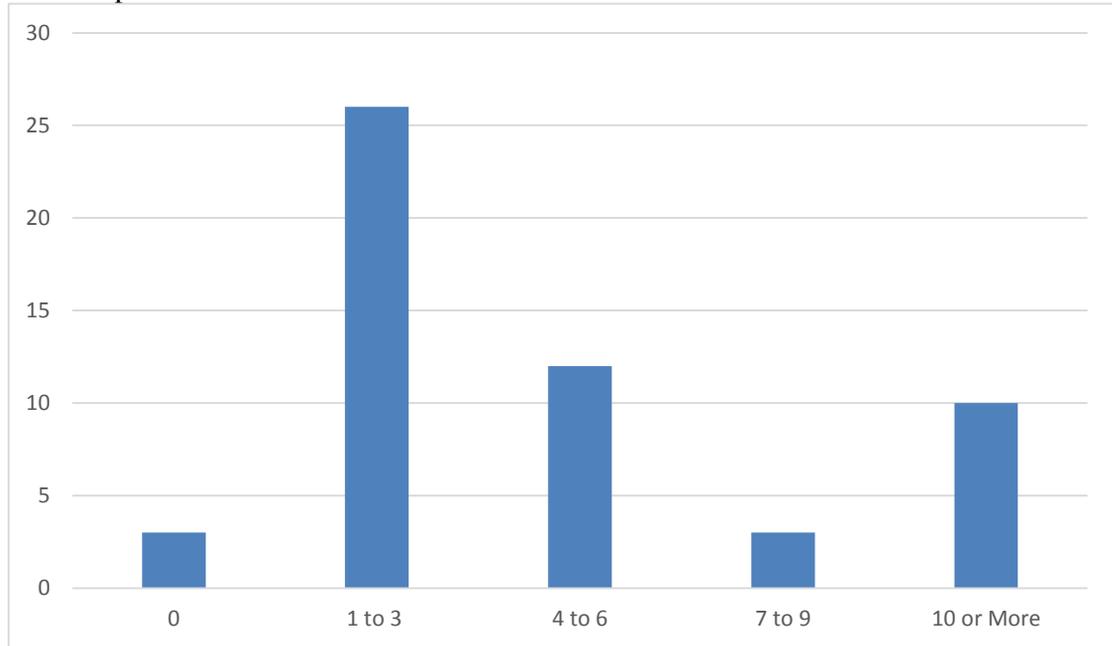
In the last year, 48% of respondents had 1-3 students with disabilities included in choirs, 22% had 4-6 students with disabilities, 6% had 7-9 students with disabilities, and 19% had 10 or more. Only 6% had no students with disabilities in choirs.

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<sup>3</sup> Mainstreaming is a term that was in vogue in the early days of PL94-142. It refers to including students with disabilities into situations where they could be social, such as lunch and recess.

Table 1 Number of Students with Disabilities Included in Choirs

# of Respondents



Next, teachers rated the levels of participation of students with disabilities in their choirs. Generally, answers tended towards higher levels of participation; 91 percent of respondents said students always or frequently sang during rehearsal, 90 percent said that students always or frequently participated in concerts, 92 percent said that all or most students came to each rehearsal and stayed for the full duration, and 74% of respondents said that students frequently or always participated in any written assignments to the best of their ability. Notably, only 47 percent of respondents said that students always or frequently auditioned to participate in choir. Respondents were asked not to answer this part of the question if students with disabilities were in an unauditioned ensemble, and only 21 teachers responded to this question.

Table 2 Levels of Participation

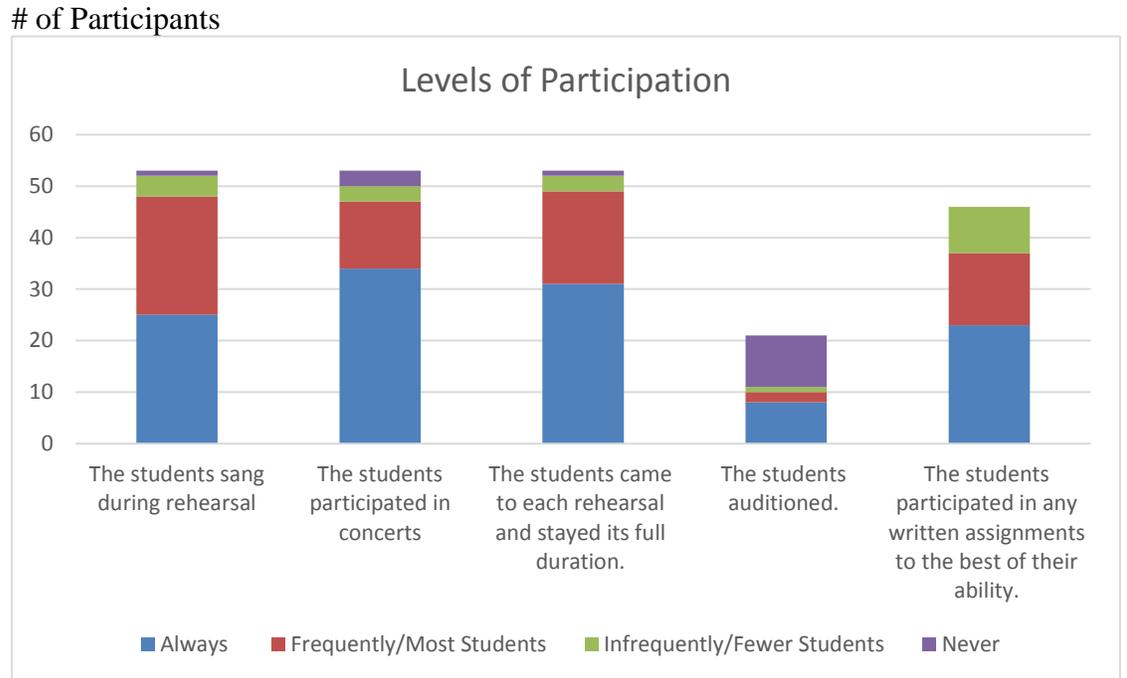


Table 3 Adaptations Used

Adaptation	Yes	No
I used modeling and/or repetition to reinforce lessons.	98%	2%
I followed a consistent rehearsal routine.	98%	2%
I chose a classroom setup that allowed any students with physical challenges to access their seats easily.	96%	4%
I familiarized myself with the contents of students' Individualized Education Plans	91%	9%
I consulted with special educators about each student's	89%	11%

abilities and needs.		
I taught student(s) who could not read music their parts aurally.	88%	12%
Students were given assigned seats.	85%	15%
Differentiated modes of instruction were incorporated into every lesson.	80%	20%
I displayed a rehearsal plan where it was clearly visible.	64%	36%
I became involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings.	55%	45%
A peer mentoring or tutoring system was used.	55%	45%
Rehearsal tapes were made or obtained for students who needed extra aural practice.	54%	46%
A paraprofessional or inclusion aide attended class with the student(s).	42%	58%
Assistive technology (positioning or seating aids, assistive music software, etc.) was utilized for students whom it could benefit.	34%	66%
I gave the student(s) simplified, highlighted, or enlarged musical scores.	32%	68%

In addition to these adaptations, teachers had several others that they reported using. Three teachers mentioned that they worked one-on-one with students with disabilities, both to help them with material and to ensure they were comfortable in class. Three teachers also mentioned the importance of parent contact. Teachers also mentioned giving extra processing time, introducing students with disabilities to the

rest of the class, allowing students with physical disabilities to sit when others are standing, and using Braille notation for students with visual impairments.

Teachers reported several different challenges when including students with disabilities in choirs. Four respondents felt that students with disabilities had difficulty meeting their musical expectations, and three felt that they were a distraction to other students. Three more teachers specifically mentioned students singing incorrect notes very loudly. Time, teacher attitude, and distraction of peers were also mentioned by three teachers. The following challenges were reported by two teachers: peer acceptance, lack of paraeducators, and the ability to differentiate instruction.

Overwhelmingly, teachers stated that the benefits of inclusion were helping students who might not achieve success elsewhere to find it in choir (10 respondents) and an enhanced or more tolerant classroom environment for all learners (13 respondents). Two teachers also reported that students received “the usual” benefits of participation in choir, including increased musical skills.

## **Survey 2**

Ninety teachers responded to the second survey, titled “Framework of Choral Inclusion.” For the most part, they were in agreement with the points that the framework put forth. Many respondents merely selected “agree” or “disagree” to each point of the framework, without explaining their choices.

Statement 1 of the framework read “Each school should have an entry-level ensemble that welcomes students of all ability levels, musical and otherwise.” Ninety-five per cent of respondents agreed with this statement; those who disagreed felt that general music might be a more appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Statement 2 was similarly agreed with; 94 percent of respondents concurred that “Choral directors should understand and comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes full knowledge of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans of all of their students with disabilities.” Disagreement came from the 6 percent who felt this knowledge was not a good use of teachers’ time.

100 percent of teachers agreed with Statement 3, which read “The teacher should have awareness of common adaptations that are made for students with disabilities in music classes.”

By far the most controversial statement, Statement 4 read, “All involved should understand that the school choir’s function is primarily educational, secondly artistic.” 63 percent of teachers agreed, while 37 percent disagreed. Many on both sides felt conflicted, and when asked to explain their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing, virtually all teachers who wrote anything said that they felt music education should be about education through artistry, putting the two ideas on an even playing field.

Statement 5, “Inclusive music education can only take place in a safe space; bullying must not be tolerated and supportive class community should be encouraged,” was also met with 100 percent agreement.

99 percent of respondents agreed with Statement 6, “The choral director must be supported by the school administration and special education teachers, and must communicate regularly with them.” The teacher who disagreed with this statement said the following: “A choral program can be successful independent of administration, if admin has a different priority. Parental support is key.”

Teachers had several different suggestions for additions to the framework, including communication and respect between stakeholders (3), maintaining high musical standards, fostering positive interaction between students, and providing a guarantee of inclusion (2 each).

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

#### **Conclusions**

Students with disabilities are included in many choirs at all grade levels, under various circumstances, though typically only a few students with disabilities are included in each choir. The extent to which students are included reflects the intention of their participation and, often, the severity of their disabilities. However, it is also reflective of their teacher's level of preparedness for and investment in inclusive education. In general, students with disabilities are included to a relatively high extent in the choirs of this study's survey respondents.

To facilitate inclusion, teachers utilize many different adaptations, especially those that are also considered generally good pedagogy. More costly and time consuming adaptations are less popular, though they can often be very beneficial to students. Notably, as seen on Survey 1, some teachers are not compliant with IDEA, although this is legally mandated. These inconsistencies in usage of adaptations can perhaps be traced back to the inconsistent preparation of music teachers that the literature reveals. Additionally, the lack of drastic adaptations may be because the students with more severe disabilities (who need may need more serious assistance) are not included as frequently in choirs, and when included are sometimes there purely for social reasons as seen in my observations.

With the exception of Statement 4, “All involved should understand that the school choir’s function is primarily educational, secondly artistic,” the framework proposed in Survey 2 can be accepted as a community-approved, “first draft” framework of successful inclusive choral music education.

#### Level and Extent of Inclusion

Based on this research, it seems that students with disabilities are frequently included in choral classrooms. This is evident both in that only 2 out of 54 respondents on the first survey had never included students with disabilities in choirs, and in the amount of teachers who took each survey. According to the respondents to Survey 1, students with disabilities are usually included fully or almost fully into several different facets of choir class, with an exception being in the audition process. This may point to the different ways that students with disabilities are placed into choirs; students with disabilities are not always enrolled in choir due to interest in or desire to learn music. Perhaps they are placed there on the assumption that choir will be a class in which they can socialize without great academic pressure. As seen at High Schools 1, 2, and 5, students with severe disabilities are sometimes brought into choral classrooms for social purposes, sometimes without the choral director’s prior knowledge. This often creates a situation in which teachers are expected to include students without the supports that they need. Survey 2 shows that these supports are necessary. Stakeholders should know what the goals of inclusion are before including a student.

## Adaptations

Survey 2 respondents unanimously acknowledge that it is necessary for teachers of students with disabilities to be aware of commonly made adaptations in music classrooms. Based on Survey 1, teachers are aware and using many research-based adaptations in their classrooms. There is, however, a dropoff in the number of teachers who use more time- or resource- heavy adaptations. 80 percent or more of teachers use modeling, follow a consistent rehearsal routine, use an accessible classroom setup, are aware of student IEPs, consult with special educators, teach aurally, assign seats, and differentiate instruction. Numbers drop to 64% of teachers who make and display a rehearsal plan, and the fewest teachers use assistive technology or create altered musical scores, though these adaptations can be very helpful to students with many different types of disabilities. Altered scores, especially, are beneficial to students with many different types of disabilities. Teachers feel that a challenge of inclusion is time; perhaps the time to create these resources is not abundant.

## Artistry versus Education

Statement 4 of Survey 2 provoked a great deal of discussion because of its placement of these two ideals in opposition to one another. While many teachers determined that, ultimately, educating their students was of a higher priority than putting on artistic performances, most were torn, expressing the opinion that choral music education is an example of education through art. For this reason, this is the only part of the framework that cannot be accepted as it is currently worded.

## Accepted Framework

At the time of this research, the following statements can be considered a tentative framework of inclusive choral music education:

- Each school should have an entry-level ensemble that welcomes students of all ability levels, musical and otherwise.
- Choral directors should understand and comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes full knowledge of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans of all of their students with disabilities.
- The teacher should have awareness of common adaptations that are made for students with disabilities in music classes.
- Inclusive music education can only take place in a safe space; bullying must not be tolerated and supportive class community should be encouraged.
- The choral director must be supported by the school administration and special education teachers, and must communicate regularly with them.

## Implications for Practice

As stated above, the investment of time into more extensive adaptations for students with more severe disabilities is something that should be considered by teachers. It is also possible that teachers were not exposed to some of these adaptations in their own educations, as seen in the literature. The usefulness of some of these adaptations should be taught to pre-service educators.

### Class Culture and its Effects

Teachers strongly agreed that the inclusive choral classroom was no place for bullying, and many reported that they felt a benefit of inclusion was an increase of tolerance from students without disabilities. Additionally, when observing high schools, I noticed that students mimicked the attitude towards inclusion that their teacher modeled. If the teacher was warm and inviting towards students with disabilities, fellow students were helpful and kind. To encourage a bully-free classroom begins with a teacher who feels comfortable teaching all learners.

### Working with Stakeholders

Ninety-nine percent of Survey 2 respondents felt that teachers needed administrative support to facilitate successful choral inclusion. Additionally, 89% of respondents on Survey 1 conferred with special educators about student strengths and needs. Finally, free-response questions in both surveys elicited responses about developing relationships with students, parents, and other stakeholders. Building positive relationships also gives choral directors more sources to ask about adaptations that best help students with disabilities. Additionally, positive relationships with special educators and administrators can help to guarantee the supports that students need, such as assistive technologies and paraprofessionals, will be provided during chorus class, and that each students' goals are being met.

### Accepted Framework

Based on this research, because they were met with approval by over 90% of respondents, the following statements can be considered a tentative framework of inclusive choral music education:

- Each school should have an entry-level ensemble that welcomes students of all ability levels, musical and otherwise.
- Choral directors should understand and comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes full knowledge of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans of all of their students with disabilities.
- The teacher should have awareness of common adaptations that are made for students with disabilities in music classes.
- Inclusive music education can only take place in a safe space; bullying must not be tolerated and supportive class community should be encouraged.
- The choral director must be supported by the school administration and special education teachers, and must communicate regularly with them.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

It is my hope that, in the future, this community-created framework will continue to expand to become a comprehensive, guiding framework for inclusive choral music education. To make this framework more meaningful, success in inclusive choral music education should be defined

To shed further light on the topic of inclusive choral music education, future researchers could repeat surveys similar to those used in this research, perhaps with a more carefully chosen body of respondents. Case studies on successful inclusive choral programs could be undertaken to extend this research. Eventually, the geographical, economic, and social factors that influence success in inclusive choral music education should be examined. Finally, research needs to be done on teachers'

perception of the importance of artistry versus education in school choral programs, especially as it pertains to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Learning the answers to these questions will continue to move the choral music education profession to become more inclusive and welcoming of all students.

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## **Appendix A**

### **SURVEY 1**

#### **Survey Text**

These surveys were conducted with Human Subjects Approval from the Institutional Review Board.

1. What grade level do you teach?

Elementary School (K-5)

Middle School (6-8)

High School (9-12)

2. In what ZIP code is your school located?

3. Have any students with developmental disabilities ever participated in your choir? Yes/No

4. How many students with developmental disabilities participated in choir in the past year?

0

1-3

4-6

7-9

10 or more

5. Please describe the extent to which students with developmental disabilities participated in your choir by rating the following statements as always, frequently, infrequently, or never the case.

	Always	Frequently/ Most students	Infrequently/ Fewer students	Never
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The students sang during rehearsal.

The students participated in concerts.

The students came to each rehearsal and stayed its full duration.

The students auditioned. (Do not answer if the ensemble is not auditioned).

The students participated in any written assignments to the best of their ability.

6. Please select the techniques that were used to facilitate the placement of developmentally disabled students in your choir.

A paraprofessional or inclusion aide attended class with the student(s). Yes/No

I consulted with special educators about each student's abilities and needs. Yes/No

I gave the student(s) simplified, highlighted, or enlarged musical scores.

Yes/No

I familiarized myself with the contents of students' Individualized Education Plans. Yes/No

I became involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings. Yes/No

A peer mentoring or tutoring system was utilized. Yes/No

I displayed a rehearsal plan where it was clearly visible. Yes/No

I chose a classroom setup that allowed any students with physical challenges to access their seats easily. Yes/No

Students were given assigned seats. Yes/No

I followed a consistent rehearsal routine. Yes/No

Assistive technology (positioning or seating aids, assistive music software, etc.) was utilized for students whom it could benefit. Yes/No

I taught student(s) who could not read music their parts aurally. Yes/No

Rehearsal tapes were made or obtained for students who needed extra aural practice. Yes/No

Differentiated modes of instruction were incorporated into every lesson. Yes/No

I utilized modeling and/or repetition to reinforce lessons. Yes/No

7. If there are any other strategies that you regularly use, please list them here.

If there are any other strategies that you regularly use, please list them here.

8. What do you perceive to be the greatest challenges of inclusive

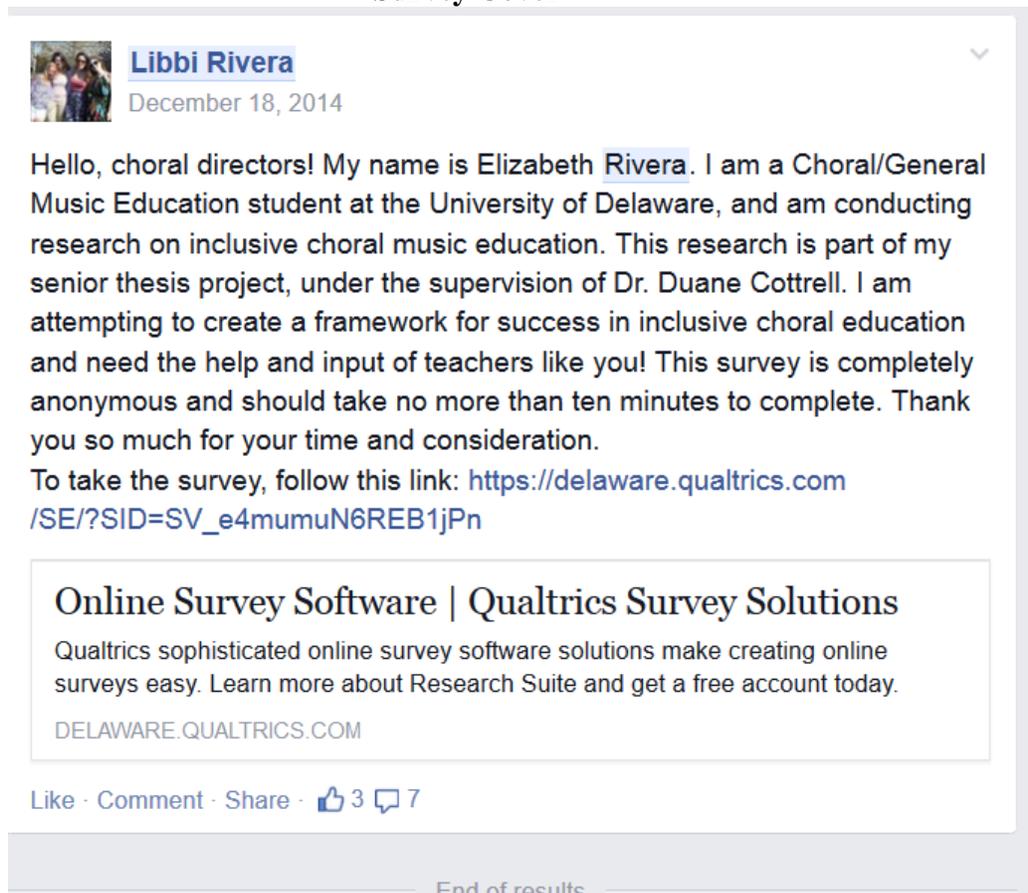
choral music education? What are its greatest benefits?

What do you perceive to be the greatest challenges of inclusive choral music education? What are its greatest benefits?

## Appendix B

### SURVEY TWO

#### Survey Cover



A screenshot of a Facebook post by Libbi Rivera, dated December 18, 2014. The post contains a message to choral directors, a link to a survey, and a Qualtrics advertisement. The advertisement text reads: "Online Survey Software | Qualtrics Survey Solutions. Qualtrics sophisticated online survey software solutions make creating online surveys easy. Learn more about Research Suite and get a free account today. DELAWARE.QUALTRICS.COM". Below the advertisement, there are 3 likes and 7 comments. At the bottom of the post, it says "End of results".

 **Libbi Rivera**  
December 18, 2014

Hello, choral directors! My name is Elizabeth Rivera. I am a Choral/General Music Education student at the University of Delaware, and am conducting research on inclusive choral music education. This research is part of my senior thesis project, under the supervision of Dr. Duane Cottrell. I am attempting to create a framework for success in inclusive choral education and need the help and input of teachers like you! This survey is completely anonymous and should take no more than ten minutes to complete. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

To take the survey, follow this link: [https://delaware.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_e4mumuN6REB1jPn](https://delaware.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_e4mumuN6REB1jPn)

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Like · Comment · Share ·  3  7

End of results

#### Survey Text

The following statements are intended to represent a framework of successful inclusive choral music education. Please read each, and in the fields below, respond with any feedback. This survey is completely anonymous, so please be candid.

Q2

Each school should have an entry-level ensemble that welcomes students of all ability levels, musical and otherwise.

- Agree
- Disagree

Q3

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q4

Choral directors should understand and comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes full knowledge of the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or 504 plans of all of their students with disabilities.

- Agree
- Disagree

Q5

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q6

The teacher should have awareness of common adaptations that are made for students with disabilities in music classes.

- Agree
- Disagree

Q7

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q8

All involved should understand that the school choir's function is primarily educational, secondly artistic.

Agree

- Disagree

Q9

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q10

Inclusive music education can only take place in a safe space; bullying must not be tolerated and supportive class community should be encouraged.

- Agree
- Disagree

Q11

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q12

The choral director must be supported by the school administration and special education teachers, and must communicate regularly and clearly with them.

- Agree
- Disagree

Q13

Why do you agree or disagree?

Q14

These statements are intended to represent a complete framework of inclusive choral music education. Based on your experience, is there anything you would add to such a framework?