

FOR MORE, go to [www.brookespublishing.com/principals-handbook](http://www.brookespublishing.com/principals-handbook)

# The Principal's Handbook for Leading Inclusive Schools

by

**Julie Causton, Ph.D.**

Syracuse University

and

**George Theoharis, Ph.D.**

Syracuse University

· P A U L · H ·  
**BROOKES**  
PUBLISHING C<sup>o</sup>®

Baltimore • London • Sydney



# Contents

About the Forms . . . . .	vi
About the Authors. . . . .	vii
Foreword <i>Richard A. Villa</i> . . . . .	ix
Preface. . . . .	xiii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	xvii
1 The Principal's Role in Inclusive Schools . . . . .	1
2 Special Education . . . . .	11
3 Inclusive Education . . . . .	27
4 Leading Inclusive School Reform . . . . .	47
5 The Backbone of Inclusion: Leading Effective Collaboration. . . . .	63
6 Rethinking Students: Presuming Competence. . . . .	87
7 Providing Academic Supports . . . . .	97
<i>Appendix</i> Useful Web Sites and Resources for Assistive Technology. . . . .	114
8 Providing Behavioral Supports . . . . .	115
9 Supporting You, Supporting Them: Caring for Yourself. . . . .	135
<i>Appendix</i> Self-Care Books. . . . .	147
References . . . . .	149
Index. . . . .	155



## About the Authors

**Julie Causton, Ph.D.**, is an expert in creating and maintaining inclusive schools. She is Associate Professor in the Inclusive and Special Education Program, Department of Teaching and Leadership, Syracuse University. She teaches courses on inclusion, differentiation, special education law, and collaboration. Her published works have appeared in such journals as *Behavioral Disorders*, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *Exceptional Children*, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *Studies in Art Education*, and *TEACHING Exceptional Children*. Julie also works with families, schools, and districts directly to help to create truly inclusive schools. She co-directs a summer leadership institute for school administrators focusing on issues of equity and inclusion as well as a school reform project called Schools of Promise. Her doctorate in special education is from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.



**George Theoharis, Ph.D.**, is Associate Dean in the School of Education and Associate Professor in Educational Leadership and Inclusive Elementary Education in the Department of Teaching and Leadership, Syracuse University. He has extensive field experience in public education as a principal and as a teacher. George teaches classes in educational leadership and elementary/early childhood teacher education. His interests, research, and work with K–12 schools focus on issues of equity, justice, diversity, inclusion, leadership, and school reform. His book *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve* (Teachers College Press, 2009) is about school leadership, social justice, and school reform. He is co-editor of a new book *What Every Principal Needs to Know*



*to Create Excellent and Equitable Schools* (Teachers College Press, 2013). George's published works appear in such journals as *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Educational Leadership*, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *Journal of School Leadership*, *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *Remedial and Special Education*, *The School Administrator*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Urban Education*. He co-runs a summer leadership institute for school administrators focusing on issues of equity and inclusion as well as a school reform project called Schools of Promise. His doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis is from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.



# Preface

## Inclusive Schooling Requires Leadership

This book comes out of very personal work. When George first became a principal, he entered a school that had isolated pockets of inclusion, maintained a self-contained program for students with significant needs, and had a tradition of pulling students out for all kinds of educational needs and therapies, including special education, speech-language pathology, English as a second language (ESL), occupational therapy, physical therapy, remedial reading, and so forth. Students were coming and going from classrooms and teachers were working very hard, but the students with the most needs had disjointed programs and were marginal school community members due to their transitions or self-contained programs.

Teachers did not have time to co-plan or collaborate, and the result was a frustrated staff and declining student achievement. There was overrepresentation of students of color and low-income students receiving special education services at the school. A disproportionate number of students of color and low-income students with disabilities received instruction outside of the general education classroom and the *vast* majority of behavioral and discipline referrals were students of color and low-income students with disabilities.

George led the staff in planning for collaborative and inclusive services for students with disabilities but also as a schoolwide philosophy that extended to all services, such as ESL, remedial reading, and academic enrichment. The result was a school that had teams of professionals that collaborated to co-plan and co-deliver instruction in inclusive ways. All instruction and the vast majority of therapies were integrated and co-delivered in the general education

classroom. This changed the ways teachers and therapists did their jobs. It is important to note that pullout services were not replaced by pulling students with disabilities to the table in the back of the general education classroom, but that general education teachers, special education teachers, and therapists co-planned instruction and accommodations.

The results were an improved climate in the school, a reduction of discipline issues, a lower special education placement rate, and significant gains in student achievement for all students across all demographic groups—including students with disabilities. This was not a utopian school but a regular place. Some teams worked better than others, some teachers believed wholeheartedly that inclusive services were best, and some had serious reservations. Leadership was key—leadership by the principal as well as a leadership team that made key decisions maintained the focus on collaborative inclusive services. The leadership team was made up of representatives from each team or grade level, who were chosen by their colleagues.

George's role as school principal was essential to moving the school in a more inclusive direction. It involved carrying the torch of an inclusive vision, leading the charge in service delivery, creating and developing teams, and providing support (planning time, space, and materials) for teams to co-plan and co-teach.

Since the late 1990s, Julie has been working alongside, coaching, prodding, and supporting principals as they do the work of creating and maintaining inclusive schools. Not only has she helped them think strategically about the work of supporting their staff to create the schools of their dreams, but she also provided professional development to those teachers and paraprofessionals and therapists to help them envision their service delivery models.

She has held their hands in the face of adversity and staff discontent and helped them to step up and lead their schools to become more inclusive spaces. As in George's school, the results have been schools and districts that no longer segregate and separate but instead embrace *all* students as part of the academic and social community. Academic achievement gains were made for students with and without disabilities in all cases, and the teachers know how to collaborate and co-design effective inclusive units and lessons. Climate has improved, and most important, all students feel a stronger sense of belonging, as their membership is no longer in question.

We have worked with and studied a great many school leaders who have engaged in this work. This work has informed and shaped many of the specifics in this book. It has also confirmed what we knew: that inclusive schools require strong, committed, knowledgeable, and visionary inclusive leaders.

## ON INCLUSION

Not a day goes by when we don't think about inclusion. When we both think of the amazing students and staff we have had the privilege of teaching and leading, we are reminded of what *teachers and leaders* they were to us. They have taught us that everyone has a right to belong, to have friends, to have access to engaging curricula, and to have powerful instruction. Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and with gentle, respectful support, and to experience that learning is intimately connected with feeling like part of the classroom. Every student deserves to receive support in a warm and welcoming place. The more this happens, the more we have



created the environment for substantial learning. It isn't, therefore, just about creating a sense of belonging for belonging's sake; that sense of connection and welcome paves the way for academic and social growth. We know that if inclusion is to be a schoolwide reality, leadership is required. Therefore, this book is designed as a guide for principals and school leaders as they work to include all students with disabilities in gentle, respectful, and meaningful ways.

## HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The first three chapters provide the context for the rest of the book: Chapter 1 focuses on the role of the principal or school leader, Chapter 2 provides background about special education, and Chapter 3 provides information about inclusive education. These first chapters provide the foundation necessary to more effectively interpret the rest of the book. Chapter 4 provides leaders with strategies to move beyond pockets of inclusion. This chapter lays out a process and tools to help leaders engage in inclusive school reform. Chapter 5 is about leading effective collaboration—the backbone of inclusive schools. In Chapter 6, we ask leaders to look at students through the lens of strengths and abilities—to reconsider some of the negative descriptors—for the sake of being able to reach and support all students more effectively. Chapters 7 and 8 are strategy-specific chapters that focus on academic supports and behavioral supports. These strategy-specific chapters provide ideas that are immediately applicable in schools. The last chapter focuses on self-care and problem solving. The job of including students in our school systems who pose the greatest challenges and require the most complex problem solving is not an easy one, and we recognize the toll that this can have on school leaders. Chapter 9 is meant to give helpful ideas for how leaders can care for themselves in order to provide the best possible education for students.

## WHO WILL FIND THIS BOOK USEFUL?

As more and more schools move toward inclusive education, principals and other school leaders are the most critical factor to success. The role of the school leader is changing, and this book represents cutting-edge ideas and strategies to create and maintain authentic inclusive schools. The idea of the principal as critical to inclusion disrupts traditional thinking in two ways: First, it allows us to move beyond islands of inclusion in only certain classrooms and toward inclusive schools—positioning the principal as central to taking up that charge—and second, we move beyond the idea that it is okay to include some but maintain outdated and ineffective pullout and self-contained programs. Leaders are essential in the work of doing inclusion well. They need to be the champions of a vision of inclusion and the effective managers to make the realities of inclusion a priority. Conversely, without appropriate knowledge or support, leaders can disrupt the inclusion of students with disabilities by following the traditional “remove and remediate” philosophy. That being said, a team approach to supporting students in the classroom is necessary. Although this book will primarily serve principals who want to learn more about creating and maintaining authentic inclusive schools, it is critical that this book is read by the directors of special education, special educators, general educators, other



administrators, parents, and other schools leaders who are team players in supporting students in inclusive school communities.

*Practicing and preservice school leaders:* This book is written specifically for practicing leaders working in or hoping to work in inclusive schools in K–12 settings. However, this book is also perfect for students in educational leadership programs at colleges and universities.

*Special educators, including related service providers:* Special educators support students in inclusive classrooms. This book identifies approaches, strategies, and suggestions for supporting all students in inclusive classrooms. This book can be used for leaders and special educators to read and discuss together in a professional development or book club format.

*General educators:* General educators are an important part of the classroom team. Learning more about inclusive leadership allows general educators to offer a seamless and thoughtful integration of services.

*Parents of students with special needs:* Parents can benefit from this book by understanding the best practices for inclusive school leadership. For them, this book can be a resource to secure help to create inclusive schools beyond just isolated inclusive classrooms.

*Professional development personnel:* This book offers cutting-edge approaches and resources for any principal training or leadership development.

This book is intended as a companion guide to *The Paraprofessional's Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2009) so that educational teams can gain shared knowledge. It is purposefully organized in the same way, using the same headings and much of the same information, shared from a very different perspective and point of view. We are currently in the process of writing several more handbooks and hope to see all of these books used together as teams work collaboratively to support all students in inclusive settings.