



Washington State University

College of Education, Sport and Human Sciences

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Will defend their dissertation on

Date: March 19, 2026

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Zoom: Link by request ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

Title:

ENGAGING FAMILIES: PRINCIPAL ACTIONS THAT INCLUDE FAMILIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

Chair: Katherine Rodela

Abstract:

This study utilized a comparative case study design to explore how elementary principals in districts implementing inclusionary practices engage families whose children receive special education services. The leadership actions of school principal can impact the level of family engagement within their school community (Ishimaru, 2012; Flores & Kyere, 2021; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). The population of students served through special education show a disparity in academic achievement compared to their peers (Nations Report Card, 2022; OSPI, 2024), while instructional models provided to students in special education are morphing to become more inclusive with their peers without disabilities (Criso-Moya et al., 2022; DeMatthews, et al., 2021; Love et al., 2017). School principals have an opportunity to engage families in ways that support a collaborative undertaking around the decisions made for students with disabilities. This qualitative study sought to answer the following questions: How do elementary principals perceive the need for engagement of families whose students receive special education services? How do elementary principals perceive their role in the engagement of families whose students receive special education services? What actions do elementary principals describe as taking to engage families whose students receive special education services? Data collection included interviews of elementary principal participants and the collection of documents relevant to their work of engaging families in special education, seeking to understand where their actions foster collaborative and inclusive strategies with families. Findings from the study include a need for principals to build capacity of staff and families, to build relationships across stakeholders, and to challenge mindsets around existing practices in special education. These findings inform my role as a practicing principal as well as shine light on considerations for districts seeking to implement and progress inclusionary instructional models.