

Attitudes About Inclusive Preschool Education Among Parents of Children Without Disability: Generalized Social Justice Orientation and Specific Inclusive Concerns

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Abstract

To make inclusive learning environments accessible, it is critical that parents of children without disability select inclusive alternatives when making decisions about their child's preschool placement. This study examined attitudes toward inclusive education among parents of children without disability across 18 state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-k) programs in Georgia. Participants were 114 parents of children without disability attending either a standard ($n=78$) or inclusive classroom ($n=34$). Results showed that most parents (79%) did not intentionally select one classroom type over another and that attitudes about inclusive education did not differ by classroom type. Attitudes about inclusive education were associated with specific inclusion concerns and parents' generalized social justice attitudes. The relation between generalized social justice attitudes and attitudes about inclusive education was mediated by parents' specific concerns about inclusive education. Implications for efforts to promote positive attitudes about inclusive preschool education among parents of children without disability are discussed.

Keywords

inclusive education, parent attitudes, pre-k, social justice, autism spectrum disorder

Benefits of Wide-Scale Access to Inclusive Education Programs

Access to inclusive learning environments for preschoolers with disabilities is recommended by professional organizations (Division for Early Childhood [DEC]/National Association for Education of the Young Children [NAEYC], 2009), codified in federal policy (United States Department of Education [USDOE] and United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS] 2023), and required by law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). Specifically, federal policy recommendations stipulate that all children with disabilities should have access to high-quality, inclusive, early childhood education programs (USDOE and USDHHS, 2023). Many authors have argued that inclusive classrooms yield benefits for both children with and without disabilities. Inclusive classrooms have been shown to promote language development, social interaction skills, engagement, and social acceptance in children with disabilities (Odom et al., 2010; A. Stahmer et al., 2010; Strain et al., 2011).

Inclusive classrooms also yield important social benefits for children without disability or expressed parent concerns (from here on referred to as “children without disability”), including higher levels of acceptance and more positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities (Peck et al., 2004; Sira et al., 2018). Despite federally mandated policies, laws, and recommendations, access to inclusive early childhood education programs for children with disabilities remains

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limited. One possible barrier is limited buy-in from parents of children without disability (Siller et al., 2021). Large-scale access to inclusive learning environments may only be feasible if such learning environments are sought out by parents of children without disability. If parents of children without disabilities express a preference for inclusive learning environments during enrollment conversations, school administrators may be more likely to offer that kind of learning environment in the future. Similarly, if parents of children without disabilities express concerns about inclusion during enrollment, administrators may be less likely to offer such programs going forward.

Parent Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Previous research studies in preschool-aged children (e.g., Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000; Odom et al., 2004) have evaluated parental attitudes about inclusive education. Generally, parents of children without disability have reported positive attitudes regarding the benefits of inclusive education (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000). When asked about possible benefits for their own children, parents of children without disability emphasized social emotional outcomes (e.g., promoting acceptance and empathy; Peck et al., 2004; Vlachou et al., 2016). However, benefits for their child's academic outcomes have been expressed to a lesser extent (Peck et al., 2004; Vlachou et al., 2016). Research on attitudes about inclusive education has also shown that parental attitudes differ based on the specific diagnosis of children to be included (Albuquerque et al., 2019; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). That is, more positive attitudes are expressed toward inclusive education of children with hearing impairment, while inclusive education of children with complex behavioral disorders (including autism spectrum disorder [ASD]) are viewed more cautiously. Of note, the number of students with ASD who need access to classroom environments has been growing steadily over the last two decades (Roberts & Webster, 2022; Simpson et al., 2003). In order to meet the needs of this growing population and scale access to inclusive programs, it is necessary to understand how to cultivate positive parental inclusive education attitudes—especially inclusive education attitudes relating to ASD. Previous research suggests that parent attitudes towards inclusive education may depend on a number of factors including parents' curricular values, previous history of their child's participation in inclusive programs, and the amount and quality of parents' prior experiences with individuals with disabilities (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000; Peck et al., 2004; Vlachou et al., 2006).

Particularly for children with ASD, inclusive education allows for increased access to and participation/engagement in educational environments that support social-communicative skills critical to classroom success (Division for

Early Childhood [DEC]/National Association for Education of the Young Children [NAEYC], 2009; A. C. Stahmer et al., 2011; A. C. Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004). Thus, in order to meet this growing need for this population, it is critical to scale access to inclusive education programs (i.e., via fostering more positive parent attitudes toward inclusive education, particularly in relation to preschool-aged children with ASD).

The Role of Parent Concerns in the Formation of Inclusive Education Attitudes

Parents of children without disability generally hold positive attitudes regarding inclusive education (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000). However, parents have also reported concerns about the possibility of their child learning “negative” behaviors from children with disabilities, delays in their child's educational progress, and perceived variations in allocation of teachers' attention to students within inclusive classrooms (Vlachou et al., 2016). In a survey-based study conducted by Tafa and Monolitsis (2003), parents of children without disability raised concerns that children with disabilities may require additional one-on-one instruction time, which may detract from the time teachers spend with their child. However, findings on parental concerns about inclusive education are mixed. For instance, in a qualitative study conducted by A. Stahmer et al. (2003), parents of children without disability did not report concerns related to division of teacher attention, and instead reported additional benefits conferred by participation in inclusive classrooms. As A. Stahmer et al. (2003) argue, it is integral to examine both parental concerns and perceived benefits when helping to allay possible discomforts surrounding inclusive education.

The Role of Generalized Social Justice Attitudes in the Formation of Inclusive Education Attitudes

Social justice—which we define as a value or belief in the importance of promoting well-being by dismantling structural and societal inequities that create bias and oppression—is an understudied yet salient core personal value that often underlies inclusive education philosophies and frameworks (Artiles et al., 2006; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Social justice has been measured according to generalized attitudes toward social justice as markers of social justice behavior to promote the well-being of marginalized communities (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). With this definition, social justice-related action serves to directly benefit the well-being of communities harmed by oppressive systems—a conceptualization that more closely reflects the current landscape of the twin pandemics of health inequities and racial injustices.

Since attitudes are often malleable, attitudinal approaches to measuring social justice suggest a promising reality—that social action-related behavior has the capacity to increase via promoting stronger attitudes toward social justice (Fietzer & Ponterotto, 2015). However, it is important to note that given positive consequences accompanying positive social action-related behaviors, it is possible that positive social action-related behaviors regarding social justice and inclusive education may indeed lead to stronger (positive) attitudes about social justice and inclusive education.

Despite the strong theoretical ideology highlighting the use of social justice practices in inclusive education, only one study to date has examined the link between generalized attitudes about social justice and attitudes toward inclusive education in educational settings (Shyman & Lisa, 2017). However, rather than conceptualizing social justice-related action as being motivated by promoting the well-being of marginalized communities, Shyman and Lisa (2017) measured social justice according to a moral obligation to scrutinize and transform oppressive societal practices. Based on this definition, they found that teachers who scored higher on morality-based measures of social justice held more positive attitudes toward inclusive education; that is, teachers who valued the importance of transforming unjust systems were more likely to support inclusive classroom environments. However, the link between inclusive education attitudes and social justice, (particularly conceptualizations of social justice that focus on dismantling biased and oppressive systems that hinder well-being) has not yet been studied in parents. Social justice is central to inclusive education philosophy; thus, it is critical to understand parents' valuation of social justice when considering personal values salient to the formation of inclusive education attitudes (Buysse et al., 2002; Odom et al., 2004).

Despite the centrality of principles of social justice and equitable inclusion underlying education philosophy, parent perceptions surrounding inclusive education programs that serve children with ASD tend to be less favorable; this is likely due to increased parental concerns about behavior severity (Hilbert, 2014). In accordance with the neurodiversity movement, conceptualizing ASD as one's unique experience of the world rather than as a pathology or deficit can support models of social justice that destigmatize the classroom inclusion of children with ASD (Davies, 2022). Thus, to support and destigmatize the inclusion of children with ASD in the classroom, it is especially crucial to not only understand the needs of children with ASD, but also foster more positive attitudes toward inclusive education and social justice in parents.

Current Study

There is limited research on social justice and inclusive education attitudes in preschool settings, but substantial research on parent perspectives of inclusive education suggesting that

inclusive education yields social emotional benefits in preschool settings (Sira et al., 2018). A. Stahmer et al. (2003) suggest that parents may be particularly concerned about the educational placement of young children due to the milestones in language and social development at this age. Over 370,700 students aged 3 to 5 years received special education services during the 2017 to 2018 academic year, and this number continues to rise (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In order to address these growing diverse learning needs and increase access to services, it is imperative to examine parental concerns, values, and attitudes toward inclusive education within preschool populations—especially in relation to preschool-aged children with ASD, for whom inclusive education programs are particularly beneficial for supporting social-emotional and social-communicative skills (A. C. Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004).

The current study examined factors that were associated with attitudes toward inclusive education among parents of children without disability attending state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-k) classrooms for 4-year-olds in Georgia. Specifically, we examined whether parental attitudes about inclusive education were associated with the parents' (1) generalized social justice attitudes and (2) specific concerns about preschool inclusive classrooms.

Method

Participants

Twenty-seven Georgia Pre-K program directors sent out the survey battery link, and 329 parents completed the pre-survey. Children were classified as without diagnosed disability (term utilized in accordance with recommended inclusive language practices) if their parents indicated on the pre-survey that their child had no Individualized Education Program, no history of early intervention services, and no current developmental concerns. Only parents of children classified as without diagnosed disability were invited to complete the full survey battery. Full survey batteries were completed by 114 parents of children without disability across 18 Georgia Pre-K programs. Of these 18 programs, 11 were administered by local public schools, six were private schools, and one was a university affiliated school. Fifteen programs offered standard in addition to inclusive pre-k classrooms, and three programs only offered inclusive programs. Parent-reported classroom enrollment was confirmed by directly contacting schools where there were inconsistencies in classroom types (standard vs. inclusive) reported by parents.

All parents were entered into a raffle for one of several gift cards as compensation, regardless of their participation in the study (in accordance with state guidelines). In addition, parents answered questions about family demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, income, parental education; Table 1) as well as parental concerns about development/behavior and classroom type (standard vs. inclusive) or preferences.

Table 1. Demographics for Parents of Pre-K Children Who Completed Survey Measures ($N = 114$).

Demographics	<i>N</i> or <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Parent gender	
Female	102
Male	12
Parent age	36.31 (6.76)
Child race	
White	76
Black/African American	10
Asian	4
Biracial/multiracial	17
Hispanic/Latinx	6
Decline to answer	1
SES (annual household income)	
Less than \$15,000	4
\$15,000 through \$34,999	12
\$35,000 through \$49,999	10
\$50,000 through \$74,999	15
\$75,000 through \$99,999	12
\$100,000 or greater	56
Decline to answer	5
Education	
Some high school, no diploma	1
High school graduate, diploma/equivalent	8
Some college credit, no degree	9
Trade/technical/vocational training	5
Associate degree	11
Bachelor's degree	31
Master's degree	31
Professional degree	6
Doctorate degree	11
Other	1
Classroom type	
Inclusive	34
Standard	78
Unknown	2
Classroom preference	
Inclusive	17
Standard	3
No preference	93
Other	1

Note. Intentional selection of an inclusive classroom differs from $N = 17$ who preferred inclusive classrooms because $N = 2$ were unknown classrooms (intentional selection of inclusive classrooms is when preference is inclusive classrooms, eventual classroom enrollment is inclusive classrooms).

Recruitment Procedures

Georgia's publicly funded pre-k program for 4-year-olds (Georgia Pre-K) offers a specific funding mechanism for inclusive classrooms where six children with disability are included with 12 children without disability, in a classroom supported by three teachers. State-funded pre-k classrooms

in Georgia were selected as the context for this research because the Georgia Pre-K Program offers grants for both inclusive and standard classrooms, and many preschool programs offer both types of classrooms. The Pre-K Program, Georgia's publicly-funded preschool program for four-year-olds, funds two types of classrooms: standard (two teachers, 22 children per class) and inclusive classrooms (three teachers, 18 children per class, including six children with disability). In 2021-22, Georgia funded pre-k inclusive classrooms across 141 programs/schools. In total, these 141 programs operated 181 inclusive classrooms and 353 standard classrooms. Out of these 141 programs, 18 offered only inclusive classrooms and no standard classrooms (Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2023).

We evaluated parent attitudes toward inclusive education, concerns, and generalized social justice attitudes at the beginning of the year to minimize possible confounding effects from experience within inclusive classrooms—a known driver of inclusive education attitudes (A. de Boer et al., 2010; Green & Stoneman, 1989). Participants were recruited by direct community outreach to schools (done remotely). To recruit parent participants, program directors of these 141 Georgia Pre-K programs were contacted via email/phone and asked to share a link to all parents of pre-k children (both standard and inclusive classrooms). The link led to an online survey battery consisting of a pre-survey, consent form, and primary questionnaires. The purpose of the pre-survey was to identify parents of pre-k children without disability. The pre-survey consisted of nine demographic questions that primarily screened their children's disability status and classroom type.

Program directors affirmed whether they sent out the survey link by providing written or verbal confirmation directly to the research team. This research was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and school district IRB procedures were completed as required.

Measures

Parental attitudes toward inclusive education. The Attitude Survey toward Inclusive Education—Parent (ASIE-P; A. de Boer et al., 2012) is a vignette-based survey that assesses parental attitudes toward inclusive education according to a 4-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree). Parents indicated their support of inclusive education following the presentation of a vignette that describes qualities that a child with a certain disability may have. Given previous work that suggests less parent support for inclusive education for children with ASD, we adapted the vignette to reflect possible experiences that a child with ASD may have (e.g., feeling anxious when making changes to school environment; Hilbert, 2014). The measure consists of 24 items (e.g., "I believe students like

[the child described in the vignette] should be given the opportunity to be included in regular schools”). The ASIE-P consists of three subscales (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) that can be combined to produce an overall score. Higher scores reflect more positive attitudes. Internal consistency for the ASIE-P in the current study was $\alpha = .937$. All items in the scale were utilized.

Parent-reported concerns about inclusive education. The 9-item Impact of Inclusive education on Typically Developing Children scale (IITDC; Rafferty et al., 2001) assessed the extent to which parents perceived risks associated with including their children without disability in inclusive classrooms (e.g., “In inclusion classrooms, typically-developing children may copy children with disabilities and learn negative behaviors from them”). The 8-item Academics and Teacher Attention subscale of the Parent Attitude Toward Mainstreaming Scale (PATMS; Green & Stoneman, 1989) measured the degree to which parents expressed concerns that their child would receive adequate instruction in an inclusive classroom (e.g., “The one-to-one instruction required by a child with a disability would detract from the instructional attention which my child might receive”). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree), and reverse scored as necessary. Internal consistency for the IITDC items in the current study was $\alpha = .910$, and $\alpha = .869$ for the PATMS items. Total scores from the IITDC and PATMS were Z-transformed then averaged to produce a total score (“IITDC/PATMS Overall Concern Score”), with *higher* scores indicating *lower* levels of parental concerns about inclusive education. All items of both subscales were utilized.

Generalized attitudes about social justice. The social justice attitudes subscale of the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012) examines beliefs regarding key tenets of social justice according to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). The social justice attitudes scale consists of 11 items (e.g., “I believe that it is important to promote fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in our society”). We used attitudes about social justice to indicate valuation of social justice. Mean scores were calculated, with higher scores reflecting more positive attitudes toward social justice. Internal consistency for the social justice attitudes scale in the current study was $\alpha = .937$. All items of this subscale were utilized.

Analytical Approach

Analyses were completed using SPSS software (Version 28.0 © IBC Corporation and its licensors 1989, 2021) and RStudio software (Version 1.4.1106 © 2009-2021 RStudio, PBC). Preliminary data inspection revealed that the distribution of

two measures evidenced a significant negative skew: generalized social justice attitudes (-1.602) and parent concerns about inclusive education (-1.166). To address concerns about non-normality, a nonparametric statistical analysis approach was used throughout (Spearman correlations or Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, as appropriate). In addition to descriptive statistics and correlations, a standard mediation analysis was also conducted.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Of the 114 parents, 78 and 34 had children enrolled in standard or inclusive classrooms, respectively. Two parents indicated that their child’s classroom type was unknown; thus, these two parents were excluded from analyses comparing classroom type. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that parent attitudes about inclusive education (ASIE-P), generalized social justice attitudes (SJS-Attitudes), and parent concerns about inclusive education (IITDC/PATMS Overall Concern Score) did not significantly differ between the two groups. Furthermore, 15 of the participating parents indicated that they intentionally selected an inclusive classroom for their child, while 93 parents reported no preference. None of the parent measures (ASIE, SJS, IITDC/PATMS) revealed significant differences between the two groups. Since we did not observe significant differences in parent measures between children in standard or inclusive classrooms, or between parents who intentionally selected inclusive classrooms compared to parents without a classroom preference, data for all 114 parents were pooled for all subsequent analyses.

Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics on all parent surveys (i.e., inclusive education attitudes, generalized social justice attitudes, and concerns about inclusive classrooms) are presented in Table 2. Non-parametric Spearman correlations between all demographic and survey measures are presented for 114 parents (Figure 1). Results showed that parent concerns about inclusive classrooms and generalized social justice attitudes - but not parent attitudes toward inclusive education—were positively associated with both parent-reported annual household income, with weak correlation strength ($r_{112; \text{concern}} = .304, p = .001$; $r_{112; \text{social justice}} = .248, p = .009$) and parent education level, with weak correlation strength ($r_{112; \text{concern}} = .258, p = .006$; $r_{112; \text{social justice}} = .266, p = .004$). Parent income and education level did not differ by race/ethnicity.

Results also showed that the three key measures (i.e., parent concerns about inclusive classrooms, generalized social justice attitudes, and parent attitudes toward inclusive

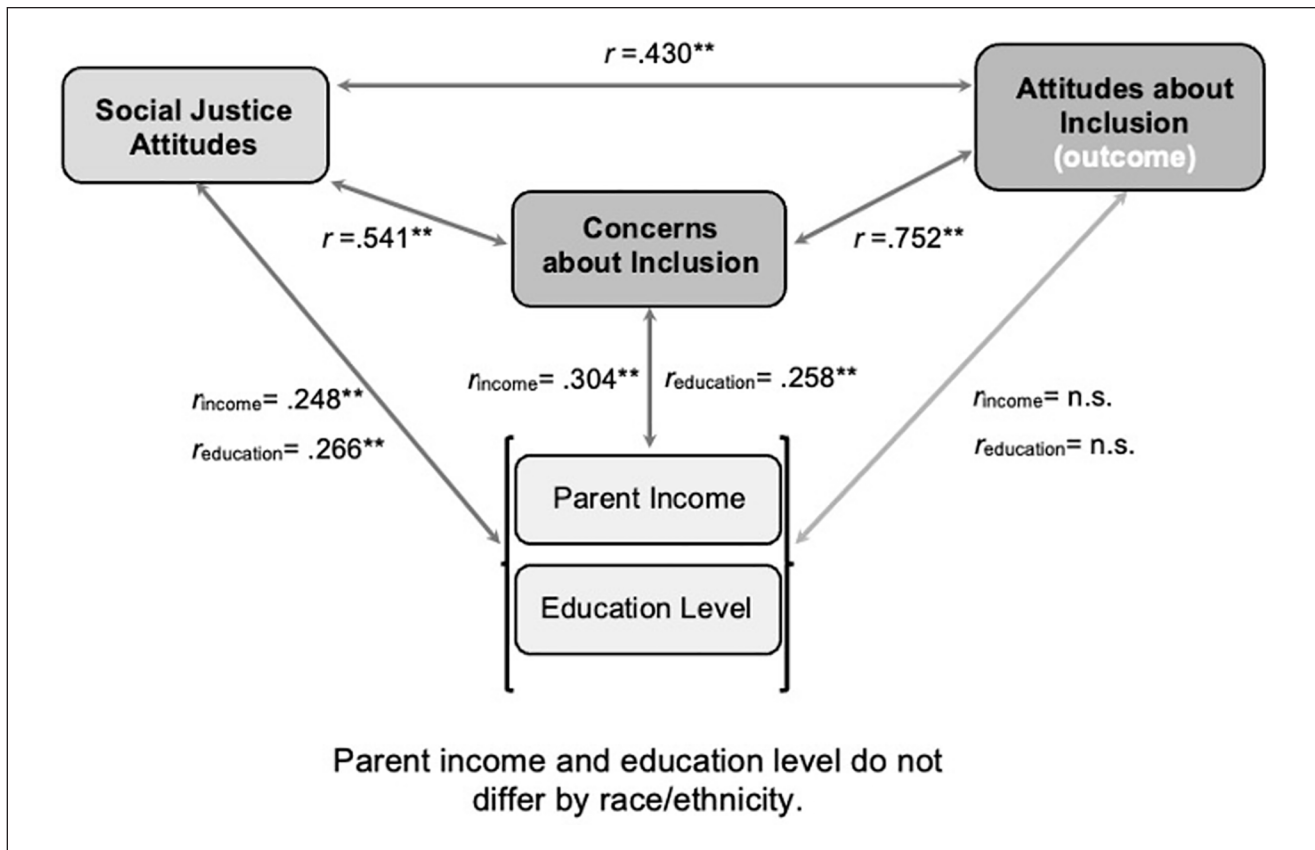
Table 2. Summary of Primary Variable Descriptives ($N=114$).

Variable	M (SD)	Median	Percentile: 25th; 50th; 75th
1. Inclusive education attitudes (ASIE-P) ^a	3.362 (0.449)	3.500	3.000; 3.500; 3.719
2. Generalized social justice attitudes (SJS) ^b	6.502 (0.711)	6.909	6.091; 6.909; 7.000
3. Concerns - inclusive education (IITDC/PATMS) ^c	0.025 (0.958)	0.782	-0.474; 0.181; 0.782

^aImpact of Inclusion on Typically-Developing Children Scale and Parental Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming Scale (combined score).

^bSocial Justice Scale (social justice attitudes subscale).

^cAttitude Survey toward Inclusive Education-Parent.

**Figure 1.** Summary of Spearman intercorrelations for concerns, social justice attitudes, and inclusion attitudes.

Note. $N=114$. Further results from a partial Spearman correlation reveal that the IV-DV relation was no longer significant when controlling for the MV ($r_{111} = .04, p = .653$).

** $p < .001$.

education) were correlated with each other. That is, parents' attitudes about inclusive education were significantly and strongly correlated with parent concerns about inclusive classrooms ($r_{112} = .75, p < .0001$), such that parents with fewer concerns about inclusive classrooms had more positive attitudes about inclusive education. In addition, parents' attitudes about inclusive education were significantly and moderately correlated with generalized social justice attitudes ($r_{112} = .43, p < .0001$), such that parents who more strongly endorsed attitudes that aligned with principles of

social justice were more likely to have more positive attitudes toward inclusive education. Further, generalized social justice attitudes were significantly correlated with parent concerns about inclusive education ($r_{112} = .54, p < .0001$), such that parents endorsing social justice were less likely to have concerns about inclusive classrooms. Follow up analyses using partial Spearman correlations revealed that the associations between all three variables remained statistically significant when parent income ($r_{\text{social justice+attitudes}} = .550, r_{\text{attitudes+concerns}} = .586, r_{\text{concerns+social justice}} = .633, \text{ all } p_s < .0001$) or

education level ($r_{\text{social justice+attitudes}} = .566$, $r_{\text{attitudes+concerns}} = .655$, $r_{\text{concerns+social justice}} = .655$, all $p_s < .0001$) was statistically controlled.

Mediation Analysis

We used a standard mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to investigate whether the relation between parents' generalized social justice attitudes (independent variable, IV) and attitudes about inclusive education (dependent variable, DV) is mediated by specific concerns about inclusive classrooms (mediating variable, MV). Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation analysis, a complete mediation happens when a) IV significantly predicts DV ($r_{III} = .43$, $p < .0001$) b) IV significantly predicts MV ($r_{III} = .54$, $p < .0001$), c) MV significantly predicts DV, ($r_{III} = .75$, $p < .0001$; $r = .68$, $p < .0001$ when controlling for IV) and d) when mediator enters the IV-DV relation, the total effect reduces significantly to non-significant. Results from a partial Spearman correlation reveal that the IV-DV relation was no longer significant when controlling for the MV ($r_{III} = .04$, $p = .653$); therefore, it was concluded that specific concerns about inclusive classrooms mediate the association between parents' generalized social justice attitudes and their attitudes about inclusive education.

Discussion

This study examined factors that were associated with attitudes toward inclusive education among parents of children without disability, including parents' specific concerns about inclusive classrooms and generalized values salient to inclusive education philosophy, such as social justice. Results show that parental attitudes about inclusive education were significantly associated with both specific concerns about inclusive classrooms and generalized social justice attitudes. Further, results from mediation analysis suggest that the relation between generalized social justice attitudes and attitudes about inclusive education was mediated by the parents' specific concerns about inclusive classrooms. This pattern of results could not be attributed to demographic variables such as parental income, education, or race/ethnicity.

Concerns About and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education in Parents of Children Without Disability

Parents of children without disability with fewer concerns about inclusive classrooms were more likely to have more positive attitudes toward inclusive education, independent of extraneous factors. This suggests that parent attitudes about inclusive education are often rooted in tangible

concerns about inclusive classrooms. This includes the extent to which teachers allocate their attention among students and perceived challenging behaviors of peers (Sira et al., 2018). Thus, by addressing parental concerns directly, teachers and school administrators may be able to support more positive attitudes toward inclusive education in parents of children without disability.

Generalized Social Justice Attitudes and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education in Parents of Children without Disability

Parents of children without disability who more strongly endorsed attitudes that aligned with principles of social justice were more likely to have more positive attitudes toward inclusive education; further, results from the mediation analysis suggest that this association was mediated by the parents' specific concerns about inclusive education. This suggests that parents' generalized attitudes toward social justice may alter their weariness about commonly reported concerns. That is, parents with strong social justice-related values may be especially committed to advancing the well-being of marginalized communities that include neurodiverse communities. In the context of inclusive classrooms, a commitment to promoting equity when advancing the well-being of all students - regardless of disability status - might make parents less wary about commonly reported concerns about inclusive classrooms. Again, this includes concerns about teacher division of classroom attention and allocation of classroom resources (Sira et al., 2018). Instead, they may view increased teacher attention for students with disabilities as necessary in order to ensure equitable classroom instruction that meets all students' needs, as long as their child is receiving adequate support—a conceptualization of classroom equity consistent with Shyman's (2015) definition of high-quality inclusive education.

Consequently, our findings indicate that addressing parent concerns about inclusive classrooms is at the core of promoting positive attitudes toward inclusive education. Even if parents hold strong social justice-related values, the extent to which these values shape—or perhaps, mitigate—concerns about inclusive classrooms determines how parents feel about inclusive education. This is consistent with previous work highlighting the importance of addressing parent concerns about inclusive education within early childhood classrooms (Sira et al., 2018). Thus, addressing concerns about inclusive education by clearly emphasizing the core equity-related philosophies of inclusive education may appeal to parents who highly value social justice. This may in turn support more positive attitudes about inclusive education. Indeed, as Buysse et al. (2002) demonstrate, parents place high importance on inclusive programs characterized by clear guiding philosophies—in this instance,

social justice and equity. Alternatively, in parents who do not highly value inclusive education, directly addressing concerns about inclusive education—regardless of framing conversations in terms of social justice—would also likely support more positive attitudes about inclusive education.

Associations Between Parent Demographic Factors and Parent Concerns About Inclusive Classrooms and Generalized Social Justice Attitudes

The current research suggests that these attitudinal factors may vary based on individual parent demographic factors. Specifically, parents with higher reported annual household income and higher reported education level were more likely to have fewer concerns about inclusive classrooms and increased affinity for generalized social justice attitudes—but not attitudes toward inclusive education—than parents of children without disability, independent of extraneous factors. This differs from past research indicating that both parent socioeconomic status and education level were associated with attitudes toward inclusive education and past research suggesting mixed findings on the link between socioeconomic status and politically liberal attitudes that favor principles of social justice (Balboni & Padrabissi, 2000, as cited in A. de Boer et al., 2010).

Implications of Parent Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education, Concerns, and Generalized Social Justice Attitudes for Eventual Classroom/Program Selection

Parents of children without disability had similar attitudes about inclusive education, concerns about inclusive classrooms, and social justice attitudes at the beginning of the school year, regardless of whether they had an explicit preference for inclusive classrooms and regardless of whether their child was in an inclusive or standard classroom. However, it is important to note that parents may have been more likely to not intentionally seek out one classroom type over another ($N=93$) due to the limited number of available spots in Georgia Pre-K programs; thus, a tendency to hold no explicit classroom preferences may be specific to Georgia Pre-K.

Group differences may instead emerge at the end of the school year. In fact, the beginning of the school year may often be parents' first exposure to a pre-k inclusive classroom environment. Additionally, experience with enrollment in inclusive classrooms has been shown to be associated with attitudes toward inclusive education in parents of children without disability (Green & Stoneman, 1989). Thus, at the time of data collection, parents' attitudes surrounding social justice and inclusive education likely did

not differ due to the limited firsthand experiences they may have had with inclusive classrooms.

In this manner, our findings suggest that parents of children without disability in Georgia Pre-K often do not base their *initial* pre-k enrollment decisions on personal philosophies surrounding inclusive education (i.e., social justice attitudes, feelings about inclusive education). These findings are consistent with previous literature highlighting firsthand experience with inclusive classrooms as primary drivers of inclusive education attitudes in parents of children without disability (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study has several limitations. First, three Georgia Pre-K programs in the current study only offered inclusive classrooms; thus, parents who enrolled their children in this program likely attended these programs because they had favorable attitudes about inclusive education. Second, parental attitudes and values were evaluated using self-report measures that may be susceptible to socially desirable response tendencies. For instance, participants surveyed by universities are likely to report more positive attitudes toward inclusive education (Lüke & Grosche, 2018). Future research should include social desirability scales to evaluate and potentially adjust for this response bias. Third, the present sample was comprised of mostly female, white, higher SES and education level demographics that may not be representative of the population given the sample homogeneity. Future research will restructure recruitment efforts to recruit a more diverse sample (e.g., via additional community-based partnerships in diverse regions). Future research should also examine drivers of inclusive education attitudes in parents by variations in socioeconomic status and education level.

Fourth, several of our parent self-report measures evidenced significantly skewed data distributions. Furthermore, it is possible that given previous research suggesting decreased support for inclusive education for children with ASD, using a vignette-based measure to capture inclusive education attitudes specific to ASD may have increased the likelihood that parents may have reported less positive inclusive education attitudes. The researchers employed analytical approaches to assess for and correct measure skewness. However, while nonparametric methods provide a robust approach for evaluating associations between variables, they may lack statistical power in detecting small effect sizes. Furthermore, future research should also involve parent interviews to better understand how parents think about social justice and the components of social justice that are relevant to the formation of positive attitudes about inclusive education. Additionally, it is important to note that the vignettes for the ASIE-P were adapted for the current study. Thus, it is possible that this modification

impacted the validity/reliability of the measure. It is important to note that in the current study, the adapted ASIE-P yielded a high Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .937$), which is comparable to that of previous research utilizing the ASIE-P ($\alpha = .910$; A. A. de Boer & Munde, 2014). However, A. A. de Boer and Munde (2014) conducted their study in the context of the Netherlands; thus, the different regional context may impact interpretations of comparing Cronbach's alpha values across samples.

Fifth, to examine whether experience within inclusive classrooms may drive changes in concerns about inclusive classrooms, inclusive education attitudes, and generalized social justice attitudes, future research should also compare survey measures at the beginning as well as at the end of the school year.

Finally, it is important to note that given positive consequences accompanying positive social action-related behaviors, it is possible that positive social action-related behaviors regarding social justice and inclusive education may indeed lead to stronger (positive) attitudes about social justice and inclusive education. As a result, additional research is needed to ascertain the causality of such variables.

Implications for Practice

Several factors are important to consider in discussions among parents and school personnel regarding program selection. It is important that these teacher-parent discussions prioritize understanding the values parents hold (e.g., social justice) that may influence their program selection. However, given the mitigating role of concerns about inclusive classrooms in the formation of attitudes about inclusive education, of key importance is directly addressing parent concerns about inclusive classrooms. Where possible, directly addressing parent concerns about inclusive classrooms should occur with intentional consideration of parents' values. Indeed, it is crucial for parents' values to inform teachers' approach to discussing parent concerns about inclusive classrooms in order to ensure that parents' concerns about inclusive classrooms are being addressed with intentional consideration of parents' goals for their child's education. For instance, framing inclusive programs as equitable programs that increase access to educational resources for both children with and without disability may resonate with parents who strongly value social justice. This may mitigate concerns they may have about the allocation of classroom resources. Nevertheless, a focus on determining and addressing parent concerns about inclusive programs is critical during these discussions, regardless of the specific values that parents report. Overall, such a focus on identifying parents' personal values and goals for their

own child lends further support to an individualized rather than generalized approach to supporting more positive attitudes toward inclusive education in parents.

It is also possible that modifying parents' generalized social justice attitudes may hinder the construction of concerns about inclusive classrooms, to support more positive inclusive education attitudes. Increasing awareness about inclusive education may mitigate concerns about inclusive classrooms by dismantling frequently reported implicit biases surrounding inclusive education (e.g., stigma against educating children without disability alongside children with disability), thereby facilitating buy-in for inclusive programs (Wüthrich & Lozano, 2018). Building upon work by Woodcock et al. (2012), it is possible that providing parents with information about inclusive programs far in advance of program enrollment may help mitigate parent concerns about inclusive classrooms. Doing so may also help prime parents to discuss their concerns about inclusive classrooms prior to program selection.

Conclusions

Parents of children without disability who expressed fewer concerns about inclusive classrooms and stronger support of values central to social justice (i.e., more positive generalized social justice attitudes) were more likely to endorse positive attitudes toward inclusive education. The intercorrelations among generalized social justice attitudes, concerns about inclusive classrooms, and inclusive education attitudes highlight the importance of considering both parental concerns about inclusive classrooms and parental values about social justice when aiming to promote positive parental attitudes about inclusive education. Finally, the finding that parents do not differ in inclusive education attitudes, generalized attitudes about social justice, nor concerns about inclusive education urges further exploration of differences in these attitudes at the end of the school year, once parents have firsthand experience with inclusive classrooms.

Overall, this work demonstrates that directly addressing parent concerns about inclusive classrooms is critical to supporting more positive attitudes toward inclusive education, with the goal of increasing parent demand for inclusive education. It is widely argued that parents can serve as advocates of reform within educational settings by deciding the educational placement of their children (Garrick Duhaney & Salend, 2000; Sira et al., 2018). Thus, increasing parent demand—specifically, promoting more supportive thoughts, feelings, and actions—surrounding inclusive education may encourage stakeholders to advocate for social policies that promote access to inclusive programs.

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