

PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEGAL LITERACY OF EDUCATORS AND THE
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS (282 pp.)

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This study was undertaken in an attempt to document the perceptions of the legal literacy of educators and to discuss the implications for teacher preparation programs. The research further attempted to study the impact and fear of legal issues on the educational practices of teachers, principals, and university professors and to determine the areas of school law that teachers, principals, and university professors felt should be included in undergraduate (preservice) teacher preparation programs.

The research design of this study employed a pilot study and a web-based survey consisting of five sections. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data and included: MANOVA, ANOVA, Pearson's product moment correlation, Hotelling's Trace T Test, and Newman-Keuls post hoc testing. Additionally, eight qualitative questions were also used to add breadth and scope to the research. Educators from three counties in Northeast Ohio were surveyed. In total, the findings of this study are based upon 186 teachers, 70 principals, and 20 university professors. All 276 participants represented three public universities and every level of public schools in Northeastern Ohio;

however, urban-core school districts in the targeted population yielded a limited response rate.

It was hypothesized that this research design would illustrate differences between the three professional groups and that the university professors would be represented as outliers in the data. This hypothesis was sometimes confirmed, but other interesting findings originated in this research. The general findings of this research determined that very few educators have been personally sued, but the perceptions of the current legal environment have led to varying levels of fear and impact upon the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, principals, and university professors. Other findings included data from inferential analyses that teachers want to know more about liability insurance and protections, although principals and university professors did not consider this area significant. Furthermore, using qualitative techniques, all three professional groups identified child abuse reporting, discipline policies, the IDEIA (special education), and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as the four most important legal issues to be included in teacher preparation programs.

The research design used in this study was unique and was constructed to compare and contrast the perceptions of the legal literacy of educators and to consider changes to teacher preparation programs. The design used in this research may have other applications and may also serve as a prototypical model to study other more curricular related aspects of teacher preparation programs.