THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN:

PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE

FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED

EDUCATIONAL PLAN

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Capella University

August 2007

UMI Number: 3289479

Abstract

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is utilized within public and private education as a means of identifying and facilitating appropriate education strategies for students with special needs. The objective is to integrate stakeholders in the student's education which entails systematic planning and maintenance. The literature demonstrates that parents and teachers are aware of the need for the IEP but there is a lack of information on how parents perceive the IEP and their relationship to it. A qualitative research methodology has been developed and applied to critically identify the personal perspectives of parents in a phenomenological research process used to assess the efficiency and appropriateness of existing IEP processes. Recommendations based upon the data are then used to identify common phenomena within parental perspectives and suggest potential system reform within the IEP. These strategies are intended to help improve delivery of specialized education to students with special needs or developmental or learning disabilities.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to five influential people who shared with me the risks and sacrifices required to complete it. The first to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "Through him all things are possible". The second is my son, Taihj Joel McCaskill, who inspires me everyday to be a better mother and a better person. The third, my mother Mrs. Lucille Sparks, her on-going struggle and guidance. "You represent how important and powerful womanhood can be". The fourth is my love and friend Marty G. Rhodes. "Thank you for your patience, love, and support". The fifth is dedicated to the memory of my father Mr. John Sparks. "I love you and miss you dearly daddy". "Although you are not physically here, you are always near and dear to my heart".

Acknowledgments

I owe thanks to many people, whose assistance was indispensable in completing this project. First among these is Dr. Bernard Klein, my first mentor, for his patience and guidance throughout the process. Thank you for all your assistance and support. To Dr. Leone Snyder, for her thoroughness and promptness in reviewing my work in progress. Without her on-going feedback, it would have been impossible to maintain the standard of scholarship that this project required. I thank Dr. Pamela Handfelt and Dr. Behrooz Sabet, for their participation in my dissertation committee and their valued feedback as well. I thank the staff and faculty of Capella University, for accepting and supporting a student whose interests in a doctoral program were somewhat unconventional.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was developed in conjunction with the

Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA), in which it became federal law that all

students with mild and moderate special needs who are able to participate in a traditional

classroom setting will receive education at levels equal to or comparable to that received

by traditional (e.g.: non-disabled) students. The IEP can best be described as process that

continuously audits the academic, social, and behavioral performance of a student on an

individual level, thus not only providing a reference through which to assess past

performance but also to provide an ongoing guide that will better facilitate areas in which

the student requires ongoing assistance and/or areas that the student is showing

improvement and the ability to proceed without continuous monitoring and assistance.

The most significant difference of the IEP from similar auditing and progress-

monitoring strategies is found within the interaction of the participants that are affiliated

with the student's academic and social environments. Of particular note are parents and

teachers, but the IEP can be extended to integrate links and mentors from various areas of

the student's social and extracurricular activities. Increased emphasis is on integration of

various persons that influence the student, a practice that is designed to not only better

direct the educational curriculum for the student but also provides significant incentives

in the form of familiarity and a display of open commitment to the best interests of the

student.

The IEP has been challenged in terms of providing the best possible

individualized education to the student in the face of multiple different and distinctive

priorities; critics suggest that the IEP lacks in appropriately prioritizing the perspectives

of parents, teachers, school administrators, as well as friends and mentors. Furthermore,

it is also necessary mention the perspectives of the student. The critics of the IEP suggest

that divided priorities and assessment of inappropriate or otherwise insufficient aspects of

a given student's education are rooted within the operations of the IEP, thus reducing its

desired effectiveness.

Background of the Study

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is designed to facilitate appropriate

education for students with disabilities and requires input from parents to determine

strategies that are best suited to the needs of individual students. The origins of the IEP

are found in the Individuals with Disabilities Act first passed in 1974 and which was later

renewed and reauthorized in 1997; the IEP was part of the original Act but was perceived

as not achieving full effectiveness due to numerous shortcomings that were never

effectively resolved in the many revisions to the original IDEA. The reauthorization of

the Act created an increased focus on the IEP as an appropriate and beneficial means of

communicating an improved, individualized education to the student, and one major

aspect of the revised methodology of the IEP was through the inclusion of parents,

teachers, administrators, and others into the delivery system.

The current form of the IEP requires parental input specifically as a means of

assessing the student's needs and in creating a direction for the student with achievable

goals. Teachers tend to be the primary source of information concerning the

effectiveness and impact of the IEP on the student, suggesting that other perspectives

may help to enrich the body of literature on IEP performance and help provide increased improvements in these programs.

Despite the stated need for parents within the IEP is a lack of measurement within isolating overall effectiveness and communicating areas of effectiveness or ineffectiveness from the parent to those with a more direct influence over the academic performance of the child. Studies of parental perspectives on the IEP are extremely limited, where assessment of effectiveness seems to broadly favor the academic setting and measures the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and the impact of the IEP on student performance.

Multiple topics appear in the literature on IEPs. The IEP is frequently identified as a program that helps students with unique educational needs acquire a more effective education, as the IEP takes into account their individual learning challenges that may not be met in the traditional classroom (Ven, 2000; Test, 2005). However, the IEP is identified as more expensive than traditional education methods and also places a burden on educators in terms of the time required to meet the needs of the IEP student and in the planning and supervisory meetings required to continuously refine the planning processes and goals of a given student's IEP (Venn, 2000). Problems in efficiency and appropriate delivery of IEP to the qualified student are consistently noted in the literature, suggesting that it is extremely difficult to establish and maintain an IEP that meets its stated goals with low impact on the student or the educator (Venn, 2000; Siegel, 2003). Parents are identified as a critical part of the IEP planning and delivery processes, as they are seen as having a direct knowledge of the challenges that their child struggles with during their

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education and are in a position to monitor their child's progress when outside of the classroom environment (Friend, 2005).

In one of the earliest studies on parent perception in the context of the new IEP, Bennett (1997) questioned whether the new rules for the IEP would in fact amount to a shifting series of perspectives within the context of the American educational setting. Specifically, Bennett (1997) created and distributed a Parent Survey on Inclusion that was conducted to collect initial responses to parental perceptions of the IEP; the researchers reported that the parents saw a dramatic and under-addressed gap between the theory and practice of inclusion research. Of note, there appeared to be sporadic and problematic gaps in communication between parents and educators, specifically found within note-passing using the student as messenger. This was noted as having a strong negative impact on the communications process; parents perceived teachers as intentionally ignoring the parents' efforts to become more interactive, while the teachers saw these efforts to communicate as under-motivated (e.g.: reflecting poor commitment on the part of the parent to the IEP) and, strangely, intrusive and invasive within the context of the teacher's classroom experiences.

Other research calls attention to shortcomings in assessing perception due to the lack of appreciation for points of deviation between parents and the educational system. One of the most important areas concerning the IEP and parental involvement is found in parents who speak English as a second language (L2). The L2 speaker has often been targeted as failing to effectively contribute to a child's education to the same degree as a native English speaker, due simply to problems in communication (Freyer & Levitt, 2004). Recognition of these problems predated the revision of IDEA and the IEP, where

sources identified how language barriers reduced effective communication (Stein, 1983; Venn, 2000). However, despite concessions made in the revised IEP/IDEA to better facilitate L2 parents; this has not come to pass. Moreover, despite an increasing number of students with L2 parents within the United States, studies assessing the perspectives of the L2 parent community are rare.

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Persons involved in the creation and continued functionality of an IEP tend to be invested in the welfare of the student covered by that specific plan. These stakeholders tend to be the school administration, teachers, the parents, and even the student covered by the IEP. The working relationship forged between these stakeholders and a specific IEP indicate that they are in a unique position to provide insight into to how the IEP impacts the student. The perceptions of the stakeholders also help to suggest areas in which the IEP is effective or can be better structured to help facilitate improved academic, social, and behavioral performance for the student.

Teachers, specifically those educators who work directly with the student in regards to a certain subject, are believed to be the source of greatest insight concerning the functionality of the IEP and the methods through which the IEP facilitates increased student academic performance. This is attributed not only to the teacher's direct observational authority in regards to determining student performance but also the requirement that "at least one of the child's regular education teachers must be on the IEP team if the child is (or may be) participating in the regular education environment" (Kupper & Kohanek, 2002, p.7). In the U.S. Department of Education's guide to the IEP,

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the authors note that the teacher is the principle contributing team member with the ability to discuss the general curriculum in the regular classroom in which the following points are clarified:

> (a) the aids, services, or changes to the educational program that would help the student learn and achieve; and
> (b) strategies to help the child with behavior, if behavior is an issue" (Kupper & Kohanek, 2002, p.7)

Furthermore, the teacher is perceived as having insight into areas of necessary support based upon these issues, for "the regular education teacher may also discuss with the IEP team the supports for school staff that are needed so that the child can:

> (c) advance toward his or her annual goals;
> (d) be involved and progress in the general curriculum;
> (e) participate in extracurricular and other activities; and
> (f) be educated with other children, both with and without disabilities" (Kupper & Kohanek, 2002, p.7)

Finally, the authors suggest that the teachers require additional attention and direct support from administrators and parents in order to better contribute to the status of the student within the classroom environment, and recommend that continued assistance and professional training be further developed towards these goals (Kupper & Kohanek, 2002).

What is interesting, however, is that this same formal brochure exploring the functionality of the IEP states that the IEP is not specifically restricted to the school environment as well as agency affiliates that will better facilitate the student's

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performance within the classroom. Essentially, the IEP can be explained not only as a

means of facilitating academic progress but also is a strategy that assists the student to

better establish the means to control his or her disability. As this strategy is done in order

to effectively integrate the student into not only the academic setting but also improves

post-educational progress and mastery of behaviors that optimize the student's ability to

acquire and participate in employment. The IEP integrates aspects of the environment

that are external to the one provided by the classroom.

   Parents are defined as playing a critical role in establishing the direction of the

student's academic career, especially in regards to direction, selection of teaching

strategies, and assessment of the effectiveness of selected strategies. One aspect of

significance in the student's life than that of the educator within the IEP criteria are the

parents. Parents are required to develop and update the IEP as needed, and are involved

in ongoing communication with teachers and administrators to identify areas of change

within the student's overall academic and social progress. The involvement of the parent

is a mandatory aspect of the IEP. Smith (2001) stated that changes to the existing IEP

had altered the educators' awareness of parental involvement and effectiveness, thus

characterizing the parent as essential in making sure that the goals of the IEP could be

satisfactorily accomplished. Smith (2001) noted in his article "Involving Parents in the

IEP Process" that:

   The parents' role as committee members and educational decision makers
   in creating IEPs was established in 1975 by the Education for All
   Handicapped Children Act, now known as Individuals with Disabilities
   Education Act (IDEA). Even though parent involvement is a defining
   feature of IDEA, Congress, as part of the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA,

believed that parental involvement needed strengthening. As a result, parents' rights and responsibilities are again in the forefront as a necessary ingredient for appropriate and individualized educational programming, mandating that schools provide an opportunity for active parental participation in decisions about the education of children. The involvement of parents in the IEP process has many benefits. (Smith, 2001, *ERIC Digest* #E611; p. 441)

These benefits are defined in the following core areas, which are (a) "Increase the teacher's understanding of the child's environment; (b) Add to parents' knowledge of the child's educational setting; (c) Improve communication between parents and the school; (d) Increase the school's understanding of the child; and (e) Increase the likelihood that, with improved understanding between home and school, mutually agreed upon educational goals will be attained" (Smith, 2001, *ERIC Digest* #E611; p. 441). Yet despite the focus on parental involvement as a mandatory and continuing aspect of the student's academic and personal development, the perceptions of parents regarding their role in their children's Individualized Education Programs are understudied, and potential reforms as determined by the parents are likewise underreported. As the parents play a significant role in effective strategies utilized in their children's IEP, assessing and reporting on parental perspectives of the IEP may help improve the quality and content of IEP for children.

With these issues known and recognized as possible components of a successful delivery of a student's IEP, the statement of the problem for the current research project is summarized as follows:

The Individualized Education Plan has been implemented to provide a framework for functional, efficient review of student performance. Stakeholders in the student's IEP have some control over how it is best implemented and maintained; research has predominantly explored the perspectives of educators and students in respect to the IEP. Parental involvement, while recognized as a significant component in the successful delivery of education, has traditionally been underrepresented in the literature on the IEP and in stakeholder involvement in the IEP.

This problem statement has guided this research effort and promotes continued focus on the goals of the project.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for the current research effort is self-evident, for despite an ongoing emphasis on the need for parent participation in the IEP, there is still a significant gap between theory and participation within the IEP program on the part of parents (Gorard, 2000). The need to address this gap demands a study that assesses parent perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the IEP. Doing so will facilitate a larger, more comprehensive understanding of how parents see the IEP as meeting, or failing to meet, the needs of their children.

The focus on parent perceptions can also provide an effective contrast between the wide body of literature that exists on educator perspectives. Through identifying the existing concepts present in the literature on educators and contrasting it against the findings from the current study, it is highly probable that the current research effort will

demonstrate the presence of conflict between parents and educators. As these persons are working towards the best interests of the same student, it is necessary to reconcile these differences in order to better facilitate the overall improvement of the IEP and to best help students achieve appropriate and comprehensive individualized education. The current research project has demonstrated that a study of this size can hope to fully accomplish these goals, but it is likely that the findings from the current research effort can be applied to a larger, more comprehensive research effort and the data from this study applied to reform of the IEP and improvement in directing the IEP towards reflecting parent perspectives.

Importance of the Study

The IEP has been established as an extremely useful tool in ensuring that students with disabilities that impede full participation in traditional classroom learning will be able to benefit from many aspects of the traditional classroom. As such, the IEP helps to facilitate a synthesis between the specialized needs of the student and the traditional classroom; improvements in the delivery of the IEP will help to improve the quality of education and will likely help to improve the student's overall academic progress. The ultimate goal of the IEP is to ensure that the student receives an education that sufficiently prepares him or her for their experiences beyond the classroom, and it is necessary to resolve any recognized problems in the delivery of the IEP to the student.

The current study is important as the IEP is often recognized as a cost- and-resource-intensive program that does not always deliver an appropriate education to the target student. Reform efforts are consistent within IEP methodologies, but reform

strategies are only successful when they have a positive impact upon the student. The study helps identify serious problems found within the IEP as recognized by parents and are potentially underreported to reformers and educators.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study is an ecological inquiry into the educational processes associated by stakeholders to the student's academic career in respect to the IEP plan. The inquiry process derives content from the learned experiences of persons within the academic profile of a student with learning disabilities and his or her IEP. It is deemed ecological in nature as it identifies the content of education, the practice and methodologies used to approach the student in respect to the IEP, and the research processes that seeks out these perceptions and frames them in an accessible and usable format.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study is embedded within the relationships that perceptions of the stakeholders in education have in respect to outcome. The current study explores an underrepresented area of content in the literature, where the correlation between perception and relationships are defined. While the study does not resolve any ongoing shortcomings in the IEP or the connection between parents and teachers, it is believed that the findings will be significant in that they will provide recommendations for future study with an aim towards long-term reform in this area.

Scope of the Study

The current study explores the data on perspectives of parents who have children with IEP requirements. The data-gathering process focuses on a total of 15 parents. The findings from this process are supplemented through a review of the critical literature in which problems in IEP delivery are identified. This information is collected through research on and critical assessment of the IEP in the academic literature. Furthermore, as parents are often not likely to read academic literature in their efforts to better understand the IEP, manuals and other resources written specifically for the perusal of parents is included.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the current study is to contribute to the broader body of literature on the IEP and to help clarify what aspects are perceived among parents as lacking in appropriate focus. Conversely, positive findings in certain areas may suggest broader areas for reform that can help promote widespread positive change among IEP delivery and revision strategies.

Narrowed objectives include a demonstration of the researcher's data collection skills, the ability to successfully review and compile relevant literature, and to generate a functional thesis as a result of these.

Research Questions

A series of research questions drives the current study effort. The primary question is:

Question One: To what extent do parents feel that the IEP is meeting the needs of their child or children?

Secondary research questions that need to be asked in order to answer the first include:

Question Two: In what areas is the IEP meeting or exceeding expectations? In what areas is the IEP failing to meet or exceed expectations?

Question Three: What phenomena are most frequently mentioned by parents as having an impact on the IEP used with their children?

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is best suited to the current study. This is due to the need to survey and monitor specific personal opinions, a practice that cannot be easily achieved through quantitative research methods (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative phenomenological research method is used. The focus of the methodology assesses a sample population of parents who have children receiving IEP services. The subjects are interviewed and their responses collected for phenomenological review. The phenomena that are reported during the interview process are then isolated and identified as representative of perceptions of the parents regarding the efficiency and appropriateness of the IEP process.

Data collection is taken from a random sample of 35 parents of IEP students at Roosevelt High School, for a total sample of 35. The data has been collected by the researcher through using a semi-structured interview process; a semi-structured interview is an interview that is directed by a series of questions or themes presented to the subject by the researcher. The content analysis process has been done through using a phenomenological approach through which the responses of the subjects are assessed, bracketed for commonalities, and these commonalities are reported as phenomenon that are representative in the perceptions of the sample population. It has been noted in the conclusion to the current research effort that the sample population provides insight into the perceptions of parents in a small percentage of students receiving additional educational assistance from the IEP programs, and that the data may change when a different population of parents (e.g.: with students in junior high school or secondary school) are sampled.

The phenomenological methodology involves an assessment process called "bracketing" that facilitates identification of specific themes or commonalities. Bracketing occurs when the "researcher disengages from all past theories or knowledge of the phenomenon. Personal presuppositions about the phenomenon under study are carefully noted to reduce, as much as possible, contamination of the data from subtle influence. This temporary disengagement from a particular frame of reference allows the phenomena to manifest themselves as they are" (Jackson, 1998, p. 216). Ultimately, the use of the phenomenological research effort helps facilitate the identification of phenomena that are manifest among multiple subjects and thus stress commonalities among their perception.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are critical to the current research effort and have been derived from the literature:

Autism: A physiological condition frequently associated with psychological, emotional, and behavioral challenges and is diagnosed through matching a minimum of seven out of ten diagnostic criteria for autism listed in the DSM-IV(R) (Venn, 2000; Siegal, 2004).

Emotionally Disabled: Any condition or co-morbid conditions that affect a student's emotional status; frequently linked to psychological disorders (Siegal, 2004).

IDEA: The Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act; federal legislation designed to promote the rights of students in education programs that receive federal funding (Venn, 2000; Siegal, 2004; Friend, 2005).

IEP: The Individual Education Plan; a federal standard with recommended criteria and planning programs that is used to help students with learning disabilities (Venn, 2000; Siegal, 2004; Friend, 2005).

Learning Disabled: Any condition or co-morbid conditions that impede a student's ability to learn using conventional processes (Venn, 2000; Friend, 2005).

Mentally Challenged: Any condition or co-morbid conditions in which the student's mental status (e.g.: information acquisition abilities, processing abilities, etc.) is challenged (Siegal, 2004; Friend, 2005).

Perception: The synthesis of observations, expectations, and learned experiences that one person applies to another person, action, or set of outcomes (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Performance: Standards of achievement that can be assessed using benchmarks or evaluated through perceived outcomes.

Physically Challenged: Any condition or co-morbid conditions in which the affected student suffers from physiological challenges (Venn, 2000).

Speech Impaired: Any condition or co-morbid conditions in which the affected student is not able to communicate verbally in a manner similar to his or her peers (Venn, 2000; Friend, 2005).

Visually Impaired: Any condition or co-morbid condition in which the affected student is not able to process visual information at a rate similar to his or her peers (Venn, 2000; Friend, 2005).

Summary

The current research effort resolve a shortcoming in the reporting of effectiveness on the Individualized Education Plans in which parents' perceptions are rarely explored and even less frequently used to guide reform efforts. Ostensibly, the IEP values the input of parents during the planning and ongoing educational processes, but both new and ongoing problems in delivering the IEP to the student suggest that these goals are not met. The majority of reporting on problems in the IEP focuses on educator perceptions and student perceptions, a strategy that suggests that the perceptions of parents are devalued in the IEP programs despite stated policy to the contrary. In the qualitative

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interview process, this study attempts to resolve the gap between the reported perceptions of educators and students through providing access to the perceptions of parents. Ideally, the data provided here will help inspire reform of IEP delivery through promoting increased focus on parents' perceptions, increased interest on areas that parents' report as problematic within the scope of the IEP, or a combination of these.

The organization of the study includes five chapters that consist of an Introduction, a Literature Review, a description of the Methodology, a presentation of the Data and Data Analysis processes, and a chapter that summarizes the study, discusses the data, and provides conclusions based on the data.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The Individualized Education Plan is a controversial delivery system for special education. The IEP is challenged by differences of opinion in terms of which strategies are best effective in providing appropriate levels of education to students with special needs. Presumably, the IEP is intended to overcome limits on the traditional delivery system and help provide a more specialized form of education to the special needs student, thus suggesting by proxy that the IEP should be *less* controversial as it overcomes challenges that are attributed to traditional education. There are, however, a series of problems in the application of the IEP that strongly suggest that this method of education is simply insufficiently suited to meet its stated goals. These problems predate the most recent reiteration of the IEP, where Smith (1990) defines these problems in discussing the older IEP program by noting that:

> The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the *outcome* of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). For special education there is no document more significant to districts, agencies, administrators, teachers, parent and educational advocates, and students. Intended as the cornerstone of the EAHCA, the IEP was considered the necessary component from which to monitor and enforce the law. The IEP supports individualized instruction based on equal views with the intent of providing adequate educational opportunities for children and youth with handicapping conditions. Succinctly, the EAHCA was intended to provide administrators with proof of compliance, teachers with formalized plans, parents with a voice, and students with an appropriate education. Thus, the importance of IEPs to children's education cannot be minimized or ignored" (Smith, 1990, p. 7)

However, while Smith's (1990) observations on the IEP reflect a failure of delivery for the old plan, and also suggest that he is in favor of the application of the IEP, he indicates that there is a persistent gap between the stated purpose of the IEP and the delivery of same. The IEP, Smith (1990) suggests, is appropriately intentioned in terms of its ideological approach towards education, in which the student is better integrated into his or her own appropriate educational setting via a program that is specifically designed towards facilitating these and similar stated outcomes. The faults in the IEP occur as a direct result of failure to achieve stated goals, specifically that the "intent of the EAHCA is not being met. Thus, the functioning of IEPs as currently formulated by public school professionals must be questioned" (Smith, 1990). This creates a context in which the IEP can be considered successful under conditions in which it effectively meets the needs of the student. The reformation of IDEA in 1997 and the subsequent restructuring of the IEP does not change this outcome. The IEP is only effective if and when appropriate, comprehensive education is delivered to the student and the student is able to best relate to their education. Additionally, as the IEP is intentionally designed to provide different outcomes to students with a range of different or distinctive needs, this creates a broad range of conditions through which it can be argued that the IEP overcomes limits upon assumptions and standard outcomes that are exhibited by traditional students.

Yet controversy is quick to emerge in the form of debate over whether the stated goals are met, and if so, the sufficiency and long-term outcomes resulting from meeting these goals. Rodger (1995) notes in a review of the literature on the initial structure of the IEP that there are assessment problems that plague the IEP, not the least of which are dissenting opinions concerning student performance in the school setting. Rodger (1995)

finds that the variety of dissimilar goals, differing delivery systems, and disparities in the

overall achievement of stated goals are problematic for teachers, parents, and

administrators due to the ability to interpret student performance. In short, the very

flexibility that is built into the IEP in order to permit functionality in education for

individual students reduces the ability to assess whether the IEP is actually working.

Differences in perceptions among those who are directly (or, to a lesser extent,

indirectly) involved in a given IEP are key in assessing whether the IEP is meeting stated

goals. Venn (2000) comments on how different persons involved in an IEP tend to have

different priorities based upon personal observations and the desire to achieve a particular

outcome. However, this does not reduce the need to study the overall effectiveness of

various forms of IEP, special education, or specialized learning programs tailored for

students in need of such delivery mechanisms, as it is certain that these aspects of

personalized education have some bearing on the effectiveness of the student's ability to

learn. What is of greatest significance within the context of the current Literature

Review, however, is how persons active in education tend to identify certain components

of education as desirable or undesirable and evaluate the delivery systems according to

this perceived state: categorizing a delivery system or aspects therein as effective or

ineffective is suggestive of a rationale in which outcome is the hallmark of effectiveness.

As such, studies in effective methodologies in the delivery of education to students must

therefore be explored in detail but not as expressive documentation of exact or

authoritative strategies through which education must be delivered.

Assessing Differences in Perspectives

      Stakeholders in education each have clear goals for participation in the education process; this participation is not merely limited to the student but can also be applied to the general setting in which various persons affiliated with the student's education interact. Specifically, the teacher, the administrator, and the parent/caretaker all have outcomes that they wish to see realized in the student and are willing to support specific strategies that they believe will best realize these outcomes. These outcomes are derived from several sources, including federal and state performance standards, as well as the school district's curriculum and the priorities that the community has determined to be critical aspects of all students' education portfolios. Yet these goals are also adapted from personal preferences, particularly those proposed by stakeholders directly involved in the student's academic progress. For instance, the parent/caregiver can identify in the IEP planning session that he would like to see specific outcomes that may not be covered by the curriculum in his child's performance; an excellent example of this is found when the curriculum integrates certain desirable social skills into the student's IEP as a means of building these into the student's academic experiences.

      For the most part, the synthesis of the goals of the multiple stakeholders is possible through promoting appropriate, rationalized strategies through which all stakeholders are able to voice their preferences for outcome and synthesize these into the requirements for outcome directed by local, state, and federal criteria. At times, however, these goals appear incompatible or otherwise inappropriately suited to achieve a mutual state of functionality within the same academic environment. When conflict arises

between stakeholders, it becomes extremely difficult to facilitate an environment in which all of the perceived needs for stakeholders in a student's education are realized.

An example of this is found within the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the requirements of the Act in identifying and promoting the needs of special education students in the form of standardized tests (Meier & Wood, 2004; Simon, 2006)). A representative from the U.S. Department of Education has stated that all students who receive IEPs will still be required to participate in the standardized testing that is used to evaluate student progress, for "[NCLB] Act is specifically designed to include all students in the state's accountability system, and thus, to leave no child behind. NCLB requires each state to develop and implement a single, statewide accountability system to ensure that all school districts and public schools show adequate yearly progress" (Delisio, 2004; para 2). However, criticism of NCLB frequently indicates that standardized testing is unfairly suited to the learning processes of many students, and persons who require special education are quite frequently portrayed by these testing processes as not achieving educational requirements.

Meier and Wood (2004) note that one of the most problematic aspects of creating a universal evaluation system for students is found in the fact that the students themselves are not universal and cannot be educated according to a template methodology that demands exacting, reproducible results from all participants (e.g.: both students and teachers). The authors suggest that the outcomes of teaching within such an environment tend to be negative; in contrast to providing an accessible format through which documentation can occur, the standardized testing process requires conformity and exhibition of certain learned behaviors from all students. Special education students are

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most often penalized through these processes, as the expectations for approved student performance typically are not effectively satisfied through either the formats provided by the NCLB in particular or within formats created by the state in general.

To further extend the discussion of perceptions within the context of the NCLB, it needs to be identified that parents, teachers, and administrators tend to each have different opinions concerning a student's "successful" completion of educational goals (Meier & Wood, 2004; Simon, 2006). A parent will have the expectation that the student's education will prepare him or her for post-secondary education or successful integration into vocational work; in this context. The NCLB may or may not play a part in communicating acquisition of goals. A teacher will consider the student to have attained successful educational goals in circumstances when the student is able to effectively identify a problem and respond to it in a manner that demonstrates acquisition of classroom materials; standardized tests administered under NCLB are a part of this process but are not the dominant indicator of success. Finally, the administrator considers an education to have been successfully communicated to the student when the standardized test scores demonstrate acceptable levels of proficiency, an outcome that reflects favorably upon the school as it is perceived as an indicator of successful teaching and engaged student participation (Simon, 2006).

Stakeholders in a special education student's academic career therefore do not all share identical goals, nor are they likely to perceive that certain strategies that are frequently used to achieve one outcome are necessarily beneficial as a whole when applied to the student's academic environment. Under NCLB, for example, the focus on standardized tests as the foremost means of student performance assessment has created a

process called "teaching to the test" in which the classroom syllabus is structured in a way that teaches topics likely to be found on the test and therefore increasing the students' body of knowledge on these subjects to the exclusion of other materials (Meier & Wood, 2004, p. 14). If the administrator identifies these educational processes as invaluable to helping the student realize necessary academic goals, he may find himself in conflict with a parent who desires his child to receive increased classroom attention on multiple subjects in order to better create a developmental foundation for post-secondary education.

These issues of perception and prerogatives in teaching suggest that the various stakeholders in education may all want what is best for the special education student but may not be agreed on what outcomes actually are better than others; if the outcome is shared, this does not automatically mean that there are shared opinions in the best strategies to help the student achieve it. Siegal (2004) suggests that the IEP may in fact further complicate the successful assessment and delivery of education to the student based upon the perceptions of those who have close contact with the student but for whom this close contact occurs in different contexts. Parents perceive themselves in a position in which they must "advocate" for their child, especially in circumstances in which they believe that their child has been overlooked by the school system and therefore needs a prominent authority figure to intervene (Seigal, 2004, p. 2). The very construction of the IEP legislation creates a platform through which the parent can act as a representative of their child's future and allows the active, involved parent the opportunity to literally help shape their child's educational activities. Seigal (2004) asks parents to consider that "there are three fundamental questions to consider as you

[parents] begin the special education process: (1) where is your child now? (2) where do you want your child to be? and (3) what do you need to get your child there?" (p. 2).

It is evident from these questions that parents, who are psychologically and emotionally involved in the overall welfare of their children, will be asked to identify certain learning strategies. These, however, are not necessarily going to meet or conform to the same or similar learning strategies that are put forth by the child's teacher. Margolis and Tewel noted in 1990 that "it is not unusual for parents of educationally handicapped students and school districts to find themselves in conflict over what environment or program is least restrictive for the student" and that "such conflicts often escalate into acrimonious legal and emotional battles" as the parents work to identify in what areas the school is obligated to provide for the welfare of their child's education and the failure of the school setting to do so (p. 283). The researchers also suggest that the version of the IEP at the time of writing was extremely ambiguous in terms of defining the capacity for providing the least restrictive environment, as well as in terms of directing and limiting the overall authority that the various stakeholders had in determining the student's educational direction.

The restructuring of IDEA targeted many of these issues but was unable to fully resolve conflict within perceptions between best interests expressed by the various stakeholders. Indeed, Seligman (2000) indicates that conflict between stakeholders may have become exacerbated in the modern version of the IEP due to the continuous focus on roles played by the various stakeholders; rather than setting limits on interaction, the new version of the IDEA stressed the manner in which administrators, teachers, parents, and even the students themselves were supposed to interact with each other in the context

of the IEP but did so to the exclusion of conflict management. Thus, the assumption became one of acceptance, in which all participants were expected to approve of their various roles and work to capacity within them, but as the existing differences in perception were not targeted this merely appeared to reduce opportunities for expansive dialogue over best practices of educational delivery. In short, the expectation that all participants would willingly conform to roles assigned to them in the IEP served to underscore existing problems in perception of educational delivery. This, Seligman (2000) suggests, has been particularly difficult for parents due to nominal efforts to resolve differences between the parent and the educational system on the part of teachers and/or administrators. For instance, teachers report that parent interaction is invasive and frequently does not allow the educator enough leeway to effectively engage in his or her job; restructuring IDEA and the IEP were supposed to clearly establish better communication channels between the parent and the educator but instead has suggested that the parents are exceeding the limits on their respective roles if they work to contact the educator through non-approved channels. Parents thus express frustration with educators because they feel as though the educator will only approve of contact to discuss the welfare of their child in limited circumstances; in contrast, educators see the parent who attempts to circumvent accepted channels of communication as invasive and belligerent, an obstacle in the student's education processes instead of a necessary aide (Seligman, 2000).

Perceived conflict between the parent and the educator also exists within the framework provided by the IEP and goal-oriented outcomes. It is recognized that the parent and the educator have different needs in a student's education processes. The

parent needs the student to improve academically but also needs the child to improve on a functional level; here, achieving a sustainable level of functionality corresponds not only to attaining specific academic goals but the ability to incorporate what has been learned in school into a real-life setting (Bennett, 1997). Moreover, students with behavioral concerns (e.g.: conduct disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, etc.) are likely to have specific outcomes associated with these behavioral events integrated into their respective IEPs (e.g.: the student will demonstrate the ability to concentrate on a given task for no less than 15 minutes; the student will demonstrate appropriate normalized social interaction with his peers in a supervised setting, etc.). The parent will wish to see these practices realized in the IEP and, subsequently, reflected in the basic behaviors of the student beyond the limitations imposed by the school (Venn, 2000). Educators, on the other hand, are more concerned about the student's ability to successfully meet criteria put forth by local, state, and federal supervisory agencies. The student's progress regarding the IEP is viewed as a series of benchmarks that can ultimately be realized in improved academic performance. These must by their very nature be measured and evaluated within the context of the educational system. This leads to the single greatest difference in perspective between teachers and parents: teachers prioritize outcome based within the context of the school, while parents prioritize outcome based within the context of school, family life, and social events (Venn, 2000; Smith, 2001).

Educator Perceptions Towards Parents

As stated in the Introduction to this paper, in the context of IDEA and the IEP, the perceptions of educators towards parents have been studied both with greater frequency

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and in greater detail than parents' perceptions of educators. Goupil (2002), for instance, stress that perceptions regarding student performance as interpreted by teachers and parents reflects marked differences in priorities, where parents identify certain outcomes (e.g. leisure and social interaction for purposes of facilitating employment at a later date) as needing attention and teachers prioritize academic achievement. Furthermore, the research clearly indicates that the teachers are divided in their perceptions of parents, and that two distinctive viewpoints are evident. The first of these is that the parent is in a position to create targeted change due to his or her proximity to the student. The second is that the parent is generally well-intentioned but is not trained in educational methods, thus should consent to the judgment of the educator in matters concerning his or her child's academic progress.

Cooperation between parents and educators tends to be one-sided on the part of the educator active in the IEP program. Special education educators tend to have received specialized training and as a profession tend to go through a series of challenges that quite often result in burnout and attrition within a relative few (e.g.: under five) years of assuming their responsibilities (Venn, 2000). As a result, educators in special education tend to be under high levels of stress and/or are coping with stress through strategies such as confidence in their positions and skills (Venn, 2000; Smithback, 2003). Conditions in which parents are confrontational or are exceeding what the educator feels are reasonable levels of involvement in their children's educations help contribute to high levels of stress (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). Educators perceive that their professional responsibilities are often taxing irregardless of the involvement of parents and that a

parent who oversteps perceived limits or boundaries is invasive and places requirements that should not be added to existing job duties (Smithback, 2003).

Gutkin (1993), for example, reviewed a sample population of teachers who were involved in special education at the primary school level. She found that teachers who utilized the IEP model in the special education classroom were more likely to seek out assistance from fellow teachers as opposed to looking to parents for additional aid. Consultation and help offered to the special education teachers was perceived as advantageous, and these perceptions were extended to offering psychological consultation designed to help both the teacher and students better identify conditions that caused stress within the classroom. However, parental involvement was not indicated by the subjects as a necessary form of assistance in the classroom environment. While Gutkin (1993) does not state this outright, it can be inferred from context that the special education teacher would be more likely to seek out assistance and aid from fellow teachers before doing so from the parent population. The result is a setting in which the educators do not identify parents as a beneficial resource in the special education classroom; if this is too great an inference, this may be understated in terms of teachers preferring to acquire aid from their professional peers due to perceptions of competence and understanding from these persons as opposed to students' parents.

Studies in the involvement of parents in the educational setting suggest that the school environment is purposefully closed to parents. Gareau and Sawatsky (1995) note that the school environment actively "discourages" the involvement of parents on multiple grounds, not the least of which is the school setting appears to infer from previous parental encounters that all parents have the ability to detract from successful

goal completion (p. 463 - 464). This is further complicated through increased resistance

on the part of educators to open doors to parents and involve them in the school setting,

especially in circumstances where educators feel themselves coerced to do so (e.g.:

federal IEP regulations, etc.).

This is not to say that all educators' perceptions of parents within the school

setting are negative. Frequently, parents are identified in the literature as an underutilized

resource that should be integrated into the school setting (Bennett et al, 1997; Kopper &

Kohanek, 2000; Seligman, 2000; Venn, 2000; Siegal, 2004). Reasons for integration are

many and tend to favor the opinion that the parent-child bond can demonstrate approval

of student participation in his or her academic activities (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000;

Venn, 2000), as well as offer structure and support for task-focus in the home

environment (Seligman, 2000). Siegal (2004) notes that educators often increase their

focus on parents during vacation periods, as lessons obtained in the classroom

environment need to be reaffirmed when the child is not actively participating in a

structured scholastic setting.

The involvement of the parent is also desirable as a committed, involved parent

communicates a sense of structure to the child (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). A

significant body of literature has been collected regarding the impact of certain parenting

strategies upon the developing child, and it is almost universally recognized that a parent

who is active in a child's life and shows a sense of commitment to the child is more likely

to raise a child without behavioral or emotional disorders (Braxton, 1999). Additionally,

this type of parenting has been associated with improved academic performance, a lower

corresponding frequency to behaviors such as teenage sexual activity and drug use, and a greater willingness to listen to authority figures.

However, while these sources strongly stress the value of parental involvement and the recognition of parents as resources to help engage and promote a student's overall academic progress, these same sources tend to avoid clear, definitive statements of purpose on how to successfully strike a balance between the teacher and the parent over the student's academic career. It appears as though the recognition of these positive outcomes is seen in the literature as self-justifying, and that an emphasis on increased communication between the parent and the teacher will be substantial enough to avoid any existing challenges.

Parent Perceptions Towards the IEP

While this section also focuses on educator performance, for the purposes of clarity it is necessary to incorporate the educator into the child's IEP as part of a broader sense of perceptions held by the parent towards the child's academic environment as a whole.

Perceptions held by parents and educators towards student performance can differ dramatically, even when the student demonstrates identical levels of performance to both parents and educators (Braxton, 1999). Early reports on the initial structure of the IEP expressed strong parental displeasure towards the status of the program and the outcome that the program had upon the student. Opie (1984) suggested that parents and educators frequently came into the IEP planning and execution process from completely different outcomes and the "untrained parents" comprised a liability within the IEP process due to

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their failure to appropriately identify the needs of the IEP process and how they, parents, could best help (Opie, 1984, p. 191). The researcher studied eighty-five parents responsible for children who required IEP participation due to mental challenges. The data suggested that parents who were unfamiliar with responsibilities of the IEP process were liabilities for successful completion of academic goals and even created conditions that could threaten the IEP process altogether, although Opie (1984) does suggest that these conditions would likely never be allowed to degrade to a point where the education of the student was compromised. In contrast, Opie (1984) did find that parents who had received information concerning the IEP and who had also participated in dialogue with the teachers and administrators of their child's school were more likely to be active and helpful members of the IEP process; parents who received training were more likely to agree with the opinions and assessments of the child's teachers, and were also more likely to become engaged in dialogues with teachers over prorogued periods of time.

The more recent reiteration of IDEA and the IEP has placed a heightened focus on the role of parents within the classroom. Additionally, questions in the methodology of studies that have reviewed the overall status of parent perception of the IEP have occurred. Kratch (2003) indicated that these problems may not be isolated within the methodology of the study but rather could be attributed to the type of parent who was willing to participate in the review process of parental overview. In a doctorate dissertation research study of parent participation in IEP planning and execution in Texas, Kratch (2003) found that parents tended to have a generally positive set of perceptions concerning the treatment of their children within the schools. Yet Kratch (2003) cautions that these findings should not be seen as an unbiased or appropriate

response to the IEP, noting that one or more factors could directly contribute to this outcome:

> This more positive perception could be a result of legislation passed to ensure parental roles in educational decision making; it could be a result of actions taken by the state of Texas to monitor the enactment of this legislation; or it could be because schools are taking a more active role in providing best practice services to students and parents in terms of communication and decision-making opportunities; or it could be because the parents who answered the survey were particularly compliant or complacent" (Kratch, 2003,p. 4)

This point is of interest, suggesting that parents who were indeed willing to lend their time and energies to the research process were more likely to be involved in their children's IEP schooling or, conversely, were more willing to acquiesce to requests from authority figures. The concept that positive results could be appropriately attributed specifically to approval of the current course of action, cautioned Kratch (2003), seemed a spurious correlation that most researchers did not endeavor to integrate into their research findings.

Research suggests that parents who are involved in a child's IEP are more likely to perceive the educator and the IEP as synonymous. Indeed, the educator uses the IEP as a framework to establish an educational rapport with the student, but this does not indicate that the IEP either governs the extent of the educator's teaching abilities and that it does limit the structure of the educational processes. This is a serious problem in perception, as the IEP is not the sum of the educator. When a student on an IEP exhibits problems in meeting the stated goals of the IEP, a parent is likely to attribute these problems to either the educator or the IEP. As the human component within the program,

the educator is most likely to be targeted as the source of the student's academic problems; if the parent has gone through the IEP planning process and has witnessed a strong display of commitment on the part of multiple stakeholders to the student, it is difficult to attribute a student's academic failures to the IEP itself as opposed to a single, fallible component. The result is a scenario in which the teacher is perceived by the parent as failing to encourage the student's best abilities and academic performance.

Summary

The literature demonstrates significant differences in perception by parents and educators, as well as regarding the establishment and fulfillment of the IEP and its outcomes. In the literature, there appears to be stark differences in how parents perceive the IEP in general and the student's performance in particular. For parents, the IEP is a tool designed to promote a desirable outcome in the student's academic career as well as the student's family and social lives. In contrast, the educator perceives the IEP as promoting a set of goals that need to be met by the student within the context of the academic setting. These two perceptions can be mutually compatible, but ensuring compatibility is difficult when the purpose of the IEP is viewed divisively.

Parents and educators also maintain views towards the other that show both positive and negative perceptions. Parents identify the educator and the IEP as part of the whole, and the failure of the student to meet the terms of his or her IEP can be interpreted as a failure on the part of the educator. Parents are also frustrated when the educator does not seem to be an interactive and communicative part of the student's academic process.

In contrast, educators perceive parents as a valuable resource in helping the child achieve his or her desired academic outcomes, but maintain that parents frequently request interactions and outcomes that meet their (the parents) terms as opposed to those endorsed by the IEP. When framed within an academic environment that is increasingly directed towards isolating outcome based upon standards-based testing procedures, this creates conditions through which the debate over appropriate relationships between educators and parents increases in importance.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Assessment of themes reported in a phenomenological, qualitative research study has helped to identifying parent perspectives corresponding to the Individualized Education Program. The use of the phenomenological study has been done as a means of identifying themes present within the literature and connecting these to themes expressed by parents when asked to provide data pertaining to the effectiveness of the IEP. The phenomenological research methodology helps to isolate outcome based upon personal opinions reflected within the research study.

This chapter defines and describes the methodology that has been used to approach the sample population and conduct the semi-structured interview. The interview process was governed by a series of questions compiled from the initial research presented in the Literature Review.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The primary question is:

1) To what extent do parents feel that the IEP is meeting the needs of their child or children?

Secondary research questions that were asked in order to answer the first include:

2) In what areas is the IEP meeting or exceeding expectations? In what areas is the IEP failing to meet or exceed expectations?

3) What phenomenon are most frequently mentioned by parents as having an impact on the IEP used with their children?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

A qualitative research methodology is best suited to the current study. This occurs because there is a need to survey and monitor personal opinions and preferences. This cannot be easily achieved through quantitative research methods (Creswell, 1994). It was originally proposed that a qualitative phenomenological research method be used, where parents of children receiving IEP services are interviewed and the phenomena reported during the interview process are isolated and identified as representative of perceptions of the parents regarding the efficiency and appropriateness of the IEP process. This was deemed an appropriate data collection strategy and research began accordingly.

In a study by Braxton (1999), the researcher used the semi-structured interview process as a tool through which he could assess the perceptions of Chinese and Korean parents raising students in the United States. Through the use of "open-ended, semi-structured interviews," the researcher was able to synthesize a series of phenomenon that he felt were relevant to perceptions of parents and the academic outcome expressed by their children (p. 155). Supplemented with "field notes from interaction with the participants," Braxton (1999) felt that the semi-structured interview process was applicable as it focused on a clear protocol and:

The rationale for using the single case approach was to test a well-formulated theory. In addition, the single case study approach helped the researcher determine whether the theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might better explain the phenomenon being investigated. This study allowed the participants to reconstruct their educational, family and school experiences, and to elaborate on the meanings they assigned to those experiences. Data collected was instrumental in assessing and evaluating their experiences" (p. 158)

The study outcomes exhibited in Braxton's (1999) own experiments are similar to those under scrutiny in the current study. As such, it is recognized that the use of this tool will be an appropriate for testing the perceptions of parents in a different area of inquiry.

Rationale for the Phenomenological Research Approach

Education is becoming increasingly qualitative in its delivery and assessment (Meier & Wood, 2005). This indicates that standardization and achievement-based assessment strategies can be assessed through quantitative analysis as a means of charting past performance and to predict likely future performance. Martin and Kettner (1996) stress that quantitative research may be extremely useful in identifying parameters and performance, but overall there are other concepts that need to be assessed in order to get a more accurate presentation of the necessary information. This is especially true in areas such as education, in which the outcome of all efforts is embodied within human performance. Moreover, Martin and Kettner (1996) argue that is it necessary to create a qualitative assessment of human performance in order to test all questions that may in fact be beyond the scope of outright quantification. Similarly, Abramson (1994) writes

that it is impractical to apply analytical assessment within areas exclusive to the human experience, as many of the most significant aspects of human life cannot be deconstructed and isolated in terms of performance and perseverance.

With these concerns in mind, the rationale for the current study is governed by a phenomenological approach that assesses the existential experiences of the subjects. This method has been chosen specifically as there is a governing need to approach the respondents in a way that demonstrates a sense of respect and value towards the opinions and preferences that they have been asked to share. This research methodology is useful because of its flexibility, where it allows for an increased examination both preference and rationale for preference within a predetermined area of inquiry. "In doing phenomenology, we try to describe phenomena without reducing those phenomena to supposedly objective non-phenomena. Instead of appealing to objectivity for validation, we appeal instead to inter-subjective agreement" (Boeree, 2000; para 1). It has also been noted that the phenomenological approach is valuable as "phenomenology is propaeduetic to science as it is essentially a prescientific step with a rigorously defined starting point which is neither expectant nor predictive. The phenomenon is allowed to speak for itself and in so doing imbues its particular meaning" (Jackson, 2003; p. 217).

The phenomenological methodology involves an assessment process called bracketing that facilitates identification of specific themes or commonalities. Bracketing occurs when the "researcher disengages from all past theories or knowledge of the phenomenon. Personal presuppositions about the phenomenon under study are carefully noted to reduce, as much as possible, contamination of the data from subtle influence. This temporary disengagement from a particular frame of reference allows the

phenomena to manifest themselves as they are" (Jackson, 1998, p. 216). Ultimately, the use of the phenomenological research effort will help facilitate the identification of phenomena that are manifest among multiple subjects and thus the dada will stress commonalities among their perceptions.

The rationale for the use of the phenomenological approach with an existential component is therefore found in the processes between preference, attitude, and the relationships that have given rise to these based upon the experiences of the person. Assessment of phenomena through identifying and isolating these processes will help provide connections between the perceptions of the parents and the perceived effectiveness of the IEP.

Semi-structured Interview as a Research Tool

The semi-structured interview is ideal in providing a framework for qualitative assessment of phenomena as it helps provide a framework through which various components can be subjected to interpretation and analysis according to theme. Thus, the semi-structured interview can best be seen as a series of conversations that have a distinct purpose; both the researcher and the respondent are aware of the subject-based framework which governs the initial research effort and are willing to participate in a dialogue that operates within the context of this framework. Doing so integrates the benefits of structured interviews, in which there is a specific question-response format, and unstructured interviews in which the dialogue between the researcher and the respondent has no encompassing parameters and therefore can wander between information points at whim.

When data is assessed using the semi-structured interview as a research tool, the purpose is to identify, describe, and interpret the significance of patterns and themes that emerge from the dialogue (Girden, 1996). A sense of balance is required between the researcher and the respondent in order for this to take place; while it is anticipated (indeed, *desirable*) that the perceptions and biases of the respondent will emerge through the questioning process, the researcher must manage the conversation in a way that reduces the negative impact of these self-reporting perceptions and biases. This should not be inferred as the researcher controlling negative outcome with the purpose of limiting its impact on the conversation. Instead, controlling negative impact refers to a process through which the researcher ensures that the respondent does not get too caught up in emotional responses as opposed to stated responses corresponding to personal preference and outcome. Allowing these emotional responses to govern the semi-structured interview will shift the discussion away from the respondent's ability to analytically present his or her perceptions and will instead indicate that the respondent continues to state negative perceptions. As the interview is limited in terms of time, this process would mean that the focus of the interview would be on negative perceptions even though it is likely that the respondent also has positive perceptions as well.

Data Collection

Data collection is taken from a random sample of forty parents of IEP students in a secondary school, for a total sample of 35 subjects. The data has been collected by the researcher through using a semi-structured interview process; a semi-structured interview is an interview that is directed by a series of questions or themes presented to the subject

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by the researcher. The content analysis process was achieved through using a phenomenological approach through which the responses of the subjects are assessed, bracketed for commonalities, and these commonalities are reported as phenomenon that are representative in the perceptions of the sample population. The conclusion stresses that the sample population provides insight into the perceptions of parents in a small percentage of students receiving additional educational assistance from the IEP programs, and that the data may change when a different population of parents (e.g.: with students in junior high school or secondary school) are sampled.

Data collection occurred through the use of recording devices that collect the raw data released by the subjects. These recording devices are used for purposes of convenience; the researcher can review the data at her convenience and deconstruct it through a process called bracketing. Additionally, data collection will be achieved through recording of notes while the semi-structured interviews are taking place.

Data Analysis

The content analysis process has been achieved through "bracketing," of a strategy through which the data is clarified in terms of themes, commonalities, or unique qualifiers that are not repeated but have been noted as a point of concern. These commonalities were then compared to the literature or isolated as representative perceptions of the sample population.

It is important to understand the bracketing process in order to fully understand the data analysis strategies used in a phenomenological research study. Bracketing is used occurs when the researcher is searching for a description of a phenomena within the

data sets provided by the sample population. This "involves a reduction operation in which the raw material (tape scripts of unstructured interviews) is systematically studied and broken into naturally evolving units of meaning" through which the "Personal presuppositions about the phenomenon under study are carefully noted to reduce, as much as possible, contamination of the data from subtle influence. This temporary disengagement from a particular frame of reference allows the phenomena to manifest themselves as they are" (Jackson, 2003; 217). Furthermore, "fidelity to the phenomenon is an explicit criterion of this methodology. The specific intent is to capture, as clearly as possible, the way in which the phenomena appears in everyday existence" (Jackson, 2003, p. 217). When this occurs, the "core of the phenomena" can be explored, a process that correlates the "essential characteristics of this core and their relationship to each other" (Jackson, 2003, p. 217). This can be achieved through the use of a broad profile against a large study population in which the phenomena are not yet identified, or through a more limited study population in which the phenomena can be bracketed and compared to the data resulting from other sources (Pietersen, 2002). In the context of the current study, the final approach was used and there was an emphasis on isolating phenomena and comparing and contrasting these to the data presented in the Review of the Literature, as well as continued literature presentation that will occur in Chapter Four that directly identifies research in which parents have reported their perceptions of the IEP process.

Population

The population used in this study is a random sample of forty parents of IEP

students in a secondary school, for a total sample of 35 subjects. The study is anonymous

and parents must sign a consent form that indicates their agreement to participate in the

study. The random sampling is achieved through approaching the parents of forty

different IEP students in a secondary school and conducting a total of forty different

interviews, then discarding five sets of data at random from the set.

Selection criteria for the sample population are broad and not limited by age,

religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. The sample population is limited by status

of child; if the parent(s) of the child is not currently receiving education through an IEP

or is not currently enrolled in one of the three primary schools; the parent is not eligible

as a candidate in the study.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations on the current study. First, there are data analysis

problems inherent with all forms of qualitative data. Personal preferences, observations,

and attitudes are by their very nature subjective and therefore are likely to change

according to the conditions placed upon them during the research process. As such, it is

likely that the data analysis processes can be challenged during the outside review

regarding bracketing and appropriate selection of phenomenon. However, this criticism

can be made for any qualitative research document (Girden, 1996).

The selection of candidates based upon the single criteria of their students' IEP

participation may likewise be challenged. Doing so removes correlations between

lifestyle experiences and academic experiences; these may have a bearing on how the subjects perceive effectiveness in IEP delivery, communication between the educator and the parent, etc. However, due to limitations on the scope of the study, these must be recognized as concerns but not identified as necessary components of the immediate research process. These will be included in follow-up research efforts.

Summary

The methodology for this research paper utilizes a phenomenological process through which results acquired via semi-structured interviews can be isolated in terms of significant themes. Themes that are significant are either reflective of strong views held by a majority of the respondents, or correlate to similar themes present within the literature, or are unique responses based upon the single perceptions of one subject. This method has been selected as a valid approach to the current study as it offers significant flexibility in application and allows for expression of themes that are of importance to the study. Subjects in the study are informed of the research process and have consented to participate; 35 anonymous data sets will be collected from parents of students in a secondary school receiving aid from an IEP.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Data collected from the interviews is presented in this chapter and assessed using the phenomenological methods process described in Chapter III. The data is presented and assessed for content and themes, but is neither criticized nor discussed in terms of significance and application. These items are reserved for discussion in Chapter IV.

All data has been separated and presented according to theme. Ten categories of themes have been identified. These are themes of communication; themes of teacher/staff training issues; themes of evaluation; themes of IEP development; progress reporting; program evaluation; inclusion topics; opportunities to participate in non-academic opportunities; future planning; and general questions that are not directly connected to these main domains.

Themes of Communication

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to communication issues vis-à-vis their children's education, IEP, and parent interaction with educators (see Appendix). While it is apparent that the majority of parents feel strongly about how they talked to and interacted with, one issue that emerged is the perception that school districts and educators can improve on these results:

Emergent Theme: School Districts and Educators Place Parent-Teacher/Parent-District Communication as an Important Priority.

Table 1: Themes of Communication

Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	148/228	64% of parents feel positive regarding how they are communicated with by the teacher(s) & district
Negative*	39/228	17% of parents feel negative in some aspect regarding the communication effectiveness/ appropriateness of teacher(s) & district
Uncertainty**	41/228	17% of parents experience some degree of confusion or uncertainty regarding how they are communicated with by teacher(s) & district

*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

Data for communication themes indicates statistically significant approval (64%) of the communications methods used by teachers and by the academic system. This was represented through respondents' views on how parent/teacher, parent/administrator, or parent/teacher/administrator interaction occurred. Most respondents demonstrated an awareness of the efforts taken to communicate; meetings and out-of-school interactions (e.g.: conferences, note-passing, etc.) were framed as necessary aspects of the communications process.

Of those respondents who did not report feelings of satisfaction with the communications process, 17% displayed uncertainty and 17% displayed a negative perception towards communications. The data suggests that there are multiple differing reasons that reduce satisfaction. Of note is that single instances in which poor communication occurred can affect the respondent's overall perceptions of the communications process as a whole.

Themes of Teacher/Staff Training Issues

The researcher interview asked a series of questions (see Appendix) related to training issues regarding teacher and staff. While this series of questions was not exhaustive or excessively detailed relevant to actual training practices, it indicates that parents are actively involved in not only their children's education planning process but also in its actual execution:

Emergent Theme: Parents appear to feel strongly about teacher/staff training and also seem to understand what constitutes "good" versus "bad" training techniques.

Table 2: Themes of Teacher / Staff Training Issues.

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	53/76	69% of parents believe that teacher/staff training is adequate
Negative*	10/76	13% of parents indicate that teacher/staff training is inadequate
Uncertainty**	13/76	17% of parents experience some degree of confusion or uncertainty regarding what may or may not constitute teacher/staff training

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group
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The majority of respondents (69%) were aware of principles within ongoing job and career training for those responsible for the education of their children. There appeared to be a gap in comprehension between pre-service training (e.g.: undergraduate, graduate, etc.) and post-service training (e.g.: ongoing professional development). This suggests that many parents are unaware, uninformed, or otherwise unfamiliar with concepts of training and professional development for educators. This is a separate issue from the 17% of respondents who were "confused;" these respondents expressed ambiguous feelings towards the degree of training offered. Surprisingly, those who expressed negative feelings towards training (13%) were aware of training and development

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sessions and also expressed a greater overall awareness of professional development

processes. This is suggestive of awareness of the need for ongoing training and

professional development among those who are informed of how, why, and to what

extent professional development can affect performance among educators.

Themes of Evaluation and Assessment

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's

evaluation process by the school district and education staff (see Appendix). For the most

part parents understand how important assessment is to the entire IEP process but despite

the majority expressing positive impressions about their children's assessment, there still

exists a substantial percentage of the sample group that were either in disagreement or

uncertain about this important process:

Emergent Theme: Parents seem to grasp the importance of the assessment phase in the

development of IEPs but appear to not fully grasp what can or should constitute an actual

assessment.

Table 3: Themes of Evaluation and Assessment

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	51/76	67% of parents feel positive regarding how their children are assessed
Negative*	14/76	18% of parents feel negative regarding their children's assessment
Uncertainty**	11/76	14% of parents appear not to understand what "assessment" does or should imply

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

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The responses indicate that the majority of parents (67%) have positive feelings towards

the current assessment processes used in the cultivation and development of an IEP. This

does not reflect comparison standards (e.g.: the researcher did not ask the respondents if

they preferred the IEP assessment process used by the current school system as opposed

to potential alternative outcomes) but reflects the actual opinions of the respondents in

respect to the current processes used at the schools. Similarly, the number of respondents

who felt that the current assessment practices were not appropriate (18%) and the number

that expressed uncertainty (14%) indicate the opinions of the current assessment

processes. Respondents who indicated that the current processes are inadequate or

expressed displeasure with same did note during the interviews that alternative programs

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were able to meet their children's academic needs better and more efficiently than those utilized in the current processes.

Themes of IEP Development

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's IEP in its final form (see Appendix). While the majority of parents felt some degree of satisfaction about the final IEP, the indication is that following the extensive assessment, planning, and evaluation phases involved in formulated the final IEP document, the results are not meeting overall parent expectations:

Emergent Theme: Parents are generally satisfied with the general character of their children's IEP but experience significant ambiguity regarding the final character of the IEP relative to their own children.

Table 4: Themes of IEP Development

Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	153/228	67% of parents indicate at least partial satisfaction with the efficacy of their children's IEP
Negative*	14/228	6% of parents indicate at least partial dissatisfaction regarding the efficacy of their children's IEP
Uncertainty**	61/228	26% of parents indicate some degree of confusion regarding IEPs in general

The majority of participants (67%) indicated that the development of the IEP plan and its continuance within the classroom were satisfied with the delivery system and the choices made by educators. This is likewise reflected in the low number of participants who did perceive problems or flaws within delivery (6%). Yet the participants also displayed high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty, where more than one-fourth of participants (26%) indicated that they were not aware of the components of the IEP process or how these components were developed. This not only includes IEP development in respect to their own children but overall themes of development within the general academic setting provided by the school. This is suggestive of a gap in communications between practice and policy within the school and its reception by educators.

Themes of Progress Reporting

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's progress report (see Appendix). The progress report is intended to demonstrate real progress made in the child's education relevant to the IEP and it is critical that the parents are able to equate what is being measured in the progress report with the associated goals and objectives in the IEP:

Emergent Theme: Parents generally perceive the progress report as either properly

detailed or comprehensible or both but there is some ambiguity about what the reports

actually measure.

Table 5: Themes of Progress Reporting

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	25/38	66% of parents indicated comprehension of their children's IEP as it related to measurable progress
Negative*	6/38	16% of parents indicated that their children's IEP did not adequately demonstrate progress
Uncertainty**	7/38	16% of parents indicated uncertainty regarding what was contained in the progress report

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci
useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the
total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

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The data suggests that the majority (66%) of respondents demonstrate high levels of

comprehension concerning the reception of student performance and outcome through the

communication channels used by educators. There is an even split between those who

perceive communication of progress as negative (16%) and those who are uncertain

concerning the outcome (16%). Uncertainty in this theme indicates not only questions of

efficiency but also those regarding alternatives that could be better suited to the communications process (e.g.: email as opposed to handwritten notes; phone calls from the teacher, etc.).

Themes of Program Evaluation

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's overall educational program (See Appendix). The entire special education program generally achieves its purpose of establishing a holistic education program for special needs children but this dimension seems to elicit the greatest variety of textual responses from the parents (see Appendix):

Emergent Theme: Regarding the entire educational program for their children, parents are generally in agreement that it serves an effective purpose but the consensus seems to be there is substantial room for improvement.

Table 6: Themes of Program Evaluation
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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	75/114	65% of parents believe their children's entire educational program is effective
Negative*	17/114	14% of parents believe their children's entire educational program is ineffective
Uncertainty**	22/114	19% of parents are uncertain if their children's education program is useful

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group
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The data suggests that the majority of respondents (65%) are satisfied with the strategies used in the evaluation of the program and the content of the program. A minority of respondents (14%) believe that the existing plan is not appropriate. The most intriguing data is collected from those who express uncertainty and ambiguity, where almost one-fifth of respondents (19%) have different perspectives of the delivery process but are not specifically ready to identify how or why these processes can be revised or reformed.

There is also a lack of consensus among parents in respect to these outcomes; parents appear to hold highly diversified concepts of how to best deliver education to their children. These may suggest perceptions towards the school system but may also suggest that the parents have a unique understanding of their children and therefore frame educational processes based on their own views of education as opposed to those put forth by the school.

<center>Themes of Inclusion Topics</center>

The researcher interview asked a series questions related to the degree or effectiveness of inclusion in their children's educational setting (See Appendix). Inclusion is either poorly practiced by the educational institutions and/or poorly understood by the parents which results in a great deal of uncertainty regarding it.

<center>56</center>

Emergent Theme: Inclusion is poorly understood by parents and this is reflected in the

majority uncertainty and negative perception opinion regarding inclusion.

Table 7: Themes of Inclusion Topics

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	25/76	32% of parents believe that inclusion at their children's educational institution is fully adequate
Negative*	6/76	7% of parents consider the inclusion practiced at their children's educational institution to be completely inadequate
Uncertainty**	45/76	59% of parents are completely uncertain about some aspect of inclusion, what constitutes inclusion, and/or how it applies in their particular circumstances

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

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The data for this table demonstrate the highest levels of uncertain perceptions (59%)

towards any of the ten themes studied. This strongly suggests that the majority of parents

do not perceive that their children are successfully included into the school curricula.

Exploratory questions indicate that this not only refers to classroom participation but also

social activities within the school; parents did report that their children feel "singled out"

or are purposefully separated from their peers based on their learning abilities. The outcome is a setting in which efforts to include the special need student into the same classroom activities as their peers is perceived as ineffective or, in some instances, as hypocritical on the part of the educator. However, there is confusion concerning how and to what extent this takes place, as 32% of respondents identified that these efforts as positive and only 7% saw these as decidedly negative. It can be reasonably assumed from the content of the semi-structured interviews that if the parents were decidedly opposed to the current practices, they would have voiced this opposition.

Themes of Access to and Participation in Non-academic Activities

The researcher interview asked a series questions related to their children's participation in or access to non-academic activities (See Appendix). Non-academic activities are designed to broaden the experience base of special needs children offering them both recreation as well as an opportunity to learn life skills:

Emergent Theme: Parents recognize the importance of non-academic programs in their children's educational programs and that they should actually be included in the language of the IEP but also fail to understand how this should manifest itself in the actual program

Table 8: Themes of Access to and Participation in Non-academic Activities

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	43/76	56% of parents believe the non-academic programs are adequate addressed in the IEP
Negative*	9/76	11% of parents indicated that their children's IEP did not adequately demonstrate access or participation
Uncertainty**	24/76	31% of parents indicate a full understanding of either what constitutes non-academic or what constitutes access or both

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

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The data indicate that 31% of respondents display ambiguous perceptions towards their children's participation in non-academic activities and that 56% of respondents believe that the current strategies are appropriately suited towards this outcome. Only 11% believe that the current strategies are insufficient, a percent that is lower than all other themes save for those of inclusion. This suggests an outcome similar to those found in the theme of inclusion, where there is confusion surrounding the processes used and it is unclear how or why these practices fit into the parents' comprehension of the IEP planning process.

Themes of Future Planning

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's future IEP process (see Appendix). Future planning is critical as the children progress through the school system from class to class, instructor to instructor or even district to district:

Emergent Theme: It seems to be a developing theme that parents are becoming more interested in influencing the evolution of the district wide special education program as an indirect way of improving the quality of their children's own program.

Table 9: Themes of Future Planning

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Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	21/38	55% of parents indicate a desire to have greater influence in the overall special education program of the district
Negative*	5/38	13% of parents would prefer no further involvement beyond their own individual children's IEP and program
Uncertainty**	12/38	31% of parents expressed no interest one way or the other

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*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group
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In this theme, the majority of respondents (55%) did indicate that the outcome of future planning was necessary to the success of the IEP plan, but there were a significant number of respondents (31%) who expressed uncertainty towards the planning and execution processes for the student's future outcomes. Only 13% of respondents expressed negative concerns; these parents indicated that the current IEP planning processes seemed to integrate the focus on future planning because it was a requirement instead of an actual concern.

Themes of General Questions

The researcher interview asked a series of questions related to their children's special education program and administration (see Appendix). The administration and monitoring of the entire special education program as it relates to the IEP is critical in order for each individual IEP to be effective in terms of measurable progress:

Emergent Theme: Parents have a well developed sense of the difficulty in offering a comprehensive special education program and cannot quite agree on what constitutes a comprehensive program.

Table 10: Themes of General Questions

Character	Responses***	Assumptions
Positive	117/190	61% of parents feel generally positive about the overall character of the entire special education program and its implementation vis-à-vis the IEP process
Negative*	28/190	14% of parents feel negative towards the overall educational program vis-à-vis the IEP process
Uncertainty**	45/190	23% of parents indicated an overall ambiguity regarding the educational program and/or the IEP process

*negative is applied only in the sense that responses were specifically not in agreement
**uncertainty indicates all other response that were not in agreement or disagreement
***all questions in a given dimension are factored together in order to identify phenomenological loci useful for academic assumptions
****the total number of responses in each question sub-category are tallied and taken as a percentage of the total number of responses possible. This figure is then applied as an average over the sample group

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In the assessment of general concerns and the overall perception of the effectiveness of the IEP, the majority of respondents (61%) reported feelings of satisfaction, while 14% felt negatively and 23% expressed feelings of ambiguity or uncertainty. These findings are confusing when contrasted against some of the statements made, however, as respondents frequently failed to identify how they expressed positive overall feelings while also expressing displeasure or confusion concerning specific aspects – especially within the other nine themes – of the IEP educational curriculum.

Summary

Data on perceptions of the effectiveness and influence of the IEP and its impact on the student's academic career indicate ambiguity in many domains corresponding to specific aspects of the student's education. Ten specific domains are addressed: these are themes of communication; themes of teacher/staff training issues; themes of evaluation; themes of IEP development; progress reporting; program evaluation; inclusion topics; opportunities to participate in non-academic opportunities; future planning; and general questions that are not directly connected to these main domains are isolated in the interviews and have been bracketed using a phenomenological inquiry process.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the information that has been collected for this research by summarizing it, discussing points of interest or merit, and offering recommendations. Doing so helps to facilitate the closure of the research effort through providing a concise exploration of the value of the project and helps future researchers identify areas that have emerged from the study process and may require ongoing exploration.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research questions that have guided the research effort are restated for clarity. The primary question is:

1) To what extent do parents feel that the IEP is meeting the needs of their

child or children?

Secondary research questions that need to be asked in order to answer the first include:

2) In what areas is the IEP meeting or exceeding expectations? In what

areas is the IEP failing to meet or exceed expectations?

3) What phenomenon is most frequently mentioned by parents as having

an impact on the IEP used with their children?

Summary

This research paper has developed and explored the research questions through five chapters. In the Introduction, the purpose and reasons for undertaking the study were discussed. In Chapter Two, the literature on the topic was reviewed and critiqued using an analytical literature review strategy. In the third chapter, the methods for the research project were presented. The fourth chapter provided the data sets and description of findings. The fifth and final chapter addresses the sum of this information and explores its significance.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a widely-used and accepted strategy within education to address students with special needs and to help create and deliver services that are uniquely suited to their own personal needs. An effective IEP is intended to integrate a student's caregivers, teachers, and own desired learning outcomes for the educational process into a plan that will best facilitate these outcomes. When an IEP is created, it is assumed that major stakeholders involved with the student will contribute to the plan and help facilitate its content delivery system. However, parents and those responsible for delivering the IEP (e.g.: administrators and teachers) come into conflict over what strategies are best suited to deliver the IEP; additionally, conflict can occur when the quality and consistency of the environment in which the IEP is to be delivered is called into question.

Parents (or guardians) of students receiving the IEP are reported to have strong perceptions concerning the IEP and various aspects of the delivery systems. It is evident that most parents identify the IEP as an important and necessary component of the

education of their special needs student; thus, the IEP itself is not in question.   The

strategies used to implement the IEP, however, are challenged due to the variety in

delivery systems, assessment of student performance, flexibility and planning, and

assurance that the school system in general and the educator in particular are fully trained

and capable.

Differences in perspective confuse many areas within the educational literature.

The No Child Left Behind Act and its treatment of special needs students is an example

of same; stakeholders in education tend to emphasize specific priorities based upon their

respective domains (e.g.: policymakers wish to see increased accountability, etc.) but

stakeholders with dissimilar perspectives tend to frame issues and their outcomes

differently. This practice is emphasized in the reauthorized version of the Individuals

with Disabilities in Education Act, in which stakeholders are framed according to their

duties and outcomes and the potential for conflict is exacerbated. The priorities of

stakeholders are exemplified in how they perceive outcome: teachers prioritize outcome

based within the context of the school, while parents prioritize outcome based within the

context of school, family life, and social events.

Educators recognize that parents are an important component in helping a special

needs student meet the challenges of the classroom. Parents not only control the

student's life beyond the academic setting, but also are powerful role models who have a

profound influence over their children's lives. However, the educator often perceives the

parent as untrained and unable to successfully deliver what the child needs to participate

in the classroom; educators also see the parent as a liability in delivering educational

reform to the student when the parent's perceptions come into conflict with the methods

or the decisions that the educator has implemented within the classroom. This has caused some special needs educators to characterize parents as liabilities instead of a resource, and has resulted in conflict between educators and parents. Efforts to improve communication often improve the comprehension level of parents and helps facilitate acceptance of the strategies and suggestions made by the educator.

Parents recognize that the educator is in control of the classroom and is likely to make decisions based upon training, recommended practice, and knowledge of the student's abilities. The IEP is useful in that it forces a dialogue to begin between teachers and parents; parents are responsible in part for maintaining this dialogue but have a heavy reliance on the educator to let them know when a problem has occurred in the classroom. Parents do generally appear to have high expectations of educator performance within the classroom but negative experiences tend to affect these expectations. Negative experiences often are centered in communication efforts, where the parents feel as though they are actively shut out from their children's educations. Also, if the student fails to accomplish some or all of their IEP goals, this tends to result in a setting where the parent questions the educator or the IEP as opposed to student performance. In this scenario, the IEP is viewed as problematic in identifying and promoting the student's goals and may be perceived as a liability or an impediment.

A qualitative research methodology was used to sample the perceptions of 35 parents at the Roosevelt High School. All participants in the study have children with special needs and are targeted by an IEP. The participants are surveyed using a semi-structured interview; the data from these interviews is assessed according to theme and the data is then used to indicate the preferences of the participants. Content analysis is

achieved through bracketing the responses and identifying the nature of the content. Once this is completed, the data is aggregated and the sum of the positive, negative, and undecided responses can be explored in order to identify common perceptions associated among the majority of parents with IEP students. Also, data collected from the interviews can suggest areas in which reform can be conducted or completed.

Using the semi-structured interview process, ten categories of themes were identified. These are themes of communication; themes of teacher/staff training issues; themes of evaluation; themes of IEP development; progress reporting; program evaluation; inclusion topics; opportunities to participate in non-academic opportunities; future planning; and general questions that are not directly connected to these main domains. In all categories, the respondents indicate general perceptions of approval and satisfaction with the strategies used by the educators in delivering and maintaining the IEP. Data from each of the ten themes tends to indicate that the respondents have positive feelings towards the IEP process and the decisions made within the academic curricula for the special needs student. However, there is evidence of confusion concerning these themes: ambiguous and uncertain responses typically take up 30% or more of the responses and this suggests that the respondents are not aware of the content of the argument, or are aware but have different opinions concerning how, why, and to what extent these issues are explored within the school setting. For example, in respect to the theme of training for educators, it was evident that respondents were unaware of the types of training that were available and tended to confuse pre-service training with ongoing professional development. Moreover, respondents who expressed negative feelings regarding the theme of training demonstrated a greater awareness of these

differences and understood the value of professional development. These issues are explored in the following section.

Discussion

Ten themes were drawn from the semi-structured interviews regarding the IEP and the status of the student participating within the IEP. Again, these ten themes are those of communication; themes of teacher/staff training issues; themes of evaluation; themes of IEP development; progress reporting; program evaluation; inclusion topics; opportunities to participate in non-academic opportunities; future planning; and general questions that are not directly connected to these main domains. There is also a heavy degree of interconnectivity among these themes: for instance, the theme of communication emerges within the discussion of inclusion and also that of program evaluation, as the educator and the parent have to discuss these issues through the communications process.

The data demonstrates that the average overall responses from parents of students with IEP plans are positive; with the exception of the theme of inclusion, the status of the responses was on average a 50% or greater expression of positive outcome. Ambiguity tended to range between 16% to 35% and was the second most likely perception, while negative perceptions ranked lowest and tended to range between 7% and 30%.

This suggests a greater than 50% approval rating, but it is important to differentiate between these two points. As noted, one of the areas of inquiry that emerged from the inquiry process and may require further study is the perceptions of respondents who provided negative answers. Respondents who answered in the negative

appeared more likely to have strong opinions as to how and why their negative

perceptions of existing programs were justified. For example, in the theme of

assessment, those respondents who noted that their children received inadequate

assessment were more likely to compare the existing assessment processes to those used

in another school. Similarly, in the theme of training, the respondents who answered in

the negative were more likely to have strong opinions concerning professional

development as a cornerstone of excellence for educators. This suggests that one area

that may deserve further inquiry is that respondents with negative perceptions of the

current educational setting have formed this opinion through recognizing alternative

possibilities or options that are not currently utilized. It should not imply that these

persons are correct or that their decisions are well-informed. However, the fact remains

that those respondents who held strong opinions towards existing processes were aware

that the existing strategies were not necessarily the only course of action available to the

school district.

Similarly, a second area of inquiry concerns the respondents who did not have a

strong opinion on the theme in question, or who were neutral concerning the

effectiveness of the school administration and its decision-making policies. On most of

the themes, the number of persons who expressed uncertainty was comparable to those

who answered in the negative. It is easy to infer from the use of the term "uncertain" that

these respondents were not well-informed and tended to lack strong opinions on the

theme in question. This is also not the case. The respondents expressed uncertainty in

respect to perception-based questioning, where their opinions reflected how well they

perceived the functionality of the school, its programs, or its educators.

On a general level, the data indicate that parents of children who participate in the IEP are likely to accept the decisions made by educators that affect their child's academic environment. There may be a gap between the policy and practices and the comprehension therein, but this gap tends to be underrepresented in the current study format.

These themes also reflect findings that were present in the initial literature review. The information contained within this review suggests that the status of parents, teachers, and the IEP is suited for individual stakeholders to affirm their respective positions but, ultimately, does not permit significant give and take between them. The IEP establishes the roles of stakeholders within the IEP but does not take into account the concessions that stakeholders may have to achieve, the mediation processes that may need to occur to arrive at a single approved outcome, or the ongoing conflict that may be derived from these processes. And, as the literature clearly denotes that these events take place and that stakeholders in the IEP have sought to resolve them, the findings of the current study are in keeping with expectations taken from the review of the literature. This also serves to suggest issues that have long been recognized within the delivery and the maintenance of the IEP but have thus far not been successfully resolved in widespread practice.

Recommendations for Practice

As indicated, the data suggest that there are themes expressed within the needs of parents, students, and educators regarding the IEP. The focus on the parental perspective is strongly suggestive of problems inherent in the communications process; the literature indicates that many of the perceived areas of failure can be resolved through improved

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communication to demonstrate that failure has not actually occurred. The need to engage in improved communication is an exceptional starting point and falls within the scope of the current study. Teachers, parents, and the IEP student can plan and promote improved dialogue through channels such as conferencing, emails, and telephone calls.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Future practice within these areas will require increased study to critically define the degree of confusion that exists and why this confusion exists. It is quite possible that the aspects of the data that indicate confusion on the part of participants are as significant to the study as those that demonstrate negative or positive perceptions; confusion suggests that the outcome of specific actions taken on the part of educators is not understood by parents.

One of the themes derived from both the literature review and the data analysis is that the IEP is best able to succeed when all stakeholders recognize the importance of its criteria and are willing to meet personal obligations. In the current setting, it appears as though the expectations of the IEP and the processes of the IEP are simply incongruent for many parents. Resolution of these issues is necessary in order to make effective change. Future practice can focus on strategies that can best clarify the roles of the stakeholders and improve communication between these stakeholders to better meet the needs of all participants, but especially those of the IEP student.

Conclusion

The literature demonstrates that parents and educators involved in the development of a special needs student's IEP come into conflict regarding how, why, and to what extent certain decisions are made. This research effort does not indicate the presence of conflict but does demonstrate that the parents of students receiving IEP services have strong preferences regarding the delivery and maintenance of the IEP. The majority of these perceptions are positive, but there does appear to be a significant degree of confusion concerning the content of the IEP and its presentation to parents. Negative perceptions by parents seem to have been triggered by single events that illustrate problems within the system, or cumulative problems that characterize the IEP delivery process for a specific student.

The initial assumptions that parents would fully understand the topics, their respective stakes, and potential outcomes in the domain of the IEP were not upheld within the data. This strongly suggests that parents have perceptions that are not based upon information or would not be upheld if more information were provided. It also indicates that the current practices used to direct and maintain the IEP are sufficient despite this lack of information; it is not within the scope of the current study to speculate on how these conditions would change were the parents to receive accurate information on IEP concerns and policies.

Recommendations

Follow-up research is needed to identify and synthesize the degree of comprehension held by the parents of IEP students in respect to the ten themes bracketed

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from this study. This will help to define and describe the degree to which parents identify the IEP and its various components. Based on this information, then recommendations can be made to affect the relationship between the parents and the educators working with a student's IEP.

Current recommendations based upon the existing research can be made in the domains of services delivered to IEP students and the comprehension of how these services are delivered. There appears to be conflict within the perceptions of how, why, and to what extent the stakeholders within the educational session regard the IEP and its impact on students. This suggests that there are issues in communications concerning the impact of the IEP, but also concerning how the IEP is explained to the various stakeholders. It is possible that the perception of the IEP differs according to what the stakeholders anticipated; if the processes and the potential outcomes are communicated to the stakeholders using different perspectives, this could in turn influence how the stakeholders perceived their objectives in the IEP process and the subsequent evaluation of its success or failure. This theme was not recognized as a potential issue prior to the research process but has emerged from conversations with parents and teachers, thus suggesting that future research efforts could benefit from studying the initial point of contact with the IEP in addition to follow-up.

Finally, no concrete solutions can be provided based on the current research study. To do so would to suggest that the data demonstrate stronger, more effective information than have actually been shown. It is important to note that the statistical significance of the majority of themes indicates that strong levels of confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty exist within the parent population. Solutions can only be

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made once these problematic perceptions are clarified; also, the clarification process is not inherently a solution and cannot be framed as such. Clarification is merely the first step in achieving a solution, but is not a solution in and of itself.

This does not, however, mean that recommendations cannot be made, nor that these recommendations cannot be carried out to affect positive change. First, it is intriguing to note that confusion may be as significant a problem within the scope of the IEP as is actual negative perceptions of educator performance. When parents are confused about specific issues, this reduces their comprehension of why decisions are made or to what extent change is needed to meet certain goals. Recommendations towards improving communication will help to clear up aspects of confusion demonstrated by parents. These can also be used as an initial, formative strategy that can help clarify the relationship between parents and educators.

Using these recommendations as the starting point, and based on the findings of the current research study, it can be concluded that improved channels of communication be identified and developed for stakeholders. These could include easy-to-use, non-invasive technologies such as an online calendar system. It is possible that planning processes for these areas of reform will help overcome or avoid resistance between the stakeholders in respect to goal-orientation for a student's IEP.

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1. Which school or center is your child/children in? Please circle your answer, indicate grade and disability-classification.

	High School	Vocational Tech	Collaborative	Other	Total
12th Grade	10				10
11th Grade	8				8
10th Grade	9			1	10
9th Grade	10				10
Total	37			1	38
(Other: Sophomore - 10th Grade)					

Disability Classification			Grade	Age	
Developmentally Disabled/Mentally Challenged			12th Grade	19 yrs	
Mildly Mentally /Developmentally Challenged			10th Grade	15 yrs	
Unknown			10th Grade	Unknown	
LD - Learning Disabled			12th Grade	18 yrs	
Autism (High Functioning - Aspbergers)			11th Grade	18 yrs	
Emotionally Disabled/Challenged			10th Grade	16 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			11th Grade	20 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			9th Grade	15 yrs	
Emotionally Disabled/Challenged			12th Grade	19 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			10th Grade	15 yrs	
Mildy Mentally Challenged			9th Grade	15 yrs	
Unknown			10th Grade	15 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			10th Grade	16 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			12th Grade	20 yrs	
Autism (PDD - Pervasive Development Disorder)			9th Grade	14 yrs	
Emotional Challenged			10th Grade	17 yrs	
Unknown			11th Grade	Unknown	
Unknown			10th Grade	Unknown	
Unknown			12th Grade	Unknown	
Essential Skills - Mildly Developmentally Disabled			12th Grade	20 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			9th Grade	14 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			9th Grade	14 yrs	
Emotionally Challenged			11th Grade	18 yrs	
Communicative Disorder/Speech Disorder			11th Grade	18 yrs	

LD - Learning Disabled			11th Grade	16 yrs	
Unknown			9th Grade	Unknown	
Unknown			11th Grade	Unknown	
Mildly Developmentally Delayed (Challenged)			12th Grade	19 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			9th Grade	17 yrs	
Unknown			12th Grade	17 yrs	
Autism -High Function (Aspbergers)			10th Grade	16 yrs	
Emotionally Challenged			9th Grade	15 yrs	
Unknown			11th Grade	17 yrs	
Unknown			12th Grade	18 yrs	
LD - Learning Disabled			9th Grade	14 yrs	
Emotionally Challenged			10th Grade	15 yrs	
Unknown			12th Grade	18 yrs	
Partial Hearing Loss/Hearing Impaired			9th Grade	15 yrs	
Disability Classification:					
Developmentally Disabled/Mentally Challenged			3		
Unknown			11		
LD - Learning Disabled			11		
Autistic (High Functioning - Aspbergers)			3		
Emotionally Disabled/Challenged			6		
Mildy Mentally Challenged			1		
Essential Skills - Mildly Developmentally Challenged			1		
Communicative Disorder/Speech Disorder			1		
Partial Hearing Loss/Hearing Impaired			1		
Total			38		
Age Levels:					
14 years old	4				
15 years old	8				
16 years old	4				
17 years old	4				
18 years old	6				
19 years old	3				
20 years old	3				
Unknown	6				
Total	38				

COMMUNICATION ISSUES:						

2. I believe that I have been fully informed by the school regarding my own and my child's legal rights in the TEAM evaluation process and IEP development.

Agree	26					
Disagree	8					
Not sure	2					
Other	0					
Not Applicable	2					
Total	38					

3. Were opportunities/accommodations including assistive technology options for including your child in general education activities fully explored and included as appropriate?

Agree	23					
Disagree	3					
Not sure	7					
Other	0					
Not Applicable	5					
Total	38					

4. I am aware of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council in my community. If in agreement, what do you see as their function and have you attended a meeting this school year?

Agree	18					
Disagree	10					
Not sure	8					
Other	1					
Not Applicable	1					
Total	38					

5. I believe that I am able to effectively communicate with my child's teachers. (Effectively means an open exchange of information, responsive to communication and follows up appropriately).

Agree	31					
Disagree	4					
Not sure	2					
Other	1					
Not Applicable	0					
Total	38					

6. I believe adequate provisions were made for outside assessments of my child's needs that go beyond the expertise of the school staff (e.g. autism, visual impairment, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment and learning disabilities).

Agree	27					
Disagree	5					
Not sure	4					
Other	0					
Not Applicable	2					
Total	38					

7. As a parent, I received sufficient information and training from the school as a means of understanding my child's special needs and development.

Agree	23					
Disagree	9					
Not sure	5					
Other	1					
Not Applicable	0					
Total	38					

TEACHER/STAFF TRAINIGN ISSUES:

8. I believe that special education topics should be a requirement for both regular and special education staff's professional development at all levels of education.

Agree	31					
Disagree	3					
Not sure	4					
Other	0					
Not Applicable	0					
Total	38					

9. It has been my experience that my child's IEP modifications and recommendations have been effectively communicated and implemented between appropriate regular education and special education staff.

Agree	22					
Disagree	7					
Not sure	7					
Other	1					
Not Applicable	0					
No Response	1					
Total	38					

EVALUATION PROCESS					
10. I believe that the school assessed my child's needs accurately.					
Agree	25				
Disagree	8				
Not sure	4				
Other	1				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				
11. Due consideration was given to my child's independent evaluations.					
Agree	26				
Disagree	6				
Not sure	5				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	0				
No Response	1				
Total	38				

IEP DEVELOPMENT					
12. Before referral to special education, did your child and you participate in any pre-referral activities such as classroom modifications, extra help, etc.?					
Agree	22				
Disagree	5				
Not sure	8				
Other	1				
Not Applicable	1				
No Response	1				
Total	38				
13. My child's IEP goals and objectives were written and agreed upon before placement and services were determined.					
Agree	28				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	3				

Other	2				
Not Applicable	0				
No Response	1				
Total	38				

14. My child's IEP specifies the teaching methodologies and approaches to be utilized in meeting my child's objectives.

Agree	30				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	4				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				

15. My child's IEP states his/her current performance or skill level in measurable terms. (E.g. measurable terms - 3.2 grade level; non-measurable terms - low average).

Agree	25				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	7				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	1				
No Response	1				
Total	38				

16. Were the goals established for your child outcome based and tied to the school curriculum goals for all students?

Agree	22				
Disagree	3				
Not sure	11				
Other	2				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				

17. Are the assessment mechanisms sufficient that you can monitor and understand your child's rate of progress in attaining the goal of the IEP?

Agree	26				
Disagree	3				
Not sure	7				
Other	1				

Not Applicable	1				
Total	38				

PROGRESS REPORTING					

18. I received my child's special education quarterly report in measurable terms (non-measurable-slow progress; measurable terms-achieved goal with 80% accuracy).

Agree	25				
Disagree	6				
Not sure	7				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				

PROGRAM EVALUATION					

19. Do you believe your child's programs and services are effectively addressing his/her needs?

Please give examples of benefits and list names of programs and services.

Are the programs effective:					
Yes	19				
Maybe/Somewhat	4				
Not really	2				
No	2				
No response	10				
Not Sure	1				
Total	38				

20. I have been invited to observe and receive an overview of my child's special education program.

Agree	28				
Disagree	5				
Not sure	3				
Other	1				
Not Applicable	1				
Total	38				

21. I have received thorough information regarding my child's program and progress from the Director of Pupil Personnel (or Special Education Director) and his/her Special Education liaison.					
Agree	28				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	5				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	1				
Total	38				

INCLUSION TOPICS					
22. What do you see as the benefit(s) for your child and the school community from inclusive schools?					
Benefits:					
More inclusion	17				
None	3				
Not Applicable	4				
No response	7				
Not Sure	7				
Total	38				
23. What do you perceive as disadvantage(s), (if any) or challenge(s) from inclusive schools?					
Advantages/Disadvantages:					
Non-Acceptance	11				
Positive Acceptance	1				
None	5				
Model	1				
Not enough time	1				
More Challenging	1				
More Training	1				
Failing Class	1				
Not Applicable	3				
No response	8				
Not Sure	5				
Total	38				

ACCESS TO/PARTICIPATION IN NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES					
24. My child's IEP includes specific language, which indicates that, the school has in place certain Physical education and non-academic opportunities which meet my child's needs.					
Agree	26				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	3				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	5				
Total	38				
25. My child has support necessary to effectively participate in non-academic opportunities. (Science Club, after school intramurals, recreational after-school activities, etc.)					
Support/Non-Support:					
Actively participate	15				
Does not participate	1				
Yes, but no participation	2				
No activities	4				
Not Applicable	5				
No response	8				
Not Sure	3				
Total	38				

FUTURE PLANNING					
26. Would you like to be involved in evaluating or providing feedback of special education programs in the Public Schools?					
Would you like to be involved:					
Yes	21				
No	5				
Not Applicable	1				
No Response	11				
Total	38				

GENERAL QUESTIONS					
27. Generally, how would you rate your satisfaction of education in the Public Schools?					
Favorable	20				
Unfavorable	9				
Other (provide comments)	9				
Total	38				
Other:					
Fair	3				
Favorable/Unfavorable	2				
Okay	2				
Don't know a lot about it	1				
Indifferent	1				
Total	9				
28. Would you support the development and implementation of a school wide assessment for your public school?					
Agree	33				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	1				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				
29. Would you support the development and implementation of a school committee assessment?					
Agree	31				
Disagree	3				
Not sure	4				
Other	0				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				

30. Are there other areas of assessment that should be developed for your public schools?

Would you like to be involved:					
Yes	9				
No	8				
Not Applicable	1				
No Response	16				
Not Sure	4				
Total	38				

31. Do you think that the Special Education Parent Advisory Council provides a valuable service to the community? Please provide comments on areas which would be useful for you or would add greater value for you and your family.

Agree	24				
Disagree	4				
Not sure	9				
Other	1				
Not Applicable	0				
Total	38				

Question 19

Comments:
1. Child participates in Saturday school for Essential Skills - and a special computer class.
2. My child benefits from daily resource room to assist him in reading comprehension and math. I am up to date and informed with all occurrences in his/her academics aligning with his/her IEP.
3. My child's programs and services have effectively addressed his needs as far as extra help resource room.
4. My child has progressed Academically and socially due to the interventions put forth. Saturday school, extended day program VESID - Vocational program designed to assist in training and job placement after High School.
5. Yes, at his school is great as he's approaching 18.
6. My son's behavior has improved some. He likes school and is doing well. He has a nice relationship.
7. No comments provided.
8. No, not explained well.
9. No comments provided.

10. My child receives resource room and speech 1xtimes a week. She is able to comprehend "Wh" questions, better focused on a task for a much longer period of time, follows directives without cueing and asks more direct questions.
11. No comments provided.
12. No comments provided.
13. Yes somewhat.
14. Don't believe so.
15. No comments provided.
16. Somewhat.
17. Yes, my child has resource room which has provided much support for her to keep up with a very competitive school.
18. I do not believe it is working.
19. Yes, the Resource Room has assisted him a great deal.
20. No he has been in High School for 6 years.
21. No comments provided.
22. I observe a change in my child's academic progress. My child as a result of the supports. (After school help and Saturday School Academy), is a better student and test taker.
23. Yes, child is getting better grades.
24. Yes after school assistance and the resource room/itinerant teacher who assists my child in and outside of the classroom. In addition, the counseling which addresses my child's social and emotional needs.
25. No comments provided.
26. Most of the time. Sometimes it may be difficult in an inclusion classroom.
27. Yes, there are too many to list. One program that comes to mind is after school extra help.
28. Yes, my child is benefiting from the VESID program - a program for people with Disabilities. The program trains and helps students to find jobs.
29. No, my child is 17 years old in the 9th grade. He is supposed to be graduating. No one is helping my child.
30. Yes.
31. Yes, it is getting better. Not completely there yet.
32. Now. Before no. My child requires special accommodations.
33. No comments provided.
34. AIS.
35. No comments provided.
36. Yes, Resource Room.
37. Yes, Resource Room.
38. Not sure of programs given and offered.

Question 22

Comments:
1. More inclusion with regular students.
2. No comments provided.
3. My child is able to learn in a general education classroom with assistance.
4. It allows my child to integrate with all students - disabled and non-disabled. They are single out infused with the general public.
5. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their individual students.
6. Not familiar with inclusion.
7. My child is given the opportunity to interact with regular education students and still learn at their own page.
8. Not sure
9. No comments provided.
10. The benefits from collaborative setting are the challenges it offers. It requires my child to bring her best to keep up with the friends she has made. It also prepares her for the work world where no one cares about your problems - they just want you to do the job.
11. No comments provided.
12. No comments provided.
13. All students united as one, so separation due to learning levels.
14. Don't know.
15. No segregation between regular education and special education.
16. Don't know.
17. It provides the opportunity for the child with special needs to receive the exact same curriculum.
18. No comments provided.
19. Helps special needs children feel normal.
20. None.
21. No comments provided.
22. Not sure.
23. Attention to my child.
24. Not applicable.
25. The extra support my son receives. He has improved from the on service he has received.
26. Having the opportunity to work class activities with students in the regular classroom setting.
27. Gives my child a chance to interact with all students in all school programs.
28. Not applicable - my child not in this program.
29. None.
30. It allows my child to integrate with students in disabled and non-disabled communities.
31. Not applicable.
32. Not applicable.

33. AIS
34. None
35. Be included general population.
36. I'm not sure of the benefits.
37. I'm not sure of the benefits.
38. No comments provided.

Question 23

1. Children taunting in regular education - non-acceptance.
2. No comments provided.
3. No comments provided.
4. None.
5. Overcrowdness and isolation.
6. Don't know.
7. None.
8. Don't know.
9. No comments provided.
10. No comments provided.
11. No comments provided.
12. No comments provided.
13. None.
14. Don't know.
15. A more challenging atmosphere for children with ED.
16. Don't know.
17. The special needs child may feel inferior.
18. I think the other kids pick on them.
19. The other students do not want to socialize with the special needs students.
20. My son's failing. I asked for help and did not get it. I blame the school.
21. No comments provided.
22. Not sure.
23. No one to model.
24. Training the educators properly to handle the needs of the students.
25. No comments provided.
26. Sometimes the regular education teacher does not have enough time to get to every child. Meeting the needs of a diverse group of learners can be a challenge.
27. Sometime my child thinks that he is inferior to other students in regular school program.
28. Not applicable.
29. None.
30. None, my child has had positive experiences thus far.
31. Not applicable.
32. Not applicable.

33. Not enough pushing.
34. None.
35. Might feel weird.
36. My feels this she is not as smart as the other students.
37. My feels this she is not as smart as the other students.
38. Kids teasing my child, calling my child names because they did not understand why my child was coming to class with an aide and devices to assist my child in class.

Question 25

Comments:
1. Not actively pushed or discussed.
2. No comments provided.
3. Not applicable.
4. My child despite his learning disability is involved in after school activities - e.g. Basketball team and the school chorus.
5. He has support from family and friends.
6. My son plays chess after school.
7. Yes.
8. Don't know.
9. No comments provided.
10. Not applicable.
11. No comments provided.
12. Yes.
13. No comments provided.
14. Don't know.
15. Yes, extensive support.
16. Yeah.
17. Yes, but she chooses not to.
18. Yes, they have many things for the kid to do.
19. Yes.
20. None.
21. No comments provided.
22. Yes, my child pays baseball and runs indoor track. Both have built my child's self-esteem and improved my child social growth.
23. Yes.
24. Not applicable.
25. No comments provided.
26. Not applicable.
27. Yes.

28. Not applicable.
29. None, my child likes chess but because my child hates school, my child does not participate in activities.
30. Yes, my child is on the yearbook committee. Basketball team and student council.
31. None, child does not participate.
32. No, my child does not participate due to social/emotional issues.
33. No comments provided.
34. No.
35. No comments provided.
36. Yes.
37. Yes.
38. I don't know.

Question 26

Comments:
1. Yes. Special Education Committee for Parents.
2. No comments provided.
3. Yes, possibly in newsletter form.
4. Yes, I currently evaluate and provide feedback at the Monthly Meetings.
5. Yes.
6. Yes, how can I get involved? Who would I have to speak to?
7. Yes, so I can be an active part in my child's future.
8. Yes I would.
9. No comments provided.
10. Yes, would like to be involved in the evaluation process.
11. No comments provided.
12. Yes.
13. No comments provided.
14. Yes.
15. No comments provided.
16. No comments provided.
17. No.
18. No comments provided.
19. No comments provided.
20. No!!
21. Yes.
22. Yes, I need more information.
23. No.
24. Not applicable.
25. No comments provided.
26. Yes.

27. Yes.
28. Yes, I need to know about it.
29. Yes, to tell them their program has failed my child.
30. Yes, I am currently.
31. Yes.
32. Yes.
33. No comments provided.
34. No comments provided.
35. No.
36. Yes.
37. Yes.
38. No.

Question 30

Comments:
1. No comments provided.
2. No comments provided.
3. No comments provided.
4. The area of assessment that should be developed for the public schools - the rate of special education students go to college, trade school or work. The school district should "track" these students to determine what areas we need to target and work on to ensure the special education students succeed and become productive citizens in society.
5. No.
6. Don't know.
7. More extensive parental involvement.
8. Yes.
9. No comments provided.
10. No, I believe it would be bias and focus on a particular stereotype of the socio-economic background of the students that attend the school.
11. No comments provided.
12. Yes.
13. Yes.
14. Yes.
15. Yes the behaviors of some students.
16. No comments provided.
17. No comments provided.
18. No comments provided.
19. No comments provided.
20. Not sure, don't know.
21. No comments provided.

22. Not sure.
23. No.
24. Not applicable.
25. No comments provided.
26. Yes, how to better meet the needs of all students in the school and find ways to address the needs of a diverse population of learners.
27. No.
28. No comments provided.
29. None
30. No comments provided.
31. No, cases should be reviewed based on individual needs.
32. Child Assessment, examine and investigate each child/own issues.
33. No comments provided.
34. No comments provided.
35. No comments provided.
36. No.
37. No.
38. I don't know.