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Examining Parents' Perceptions of the Individualized Education Program Meeting

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Christine Anne Sullivan, PhD

University of Connecticut

2015

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, most recently reauthorized in 2004, explicitly reinforces the role of parents as partners with school professionals in the education of their children with disabilities. As members of the individualized education program (IEP) team, parents participate in all decisions about their child's educational program. Research on parents' perceptions of their experiences in their children's individualized education program (IEP) meetings however, documents a lack of meaningful participation and involvement in decision-making. In this study, a researcher-developed survey was utilized to investigate the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities in grades three through five. Thirty-four parents completed an online survey and were asked to rate their agreement, using a five point Likert-type scale, with a series of twelve statements about their experiences in IEP meetings. In this study, two open-ended questions provided qualitative data on parents' descriptions of their best and worst experiences at IEP meetings. The results of this study indicate parents are not participating in decision-making about their child's educational program. Fifty-six percent of parents disagreed with the statement that their school's team listens and responds to the concerns the parent has about their child's school program. In addition, fifty-nine percent of parents indicated they did not have enough time to read reports before decisions were made at IEP meetings. No significant differences in parent perceptions were found across groups of parents (including

parents of boys versus girls, parents from different socioeconomic groups, parents with different educational backgrounds, parents of children in different grades or parents of children with different disabilities). The results of this study indicate that parents continue to struggle to participate meaningfully in the decision-making responsibility of the IEP team. Limitations in the sample size, representativeness of the sample, and statistical power of this study should be considered when interpreting the results.

Examining Parents' Perceptions of the Individualized Education Program

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B.A., College of the Holy Cross, 1984

J.D., University of Connecticut, 1988

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2015

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2015

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Examining Parents' Perceptions of the Individualized Education Program Meeting

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2015

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My initial intent was to contact the Neag School of Education about the possibility of enrolling in a graduate program in special education; however I soon realized my desire to learn more to help my own daughter and other parents of children with disabilities was about to take me on a journey I would never have thought possible. While speaking with Dr. Michael Coyne, upon hearing of my interest in helping parents, I was given Dr. Mary Beth Bruder's name. As soon as I met Dr. Bruder, I realized there was no turning back. My law practice was to go on hold and a new chapter of my life was to begin. As my advisor and friend, she has always pushed me out of my comfort zone while encouraging me to keep my personal goals in mind as I revised my focus throughout my graduate training. I thank her for her guidance, friendship, and devotion to helping children with disabilities and their families. While there have been times over the last 5 years when I questioned the *timing* of my decision to return to graduate school, I have never questioned my inspiration to do so.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW AND FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In 1975, the United States Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act (EHA, 1975). A 1990 amendment to the legislation renamed it The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). In this landmark legislation funding was provided to states to serve children with disabilities who were eligible by their state definition to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through the development of an individualized education program (IEP). The IEP document must include a complete description of a child's educational needs, educational goals and objectives, placement, evaluation criteria, present levels of educational performance, and accommodations and modifications needed (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, herein after referred to as IDEA, 2004; Bateman & Linden, 1998; Christle & Yell, 2010). Since 1990, amendments in 1997 and 2004 have continued to emphasize the importance of the IEP and mandate that parents not only be included in all aspects of the decision-making process, but serve as active participants on the individualized education program team (IDEA, 1997, 2004). As members of the IEP team, parents play an important role in the decision-making process and contribute information about their child and the family's expectations and dreams for that child's future (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). The study discussed in this dissertation examines the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities in third, fourth, and fifth grades about their experiences in the IEP meeting.

In this chapter, an overview of the study is provided beginning with a review of parent's rights related to participation in the IEP process under the IDEA and the status of research

conducted on parental perceptions of the IEP meeting. In the second section, an outline of this dissertation document is presented.

Participation in the IEP and Parent's Perceptions

Parent's rights to participation in the IEP process under the IDEA.

The Regulations, that guide the implementation of the IDEA require school districts to “take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of a child with a disability are present at each IEP team meeting or are afforded the opportunity to participate” (IDEA Regulations, 2006, p. 46788). In addition to ensuring that every IEP team for a child receiving special education services includes a parent of that child, school districts are responsible to follow specific notification and scheduling requirements including, if necessary, individual or conference telephone calls to ensure parent participation. Interference with a parent's opportunity to participate in the special education decision-making process rises to the level of procedural error, potentially invalidating the IEP and jeopardizing that child's right to a FAPE (IDEA, 2004; Christle & Yell, 2010).

Federal courts have emphasized the rights of parents as established in the IDEA in a number of decisions. In two recent decisions, courts stressed the importance placed on non-interference with parents' rights, specifically those that impact the child's receipt of a FAPE. In 2007, the United States Supreme Court decided *Winkelman v. Parma City School District* and affirmed that parents have enforceable rights under the IDEA and are free to exercise those rights in court. Referring to parents' rights, the Court stated that the “IDEA grants independent, enforceable rights. These rights, which are not limited to certain procedural and reimbursement-related matters, encompass the entitlement to a free appropriate public education for the parent's child” (*Winkelman v. Parma City School District*, 2007, p. 2005).

In 2013, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Hawaii held that a school district violated a child's FAPE by holding the child's annual IEP meeting without parental participation. The Court cited the language of the IDEA (2004) and found that it explicitly requires parental participation in the IEP process (*Doug C., et al. v. State of Hawaii Department of Education*, et al., No. 12-15079, 9th Cir. June 13, 2013). The Court reasoned that unless the parent affirmatively refuses to attend the meeting, holding the meeting without the parent violates the procedural requirements of the IDEA and thereby invalidates the IEP.

Research on parent's perspectives.

Although courts have strictly interpreted the language of the IDEA with respect to the importance of active and meaningful parental participation in the IEP process, research on parent's perspectives of the IEP meeting suggests that what occurs in practice is different. In studies, researchers have shown that parents have not been valued as equal members of the IEP team (Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978; Salett & Henderson, 1980; Gilman & Coleman, 1981; Davis, 1983; Garriott, Wandy, & Snyder, 2000; and Fish, 2006). Parents have not participated in the IEP decision-making process or have played a passive, consent-giving role in the process (Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988; Bateman & Linden, 1998; and Harry, 1992). Parents have been asked to accept educational plans that have been drafted prior to the IEP meeting (Souffer, 1982). Parents from culturally and linguistically diverse groups have experienced additional barriers to full participation in IEP meetings, specifically negative attitudes of team members, differences in values, lack of English language proficiency, ineffective translation services, feelings of marginalization, and lack of knowledge of the special education system (Lynch & Stein, 1987; Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Sheehey, 2006; Harry, 2008; Olivos, 2009;

and Pang, 2011). Parents from low socioeconomic groups are also less likely to be active participants in the IEP decision-making process and more likely to be less educated about the special education process and less confident when advocating for their child's needs (Jones & Gansle, 2010 and Lalvani, 2012).

Overview of the Study

In this study, the researcher examined the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities about their experiences in their children's IEP meetings. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine the perceptions held by parents of third, fourth and fifth grade students in Connecticut public schools. The following is a brief summary of the study.

Statement of the problem.

Specific language in the IDEA (2004) mandates that parents serve as equal members of the IEP team and are active participants in the IEP decision-making process. This includes the development, implementation and monitoring of the IEP. Any actions deemed to interfere with a parent's right to participate in the IEP decision-making process can be considered a violation of a child's right to a FAPE (*Doug C. v. State of Hawaii Department of Education*, 2012/2013).

Research on parents' perceptions about their experiences in these meetings indicates that although active parental participation is mandated by the IDEA, many barriers precluding full and equal participation exist in practice. Specifically, studies describe the concerns and dissatisfaction of parents from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Harry, 2008; and Lo, 2008) and those of lower socioeconomic status (Lalvani, 2012). The problem addressed in this study is parents' failure to participate in an active manner in decision-making at the IEP meeting. The perceptions of parents of children with disabilities about their experiences at their child's IEP meeting were explored in this study.

Research Questions.

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) With which survey items describing IEP meeting experiences do parents indicate the strongest agreement?
- 2) Is there any statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of students in different grades?
- 3) Is there any statistically significant difference between fathers and mothers' perceptions of the IEP meeting?
- 4) Is there any statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of different socioeconomic status?
- 5) Is there any statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds?
- 6) Is there any statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of students with different disabilities?
- 7) Is there any statistically significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of boys and girls?
- 8) Is there any statistically significant difference in the parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents who have different levels of education?
- 9) How do parents describe their "best" experiences at their child's IEP meeting?
- 10) How do parents describe their "worst" experiences at their child's IEP meeting?

Methods and Procedures.

Research methods. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to address the research questions. Survey research methods were used to gather quantitative data about parents'

general information and parental perceptions of their child's individualized education program meeting. Parents' responses to two open-ended questions in the survey provided qualitative information. The open-ended questions asked parents to describe their "best" and "worst" experiences at an IEP meeting for their child.

Sample. Parents of children with disabilities who were receiving special education services pursuant to an IEP in a Connecticut public school in grades three, four or five during the 2013/2014 school year were the focus of this study. According to data collected by the state of Connecticut, Special Education Data Application and Collection system, 15,083 students received special education in Connecticut public schools in grades three, four and five during the 2013/2014 school year. Parents of children with disabilities in this particular grade range were targeted for participation in the study because previous research suggests parents are more involved in their children's IEP process in the early elementary years and their level of involvement decreases as the child ages, typically beginning in the middle school years (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). It is hypothesized that targeting parents of children in grades three, four and five would result in a sample of parents least affected by this variation in parents' level of involvement. The survey questionnaire was developed in SurveyMonkey and posted online using a specific URL. The survey was open to participants for thirty days during which time a total of 63 responses were received.

Instrumentation. Data for this study were collected through an online survey developed by the researcher for this study. The survey instrument included four sections: 1) general information about the parent and child, 2) statements about parent's perceptions of the IEP meeting, 3) open-ended responses, and 4) information about other children. The first section of the survey gathered parent's demographic information and child's age, grade level, and

disability. The second section asked parents to respond to statements about their IEP meeting experiences. Utilizing a five-point scale, which ranged from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree,” parents were asked to rate their agreement with statements about the IEP meeting. The two open-ended response questions provided data for qualitative analysis. The final section asked information about other children in the household. Information received through responses to the survey was anonymous and no identifying information was collected. Cronbach’s alpha is reported as a measure of reliability of the instrument created by the researcher for this study.

Recruitment. Parents of students receiving special education services in third, fourth, and fifth grades during the 2013/2014 school year in Connecticut public schools were asked to participate in this study by completing an online survey hosted through SurveyMonkey. In order to inform potential respondents of the purpose of the study and criteria for participation, the researcher prepared an electronic informational flyer with a link to the survey embedded therein. The survey instrument and informational flyer were designed in English and translated into Spanish and each version was accessed through the dedicated link embedded in the flyer (See Appendices A, B, C, and D for the English and Spanish copies of the survey and flyer). The flyer was posted on the websites of parent support groups, the University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy, and the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center. Additionally, the flyer was disseminated to parents by email through contact lists compiled by the organizations listed above. Responses were collected for thirty days and 63 responses were received.

Data Analysis. Survey data were entered and analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive

statistics were used to organize, summarize and describe results for research questions. The dependent variable was parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting. Parents' perceptions were reported as Parent Behavior and Team Behavior and these were measured utilizing a five-point rating scale. Independent variables in the study were parent's household income, parent education level, child's gender, child's disability, and child's grade level. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted as an omnibus test statistic to determine if there were differences in the dependent variables measuring parent perception, Team Behavior and Parent Behavior based on the five independent variables. Data from the two open-ended questions were analyzed using qualitative methods including coding and interpretation of themes.

Importance of study. The results of this study offered additional insight into the unique perspectives held by parents and thus contributes to the extant literature. The focus of this study was on parents of children in specific grades; however, future replications should be conducted with parents of students in other grade levels. This study begins to establish the researcher developed survey instrument as a reliable measure of parent perceptions. The results of this study will lead to future research exploring interventions designed to improve parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting in addition to expanding the sample population to include parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Ultimately, this study adds to our understanding of what is important to parents as they participate in the IEP meeting, information that will inform additional research in interventions that facilitate the collaborative relationship between schools and parents.

Limitations. Several limitations exist in this study. First, the design of this study does not enable causal inferences to be drawn. Therefore, on the basis of the results of inferential statistical tests, it is only possible to state whether a relationship exists or not between variables.

Even so, information gained from studies such as this is needed if parents are to achieve meaningful participation in the IEP process as intended by the IDEA. Second, the size of the sample did not reach the targeted number, which was approximately 350 parents. Future efforts should be directed toward specific outreach efforts to parent organizations and possibly school districts in order to obtain a larger sample, as well as expansion of the parent sample to parents of children in all grades. This is a significant limitation, which negatively effects the assumptions made for conducting specific statistical tests, including a MANOVA. Third, the characteristics of the sample reflected a homogenous sample, not representative of the current target population. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the results of the study. Additionally, the sample was not culturally and linguistically diverse and did not contain the perspectives of fathers, both necessary components in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of parents' perspectives. The homogeneity of the sample and the small sample size also impacted the researcher's ability to analyze all proposed research questions.

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter Two, a thorough review of the literature regarding parents' perceptions of their experiences at their child's IEP meeting is provided. The literature review contains an overview of the IEP process, a review of the literature on parents' participation in the IEP process, and literature on parents' perceptions of the IEP process, including perspectives of parents from specific populations. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the need for the current study.

In Chapter Three, a detailed review of the research methods and procedures employed in this study are summarized. The sample, criteria for inclusion in the study, recruitment measures, and a discussion of the development of the survey instrument utilized in this study are included.

The last section in Chapter Three previews the statistical analyses used in the study. Chapter Four contains the results of the statistical and qualitative analyses addressing the research questions of this study and Chapter Five contains the discussion of findings and the implications of the study, including limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature on parental participation in the IEP process and parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting is presented in this chapter. Research on the perspectives of parents from specific populations including, culturally and linguistically diverse parents, parents of different socioeconomic status, and parents of children with autism is also included. A summary of the literature addressing the need for the current study wraps up the chapter.

The IEP Process and Early Literature

The IEP process. In 1975, the United States Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (EHA, 1975), renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the 1990 amendment to the Act (IDEA, 1990). This landmark legislation provided funding to states to serve children with disabilities who were eligible by their state definition to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through the development of an individualized education program (IEP). By law, states must comply with six principals encompassed by the IDEA (2004) in order to receive funding. These are:

- Every child is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE),
- A student suspected of having a disability is entitled to a nondiscriminatory evaluation in all areas related to the suspected disability,
- An Individualized Education Program (IEP) shall be created for each student determined to be eligible for special education services,
- All education and services are to be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE),

- The input of the child and parents must be taken into account in the process of the education process, and
- Parents have the right to due process should they believe their child is not receiving appropriate services or the child's IEP is inappropriate (as summarized in Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011)

The most important component of FAPE is the IEP as it describes a child's special educational needs. Although the IDEA has always required that parents be active participants in the IEP decision-making meetings, the preamble to the 2004 amendments confirmed that "almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by ... strengthening the role and responsibilities of parents and ensuring that families have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home" (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (c)(5)(B), 2004). The 2004 amendments to the IDEA, continue to require a child's IEP contain statements about the present levels of a child's educational performance, educational goals and objectives, the accommodations and modifications needed by the child, and the child's least restrictive educational environment (LRE) (IDEA, 2004).

Early research on the IEP process. Following the passage of the initial IDEA legislation in 1975, researchers began documenting the failure of the special education system to fulfill the mandate of parent participation in the IEP process. In the decades following the law's enactment, studies provided indications that parents were often not active decision-makers in the development of the IEP. Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980), utilized a coder-observer technique to record the frequency of parent involvement in the IEP meeting, as well as the topics discussed. The coder-observer attended the IEP meetings of 14 children in grades three

through six and recorded the topic, speaker, and recipient at two-minute intervals. An eight-item survey was administered to all participants at the conclusion of the meeting. The results of the recordings did not reveal any one topic that was common to all meetings, however, evaluation and curriculum were mentioned most frequently. No significant differences were found between participants concerning satisfaction with the IEP meeting. In conclusion, Goldstein, Strikland, Turnbull, and Curry suggested that effective parental involvement in the development of the IEP and its implementation should be more clearly defined.

Other studies set out to determine if parents were active, equal participants at IEP meetings. Gilman and Coleman (1981) investigated the status ranking of all IEP participants and their actual influence in those meetings. The study included 130 participants across 27 IEP meetings in three school districts in Michigan. Participants completed questionnaires before and after each IEP meeting. The first survey asked questions regarding the perceived status of each participant at the meeting. The second survey asked participants to comment on the actual contributions of each participant to the meeting. Each survey utilized a Likert-type scale and asked participants about diagnosis, planning, placement, implementation, and due process. The results showed that the relationship between participants' preconceived importance of different members of the IEP team and their influence in the IEP was not significant. Parents, as well as general education teachers, social workers and principals were ranked higher in importance than their actual influence in the IEP meetings.

Lynch and Stein (1982) reported parents had differing definitions for active roles in IEP meetings ranging from passive acceptance to expressing their opinions in two descriptive studies. The first study involved 106 families of low socioeconomic status with children with disabilities. The second study involved 328 families from different socioeconomic status levels. All families

completed 64 item questionnaires administered by interviewers who came to the parents' homes. Although 70% of the parents indicated they were active participants in their child's IEP meeting, only 47% stated they made suggestions at those meetings. Parents of all socioeconomic status levels responded similarly. In discussion, Lynch and Stein recommended additional research should be done to determine why approximately one-third of parents surveyed did not view themselves as involved in the IEP team.

Researchers also studied the perception of special educators as to their views of the value and purpose of parent participation in the IEP meeting. Gerber, Banbury, Miller and Griffin (1986) surveyed 145 special educators across six states to determine their perceptions of parent's contributions to the IEP process. Thirty-six items were included in the instrument. The following is a sample of the items included and the percent of respondents indicating "strongly agree" or "agree": "Parents make a significant contribution to the IEP process" (50.4%), "IEPs written prior to the IEP conference are detrimental to parent participation," (26.7%) and "Parents should be given the option to waive their right of attendance at IEP meetings." (71%) (p. 160). The results of this survey showed that the opinion of special educators was divided, at best, as to the purpose and value of parent participation and attendance at the IEP meeting (p. 162).

In an early study, Lynch and Stein (1987) studied parent participation in their child's special education program by ethnicity, specifically Mexican American, African American and Anglo American parents. Interviews with 63 Mexican American parents indicated that only 45% felt they were part of the assessment process for their child and half did not feel that they were active participants in the development of their child's IEP. Paradoxically, all parents studied generally felt satisfied with their child's program, but Mexican American and African American parents felt that they were less knowledgeable than their Anglo American counterparts were.

Mexican American parents reportedly felt educational decision-making was the school's responsibility and respected the role of the teacher and school personnel.

Researchers also studied the frequency and duration of parents' verbal interactions with the IEP team at meetings in an effort to understand parent participation. Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky (1988) observed 26 initial placement/IEP conferences to determine the relative duration of parent participation, which was defined as parent verbal interaction. On average, parents spent less than 15% of the time in IEP conferences interacting with the team, yet 69% of parents later indicated they felt positive and appreciative about the meetings. Possible reasons for parents' continued passivity in IEP meetings included the assumption that the results reflected parents' actual satisfaction and level of comfort in terms of participation or that parents lacked knowledge of their child's condition and of the decisions, which were made in the meeting. Other potential reasons included school personnel's perception of the appropriate level of parent participation in education and inconsistent communication between parents and teachers and other members of the IEP team.

The focus on parents' level of participation in the IEP meeting and satisfaction with the IEP process also led researchers to come to conclusions about barriers to parent participation and decision-making. Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) classified barriers as psychological, attitudinal, cultural/ideological, and logistical, while Lynch and Stein (1987) discussed slightly different categories: work, time conflicts, transportation problems, and childcare needs. Regardless of the title of the category, researchers began to document the fact that parents reported obstacles to full meaningful participation and decision making in their child's IEP meetings.

Parents' participation and decision-making in IEP meetings continued to be the focus of research in the 1990's. Teachers continued to be perceived as the educational decision-makers

leaving parents to be the consent-givers. In a position paper regarding the need to restructure the participation of African-American parents in special education, Harry (1992) argued for new roles for all parents to restore the power balance between schools and parents. Although the position paper concentrated on African American parents, Harry addressed her argument concerning a restoration of power to all parents. Acknowledging that parents typically are in the role of consent-giver, she envisioned parents to have roles in the assessment process, in placement decisions, and as policymakers and advocates.

Parents' perceptions of their role in the IEP meeting was briefly discussed by Lovitt and Cushing (1999) in a mixed methods study involving some 43 parents. Parents were interviewed about their opinion of their child's program and the level of involvement they had in their child's education. In addition, they were asked about the role the IEP played in their child's education, and any recommendations for improvement. Eleven of the 43 parents completed surveys as well. Four themes emerged from the data. They were: 1) the lack of individualization of the IEP, 2) a disappointment with the special education system, 3) being tired of the special education system and, 4) minimal parent expectations.

In a 1990 review of the literature on the IEP process and specifically the development of the IEP, Smith recognized three phases of IEP studies. The normative phase included research studying whether schools met specific requirements of the IDEA. Studies included in the analytic phase, involved a closer inspection of the contents of the IEP and the perspectives held by all key stakeholders in the process, including teachers, administrators, and parents, as well as their level of involvement in the process. Finally, the technology-reaction phase focused on the study of computer-assisted systems designed to manage the IEP process, including the drafting of the IEP document.

In a subsequent study, Smith and Brownell (1995) proposed that the IEP process primarily existed to satisfy legal mandates of the IDEA, rather than a process to determine what an appropriate educational program for a child with a disability should look like. Among the concerns cited by Smith and Brownell, were whether appropriate instructional strategies were documented on the IEP, whether goals and objectives were selected from a standardized list, whether the IEP document was actually produced prior to the actual IEP meeting, and the impact of the computerization of the IEP document.

Interventions. Concurrent with research on the IEP process and the level of parent participation in the development of their child's IEP, has been a focus on strategies to increase parent participation at IEP conferences. Recommendations to develop training packages for parents and schools have been made. In an early study by Goldstein and Turnbull (1982), the effectiveness of two intervention strategies designed to increase parent participation in the IEP meeting were tested. The two strategies were 1) sending parents questions before the IEP meeting and a follow up phone call or 2) having a school counselor acting as a parent advocate at the meeting. Forty-five parents of children receiving special education services were randomly assigned to one of three groups (the two intervention groups and one control group) and observed during an IEP meeting. Follow up questionnaires assessed parents' perceived levels of participation at the meetings. Findings indicated significantly more involvement by parents who were accompanied by an advocate rather than those receiving questions and phone call and parents in the control group. However, all groups of parents in the study reported satisfaction with the IEP meeting.

Brinkerhoff and Vincent (1986) developed a training package for parents and school staff in an attempt to increase parent participation at the IEP meeting. Seven parents were assigned to

the experimental group and seven to a control group. Parents in the experimental group completed a family profile, a developmental assessment, and an inventory that asked parents to describe their child's performance levels for specific activities at home. This information was then used by the school to better understand the child's abilities, as well as the family's priorities for the child. IEP meetings were observed and coders recorded speakers and topic every 20 seconds. Parents in the experimental group contributed to discussion more often at the meetings, participated in significantly more decisions, and generated significantly more goals than parents in the control group generated.

Current Research

In this section, an overview of current research (specifically literature published in 2000 and after) on the general concerns perceived by parents about the IEP process is presented. Also included are current studies involving parents from specific populations including parents from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, parents of low socioeconomic groups, and parents of children with autism.

Perceptions of the IEP process. Fish (2008) surveyed 51 parents from one family support service agency about their overall perceptions of the IEP meeting, knowledge of the IEP process, special education law, relations with educators, IEP outcomes, and recommended areas for improvement. A majority of parents reported their overall IEP experiences were positive, and most felt they were given enough time to ask questions, voice concerns, and give input to educators. The most common source of disagreement with educators was related to placement decisions and academic curriculum. A majority of parents felt they had a clear understanding of the IEP process, and most indicated they received that knowledge through self-education. Even so, about one-third of parents still desired more information. The majority of parents agreed or

strongly agreed that they were treated with respect and treated as equal decision makers in IEP meetings. The author indicated the findings supported the importance of building positive relationships between educators and parents during the IEP meeting by treating parents as equals and valuing their input.

Garriott, Wandy, and Snyder (2000) investigated parental involvement as equal partners in the IEP planning process. Questionnaires were distributed by students in a large mid-western university to 96 parents of a child with a disability. Parents were asked to rate their level of agreement with four questions concerning IEP meetings. Questions also provided space for parents to offer open-ended responses. While 89% of parents surveyed indicated they always attend IEP meetings, only 27% stated they attend with their spouse citing work schedule and inability to miss work as the reasons for the spouse's inability to attend. Of the parents who attend IEP meetings, half indicated they did so in order to be aware of educators' plans for their child's education (a passive role) and not to be equal participants in the development of the IEP. Parents also commented they would have preferred to have their spouse at the meetings in order to present a "unified front" for the school personnel on issues pertaining to their child's IEP and felt disadvantaged when forced to attend alone (p. 42).

Less than half of the parents felt they were treated in a fair and equitable manner at IEP meetings and 27% of parents responded that they only "sometimes" or "never" were treated as an equal. They indicated they felt useless and inferior because IEP documents had been prepared by school personnel prior to the meeting without parents' input. Parents felt their child's team did not value their knowledge or expertise about their child. The authors cited the following implications for practice: a) educators need instruction in interacting with parents in order to facilitate partnerships in decision-making to develop an interactive partnership, b) increase

parental involvement in school wide activities, c) educators should not write plans for IEPs before meetings, d) schools should be in contact with parents on a regular basis, whether or not problems arise, e) IEP meetings should be scheduled at times convenient for parents in order to encourage attendance, and f) the goal should be to provide the best possible program for the child (Garriott, Wandy, & Snyder, p.41).

Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) examined parents' perceptions of their negative and positive experiences in IEP meetings. In this qualitative study, nine parent members of the school district's special education advisory committee completed a survey which asked the parents to describe meetings they considered to be the most positive (and negative) experiences they had in school meetings about their child. Parents' comments suggested that characteristics of positive meetings included those that were well organized, attended by less people, and where attendees had clear responsibilities. Parents indicated that experiences in school meetings were affected by past and current relationships with education professionals. Relationships among professionals also affected the experience at team meetings. Parents wanted to know that their ideas and contributions, as well as those of other team members were recognized and accepted. Parents also appreciated attempts by the team to problem-solve to find creative solutions. Parents felt the type of information being presented at the IEP meeting influenced the parent's emotional level. Overall, parents preferred regular communication between parent and educators outside of team meetings and recommended involving parents in pre-meeting organization and planning.

Common findings among these studies include parents' desire for consistent communication between schools and parents, preplanning meetings to organize items to be discussed at IEP meetings, to be treated as partners in all decisions regarding their children's education and to schedule IEP meeting at times convenient for parents.

Special populations.

Culturally and linguistically diverse parents. The perceptions of parents of children with disabilities, who are from linguistically and culturally diverse groups, have been studied to determine if there are differences in their perceptions about experiences in IEP meetings as compared to parents of the dominant culture. Researchers have also specifically considered the impact of the dramatic increase in the Latino (Hispanic) population and the ability of schools to collaborate with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Harry (2008) conducted a literature review to identify research-based definitions of collaborative relationships between special education professionals and culturally and linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities. Her analysis concluded that a deficit view of culturally and linguistically diverse families, cross-cultural misunderstandings about the meaning of disability, difference in values about setting goals for people with disabilities, and the cultural difference in caregivers' views of their roles, all existed as barriers to collaboration.

Sheehey (2006) conducted three case studies with parents of Hawaiian descent. Informal interviews, telephone calls, and observations recorded three families' stories of their experiences with educational decision-making, as well as the programs, placements, supports and services their children received. Each parent described obstacles encountered in their experiences. Obstacles ranged from inexperience and lack of knowledge of the IEP decision-making process and special education laws, to educational professionals thwarting parental involvement by being uncooperative and not seeking parental input, and intimidation of parents who were not trained in the IEP process. The Hawaiian parents in the study defined involvement broadly, in that they felt it included their presence in the school, the informal communication between parent and teacher, obtaining knowledge on special education and advocating for their child. Thus,

involvement for these parents reflected more than just the decision making responsibility at the IEP meeting. Parents were very discouraged and uncomfortable when education professionals drafted IEPs before the meeting. Feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, intimidation, and disenfranchisement were documented by the author and served to fuel parents' desire for additional information and knowledge.

Salas (2004) explored Mexican American parents' perceptions of and experiences with the IEP meeting through interviews of 10 mothers of children with disabilities who were receiving special education services. All of the women interviewed in this study revealed that their voices were not heard, due to the English language dominance in the schools. This resulted in feelings of isolation and marginalization when participating in the IEP meetings. Salas conveyed stories told by the mothers about incidents that occurred in their child's IEP meeting including disrespectful behavior by school personnel and mothers' reluctance to engage in decision making and planning for their child. Overall, the women interviewed by Salas describe their relationship with their child's special education team as "fragile", as their voices were often not heard, discounted and not respected (p.190).

Chinese parents' perceptions of their children's IEP meetings were examined by Lo (2008) through observations and interviews. Lo attended all IEP meetings that were held over a two-year period for five children who had varying disabilities. During the meetings, she recorded information related to how parents were greeted, the number of people in attendance at the meeting, questions asked by parents, the number of times parents responded to questions of professionals, the number of comments initiated by parents, and the purpose of the meetings. Interviews of parents immediately followed the IEP meetings. These were conducted by Lo in the parents' native language. Findings suggested barriers confronting parents made it difficult, if

not impossible for them to participate in IEP meetings. All parents felt challenged by a language barrier; they were unable to communicate and understand what was happening in the meetings. Translators, when provided, were not trained in special education and were unfamiliar with important terminology, making it impossible to translate accurately. Parents perceived other team members did not value their opinions and input. As a result, questions asked by parents were often rejected and decisions were made without parent input. Finally, parents reported feeling disrespected when they were openly criticized in meetings and when professionals arrived late to or left early as meetings were scheduled at the convenience of the school not the parent. Suggestions by the author to improve the effectiveness of IEP meetings included professionals meeting with translators prior to meeting to review terminology, listening to parents' concerns in order to avoid misunderstandings and collaborating with community organizations to develop training for parents.

Cho and Gannotti (2005) interviewed 20 Korean American mothers about their perceptions of their roles in IEP meetings. Interview responses revealed information about their experiences, including barriers encountered. Mothers complained that educators disenfranchised them and marginalized them at the IEP meetings. Of the 20 mothers interviewed, a substantial number felt their limited English proficiency and lack of knowledge about services was the reason for the difficulty they had with IEP teams. Although parent training was available, it was only offered in English. Interviewees were critical of translators provided by schools indicating formal translators did not know special education jargon and had unprofessionally offered the IEP team their own opinions. The authors discussed the need for better training of translators, as well as professional awareness of the "culture clash" experienced by these Korean mothers and the "heightened level of stress created by conflict" (Cho & Gannotti, p.8).

In summary, parents from diverse cultural and linguistic groups continue to face barriers to their active participation in decision-making in IEP meetings. The studies reviewed herein suggest parents from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have reported similar concerns. Those concerns cited by parents included: misunderstandings created by a lack of English-language proficiency and cultural differences, a perception of disrespect and negative professional attitudes toward parents, a lack of information and need for training in parents' native language, and ineffective or inappropriate translation services.

Socioeconomic Status. Researchers have also examined family socioeconomic status when assessing perceptions of parents about their child's IEP meeting. Jones and Gansle (2010) investigated the use of a pre-IEP mini-conference as a means to increase parent's participation in the IEP meeting as perceived by parents, teachers and administrators, and the relationship of this intervention with parents' socioeconomic status and education levels. Forty-one parents participated in the study. Direct observations of IEP meeting were conducted and parents completed a survey of their perceptions about participation in the IEP meeting. Findings suggested that parents' participation in terms of comments made in IEP meetings increased with parents' socioeconomic status and education levels.

In a qualitative study, Lalvani (2012) investigated perceptions of 33 parents through individual semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions investigated parents' experiences at IEP team meetings and the IEP planning process, perceptions of their child's current programs, and their beliefs about their role in their children's education. Parents who were in a higher socioeconomic group defined as middle to upper-middle income groups, understood special education laws better than parents in other socioeconomic groups. Children of parents in the low socioeconomic group were all educated in self-contained classrooms, as parents were less

educated about inclusive education. Parents indicated they felt the need to educate themselves about special education as they advocated for their children in the decision making process in IEP meetings. Parents from higher socioeconomic groups reported feeling more confident than parents from the low socioeconomic group, as to the effectiveness of their advocacy efforts. Some parents also felt responsible to educate teachers about their child's disability, while others indicated they followed the lead of the educational professionals.

The findings suggested in these two studies provide support for the inequity resulting from the disparity in family's socioeconomic status such that even placement decisions may be linked to socioeconomic status. Further, although there is a need to educate all parents about the IEP process, these findings suggest educating parents from low socioeconomic groups about services and placement options for their children with disabilities is vital.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Parents of children with a diagnosis of autism have been interviewed about their perspectives and experiences at their child's IEP meeting. In a qualitative study, Fish (2006) investigated the perceptions held by seven parents who were members of a specific family support group for parents of children with autism in north Texas. Audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interview questions were designed to solicit parents' views about the IEP meeting and what changes they would recommend to improve the meeting. The five open-ended questions asked were as follows: "Describe the quality of services that your child has received as a result of your child's IEP meetings," "How are you treated and perceived by IEP team members?" "What changes would you desire pertaining to your child's IEP meetings?" "What can school districts do to improve IEP meetings?" and "What can parents do to improve IEP meetings?" (Fish, p.59).

All parents reported their initial IEP experiences had been negative. Response to discipline issues and the quality of services for students with autism were identified as factors that contributed to the report of negative experiences. Concerns about the need for better transition services and a desire for more inclusive opportunities for their children were also mentioned. Parents described being blamed by the school for their children's behavioral and academic problems. In addition, requests for specific services were deemed unnecessary or too expensive by the school. However, the study reported that school members treated parents more positively when parents brought an advocate to IEP meetings. As parents' knowledge of appropriate IEP procedures and process, as well as educators' knowledge of the child's disability increased, parents reported an improvement in their relationship with the school. Parents suggested improvements to the IEP meeting could be made by implementing a more democratic process to make parents feel as equal contributors, to make decisions with parent input, and to value and listen to parental input.

Tucker and Schwartz (2013) explored 135 parents of children with autism about their perspectives on collaboration in the IEP process using a mixed methods design. An internet-based survey addressed two questions: "What do parents of children with ASD identify as issues related to collaboration and conflict in the IEP process?" and "What factors facilitate parents' satisfaction with the educational planning process involving special needs students?" (Tucker & Schwartz, p. 5). A 36 item survey included questions in five areas: collaboration, supportive practices and professional behavior, conflict and resolution, service needs, and educational and outcome priorities. Ninety-four percent of parents rated their involvement in the IEP process as "high" or "moderate". Parents reported the school involved them by "asking for my input into the IEP draft," "providing regular communication about my child's progress," and "planning and

writing goals and objectives with me” (Tucker & Schwartz, p. 6). Parents identified the need for the school to maintain regular contact and include parent’s suggestions for goals and objectives and curriculum and instructional approaches, as the most important means to collaborate for the IEP team. When asked about level of confidence in school professionals’ ability to handle problems the most frequently chosen response was “not confident.” About one-third of parents reported that the IEP had been created without their input. Suggestions for school professionals included considering parents as valued member of the IEP team, pursuing collaborative efforts with parents, and understanding the larger parental picture concerning advocating for a child with a disability such as autism.

Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen (2003) conducted a telephone survey with 45 families of children with autism and examined parents’ knowledge of and involvement in their child’s IEP process. Questions asked included the following: “What is your degree of knowledge with the IEP document (low, moderate, or high)?” “What is your degree of involvement with the IEP document and meetings (low, moderate, or high)?” and “What is your overall degree of satisfaction with the IEP process (low, moderate, or high)?” (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, p. 229). A majority of parents (78%) believed that they had high to moderate knowledge of their child’s IEP document, 56% reported moderate levels of involvement in the IEP process, and 73% reported moderate levels of satisfaction with the IEP process. Similar to findings in other studies, parents of older children reported less input in the IEP process. Also, despite the high percent of parents responding that they were satisfied with the IEP process, comments were received suggesting they were unable to participate in the decision making process because the document had been written prior to the meeting. Nearly half (44%) of parents believed that their child’s school was doing little to nothing about currently addressing their child’s most pressing needs

(Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, p.235). The authors suggested that these results showed the complexities inherent in the family-school relationship, and pointed out that parent-school communication and parent participation in the IEP meeting affected the school's ability to address parents' priorities.

While parents of children with autism had perceptions of the IEP process and IEP meeting that were similar to parents in other studies reviewed, there were some differences. These included specific concerns about behavior, the academic needs of children with autism, the desire to have their children educated in inclusive environments, the perception that teams did not value parents' input into the IEP, and the need for teams to work collaboratively with parents. These studies appear to suggest that parents of children with autism perceive their collaborative involvement in the decision-making process to be integral to the effective provision of services for their children.

Summary

This review of early and current research on parent's perspectives of the IEP meeting suggests that despite the fact that nearly 40 years has passed since the EHA was enacted, the intention that parents serve as equal partners on the IEP team and actively participate in all decision-making in the IEP process, has not been realized. This has been especially true for parents from specific populations such as culturally and linguistically diverse groups and those in lower socioeconomic groups. In order to better understand why discrepancies between the IDEA mandate for parent participation in the IEP decision making process and actual practices encountered by parents continue to exist, additional studies of parents' perceptions about their experiences in their child's IEP meeting are necessary. The dissertation study seeks to contribute

to the literature by examining those perceptions help by parents of children with disabilities in grades three, four and five. The next chapter discusses the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methods and procedures employed in this study are described in this chapter. In order to answer the research questions guiding this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were required. The criteria for inclusion in the study, recruitment procedures, and information about the study sample are discussed in the first section. In the second section, the survey instrument, *Examining Parents' Perceptions of the IEP Meeting* (a questionnaire designed by the researcher for the study) is described along with the data collection procedures. Finally, a summary of the data analysis procedures follows.

Sample

Recruitment procedure and inclusion criteria. After receiving HS-IRB permission to conduct this study, various parent support organizations in Connecticut were contacted to disseminate recruitment information about this study. The Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy, Connecticut Parents Advocacy Center and the A.J. Pappanikou Center on Developmental Disabilities all agreed to disseminate information about the study. An electronic flyer, which contained information about the survey and its purpose, as well as an electronic link to the survey, was posted on the home page of the University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) where the researcher is employed as a graduate assistant. Additionally, the flyer and embedded electronic link was distributed by email to various list serves and contact lists through the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, the State of Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy, and the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center. The Connecticut SEPTO Alliance, a special education parent teacher organization in Connecticut, also assisted in disseminating the study flyer through their email contact list. Finally, the researcher was referred

to individual SEPTOs through the Connecticut SEPTO Alliance and the flyers were distributed by email to parents through these contacts. The electronic link to the survey remained active for a period of one month (30 days). After two weeks, this researcher asked those organizations assisting in the dissemination of the survey to forward a reminder email to the same list serves and email contact lists in order to encourage participation.

A non-probability sample of parents of children with varying disabilities who were receiving special education services in public elementary schools in Connecticut were recruited for this study. Specifically, parents of children with disabilities in grades three through five, in Connecticut public schools were invited to participate by completing an online survey. Limiting the recruitment to parents of children in these specific grades was a decision made in consultation with the researcher's committee. Research suggests parents are more involved in their child's IEP process in the early elementary years and that their level of involvement decreases as the child ages, typically during the middle school years (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). It was hypothesized that targeting parents of children in grades three, four, and five would result in a sample of parents least affected by this trend in parents' level of involvement.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this study was to investigate how parents of children in grades three through five perceive their child's IEP meeting by measuring their agreement with specific statements about activities preparing for and occurring during the IEP meeting. Survey questions were developed following an extensive literature review of parents' perceptions of their child's IEP meeting, the researcher's personal experiences of attending IEP meetings for her child and others, and feedback from parents and experts. Specifically, the extant research on parents'

perceptions suggests many parents do not feel IEP teams consider their input, do not involve them in decision-making about their child's educational program, and do not feel they are respected as equal members of the team. Therefore items were included that related to these issues. Research also supports culturally and linguistically diverse parents' claims that barriers, such as negative professional attitudes and low levels of English language proficiency make it difficult, if not impossible, for parents to participate actively in IEP meetings as intended under the IDEA. Items were drafted so that they could be read and understood easily.

Existing surveys located in the literature review guided the development of content for items in this survey. Studies, which utilized a survey to assess parents' perceptions about their child's educational program, were identified and specific survey items were reviewed and modified slightly to fit the needs of this study. Tucker and Schwartz (2013) utilized a survey to assess perceptions of parents of children with autism and professionals about collaboration. The 36 item questionnaire was divided into five sections measuring collaboration, supportive practices and professional behavior, conflict and resolution, service needs, and educational and outcome priorities. The items relating to attitudes about the IEP meeting were examined. Similarly, Martin, Marshall and Sale (2004) studied the perceptions of IEP meeting participants, including parents utilizing a written questionnaire. Specific items measuring participants' perceptions about experiences in the IEP meeting were reviewed. Lastly, the *Parent's View of IEP Meeting Questionnaire* (Rehfeldt, 2007), utilized by Rehfeldt, Clark, and Lee (2012) in a study investigating the effects of a transition intervention on IEP meeting outcomes provided additional items to measure parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting. Table 3-1 displays the items from studies in the literature review alongside the adapted version of the item contained in the survey utilized in this study.

Table 3-1

Adaptation of Survey Items from Existing Studies

Original Items	Adaptation
Tucker and Schwartz (2013)	
Includes my suggestions for goals and objectives for the IEP	I help decide goals and objectives for my child
Attends IEP and other meetings	My child's IEP team meeting happens at a time that is convenient for me
Takes my suggestions into account regarding my child's IEP	My child's team listens and responds to the concerns I have about my child's school program.
Knowledgeable about my child's disability	The people from the school have knowledge about my child's disability
Martin, Marshall and Sale (2004)	
I talked at the meeting	I am given enough time to ask questions
I helped make the decisions	I help decide goals and objectives for my child
	I am involved in making decisions about my child's services
I understood what was said	I understand what everyone is saying
Rehfeldt, Clark, and Lee (2012)	
I understood what was said	I understand what everyone is saying
I believe people listened to me at the meeting	My child's team listens and responds to the concerns I have about my child's school program.

Next, items based on this researcher's personal experience, were included in the survey. These items related to: whether the IEP meeting is scheduled at a time convenient for the parent, whether materials are provided to the parent prior to the meeting and whether the parent is given sufficient time to read materials when they are provided to the parent at the IEP meeting. The resulting survey contained 12 items that reflect a range of issues concerning parents' participation in decision-making at IEP meetings.

The initial survey was field tested with 19 parents of children with various disabilities. Parents were asked to give feedback concerning the readability of the survey statements and clarity of all questions. Comments received from parents revealed that in general, parents found the survey easy to read. One parent questioned whether respondents would be required to answer all questions and another suggested adding a response choice “Don’t know” for questions regarding child’s disability category. The survey was subsequently revised to incorporate those suggestions and was reviewed by a panel of five experts, all individuals with doctorate level education and who have experience developing surveys and working with families of children with disabilities. Feedback from experts primarily involved the placement of questions within the survey, whether skip logic was employed in the development of the survey questions and the appropriateness of that logic. Also, a suggestion was made to modify the wording of the informational text at the beginning of the survey in order to simplify terminology and make it more readable for parents with varying educational levels. All comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the survey. Final Flesch-Kincaid readability statistics for the declarative statements measuring parents’ perceptions of the IEP meeting were calculated at the 5.9 grade level. To ensure the survey was accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse parents, the survey and the informational flyer were both translated into Spanish through a professional translation company, Interpreters & Translators, Inc.. A certification of authenticity of the translation was received (See Appendices B and D). A Spanish-speaking staff member of the UCEDD reviewed the final version of the translation in order to make sure all words translated well from English to Spanish. This study provided the opportunity to validate this instrument as a measure of parents’ perceptions about their experiences in IEP meetings.

The final iteration of the survey consisted of four sections; each section focused on a different area of inquiry (See Appendices A and C). The sections included: 1) general information about the parent and child, 2) statements about parent's perceptions of the IEP meeting, 3) open-ended responses, and 4) information about other children. The first section of the survey collected demographic information about the parent and family as well as child's age, grade level, and disability. It also asked whether the child attended school in a priority school district. The second section asked parents to respond to statements about their IEP meeting experiences. Utilizing a five-point scale, which ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree," parents were asked to rate their agreement with statements about the IEP meeting. The survey utilized all-direct stems combined with the bidirectional response options referenced above in order to increase internal consistency of the survey (Barnette, 2000). The statements included in this part of the survey are listed in Table 3-2.

The two open-ended response questions included in section three of the survey provided data for qualitative analysis. These questions simply asked respondents to describe their "best" and "worst" experiences in an IEP meeting for their child. The final section of the survey asked information about other children in the household, including the age of other children, their gender and whether any other children had IEPs.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used for screening the survey data and all subsequent data analysis. Prior to data analysis, the data were screened for missing data, data entry errors, and respondent's authorization to submit responses and participate in this survey. Descriptive data procedures were used for this purpose. Listwise deletion within SPSS 21.0 was used in all analyses. Frequency and descriptive statistics were

Table 3-2

Survey Items Measuring Parents' Perceptions of IEP Experiences

Items

1. My child's IEP team meeting happens at a time that is convenient for me.
 2. I understand the written information I am given.
 3. I understand what everyone is saying.
 4. The people from the school have knowledge about my child's disability.
 5. I have enough time to read (or have read to me) all written reports before decisions are made.
 6. I am given enough time to ask questions.
 7. My child's team listens and responds to the concerns I have about my child's school program.
 8. The team considers my opinions before decisions are made.
 9. I help decide goals and objectives for my child.
 10. I am involved in making decisions about my child's services.
 11. I am involved in deciding how much time my child spends with his/her peers during the school day.
 12. The people from the school treat me with respect.
-

used to organize, summarize and describe the results of the items in the first section of the survey. Since this was a survey specifically developed by the researcher for this study, previous reliability data on this survey was not available.

Factor analysis was conducted with the study data to determine the factors that contribute to differences in parental perceptions. This analysis checked the "relationship among the items on the instrument to ascertain if there exists constructs that help us explain the covariation among the items. If meaningful covariation among items exists, the clustering of items to form scales on the instruments will be supported" (Gable & Wolf, 1993, p. 105). The results of the factor analysis are presented in more detail in Chapter Four.

In order to address research question one, "With which items describing IEP meeting experiences do parents indicate the strongest agreement?" descriptive statistics were used to organize, summarize and describe results. Due to the fact that there were no respondent fathers

in the sample, research question three, “Is there any difference between fathers’ and mothers’ perceptions of the IEP meeting?” was not analyzed. In addition, as a result of the small sample size and the homogeneity of the sample, research question five, “Is there any difference in parental perceptions between parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds?” was not analyzed. These issues are discussed further under study limitations in Chapter Five.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted in order to address the remaining research questions and to identify whether significant differences existed between parents’ perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences. This omnibus test statistic was utilized to determine if there were differences in the dependent variables measuring parent perception, based on five independent variables, parent’s household income, parent education level, child’s gender, child’s disability, and child’s grade level. The following research questions were evaluated in this manner:

- RQ2. Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions between parents of students in different grades?
- RQ4. Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions between parents of different socioeconomic status?
- RQ6. Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions between parents of students with different disabilities?
- RQ7. Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions between parents of boys and girls?
- RQ8. Is there any significant difference in the perceptions of parents who have different levels of education?

Appropriate procedures were utilized to determine if the assumptions necessary to analyze the data in MANOVA were met. The small sample size and the relative homogeneity of the sample resulted in the likelihood that test assumptions were violated. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

In order to answer Research questions nine and 10, “What are parents perceptions regarding their best experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?” and “What are parents perceptions regarding their worst experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?” data received in response to the two open-ended questions in the survey were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) guidelines for content analysis. The researcher read the responses received to each question a minimum of three times in order to become familiar with the data. Each response was then bracketed into units of analysis. Each unit of analysis was placed on an index card for further analysis. Initial definitions for categories began to develop as commonalities were seen across the units of analysis. Category definitions were refined as the bracketed units of analysis were re-read. Definitions of mutually exclusive categories were developed so that each unit of analysis fit only one category. Two doctoral students at the UCEDD agreed to conduct a peer examination of the data. The students received instruction on qualitative analysis from a post-doctorate researcher at the UCEDD experienced in qualitative research. The students separately examined the bracketed units of analysis and developed categories for the units of analysis. They then discussed and reached consensus on the definitions of categories for all units of analysis. The researcher then reviewed the categories developed by the students and compared them to those developed by the researcher. Themes were then developed. These are reported in Chapter Four.

Summary

Parents of children receiving special education services in grades three, four and five, in Connecticut public schools were recruited to participate in an online survey measuring their perceptions of their children's IEP meetings. Respondents who completed all of the items in the second section of the survey were included in the factor analysis and subsequent MANOVA test. Qualitative data from the responses to the two open-ended questions in section two of the survey were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) guidelines for content analysis. The next chapter describes the results of these analyses in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of the parental perceptions of their children's IEP meeting experiences are presented in this chapter. The results of the study are reported using both quantitative and qualitative data. Using the Examining Parents' Perceptions of the IEP Meeting Survey, general information was collected on parental demographic status and perceptions of their children's IEP meetings. This data was used to answer research questions one, two, four, six, seven and eight. Included within this survey were two open-ended questions that provided the qualitative data that was used to answer research questions nine and 10. First, the results obtained from the quantitative data are described followed by an interpretation of the results of the qualitative data.

Demographic Information on Sample

Before reviewing the results of the research questions, an overview of the sample demographics is presented. There were approximately 70,785 students (ages three through 21) receiving special education services in Connecticut in the 2013/2014 school year (SEDAC, 2013). Of these 15,083 students were in grades three, four or five. Parents of those children were recruited to complete this survey.

At the close of data collection, 63 responses to the survey were received. The data were cleaned by removing responses where respondents did not meet the study criteria, responses in which respondents did not authorize the submission of their responses. In addition, the data were examined for missingness, as respondents could skip questions on the survey. There were 34 responses available for analysis in this study.

Table 4-1

Number of Students Receiving Special Education Services in Third, Fourth and Fifth Grades During the 2013/2014 School Year in Connecticut

Grade Level	Number of Students
Third	4,554
Fourth	5,026
Fifth	5,503
Total	15,083

Note. Adapted from Special Education Data Application and Collection (SEDAC), Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Data Collection, 2014

The demographics of the 34 respondents suggest a homogenous group, the majority being White mothers, whose primary language was English, who had a four-year college education or more, and a household income of \$80,000 or more. The limitations of this homogenous sample will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, but need to be acknowledged at the outset. Because of the homogeneity of the sample, the researcher was unable to compare the perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse parents or the perceptions of fathers and mothers, originally described as research questions three and five. In addition, the analyses of data to answer research questions four and eight, which concerned the comparison of parents' perceptions by socioeconomic status and educational level, were affected by the homogeneity of the sample. As a result of the small sample size, specific categories within the variables household income and parent education level had to be combined in order to allow for statistical analysis.

Table 4-2 summarizes the data collected on the sample of parents in this study. This indicates that this sample may not be representative of the population of parents of children with disabilities receiving special education services in Connecticut public schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

The sample of parents that completed the study survey consists of all women, 97% of which identified themselves as the children’s mother. Only one respondent identified herself as “grandparent.” Of the total sample, 74% of parents reported their child was male (n=25), whereas, 26% (n=9) were female. Thirty-three of 34 respondents indicated their primary

Table 4-2

Individual and Family Characteristics as a Percentage of the Sample

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Status of respondent		
Mother	33	97
Grandparent	1	3
Primary Language Spoken		
English	33	97
Spanish	1	3
Race		
White	30	88
African American	2	6
Asian/More than one race	2	6
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	5	15
Non-Hispanic	29	85
Household Income		
Less than \$19,999	2	6
\$20,000 – \$39,999	2	6
\$40,000 - \$59,999	1	3
\$60,000 - \$79,999	4	12
\$80,000 and over	20	59
Preferred not to answer	5	15
Education level completed		
Less than high school	1	3
High school/ GED	3	9
Some college	3	9
Two year degree	2	6
Four year degree	14	41
Masters degree	9	26
Doctorate/ professional degree	2	6
Child’s Gender		
Male	25	74
Female	9	26

Table 4-2
Individual and Family Characteristics as a Percentage of the Sample

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Child's Grade		
3 rd Grade	9	26
4 th Grade	12	35
5 th Grade	13	38
Child's Primary Disability		
Autism	9	26
Specific Learning Disability	10	29
Intellectual Disability	7	21
Multiple Disabilities	4	12
Emotional Disturbance	2	6
Other Health Impairment	1	3
Speech/Language	1	3

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

language as “English.” One respondent indicated “Spanish” as her primary language; however indicated “English” in response to a question on other languages spoken in the home. It should be noted that no responses were received to the Spanish version of the survey. The overwhelming majority (88%, n=30) of parents described themselves as “White” while two parents indicated “African American” and one each responded “Asian” and “More than one race.” Only five parents (15%) described themselves as “Hispanic” whereas the majority (85%, n=29) described themselves as “Non-Hispanic.”

A small percentage of parents (12%, n=4) indicated their highest level of education as “less than high school” or “high school/General Educational Development (GED),” whereas the majority of parents (74%, n=25) reported achieving a four year degree or higher. Not surprisingly, the majority of parents (69%, n=20) also reported household incomes of \$80,000 or higher. Twenty-six percent of parents (n=9) reported their household incomes to be less than

\$80,000 and of these, two parents reported their household income as “Less than \$19,999.” Five parents preferred not to divulge their household income.

Twenty-six percent of parents (n=9) reported their child was in grade three, 35% (n=12) reported their child was in grade four, and 38% (n=13) reported their child was in grade five. Twenty-nine percent (n=10) of parents reported their children’s primary disability as “Specific learning disability” and 26% (n=9) of parents reported their children’s primary disability as “Autism.” “Intellectual disability” was reported by 21% (n=7) of parents and “Multiple disabilities” was reported by 12% (n=4) of parents. The remaining parents indicated their children’s disability as “Emotional disturbance,” (n=2) “Other health impairment,” (n=1) and “Speech/language disorder” (n=1).

Research Questions

The following research questions originally guided this study:

- 1) With which survey items describing IEP meeting experiences do parents indicate the strongest agreement?
- 2) Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of students in different grades?
- 3) Is there any significant difference between fathers and mothers’ perceptions of the IEP meeting?
- 4) Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of different socioeconomic status?
- 5) Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds?

- 6) Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of students with different disabilities?
- 7) Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of boys and girls?
- 8) Is there any significant difference in the parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents who have different levels of education?
- 9) How do parents describe their “best” experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?
- 10) How do parents describe their “worst” experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?

Research question three was designed to determine if significant differences existed between fathers and mothers in their parental perceptions of the IEP meeting. However, no responses were received from fathers and therefore, the researcher was unable to analyze this question. Also, research question five sought to determine if significant differences existed in parental perceptions between parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This required the sample to include parents who represented culturally and linguistically diverse groups. However, the sample only included four responses from parents indicating a race other than White. As a result, the researcher was not able to analyze this question with this data set. These issues are discussed further in Chapter Five under limitations and future research.

Reliability of the Survey Instrument

The dependent variable in this study, parents’ perceptions of their children’s IEP meeting, was measured with the *Examining Parents’ Perceptions of the IEP Meeting Survey*. Parents rated their agreement with 12 specific statements about the IEP meeting on a five-point response scale (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree). The statements on the survey focused on parents’ perceptions about the activities and behaviors experienced in

their child's IEP meeting. Item analyses and Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability information are presented in Table 4-3.

Overall, internal consistency estimates of reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha were .932 for the entire scale. Since all items had good correlations with remaining items and the overall internal consistency reliabilities were very good for this instrument, consideration was not given to removing any item from the scale. Based on this information, the survey instrument was considered reliable.

Table 4-3

Alpha Reliability for Parent Perception Survey

Item	Item Response Percentages ^a					Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>r</i>	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability If Item Deleted	Overall Scale Alpha Reliability
	1	2	3	4	5					
										.932
1. Convenience of IEP scheduling time	9	18	9	50	15	3.44	1.211	.496	.933	
2. Understand materials	12	6	9	44	29	3.74	1.286	.646	.928	
3. Understand what is said	15	9	9	44	24	3.53	1.354	.695	.926	
4. Knowledge of child's disability	18	15	15	41	12	3.15	1.329	.736	.925	
5. Time to read	21	38	3	29	9	2.68	1.342	.577	.931	
6. Time to ask questions	12	18	15	35	21	3.35	1.323	.764	.924	
7. Team listens	15	21	9	44	12	3.18	1.314	.784	.923	
8. Team values parent Opinion	18	18	21	35	9	3.00	1.279	.789	.923	
9. Parent decide goals	29	21	15	29	6	2.62	1.349	.677	.927	
10. Parent makes decisions	15	18	18	38	12	3.15	1.282	.800	.922	
11. Time with peers	24	9	35	21	12	2.88	1.320	.701	.926	
12. Team treats parent with respect	12	12	18	29	29	3.53	1.354	.767	.924	

Note.^aFor Item response percentage: 1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly agree.

Factor Analysis

A Principal Component Factor Analysis with an oblique rotation was completed on the data derived from the 34 respondents completing all perception statements in the survey. This method was chosen in order to account for variance in the measured variables and to reduce the variables into a smaller set of variables for further analysis (McCoach, Gable, & Madura, 2013). An oblique rotation method was chosen because it was hypothesized that the factors were correlated.

Prior to conducting the analysis, the data were inspected and tested for violations of assumptions necessary to carry out the analysis. The Bartlett Test of Sphericity compares the correlation matrix for these items to a matrix of zero correlations (Pett, et al, 2003). From this test, it was determined that it is highly unlikely that these correlations were obtained from a population with zero correlation. In addition, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) was performed and measured .823, which is good (Beavers, et al., 2013). Upon review of the Anti-Image Matrices, MSA for each item was above 0.7. Items were also tested to determine if they were highly correlated. Multicollinearity can be tested by inspecting the summary measure, determinant, and checking its value. Values above .00001 are desirable (Berry, 1985). The determinant equaled .0000209. In addition to these tests, consideration was given to the small sample size in deciding if a factor analysis should be conducted. The sample size was less than recommended which may have affected the reliability of the analysis (Field, 2005).

Based on Eigenvalues calculated by SPSS, two factors were extracted in the analysis and both were retained. Together these factors explained roughly 67.7% of all the variables' variances. The scree plot in Figure 4-1 supports this conclusion (Cattell, 1966).

As stated, two factors were extracted in the analysis. Conceptually, these items are related to each other in that they describe activities that occur during the IEP meeting. The names given to each factor describe activities in the control of the team versus those that rest with the parent. The first factor, *Team Behavior*, contained nine items that included content related to activities that occur during the IEP meeting involving the IEP team working together to discuss the child's services, school programs, time with peers, and making decisions collaboratively. Cronbach's alpha reliability measure for Factor One was .930. The second factor, *Parent Behavior*, contained three items that addressed parent's understanding of written and verbal information communicated during the IEP meeting. It also addressed whether the IEP meeting occurs at a time convenient for the parent. Cronbach's alpha for Factor Two, was .827.

Figure 4-1. Scree Plot Showing Eigenvalues Obtained From Principal Component Analysis

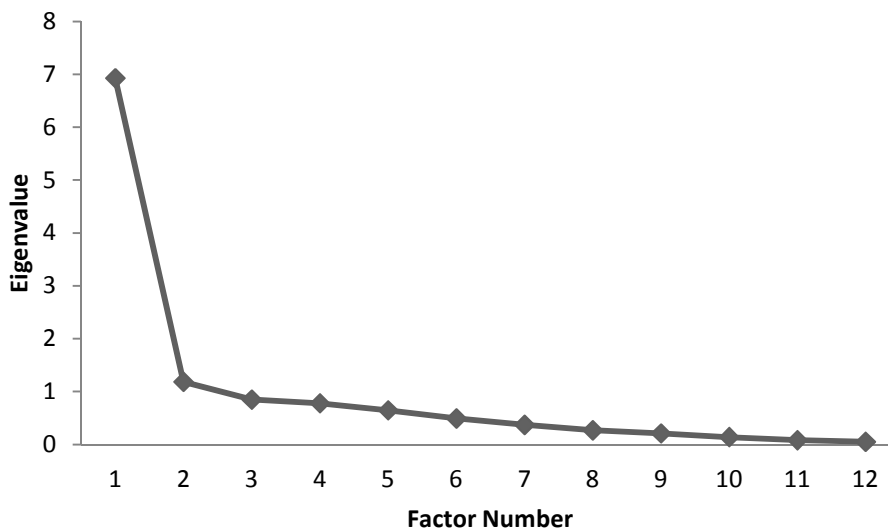


Figure 4-1. Scree plot showing Eigenvalues leveling off after the second eigenvalue suggesting extracting two factors is appropriate.

A review of the factor loadings for each item in each factor was performed. All but one of the 12 items included in the analysis displayed factor loadings of 0.5 or above on any one of the two factors extracted in the analysis. Item Five loaded on Factor One, Team Behavior, at

.451. Although this was below 0.5, it was still sufficient and the item was retained. Table 4-4 lists the items and their loadings for the two factors.

Table 4-4

Factor Loadings for Principal Component Analysis with Oblique Rotation of Parent Perception Survey

Factor	Item	Loadings
Team Behavior	4.	.801
	5.	.451
	6.	.849
	7.	.921
	8.	.908
	9.	.666
	10.	.680
	11.	.738
	12.	.929
Parent Behavior	1.	.702
	2.	.954
	3.	.863

Research Question One: With which items describing IEP meeting experiences do parents indicate the strongest agreement?

Descriptive statistics were used to answer research question one. In section two of the survey, parents were asked to respond about their agreement with statements about experiences at IEP meetings. The statements used a five-point response scale. The frequency, percentages of responses and mean response for each item are reported in Table 4-5.

The data, which were collected through the survey provided information about what this sample of parents, have experienced in the IEP process. After reviewing the frequencies and percentages in Table 4-5, the items with which parents noted the most agreement included: Item

Two. I understand the written information I am given (Mean = 3.74), Item Three. I understand what everyone is saying (Mean=3.53), Item 12. The people from the school treat me with respect (Mean=3.53), and Item One. My child's IEP team meeting happens at a time that is convenient for me (Mean=3.44).

The percentages in Table 4-5 suggest parents understand the written information that they receive, as almost 74% of parents indicated, "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with this statement. Nearly 68% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what everyone was saying at the IEP meeting and 59% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that people from the school treat them with respect. Sixty-five percent of parents reported their child's IEP meeting happens at a time that is convenient for them. Slightly more than half (56%) of the parents responding agreed or strongly agreed they are given enough time to ask questions at the meeting. When asked whether the team considers the parent's opinions before decisions are made, 12% of parents strongly agreed, 44% agreed yet 35% strongly disagreed or disagreed. Fifty-three percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that people from their child's school had knowledge about their child's disability and 50% agreed or strongly agreed they were involved in making decisions about my child's services.

Fifty percent of parents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that they help decide goals and objectives for their child, and 59% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that the team listens and responds to the concerns the parent has about their child's school program. Thirty-five percent of parents gave no opinion, 32% of parents strongly disagreed or disagreed, and 32% of parents strongly agreed or agreed they are involved in deciding how much time their child spends with his/her peers during the school day.

In summary, after reviewing the data, there is inconsistency in the responses. While parents reported experiences that are positive and would appear to facilitate collaboration, parents have also indicated they are not participating in decision-making responsibilities of the IEP team. A majority (59%) of parents did not agree that the team listens and responds to their concerns about their child's school program. Fifty percent of parents did not agree that they were able to help decide their child's goals and objectives. Thirty-two percent disagreed that they were involved in making decisions about their child's services and another 18% did not indicate an opinion one way or the other on this important item.

Table 4-5

Frequency and Percentage of Parents' Responses to Each Survey Item (N=34)

Item Number	Level of Agreement				
	1 n(%)	2 n(%)	3 n(%)	4 n(%)	5 n(%)
Factor One – Team Behavior					
4.	6(18)	5(15)	5(15)	14(41)	4(12)
5.	7(21)	13(38)	1 (3)	10(29)	3 (9)
6.	4(12)	6(18)	5(15)	12(35)	7(21)
7.	5(15)	7(21)	3 (9)	15(44)	4(12)
8.	6(18)	6(18)	7(21)	12(35)	3 (9)
9.	10(29)	7(21)	5(15)	10(29)	2 (6)
10.	5(15)	6(18)	6(18)	13(38)	4(12)
11.	8(24)	3 (9)	12(35)	7(21)	4(12)
12.	4(12)	4(12)	6(18)	10(29)	10(29)
Factor Two – Parent Behavior					
1.	3 (9)	6(18)	3 (9)	17(50)	5(15)
2.	4(12)	2 (6)	3 (9)	15(44)	10(29)
3.	5(15)	3 (9)	3 (9)	15(44)	8(24)

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree.

Research Questions Two, Four, Six, Seven, and Eight: Is there any significant difference in parental perceptions of their IEP meeting experiences between parents of students in different grades, parents of different socioeconomic status, parents of students with different disabilities, parents of boys and girls, and parents who have different levels of education?

Research questions two, four, six, seven and eight were intended to determine if there were significant differences in parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting between parents of children in different grades, specifically grades three, four and five based on the five independent variables: child's gender, child's disability, parent's education level, and socioeconomic status as measured by household income. Household income was defined as less than \$40,000, \$40,000 to \$79,999, and \$80,000 and over. Child disability was categorized as autism (ASD), specific learning disability (LD), intellectual disability (ID), and a final category that included emotional disturbance, other health impairment, multiple disabilities, and speech and language disorders. Parent education level was categorized as less than high school or high school/GED, some college or 2 year degree, 4 year degree, and master degree and above.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed on the two dependent variables, Team Behavior and Parent Behavior, as measures of parent perception, to determine if there were significant differences between parents' perceptions and all of the five independent variables. While the dependent variables, Team Behavior and Parent Behavior, are correlated, it is hypothesized that they represent different aspects of parents' perceptions. A multivariate test was deemed appropriate as there was a strong possibility that conducting multiple univariate analysis of variance tests (ANOVA) would result in redundancy of information due to the lack of independence and the relationship between the dependent variables.

Prior to conducting the MANOVA, the data were checked to determine if any of the assumptions of conducting a MANOVA were violated. It was determined that all assumptions had not been met thereby compromising the validity of the results. Most importantly, the size of the sample was not adequate. As a result, Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was not able to be conducted due to the lack of covariance between two or more levels of independent variables, and the researcher could not confirm the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance was met. Finally, the dependent variables may have been too highly correlated (.598) as to violate the assumption of no multicollinearity.

However, the *F* tests for both dimensions on the parent perceptions scale were not significant, suggesting no significant group differences existed in parents' perceptions, as measured by Team Behavior and Parent Behavior across all five independent variables. Given that the omnibus test was not significant, there was no further analysis of the data.

Qualitative Data

The second section of the survey completed by parents asked them to describe the best and worst experiences they have had at an IEP meeting for their child. Twenty-six responses were received that described parents' best experiences while 29 responses were received from parents describing their worst experiences. The researcher read all responses a minimum of three times in order to become familiar with the data. Each individual's response was then bracketed into units of analysis. Each unit of analysis was placed on an index card for further review and analysis. Thirty-nine units of analysis were identified from the data on best experiences and forty-four units were identified from the data on worst experiences. During this open coding process, the researcher used the index cards to identify similar concepts across the units of analysis. By repeatedly reviewing the units of analysis, initial definitions for categories began to

develop as commonalities were seen across the units of analysis. Category definitions were refined as the bracketed units of analysis were re-read. Definitions of mutually exclusive categories were developed so that each unit of analysis fit only one category. Two doctoral students at the UCEDD agreed to conduct a peer examination of the data. The students received instruction on qualitative analysis from a post-doctorate researcher at the UCEDD experienced in qualitative research. The students separately examined the bracketed units of analysis and developed categories for the units of analysis. They then discussed and reached consensus on the definitions of categories for all units of analysis. The researcher then reviewed the categories developed by the students and compared them to those developed by the researcher. Consensus was achieved and three categories emerged from the data on best experiences: Team, Options, and Advocate and four categories emerged from the data on worst experiences: One-sided, Misuse of data, Placement, and Underprepared. The researcher next reviewed the categories to determine how they related to each other. The relationships reflect how the categories interact and relate to the context within which the parents are responding.

This level of review led to the development of patterns of parents' experiences at IEP meetings, which then led to themes in response to each research question. Two themes were identified from the categories in best experiences. These were: 1) Parents value a team approach to the IEP meeting characterized by communication, collaboration, and providing parents with choices, and 2) Parents need support from others at times in order to get what child needs. One main theme was associated with categories related to worst experiences. This was: 1) Parents value their meaningful participation in all team decisions and hold schools accountable for implementation of IEP and decisions made by IEP team.

The findings associated with each research question are described in the following sections. Each finding along with the contributing data categories that support it are described and represented.

Findings Related to Research Question #9: How do parents describe their “best” experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?

Finding One: Parents value a team approach to the IEP meeting characterized by communication, collaboration, and providing parents with choices.

Parents in this study associate a team approach to decision making and discussion at their child’s IEP meeting, including exchange of information, collaborative decision-making, and provision of options with their best experiences at the IEP meeting. The data categories contributing to this finding included Team and Options. Responses reflected a range of experiences by parents.

Team. Within the category of Team, parents’ comments suggest they value consistent communication with the school, as well as collaborative team approaches which lead the parent to feel valued and supported. Examples include: “when the teacher in fifth grade special education resource was in constant communication with me weekly” and “she is bilingual and understood how I felt.” At the same time, parents in this study connect individual people with positive experiences: “my very first IEP meeting was fabulous, the Special Ed director left our district” and “support received by director of education who understood my son’s challenges, the adverse impact on him.”

Satisfaction with the IEP meeting experience is reflected in responses from parents in this study who comment on collaborative approaches to discussion and decision-making. For example, parents stated “the staff were all very welcoming and asked us questions about my

son's behaviors and performance" and "he treated me with respect and showed interest in my ideas and opinions." Other comments revealed parents in this study believed they need to be prepared for meetings and appreciated when schools cooperated in communicating with them prior to a meeting. Parents stated, "these meetings are super important and you need to be ready as you can be" and "I attend SEPTA meetings, support groups and other various organizations to educate myself." Further, parents identified specific requests as reflected in the following two comments: "I would like to get the paperwork prior to the meeting" and "I have (a) pre-meeting with (the) teacher to know what's coming my way."

At the same time parents in this study revealed they did not always experience the team collaborative approach to IEP meetings. The following comments suggest parents in this study experience frustration: "They are rude, will not answer any of my questions," "I do not like them but must attend so my child gets FAPE," "Every IEP (meeting) has been cordial yet fake," and "I don't always feel like I am heard." Other comments reflect a passiveness in parents' interactions at the IEP meeting: "I know that many parents in other districts are not given that opportunity" and "Each meeting I am permitted to express my concerns prior to the other team members."

Options. Within the category of Options, comments from parents in this study included references to choices for their child's educational programming as well as placement. The most common set of responses related to Options from parents in this study talked about alternatives the school provided to meet their child's specific needs. For example, one parent stated "hearing the positives and how they are going to work on and address the areas of concern," and another said "some services that were mentioned in the IEP, however were not documented in the hours of services, which they added," and "when the team included a 20+ bullet point list of accommodations to assist my son with succeeding." The parents in this study also made

comments about needing to make changes to their child's IEP and having choices if things weren't working as planned. Comments included "I mainly call for PPT meeting to make changes and continue to follow up," and "my motto (is) if one way is not working we need to try another."

Parents also described experiences which were negative and imply that parents felt disappointed by the school's actions. Such responses included "they said she definitely qualifies for special ed but that was it, nothing has been clear or specific since then," "they speak as if they have knowledge, but their actions say otherwise," and "I was told she was going to be in a small structured classroom, turns out it was not what was explained nor what is happening."

Finding Two: Parents need support from others at times in order to get what child needs.

Finding Two relates to comments by parents in this study about their decision to hire an advocate in order for their child to receive the services they believed were necessary. These responses suggest the parents in this study perceived their best experiences in an IEP meeting to be those where an advocate was present. Responses from parents classified under the category, Advocate, supported this finding. It is important to note that the data which were classified under this category are distinguishable from those classified under the Team category wherein parents spoke of needing to be prepared and to educate themselves in preparation for IEP team meetings. Parents whose comments are classified under Advocate spoke of the specific need to hire an advocate. Specific comments made by parents included: "when I brought in an Office of Protection and Advocacy advocate, I only then received everything I was asking for," "I still have needed to hire an educational consultant to receive services my children need," and "having a child advocate that was able to explain the process and my rights." Another parent in this study

stated “they tell me if you don’t like it take us to due process, they say they decide.” It is possible the parents in this study who reported hiring an advocate did so in response to similar attitudes among their child’s IEP team.

Findings Related to Research Question 10: How do parents describe their “worst” experiences at their child’s IEP meeting?

Finding One: Parents who have an adversarial relationship with school districts, characterized by denial of services and supports, and a lack of meaningful participation in the decision making process have negative experiences at IEP meetings.

In response to this question, parents in this study submitted comments suggesting they were unable to participate in their decision making responsibilities on their child’s IEP team. Parents in this study described various experiences in which they perceived the schools were unprepared, unreasonably refused to authorize services, pressured parents into agreeing with the school’s position on service or placement issues, denied parents the ability to participate in decision making, and ignored or misconstrued data to support the school’s position on services. The data categories contributing to this finding are One-sided, Placement, Misuse of Data and Underprepared. Each category of data is presented below along with supporting examples of parent’s comments.

One-sided. The largest category of responses from parents to this research question involved the description of experiences in which parents indicated they were denied the ability to participate in decision making, were pressured by school personnel to make specific decisions, and generally encountered adversarial conditions in the IEP meeting. Parents commented on experiences where decisions had been made prior to the IEP meeting or in the absence of the parent. The following comments are examples: “Director held PPT in our absence after multiple

requests from us in writing to hold it on a different date,” she refused to redo IEP until we hired representation,” and “she removed para support and services in our absence.” Also, parents report decisions made without the full team participating: “when not all team members were present and our director of special services was not participating.” Other parents reported feeling pressured by school personnel when discussing a contentious issue: “he was so angry when I repeatedly refused he raised his voice and walked out of the meeting,” “the principal was putting a lot of pressure on me for IQ testing,” “he was a bully, trying to intimidate me to do what he wanted,” and “the team kept telling me it was the only thing I could do for my child to stay in public school and it was the right thing to do.”

Parents also reported their relationship with their child’s school as an adversarial one, revealing some parents in this study felt they were in a constant battle whose concerns were not being listened to. Comments which support this include: “having the school system say no to everything,” “having to pay \$5,000 for a child advocate in order for the board of Ed to say yes to everything I originally wanted,” and “it seems to me the older they get the harder it is to establish what and how needs are addressed.”

Placement. This category of responses included comments from parents which depicted the school had not followed through on services and supports included in the child’s IEP or had not included services which had been discussed in the IEP meeting on the IEP. Specific comments included: “evals that were supposed to be done were never completed and director tried to cover it up,” “I was told that my son would receive 20 minutes of written expression instruction 1:4 and 20 minutes 1:1 only for it not to be put on the IEP,” and “they did agree to conduct their own testing, which took over 6 weeks and they came up with the same results as the independent evaluation.”

Misuse of Data. Some parents in this study also reported experiences in which their child's school either refused, ignored or misused data concerning the parent's child. Comments received suggest that although parents were told their independent reports would be considered, they did not believe they had been. The following comments provide support for these concerns: "they told me they will decide what is best and my outside doctors are wrong," "the outside testing and recommendations were ignored by the Special Ed Director who had an agenda to use my daughter's funding for her projects," "the school staff minimizes my child's behavior history condition symptoms and focus(es) only on clinician comment that supports that minimization," and "all professionals with concerns as well as my own concerns were countered and left out of official IEP documentation."

Underprepared. In this final data category, comments from parents in this study suggest that team members were sometimes not prepared for team meetings, while parents continue to feel the need to educate themselves. Two specific comments to illustrate this are: "my older son had just transitioned to middle school, his records were not read, his transition was a train wreck," and "the team should have been more on top of things before the meeting had to even be called." At the same time some parents reported they have always pursued education as their children grew: "I went to every training, groups, lots of reading and 7 years later continue."

Summary

Results from the quantitative data showed that while parents in this sample reported experiences that are positive and would appear to facilitate collaboration, parents have also indicated they are not participating in decision-making responsibilities on the IEP team. A majority (59%) of parents did not agree that the team listened and responded to their concerns about their child's school program. Fifty percent of parents did not agree that they were able to

help decide their child's goals and objectives. Thirty-two percent disagreed that they were involved in making decisions about their child's services and another 18% were ambivalent on this issue. When comparing parents' perceptions between different groups (parents of children in different grades, different genders, and having different disabilities, parents of different socioeconomic status, and parents having different education levels), no significant differences were found. The results of the qualitative analysis also confirm that parents perceive that it is their responsibility and right to participate in the decisions made by their child's IEP teams and that they seek a collaborative approach in doing so. However, comments received in response to both research questions suggest parents in this study feel their experiences have not allowed them to participate at the level they desire. A discussion of these results, implications, as well as limitations of the study and proposed future directions for research are contained in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the study are discussed and are related to other research regarding parents' perceptions of their experiences at their child's IEP meeting. The implications of the findings are then summarized and ideas for future research are suggested.

This study examined the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities about their experiences at IEP meetings. Parents' perceptions were surveyed and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Given the long standing discrepancy in the research as to the IDEA requirement for parent participation in the IEP meeting as well as in decision-making about the IEP, and the actual practices in IEP team meetings, this research is relevant and important. It is apparent from the qualitative data collected in this study that parents' perceptions about their experiences in their child's IEP meetings continue to draw attention to their lack of meaningful participation and decision-making about their child's IEP.

Summary of Research Findings

Parent participation in their child's IEP meeting and decision-making opportunities in the evaluation, placement, and implementation of services for their child is not a new concept (EHA, 1975; IDEA, 2004). As the literature review reveals, researchers have been examining the extent to which parents have been involved in their child's IEP meeting for decades. This study measured parents' perceptions of their experiences at IEP meetings for their children in third, fourth, and fifth grades. In general, the responses received from parents in this study to the perception statements and open-ended questions in the survey can be summarized as follows:

- Parents are able to understand what is said and understand written materials they receive at IEP team meetings.
- Most parents feel that teams treat them with respect at IEP meetings.
- Parents perceive that their opinions are not taken into consideration by IEP teams before decisions are made.
- Parents do not feel they participate in decision-making about their child's goals and objectives.
- Parents feel they do not have enough time to read reports at IEP meetings.
- Parents do not feel they are involved in making decisions about their child's services
- Parents want to be involved in a meaningful way in all decision making about their child's educational program through a collaborative approach with team members

These findings suggest that the parents in this study were able to attend their child's IEP meetings and understood what was happening in the meetings. However, they sometimes perceived their presence at meetings to be insignificant and inconsequential, yet compulsory in order to satisfy a legislative mandate (See school district responsibilities as described in 34 CFR §300.322 (b)(1)). This is discouraging in that parents' efforts do not correlate with meaningful participation in decisions about their child's education. Parents' responses to the open-ended questions in the survey which asked about their best and worst experiences at IEP meetings revealed unexpectedly that many negative comments were received from parents when asked specifically to describe their best experiences at their child's IEP meeting. Specifically, within the category of Team, comments by parents in this study reflected a spectrum of experiences

involving communication, collaboration and feeling valued at IEP team meetings. Examining the relationship among the categories of data from these responses (Team, Options, and Advocate) suggests that best experiences were related to team decision making which involved parents being provided with options and choices made through cooperation and collaboration among team members. Decisions to engage an advocate were related to negative experiences with the IEP team. In regard to parents' worst experiences, categories of data (One-sided, Placement, Misuse of Data, and Underprepared) were related in that they all reflect a perceived disregard for parent participation in the IEP decision making process.

Specific Research Findings and Comparison with Prior Research.

When examining the overall means of parents' perceptions of experiences at the IEP meeting (12 items in section two of the survey), parents reported no average above 3.74 (where 3 represented "Neither agree nor disagree" and 4 represented "Agree"). The parents in this study indicated the most agreement with statements suggesting they understood the written information they were given (74% agreed/strongly agreed), understood what everyone was saying (68% agreed/strongly agreed), and attended meetings at times that were convenient for them (65% agreed/strongly agreed). While this information does imply that these parents had access to information needed to actively participate in the IEP meeting, it does not mean parents were involved in decision-making. Also, it should be noted that the sample of parents completing this survey only included one parent who reported her primary language to be Spanish, and the majority of parents had completed four years of college or more.

Upon examining parents' responses to statements related to their perception of their role in decision-making activities at the IEP meeting, items five through 11 on the parent perception scale, the average rating was 2.98 (where 2 represented "Disagree" and 3 represented "Neither

agree nor disagree). In fact, 50% of parents disagreed or were uncertain about whether they were involved in making decisions about their child's services. Responses received from parents to the open-ended questions in the survey also support this finding. This is consistent with prior research wherein parents were more involved as recipients of information rather than providers and decision-makers (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Lynch & Stein, 1982; and Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000).

For example, a majority of parents (65%) in the present study strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided about whether they helped decide goals and objectives for their child. Garriott, Wandry and Snyder (2000) reported similar findings in that parents felt documents were prepared prior to the IEP meeting without parent input. Garriott, et al. (2000) reported parents felt the team did not value their knowledge or expertise about their child.

Fish (2008), reported 51 parents from one particular family service agency had positive experiences in IEP meetings, felt that educators valued parents' input and treated as equal decision makers. In contrast, the data in the current study show that 56% of parents strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided whether the team considered parents' opinions before decisions were made. Parents in this study provided comments to open-ended questions indicating decisions were made in their child's IEP meetings in their absence. Also, parents in this study reported many experiences where decisions made by the IEP team were one-sided disregarding parents' input. In addition, 62% of parents in this study strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were uncertain about whether they had enough time to read reports before decisions were made in the IEP meeting. Forty-four percent of parents strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided as to whether the IEP team listened and responded to parents' concerns about their child's school program. One parent reported her child's team does not answer her questions

and told her to bring them to due process if she disagreed. Other parents reported feeling that the team did not take their information into account and made decisions regardless of parent's concerns. In addition, 68% of parents strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided as to whether they were involved in deciding how much time their child spent with his/her peers during the school day. These findings were similar to those reported by Garriott, Wandy and Snyder (2000). Although 46% of parents surveyed by Garriott, et al. (2000), reported they always had ample input in the development of their child's IEP, 51% of parents responded they "usually" (24%), "sometimes," or "never" (27%) had input into the IEP. These parents reported frustration that they were not involved in the development of goals and objectives and although they contributed information and opinions at meetings, this was disregarded or not incorporated into the IEP (Garriott, et al., p. 41).

A majority of parents in this study (59%) strongly agreed or agreed they were treated respectfully in the IEP meeting. Similarly, Fish (2008) studied parents overall perception of the IEP meeting and found that generally parents reported positive experiences specifically that they were treated respectfully by the IEP team. Fish stressed the importance of building positive relationships between educators and parents by treating parents as equal partners in IEP meetings. The failure to do this may be the reason why 41% of parents in the current study did not feel they were treated with respect by their child's IEP team. In addition, this perception was further supported by comments made by parents who described their best and worst experiences at IEP meetings. Parents reported feeling pressured to acquiesce to the school's requests. One parent described a confrontational meeting with her child's principal. When the parent continued to refuse consent for testing, the principal became angry, raised his voice, and walked out of the meeting. Upon discovering her child had been bullied at school, another parent was informed her

son's services would be reduced due to her repeated attempts to unveil the circumstances of the bullying.

Actions such as those described above set the tone for future negative experiences with the team. In fact, Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) surveyed parents about their positive and negative experiences at IEP meetings and found that past and current relationships with educational professionals affected their experiences in IEP meetings. Parents made similar comments in the current study. When asked about their positive or best experiences at IEP meetings, three parents made comments about specific persons at their child's school who had made positive impressions on the parents during IEP meetings. At the same time, 10 comments were received to the same question that were decidedly negative. These comments described experiences where educational professionals were perceived to have negative attitudes about parents' participation in the IEP meeting and where educational professionals failed to implement the IEP effectively and appropriately.

Differences in perceptions between groups of parents.

This study addressed whether there were any significant differences in parents' perceptions of the IEP meeting between parents of different groups. Specifically, this study examined differences between parents of children in different grades, parents of boys and girls, parents with different educational backgrounds, parents with different household incomes, and parents of children with different disabilities. No significant differences were found between parents' perceptions for any of the groups identified. This suggests that the parents in this study held similar perceptions about their child's IEP meeting. However, this finding is not surprising considering the homogeneity of the sample group. Parents in this study were generally well educated and their household incomes were over \$80,000. Unfortunately, even the advantage of

education and socioeconomic status did not appear to facilitate more active participation in decision-making responsibilities at IEP meetings for these parents.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study, one limitation which must be considered is the small sample size. The study did not achieve the a priori sample size of 350 parents which would have allowed for an appropriate level of statistical power (.80). While the sample size may be justifiable as an exploratory study (Johanson & Brooks, 2010; Hertzog, 2008) of a specific group of parents (parents of students specifically in grades three through five), statistical significance may not be attainable with a sample of 34 parents. Additionally, the sample did not appear to be representative of the population of parents that were the targeted audience for this survey. The sample was homogenous, in that it consisted entirely female, primarily White mothers, who spoke English, were well educated and had household incomes exceeding \$80,000.

The small sample size may have been related to the manner in which information about the study was disseminated. All recruitment was performed by email and no information was retained on the number of email recipients. It is possible that more targeted recruitment, including direct solicitation of school districts for direct access to parents of students receiving special education services would have increased the sample size. Also, the decision to limit the study to participants who were parents of third, fourth, and fifth grade students, may have had a chilling effect on participation in that the informational material about the study could have confused parents. The rationale in limiting participation to this number was to avoid the potentially confounding issue of changes in the intensity of parental involvement in their child's special education as the child ages (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). The selected grade

range was intended to represent a grade range during which parents are somewhat consistent in their level of involvement.

Finally, data was collected through a self-report survey. It is possible that parents responding to the survey could have reported information inaccurately or dishonestly (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). However, the data collected through the open-ended questions corroborates the data collected through the perception survey, thereby increasing the reliability of the survey data.

Implications

The major findings of this study are that parents of children with disabilities in grades three through five perceive that they are not involved in decision-making responsibilities in their child's IEP meeting. Further, parents do not feel their opinions are taken into consideration by the IEP team before decisions are made.

Suggestions for educators.

Educators need to be aware that the parent participation requirements of the IDEA (IDEA, 2004) have been in place since the inception of the law in 1975. The 2004 reauthorization reaffirms the importance associated with parents' meaningful participation in their child's educational program. This includes decision-making in IEP meetings. Further, federal courts have started holding schools accountable to provide opportunities for parents to participate actively in these meetings. Failure to provide these opportunities has been determined to amount to a failure of FAPE and renders the IEP invalid (*Doug C. v. State of Hawaii Department of Education*, 2012/2013). School leaders need to be cognizant of the implications of their failure to involve parents in the IEP process. Some parents may need more flexibility in scheduling meetings, while others may need translators. Further, if it is at all possible, parents

should be provided with all pertinent written materials prior to the IEP meeting. In the event information is provided for the first time to parents in the IEP meeting, they should not be expected to make decisions without having adequate opportunity to read the documents. This includes having the reports explained to the parent in a language they understand while offering parents an opportunity to ask any questions they may have. Requiring parents to make decisions about the content of a document they have not had the opportunity to read completely is unfair and does not promote parents' meaningful involvement in the IEP process.

Accordingly, specific recommendations to schools include: 1) provide professional development opportunities to school personnel participating in IEP teams on the importance of meaningful parent participation in IEP meetings, 2) provide written materials and reports to parents in advance of IEP meetings, and 3) provide opportunities to parents for education in the special education system, specifically the IEP process and parents' rights and responsibilities..

Suggestions for parents.

Parents of children with disabilities need to become educated about special education law and specifically, their rights in the IEP process. The value of active participation in the IEP process should be reinforced and opportunities for participation should be facilitated by the school. Parents should request their child's team provide them with necessary documentation in a language they understand. Parents should be aware that while the IDEA requires they are given opportunities to be involved in making decisions about their child's educational program, they should do so at the level of involvement with which they are comfortable. Parents can request informal team meetings, in which decisions affecting the IEP are not made, but during which meeting information can be shared and questions asked. Meeting with part of the team more frequently can avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication for parents. For parents who

have difficulty attending meetings during the day, alternatives should be pursued including, meeting at the child's home, telephone conference calls and email communication.

Specific recommendations for parents include: 1) request more frequent meetings with specific members of IEP team, 2) request copies of written information such as reports be provided prior to meetings in which they will be discussed, and 3) request additional meetings to be scheduled to discuss reports which are disclosed at the IEP meeting.

Future Research

This study of the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities in third, fourth, and fifth grades, about their experiences at their child's IEP meetings confirms prior findings, but also demonstrates the need for continued study of parents' perceptions as well as research in interventions which facilitate parent involvement and promote collaborative decision making in IEP teams. Specifically, interventions may involve the use of a facilitator or advocate for parents to promote their participation. Thirty-two years ago, Goldstein and Turnbull (1982) found that providing parents with an advocate at the IEP meeting significantly increased parent involvement in the IEP meeting. In addition, other strategies have been aimed at assisting schools in better understanding the child through the eyes of the child's family. These strategies have been shown to increase parents' participation in decision-making and involvement in setting educational goals for their child (Brinkerhoff & Vincent, 1986).

Another strategy designed to increase the level of parents' participation in IEP meetings includes the addition of a pre-conference meeting (Jones & Gansle, 2010). This may be an attractive option for parents who do not have difficulty attending additional meetings at the school, but for other parents this may not be a preferred option. One common underlying complaint by parents about the IEP meeting in this study was their perception that the IEP team

did not communicate with them effectively and consistently. Research in strategies that provide parents with different opportunities to communicate with the IEP team should be pursued. Any intervention strategy must take into consideration the amount of time that it will take to implement, so as not to overburden educators as well as parents.

Many of the parents in this study reported they had hired an advocate to represent them in order to obtain services or supports for their child. Some parents in this study reported they were not able to advocate effectively for their child due to a lack of knowledge including their rights in the IEP process. Strategies that incorporate special education training opportunities for parents must be offered. However, training must be appropriate to parents needs and must be accessible to parents. Offering training to parents in a language they do not speak or understand well is not accessible (Cho & Gannotti, 2005).

Finally, studies should be conducted with larger samples of parents who are representative of the larger population of parents. While the current study provides confirmation of prior research findings, the small homogenous sample of parents seriously limits the generalizability of these findings. However, the fact that these findings are so similar to those of previous studies, even after acknowledging the small sample size, supports the need to study this area further. In addition, examining educators' perceptions of the IEP meeting may provide key information about the IEP process and may draw attention to steps in the process that need improvement in order to foster positive and collaborative relationships with parents.

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Appendix “A”



Principal Investigator: Dr. Mary Beth Bruder

Student: Christine A. Sullivan

Title of Study: Examining Parents’ Perceptions of the IEP Meeting

You are invited to take part in a survey for parents of children receiving special education services. I am a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, and I am conducting this survey as part of my dissertation. As a parent of a child with a disability, I have attended many meetings at my child’s school. I am interested in finding out what other parents think about their child’s individualized education program (IEP) meeting.

This study asks you to answer a survey. This should take less than 15 minutes of your time. Your participation will be anonymous and we will not contact you again about this study in the future. The information in your answers will not be shared with anyone. Your answers will be combined with other parents’ responses.

You will not be paid for being in this study. This survey does not involve any risk to you. The benefits of your completing the survey may help special education practices.

The survey asks for some information about you and your child who has an IEP. It also asks you to rate your agreement with statements about your experiences at the IEP meeting.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You also do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer for any reason. On the following page, if you choose “I agree,” it means you consent to take part in this research study

by answering some questions. At the end of the survey, it will ask you to submit your responses. By submitting your answers to the survey, you choose to take part in the study.

If you have any questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me, Christine A. Sullivan, or my advisor, Mary Beth Bruder, PhD at (860) 679-1500. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Do you agree to take this survey?

- a. I agree
- b. I do not agree **(If this response is chosen - skips to end of survey)**

Are you 18 years of age or older?

- a. Yes
- b. No **(If this response is chosen - skips to end of survey)**

Section One: The part of the survey will ask questions about you and your child:

1. As the person responding to this survey, are you the:

- a. Child's mother
- b. Child's father
- c. Child's legal guardian
- d. Other_____

2. What is the highest level of school you have completed?

- a. Less than High School
- b. High school graduate/GED
- c. Some college
- d. Two year degree
- e. Four year degree
- f. Master's degree
- g. Doctorate (Ph.D./J.D./M.D./Ed.D.)

3. What is your approximate household income?

- a. Less than \$19,999
- b. \$20,000 – \$39,999
- c. \$40,000 - \$59,999
- d. \$60,000 - \$79,999
- e. \$80,000 and over
- f. Prefer not to answer

4. What is the primary language spoken in your home?

- a. English
- b. Spanish
- c. French/French Creole
- d. Italian
- e. Polish
- f. Portuguese/Portuguese Creole
- g. Other _____

5. What other languages are spoken at home?

- a. English
- b. Spanish
- c. French/French Creole
- d. Italian
- e. Polish
- f. Portuguese/Portuguese Creole
- g. Other _____

This survey is about your child who has an IEP and was in grade 3, 4, or 5 during the past school year.

6. What grade was your child in during the 2013/2014 school year?

- a. 3rd grade
- b. 4th grade
- c. 5th grade
- d. other (**If this response is chosen – skips to end of survey**)

7. How old is your child?

Answer: _____

8. Is your child male or female?

- a. male
- b. female

9. What is your child's race?

- a. White
- b. African American
- c. Asian
- d. American Indian/ Alaskan Native
- e. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- f. More than one race
- g. Other_____

10. What is your child's ethnicity?

- a. Hispanic
- b. Non-Hispanic

11. What is your child's primary disability label for special education?

- a. Intellectual disability
- b. Autism Spectrum Disorder
- c. Specific Learning Disability
- d. Deafness
- e. Deaf-Blindness
- f. Visual impairment including blindness
- g. Traumatic brain injury
- h. Multiple disabilities
- i. Orthopedic impairment
- j. Other health impairments
- k. Speech or language impairment
- l. Emotional disturbance
- m. Other_____
- n. I don't know

12. Does your child with an IEP attend school in any of the following districts:

Ansonia
Bridgeport
Danbury
East Hartford

Meriden
New Britain
New Haven
New London

Hartford
Norwich
Stamford
Windham

Norwalk
Putnam
Waterbury

- a. Yes
- b. No

Section Two: Next, please think about your experiences at IEP meetings. Choose the response that best describes your opinion for each statement.

Response Choices: (Will be repeated for each statement)

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

1. My child's IEP team meeting happens at a time that is convenient for me.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

At the IEP team meeting:

2. There is someone who speaks my native language and tells me what people are saying. **(This statement will appear for all respondents answering other than "a. English" to Questions 8 or 9 in the prior section)**

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

3. I understand the written information I am given.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

4. I understand what everyone is saying.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

5. The people from the school have knowledge about my child's disability.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree

6. I have enough time to read (or have read to me) all written reports before decisions are made.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
7. I am given enough time to ask questions.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
8. My child's team listens and responds to the concerns I have about my child's school program.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
9. The team considers my opinions before decisions are made.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
10. I help decide goals and objectives for my child.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
11. I am involved in making decisions about my child's services.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
12. I am involved in deciding how much time my child spends with his/her peers during the school day.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
13. The people from the school treat me with respect.
Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly agree
14. Which statement best describes how you felt about the *most recent* IEP meeting you attended for your child?
- a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied

- e. Very dissatisfied
- f. I did not attend

15. Tell us about the *best* experience you have had at an IEP meeting for your child.

_____.

16. Tell us about the *worst* experience you have had at an IEP meeting for your child.

_____.

This section asks about *other* children you may have.

1. Do you have *other* children?

a. Yes

b. No (**If this response is chosen, skips to end of survey**)

2. What are the ages of the other children?

Answer: _____

3. What is the gender of the other children?

Answer_____

4. Do any of these children also have IEPs?

a. Yes

b. No

At end of survey:

Respondent will be asked to choose:

“Submit responses” or “Do not submit responses”

Appendix “B”

Hoja Informativa de la Encuesta de Percepción de los Padres de Familia



Investigadora Principal: Dra. Mary Beth Bruder

Estudiante: Christine A. Sullivan

Título de la Investigación: Examen de las Percepciones de los Padres en las Reuniones del IEP

Le invitamos a que participe en una encuesta para los padres de los niños que reciben servicios de educación especial. Soy una estudiante de posgrado en la University of Connecticut y estoy realizando esta encuesta como parte de mi tesis doctoral. Como madre de una niña que tiene una discapacidad, he asistido a muchas reuniones en la escuela de mi hija. Mi interés es descubrir lo que otros padres opinan sobre la reunión para el Programa de Educación Individualizada (IEP, por sus siglas en inglés) de sus hijos.

Es parte del estudio pedirle que complete la encuesta. Le tomará sólo unos 15 minutos de su tiempo. Su participación es anónima y no le contactaremos nuevamente en el futuro acerca del estudio. La información de sus respuestas no se han de compartir con nadie. Sus respuestas se combinarán con las respuestas de otros padres.

No se le pagará por participar en este estudio. La encuesta no implica ningún riesgo para usted. El beneficio de completar la encuesta es que su participación podría ayudar a mejorar las prácticas de la educación especial.

La encuesta requiere cierta información acerca de usted y del niño que tiene un IEP. Se le pide evaluar qué tan de acuerdo está con las declaraciones acerca de sus experiencias en la reunión del IEP.

No tiene que participar en el estudio si no quiere. Tampoco tiene que contestar ninguna pregunta que no quiera contestar por cualquier motivo. Si selecciona "Acepto" en la página siguiente, significa que estará dando su consentimiento para participar en este estudio de investigación. Al final de la encuesta se le pedirá enviar las respuestas. Al enviar las respuestas de la encuesta usted decide tomar parte en el estudio.

Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca del estudio o si tiene algún problema relacionado con la investigación, puede comunicarse conmigo, Christine A. Sullivan, o con mi consejera, Mary Beth Bruder, PhD en el (860) 679-1500. Si tuviera alguna pregunta en lo que se refiere a sus derechos como participante de una investigación, puede comunicarse con la Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por sus siglas en inglés) de la University of Connecticut al 860-486-8802. La Junta está integrada por personas que revisan los estudios de investigación a fin de proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes.

¿Acepta contestar a esta encuesta?

- a. Acepto
- b. No acepto **(Si selecciona esta respuesta- salta al final de la encuesta)**

¿Tiene 18 años de edad o más?

- a. Sí
- b. No **(Si selecciona esta respuesta- salta al final de la encuesta)**

Primera Sección: en esta parte de la encuesta se le hacen preguntas acerca de usted y su hijo:

1. Como la persona que contesta la encuesta, ¿es usted?:

- a. la madre del niño
- b. el padre del niño
- c. el tutor legal del niño

d. Otro _____

2. ¿Cuál es su nivel educativo más alto alcanzado?

- a. Menos de escuela secundaria
- b. Graduado de escuela secundaria / GED
- c. Algunos estudios universitarios
- d. Título universitario de dos años
- e. Título universitario de cuatro años
- f. Maestría
- g. Doctorado (Ph.D./J.D./M.D./Ed.D.)

3. ¿Cuáles son los ingresos anuales estimados del hogar?

- a. Menos de \$19,999
- b. \$20,000 – \$39,999
- c. \$40,000 - \$59,999
- d. \$60,000 - \$79,999
- e. Más de \$80,000
- f. Prefiero no contestar

4. ¿Cuál es el idioma principal que se habla en su hogar?

- a. Inglés
- b. Español
- c. Francés/francés criollo
- d. Italiano
- e. Polaco
- f. Portugués/portugués criollo
- g. Otro: _____

5. ¿Qué otros idiomas se hablan en el hogar?

- a. Inglés
- b. Español
- c. Francés/francés criollo
- d. Italiano
- e. Polaco
- f. Portugués/portugués criollo
- g. Otro: _____

Esta encuesta es acerca de su hijo que tiene un IEP y que ha cursado el grado 3, 4, o 5 el año escolar pasado.

6. ¿Qué grado cursó su niño en el año escolar 2013/2014?

- a. 3^{er} grado
- b. 4^{to} grado
- c. 5^{to} grado
- d. Otro (Si selecciona esta respuesta- salta al final de la encuesta)

7. ¿Qué edad tiene su hijo?

Respuesta: _____

8. ¿Es su hijo varón o mujer?

- a. Varón
- b. Mujer

9. ¿De qué raza es su hijo?

- a. Blanco
- b. Afroamericano
- c. Asiático
- d. Indio americano/nativo de Alaska
- e. Nativo hawaiano o de otra isla del Pacífico
- f. Más de una raza
- g. Otra_____

10. ¿A qué grupo étnico pertenece su hijo?

- a. Hispano
- b. No hispano

11. ¿Cuál es la categoría de discapacidad principal de su hijo para la educación especial?

- a. Discapacidad intelectual
- b. Trastorno del espectro autista
- c. Discapacidad específica del aprendizaje

- d. Sordera
- e. Sordo-ceguera
- f. Impedimento visual, incluida la ceguera
- g. Lesión cerebral traumática
- h. Discapacidad múltiple
- i. Impedimento ortopédico
- j. Otros impedimentos de salud
- k. Discapacidad del habla o del lenguaje
- l. Trastorno emocional
- m. Otro _____
- n. No sé

12. ¿Su hijo que tiene el IEP asiste a la escuela en alguno de los distritos a continuación?:

Ansonia
Bridgeport
Danbury
East Hartford
Hartford
Norwich
Stamford
Windham

Meriden
New Britain
New Haven
New London
Norwalk
Putnam
Waterbury

- a. Sí
- b. No

Segunda Sección: a continuación, piense en su experiencia en las reuniones del IEP. Seleccione la respuesta que mejor describa su opinión para cada afirmación.

Opciones para las respuestas: (se repetirán para cada afirmación)

Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo

17. La reunión del equipo del IEP de mi hijo se hace a una hora conveniente para mí.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo

En la reunión del equipo del IEP:

18. Hay alguien que habla mi lengua materna y me repite lo que las personas están diciendo. **(Esta afirmación aparecerá para todos los que no elijan "a. Inglés" en las preguntas 8 o 9 de la sección anterior)**
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
19. Entiendo la información que se me entrega.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
20. Entiendo lo que todos dicen.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
21. Las personas de la escuela tienen conocimiento de la discapacidad de mi hijo.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
22. Dispongo del tiempo suficiente para leer (o para que me lean) todos los informes escritos antes de que se tomen las decisiones.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
23. Se me da el tiempo suficiente para hacer preguntas.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
24. El equipo de mi hijo presta atención y responde a las preocupaciones que tengo acerca del programa escolar de mi hijo.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
25. El equipo toma en cuenta mis opiniones antes de tomar las decisiones.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
26. Yo ayudo a decidir las metas y objetivos de mi hijo.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo

27. Estoy involucrado en la toma de decisiones acerca de los servicios de mi hijo.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
28. Estoy involucrada(o) en la decisión acerca del tiempo que mi hijo pasa con sus compañeros durante el día escolar.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
29. Las personas de la escuela me tratan con respeto.
Muy en desacuerdo; En desacuerdo; Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo; De acuerdo; Muy de acuerdo
30. ¿Qué declaración describe mejor cómo se sintió en la reunión *más reciente* del PEI IEP para su hijo a la cual asistió?
- Muy satisfecho
 - Satisfecho
 - Ni satisfecho o insatisfecho
 - Insatisfecho
 - Muy insatisfecho
 - No asistí
31. Cuéntenos acerca de la *mejor* experiencia que haya tenido en una reunión del IEP para su hijo.
_____.
32. Cuéntenos acerca de la *peor* experiencia que haya tenido en una reunión del IEP para su hijo.
_____.

En esta sección las preguntas son sobre *otros* hijos que usted tenga.

- ¿Tiene *otros* hijos?
 - Sí
 - No (**Si se selecciona esta respuesta, salta al final de la encuesta**)
- ¿Qué edades tienen sus otros hijos?
Respuesta: _____
- ¿Cuál es el sexo de sus otros hijos?

Respuesta_____

4. ¿Algún otro de sus hijos tiene también un IEP?

- a. Sí
- b. No

Al final de la encuesta:

Se le pedirá al participante que seleccione:

“Enviar las respuestas” o “No enviar las respuestas”

Appendix “C”



Parents please tell us about your experiences at your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting

If your child:

- Has an IEP for special education in a Connecticut public school
- Was in grade 3, 4 or 5 this past year

We want to understand more about what you think about the IEP meeting and your experiences at these meetings!

Click on the link below to take the survey - will only take 15 minutes or less to complete

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YXFK9MQ>

Please direct any questions to:

Mary Beth Bruder, Ph. D. or Christine A. Sullivan, J.D.
860-679-1500

Appendix “D”



Padres de familia: compartan con nosotros su experiencia en la reunión para el Programa de Educación Individualizada (IEP, por sus siglas en inglés) de su hijo.

Si su hijo:

- Tiene un IEP para educación especial en una de las escuelas públicas de Connecticut
- Cursó el grado 3, 4 o 5 el año pasado

¡Queremos entender mejor lo que ustedes piensan acerca de las reuniones del IEP y su experiencia en las reuniones!

Haga clic en el enlace a continuación para contestar la encuesta – le tomará sólo 15 minutos o menos completarla

(<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YNG5HPX>)

Favor de dirigir cualquier pregunta a:

**Mary Beth Bruder, Ph. D. o a Christine A. Sullivan, J.D.
860-679-1500**

Appendix “E”

Subjectivity Statement

There are many factors that I feel have influenced me in connection with my views about conducting research in the area of education of children with disabilities. There are three spheres of influence that I can identify: my family background and upbringing; my career and experiences as a practicing attorney; and finally, and most influential factor, my children and experiences as a mother of a child with a disability.

I was brought up in a small town in Connecticut, the first of three daughters fairly very close in age. Our family could be characterized as middle class, of Catholic faith, close-knit with a strong influence from grandparents. There was never a question whether I would go to college, it was a given as my parents firmly believed in the value of an education, a principle that I have definitely adopted. My mother did not work after she had children and, as a result, I believe it was difficult for her to understand why I did not stop working once I had a child. I have always felt that a person should use their mind and make the best of the attributes you are born with. After enduring an exhausting educational experience, I could not think of ending it especially since most employers have flexible hours and plans to accommodate working parents. I have always believed, however, that it is not solely one parent’s responsibility. With regard to my father, I have a great deal of respect for him as he worked 3 jobs while going to college and supporting a family at the same time. I can still recall attending his college graduation, not realizing at that time what an accomplishment it was for him. His sacrifices gave our family the opportunity to enjoy many more amenities than most families. Both of my parents instilled in me a sense of responsibility to oneself as well as to one’s neighbor. They always directed our attention towards making good choices and being accountable for your actions. That is not to

say I always listened. I think making mistakes helps you appreciate what you have, and makes you a wiser person. It certainly comes in handy once you are a parent.

With respect to religion, I was raised Catholic, believe in God and try to maintain a Christian lifestyle. While I would consider myself a relatively conservative person, I do believe that you can't exist in this world without being open minded and accepting of people who have other views and beliefs. I try to be non-judgmental when I am confronted by a person whose actions or thoughts are not in line with my own. I can say that this is one area that I feel my parents and I have fairly different mindsets. Although I do not actually believe my parents are judgmental people, I do think they are products of their generation, specifically, the fifties. Ideally, I think they prefer things to be simpler and have a tough time putting their own prejudices aside. As a result of my reminding them to be more open-minded, I am considered a liberal.

My experiences as an attorney have definitely impacted the way I look at the world. I can accept when things are not black or white and work within the grey area, but I do appreciate accurate factual information. I also strive to be able to communicate effectively and base findings on facts. With regard to the legal system, it is not always as cut and dry. There are inequities within the system and not everyone has access to the best quality representation. I have also seen the impact that institutions, such as insurance companies, can have on a person's rights, financial well-being, and peace of mind. Huge corporations and coalitions have a significant impact on policy and I don't believe this is ever going to change. As an attorney, I have always represented the individual with regard to their rights, whether it was for monetary awards as a result of injury or familial and parenting issues. I received personal gratitude knowing I could help a person exercise their rights, whether it was an issue of access or financial

benefit. Basically, I have a great respect for the law and for the court system, especially the Supreme Court which is responsible for the decisions that are the foundation for current law. While I speak highly of the profession of law, I fully recognize that there are fewer and fewer average people who would share that opinion. This is fine, everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Unfortunately, in law as with most professions, there are those who taint the integrity of the profession. I believe we are individually accountable for our own actions. As with any professional field, I don't believe you should be in that field unless you have high morals and value what you do.

Another aspect of my legal background that has led me to develop opinions that could impact my work with people with disabilities is my involvement with a local hospital board of directors. Being on a board of directors has made me very aware of the inequities within the reimbursement system in this country from the perspective of the hospital. Having this information does impact the way I look at certain legislative proposals by specific political parties.

Finally, I could not conclude before discussing the fact that I have two children, the youngest has an intellectual disability. The experience of raising her has had a tremendous impact on my views on education, the rights of people with disabilities, and my priorities on a daily basis. I strongly support the right of a child with a disability to be educated in the same environment as a child without a disability. I think it is beneficial for all involved. It requires more effort on everyone's part, however, it is worth it. I do believe that the educational system should be accountable for assuring this occurs. I also feel we need to focus on children as individuals in terms of their capacity to learn and exercise great care in choosing evidence based interventions and strategies when planning instruction and behavior management. I agree with

those people who view the issue of equality for people with disabilities as a civil rights issue. I admit I had not given this a second thought until my daughter was born. As a result of her birth, I have a much stronger appreciation for health, intellect and life in general. Too many people take things for granted and waste a great deal of their potential. At this point in my life, having made a commitment to pursue a doctorate in special education, I would like to put my effort toward doing what I can from an educational perspective to see that children with disabilities and their families, have the supports they need to reach their full potential and that society sees the benefit to this as well. Children with disabilities are not burdens on their families to be pitied by society. Every child with a disability is a person first and must be respected and have access to the same opportunities as every other human being. Research must have social validity, practical application, be accessible and accountable, and include realistic, achievable outcomes that benefit people with disabilities and their families in a manner that can be measured.