

Parental roles in special education decision-making: A review of the literature on parental perception of interactions with school personnel regarding special education

David Blaiklock

George Mason University

Dave, A good job of identifying the research and laying it out. I think that a data table of some sort would be an asset. We can work on that. The biggest issue that I have is that there is a tendency to conclude beyond what the data can actually support in some of the sections. You do a nice job of tempering it at the end. I think that a "What we can say we know and what we need to know" paper for publication could easily emerge from this.

Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires parental participation in developing the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student. Interesting statement. It is simultaneously too expansive and too restrictive. It requires that they be allowed, encouraged, invited etc. to participate, but they are not required to do so. See what I mean? That's the expansive part. Now, the restrictive part... They actually have influence at several other stages of the process including assessment and identification. Thing that we can word it so that it is more accurate and less of the advocacy approach? A potential consequence of not allowing parents to participate is that they will file a due process claim. State in the positive frame (e.g., preventing parental participation), it is more likely to be accurately perceived by the reader. Due process claims can damage the relationship between parents of students with disabilities and schools. And perhaps, limit the potential for salutary educational programming? There have been several attempts in policy to increase parental participation. This paper reviews the literature on parental participation in special education decision-making. Though some parents are satisfied with their level of participation many parents continue to report being marginalized, not understanding the jargon, and their input not being valued. Recommendations on increasing understanding, improving collaboration, and clarifying roles are provided.

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Parental roles in special education decision-making: A review of the literature on parental perception of interactions with school personnel regarding special education

The most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 included intentions to develop trusting relationships between parents and schools regarding special education decisions (H.R. Rep. 108-77, 2003; S. Rep. 108-77, 2003). The purpose for developing collaborative relationships between parents and schools was to decrease the bureaucratic components associated with special education that are focused on procedural safeguards and due process claims can you support this? Maybe testimony for the reauthorization? The claim that they intended to reduce procedural safeguards needs some justification!. The bureaucratic components of special education require an abundance of

resources that shift the focus of special education away from providing direct service to the student (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005).

History

I think that pointing out that the feds have no direct authority over education and therefore used the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment as the tool to create the law. It explains a great deal of why the red tape exists and also why some people are less than enthused about decreasing it. Parental rights in the original EAHCA were protected through a set of procedural safeguards that both allow parental access to student records and require the school to notify the parent when they plan to initiate, change, or refuse a service. If the parent disagrees with the school's decision, the procedural safeguards provide the parents with the right to impartial due process and civil suit, to resolve the disagreement (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). Educators were considered to be the experts and, therefore, should make the appropriate decisions about educational programming (the case law was pretty specific about what expertise educators hold) for students with disabilities. Parents who disagree with these decisions were provided the right to challenge them through the procedural safeguards (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). The 1983 amendment to EAHCA included funds to create regional training centers for technical assistance and training to parents of students with disabilities. The 1983 amendment established a national advisory panel for special education which included parents as members. (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1983).

IDEA also requires parental consent for the initial evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services as well as initial placement in special education services. The special education eligibility determination is a collaborative process involving both the parents and the school. The parent does have the right to refuse to evaluations for their student. However, the

school is able to exercise the same mediation/due process afforded to the parents to resolve the dispute (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997). In IDEA 2004, schools could not be held responsible for failing to provide special services if the parent refused to consent to the evaluation for the initial eligibility determination (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

The process of schools making decisions and parents challenging those decisions through due process created many conflicts between schools and parents (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005).

Nothing wrong with these guys, but we are leaning on them pretty heavily. Would be good to have other sources to verify the information. The time, effort, and money, required to exercise due process requires social capital that is more fiscal capital, social capital is related but has more to do with the influence necessary to carry it off even with the time and money, that some families of students with disabilities may lack not possess. (that positive construction thing again) Needs a supportive citation to disambiguate the meaning of social capital here. The lack of social capital excluded some parents from being able to exercise due process. From the school perspective, participation in due process shifts resources away from direct service to the students. Such resources include legal fees and time the special educators and related service providers must spend engaged in due process proceedings instead of providing services (Hehir, 2010). Therefore, the lack of collaboration between schools and parents can result in a process that is costly in time, money, and effort, that is shifted away from direct service to students with disabilities. I like the way that you are building your case across this section.

The problem of conflicts between the schools and parents was addressed by the U.S. Congress during the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. Mediation was offered as a nonadversarial resolution to conflict. States were required to offer mediation as a voluntary option for parents

but parents had the right to refuse mediation and proceed with a due process claim (H.R. Rep. 105-95, 1997). A report by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) recommended an increase for support of programs that helped parents better understand the special education process. The U.S. Congress recognized the tension between parents and schools during hearings for the reauthorization of IDEA in 2003 (S. 7836, 2003). A pre-resolution session was added to the due process procedure to facilitate amicable conflict resolution (S. Rep. 108-77, 2003). An additional goal of IDEA 2004 was to decrease litigation by improving trust between schools and parents to allow them to work together in a collaborative manner (S. Rep. 108-77, 2003). Hey, look at that! A whole paragraph with no comments from me!

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 expanded the regional parent training centers by allowing grants to organizations to develop parent training centers. The intent of the expansion was to make the resource centers more accessible particularly for parents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) backgrounds (H.R. Rep. 105-95, 1997a). One goal of the parent training centers was to help educate parents about the procedural safeguards and to teach them about alternate dispute resolution methods, including mediation. See why we need the cite about reducing the procedural safeguards? Now we are back to enhancing them. Other goals of the parent training centers included assisting parents with communicating with school personnel and helping parents become more active in the decision making process (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). The grants for parent training centers also were included in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 though the language was changed from helping parents communicate to helping parents collaborate with schools (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The federal funding for the parent centers has ranged from \$16 million

when they were first established in 1997 to \$28 million in the 2011 budget (U.S. Government Printing Office, n.d.).

The role of parents in IEP meetings was unclear to school personnel in the implementation of the original EAHCA (Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). The lack of clarity about parental roles potentially created a scenario where schools made the decisions that could only be challenged through parents filing a due process claim. Well, that was the only formal mechanism available, but some districts bent over backwards to help parents, I think you are over-stating the case here. The attempt to increase the role of parents in special educational decision making emerged in IDEA 1997 I think that it was embedded in EHCA in 175, but increased in 97. However, the collaborative relationship in IDEA 2004 is more apparent because lawmakers were focused on informing the parents of special education processes and providing them with a wider range of options (S. Rep. 108-77, 2003a). That doesn't sound like reducing procedural safeguards... Developing collaborative relationships means educating parents on special education services and processes. Educating parents will allow them to make informed choices and provide meaningful discussion during collaboration. Parents who are better informed about special may also recognize the expertise of the school personnel which will ultimately allow true collaboration to occur. One would hope that this is the case, but there is a substantial body of research on decision-making that demonstrates people are hardly rational, even when armed with the facts!

The current version of IDEA also requires states to collect data on specific outcome measures to determine their performance in the implementation of IDEA. The eighth indicator focuses specifically on parental participation in special education. I think that this is a new feature. We can hang a great deal of the argument on its appearance. States are required to

collect data on their performance on this indicator, evaluate their performance, and develop strategies to improve their performance when necessary. States are required to report their performance on the indicators annually (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

The changes to IDEA 1997 and 2004 were intended to better inform parents of special education services to facilitate collaboration with schools (H.R. Rep. 105-95, 1997; H.R. Rep. 108-77). Increasing collaboration allows schools and parents to agree on special education decisions which will potentially decrease due process (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005).

Decreasing due process may allow schools to use their resources to provide direct services for students with disabilities rather than having to dedicate time and money to due process claims.

Evaluation

Ahearn (2002) analyzed the number of due process hearings from years prior to the 1997 IDEA reauthorization to the year 2000. Results indicated the number of due process requests increased by 10.4 percent each year from 1996 to 2000 with 7,532 requests made in 1996 and 11,068 requests made in 2000. However, a number of those requests were withdrawn with a total of 3,555 requests being heard in 1996 and 3,020 requests being heard in 2000. The decrease from 1996 to 2000 represents a decrease of four percent each year. Zirkel & Gischlar (2008) extended Ahearn's research and surveyed states for the number of adjudicated due process hearings from the years 2000 to 2005. They found that the decreasing trend identified by Ahearn (2002) ~~did not~~ failed to continue and the number of due process hearings remained steady as a plateau of approximately 3,000 cases being adjudicated each year from 2000 to 2005. However, Zirkel & Gischlar (2008) also found due process claims to be concentrated within five metropolitan areas across the country. Seems like there should be some sort of interpretative

follow-up on this, particularly the last sentence. Something along the lines of "these findings suggest..."

Present Study

One of the intentions of both IDEA 1997 and 2004 was to help develop collaborative relationships between parents and schools (H.R. Rep. 108-77, 2003; S. Rep. 108-77, 2003). The number of due process claims increased after IDEA 1997 though the number of due process claims being adjudicated decreased. Nonetheless, the number of claims being adjudicated has remained steady beyond the passage of IDEA 2004 (Ahearn, 2002; Zirkel & Gischlar, 2008).

I'm going to leave it to you to move the rest of the paper from the "do not" to the psotive construction. However, due process filing and adjudication are not an effective measure of the success of IDEA's attempt to develop collaborative relationships between parents and schools for three reasons. First, due process data does not capture successful interactions between parents and schools regarding special education decisions. Due process is filed when there is a disagreement and reflects only negative experiences. Second, using only due process data to measure the success of IDEA's attempt to develop collaborative relationships assumes both that every parent understands the right to due process and that every negative experience will result in a due process claim. Finally, the due process data does not reflect the variation of disagreements that may occur to include disputes over inclusion, access to the general education curriculum, or standards-based IEPs. In many cases there is external pressure on schools regarding the aforementioned issues that make it challenging for schools to develop an IEP that is both legally compliant and satisfactory to the parent. Nicely framed.

There is a body of literature that has explored the interactions between parents and schools regarding special education decisions. The present study will review the literature on

parent-school interactions in special decisions and discuss the experiences reported by both the parents and the schools. The present study will also review the state data on Indicator 8.

Recommendations for future policy will be made based on the results. Can we state one or more research questions (e.g., are the previously reported trends continuing)?

Method

Studies regarding the interaction between parents and schools were found by searching *ERIC* under the following terms *parental perception*, *IEP Meeting*, *parent-educator collaboration*, *parent involvement*, and *special education law*. An ancestral search of studies was conducted to identify additional research on the topic. The data on Indicator 8 will be obtained from each state's website.

For a study to be included it needed to focus on the interaction between parents and school personnel regarding (a) special education rights, (b) Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, (c) services, (d) placements, or (e) other topics relevant to special education decisions were included. Studies that occurred outside of the United States, focused on student directed IEP meetings, or solely focused on transition issues were excluded.

Results

The search yielded 12 studies from the years 1998 through 2008. The reviewed studies were in the journals *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, *Education, Preventing School Failure* (N=3), *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities* (N=2), and *Exceptional Children* (N=2).

The data for Indicator 8 from each state was reviewed but the data lacked uniformity for comparison. The websites did not consistently report the current year and varied in the level of

detail reported on Indicator 8. For example, Missouri reports one aggregate score related to performance on Indicator 8 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011) whereas South Dakota provides a detailed account of responses to each item of the Indicator 8 survey (South Dakota Part B Parent Survey, 2011). Each state was also responsible for developing their own data collection instrument resulting in different types of data being collected. Many states, such as Ohio used a survey developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM) (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). However, some states, like Texas, developed their own instrument for collecting data (Texas Education Agency, 2010). The complexity associated with comparing data of varied detail from different instruments is beyond the scope of this paper.

The studies reviewed fell into two categories with the first category including studies that revealed positive parental perceptions towards the IEP process and the second category indicating parents who perceived they were being excluded from the IEP process. Within the second category, the subcategories of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD), barriers to understanding, and input not valued emerged from the literature. [I like the way that you did this section!](#)

Parents Included

The studies reviewed in this section will focus on studies where the results indicated the parents perceived they were able to actively participate in special education decisions. The parents in these studies reported their input was valued and were satisfied with the special education process.

Fish (2008) studied the perceptions of parents of students receiving special education regarding the IEP meeting. The parents of 51 students receiving special education services

completed a survey that focused on demographic information, IEP meeting experiences, knowledge of the IEP process and special education law, relations with educators, IEP outcomes, and recommendations. The majority of the items on the survey used a 5-point (Needs uppercase "L". It was the dude's name.) likert scale. The parents were sampled from a family resource center. The survey data was analyzed by reporting the percentage of parents who indicated the specific value on the likert scale for each item on the survey. Fish interpreted the results to indicate parents had positive experiences in IEP meetings, were knowledgeable of special education law, had good relationships with educators, and believed the IEP outcomes for their students were appropriate. Parents recommended IEP administrators follow the appropriate protocol for IEP meetings and that the IEP not be predetermined prior to the meeting. These results indicate parents have a firm understanding of the IEP process and feel they are active participants in IEP decision making. Parents being active participants in IEP decision making is congruent with the intent for parental roles in IDEA 2004.

Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen (2003) studied parental involvement and perceptions of special education services. Specifically, frequency and quality of communication between home and school, perceptions of the IEP process, and overall satisfaction with special education services were studied. Fifty-seven parents of 45 students with autism or developmental delays aged 4-18 participated in a telephone survey. All of the parents belonged to an autism support group that served six counties in a mid-Eastern state. The majority of the parents reported good communication with the school with 82 percent reporting communication with the school at least several times a week. The results of special education knowledge were mixed. Regarding knowledge of the IEP document, 36 percent reported high, 37 percent reported moderate, and 27 percent reported low knowledge. Fifty nine percent of the parents reported moderate

involvement in the IEP process with 28 percent reporting high involvement and 13 percent reporting low involvement. For overall satisfaction with the IEP process, 13 percent reported high satisfaction, 79 percent reported moderate satisfaction, and 14 percent reported low satisfaction. Overall the majority of parents reported being at least moderately knowledgeable of the IEP process and satisfied with the results.

Parents Excluded

Indent this level of heading. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. The section on CLD focuses on parents who reported feeling disenfranchised due to differences in culture and language. The differences in culture and language prevented the parents from being able to actively and meaningfully participate in the IEP meetings. For example, interpreters may only translate a summary of the discussion rather than word for word resulting in parents not being able to hear the entire discussion (Lo, 2008). In other cases, the school refused to communicate with the parent in their native language (Salas, 2004). The inability to understand and interact with the discussion prevents parents from being able to participate in IEP meetings.

Cho and Gannotti (2005) explored the experiences of Korean-American mothers with early intervention services, special education and related services, and translator services. Twenty mothers of students with developmental disabilities were interviewed twice with a portion being interviewed a third time. The Korean-American mothers reported positive experiences with early intervention services and appreciated the expertise within special education. However, they felt they were disenfranchised due to their limited English proficiency. Many of the mothers did not agree with the decisions regarding services or goals for their students but did not want to argue because they believed disagreement with the school would impact the quality of education their student would receive. More than half of the

mothers had attended training on special education and five of them used strategies such as hiring advocates or filing due process. Several of the mothers were aware of the special education training but did not attend because they were only held in English. The Korean-American mothers were satisfied with the special education services though they had to fight to get what they believed was appropriate. It is important for school personnel to recognize the language barriers and cultural differences when working with families. A family may not assert their disagreement for concern over how an adversarial relationship with the school will impact their child. Do you mean "for" in the sense of "because" in that sentence?

Lo (2008) studied the level of participation and experiences in IEP meetings for Chinese families. The IEP meetings of five Chinese families were observed and the families were interviewed in their native language about their perception of the meetings afterwards. The parents participated minimally and seldom made comments during the meetings. The parents reported that their treatment lacked respect, their opinions were not heard, they did not understand the special education terminology, and the interpreters did not always convey everything being said. In several cases, services were denied or reported to be discontinued without an explanation for the reason. One parent requested a more challenging goal and was told in public forum they did not understand the student's need and therefore the goal was appropriate. Well, inappropriate on both parties. Why would a parent do that in a public forum, and why did the educators take the bait? Several parents reported the school blamed them for the severity of the student's disability. Parents were dissatisfied with professionals arriving to the meeting late or leaving the meeting early. I'll bet that can be said on the part of the educators resenting parents arriving late, etc. The interactions between the parents and schools in this study demonstrate the parental input was not valued and parents were not seen as equal members

of the IEP team. I don't think that you can go so far as to say demonstrate. You have only the claims of one side of the issue with no corroboration. Have you ever heard people describing former bosses? Often minor irritations are blown into major injustices to support claims of maltreatment. Not saying that is what is going on hear but we would not want to convict the other party on the basis of what essentially amounts to hearsay evidence.

Salas (2004) described the experiences of Mexican Americans with special education meetings. Ten Mexican American mothers of students with disabilities from a rural Southwest school district were interviewed. The mothers reported feeling alienated by the school in IEP meetings due to their inability to understand English. The mothers also reported feeling a lack of respect from the school due to their lack of proficiency in English. The perception of lack of respect resulted in the mothers believing their input in IEP meetings was not valued by the school personnel. The school's insistence of only communicating with the families in English impedes the mothers' perceptions of their input being valued and therefore prohibits them from meaningfully participating in special education decision making. Was it insistence or that they could not speak Spanish? There is a difference between insistence and inability.

Barriers to Understanding. Several studies reported parents not understanding either the special education jargon or the procedural safeguards as potential barriers to participation. Parents may not be able to actively participate in IEP meetings due to an inability to understand the jargon associated with special education (Childre and Chambers, 2005). Combine the preceding two sentences. They are redundant as written. In addition to issues with jargon, the procedural safeguards of some states are written in technical language which may potentially make them inaccessible to parents who have difficulty reading them. Interesting problem in that common language substitutions of some terms actually create more problems because they lack

the more precise meaning required of legal terminology. Not arguing against your point, but there is a difference between jargon that carries the idea of unnecessarily obtuse and precise language. It is, I think, a difficult balance to maintain.

Childre and Chambers (2005) studied the impact of IEP development technique focused on family involvement in the IEP process. They explored the perceptions of six families in a rural southeast area regarding the IEP process. The students of these families had either an intellectual disability and/or an orthopedic impairment. Interviews about the process were conducted prior to the IEP meeting, a student centered approach was implemented during the IEP development process, and follow-up interviews were conducted after the IEP regarding family perceptions of the student centered approach. The initial interviews indicated parents did not actively participate in IEP meetings, believed the IEP was determined prior to the meeting, and did not understand the special education jargon. The follow-up interviews revealed the student centered approach facilitated family participation in the IEP meeting. However, Childre and Chambers did not report if families gained a better understanding of the jargon or how their input was utilized to develop goals and services. The student centered approach helped families become more involved in developing the IEP leading to a positive perception of the student centered approach. However, the student centered approach did not increase families' overall understanding of special education jargon. We need to have an idea of what "student-centered" means. It would also be useful to have because it would probably create a clear contrast with the soon-to-be-required standards-based IEPs.

Fitzgerald & Watkins (2006) studied the readability level of procedural safeguards based on initiatives for government documents to be written in simple English. Procedural safeguards from 49 states were analyzed based on commonality of the words, number of syllables in the words, and font size. The analysis of word commonality revealed the procedural safeguards

were written on a reading level ranging from fifth to sixteenth grade with a mode of 11th to 12th grade. The procedural safeguards ranged in length from two to 47 pages and used font sizes ranging from five to 72 point with a mode of 11 point. The analysis of the procedural safeguards by syllable indicated they were written on a reading grade level ranging from 7.2 to 17.4 with a median of 13. Overall, only four to eight percent of the procedural safeguards were written below the recommended seventh grade reading level and at least 92 percent were written at a reading grade level above ninth grade. Furthermore, twenty percent of the procedural safeguards were written at a collegiate reading level. The complexity of language in the procedural safeguards may render them unavailable for parents who are unable to understand them. Parents unable to understand the procedural safeguards may be prevented from using due process as a vehicle for conflict resolution as guaranteed by IDEA.

IndentInput not Valued. The remainder of the studies focus on parents who reported their input was not valued. In these studies, parents reported attempting to actively participate in IEP meetings. Their opinions were disregarded by the remainder of the IEP team and the parental recommendations were not included in the finalized IEP. I prefer describing the studies and then drawing the conclusion. It seems, somehow, premature to tell the reader what the yet-to-be presented data means.

Fish (2006) explored measures that could improve parental input in IEP meetings. The parents of seven students with Autism in northern Texas were interviewed about their perceptions of the value of their input and the atmosphere of IEP meetings. All of the families were associated with an advocacy center. The results indicated parents did not believe their input was valued in IEP meetings. Parents reported that IEPs were often written and predetermined prior to the meeting. Schools did not educate parents about available special

education services and as parents learned more about special education, they were better able to advocate for services. Ideas from the IEP meeting were not always included in the final IEP. Several parents reported that schools were not always prepared to educate particular disabilities and the schools would attempt to blame the parents for the disability. Parents who brought advocates to the meeting believed they were treated better by the schools than when they did not bring an advocate. The parents recommended schools take a more collaborative approach to IEP development and focus more on educating parents about special education law and services. Parental participation and input is required in IEP development. The experiences of these parents suggest that the schools represented in this study were not adhering to the requirements for parental participation in IEP development. Again, we are convicting based on hearsay. I'll grant you that the parents do not believe that they are, but a belief while firmly held, can be erroneous so we need to temper the language.

Simon (2006) studied school personnel and parental perceptions of IEP requirements to determine if the perceptions were the same. Could revise the sentence to make it a little more clear. A survey was completed by 98 special education teachers and 143 parents from a large southern school district. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale and focused on tracking services, team processes, maintaining services, and availability of services. The results indicated parents were less able to identify the services for the students, were less likely to perceive IEP development as a collaborative process, and were not always able to maintain what they believed was an adequate level of service. One parent indicated the service was determined by the school prior to coming to the meeting. Special education teachers had a significantly more positive perception of the IEP meetings than the parents. The perceptual disparity between the parents and the teachers indicates school personnel may not be aware of parental perspective

with IEP meetings. Simon (2006) discusses the frequency with which special educators attend IEP meetings as an explanation for a better understanding of the IEP process. Nonetheless, the lack of familiarity with IEP meetings for parents should be taken into account when interacting with them regarding special education issues. This is a good conclusion based on the data you describe.

Stoner et al. (2005) explored parental perceptions of their interactions with educational professionals regarding their student's disability. The parents of four young students with either an autism spectrum or developmental disability were interviewed three times over a period of nine months. The parents were recruited from a parent support group. Parents reported difficulty with getting medical professionals to provide a diagnosis for their child. Once the child received a diagnosis, they began to educate themselves on services and rights. The two families that received early intervention services reported positive experiences with the in-home workers. However, all of the families referred to the IEP process within the schools as confusing and traumatic. Parents had difficulty obtaining services for their child and lost trust in educational professionals when they would not agree to the services being requested. Once the trust was diminished, parents became more vigilant in ensuring schools were providing them with the appropriate services and following through with the IEP. One parent reported they knew to ask more than they would receive so that the desired outcome would be part of the bargaining process. Ah, do you see how this is an ingenuine strategy that undermines trust for the parent. Because the parents had to fight for services, trust was diminished which prevented a collaborative relationships from developing between the parents and the schools.

Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) studied the evolution of African-American parents' roles in the special education decision-making process. The IEP meetings of 24 African-

American preschool students with a variety of disabilities from three schools were observed over a three year period of time. Both parents and school personnel involved in the IEP meetings were interviewed. All of the parents reported their perception of the special education preschool class was to provide their child the opportunity to catch up with their peers. The parents reported concerns about the appropriateness of the special education classroom given the diversity of disabilities served in one classroom and the stigmas associated with the special education labels.

I think I'd start a new paragraph here. Sixteen of the parents attended the first IEP meeting in the study but participation decreased partially due to parents' perceptions they were not able to influence decisions. Parents also reported barriers to participation such as receiving meeting invitations with minimal prior notice, not receiving meeting invitations, inflexibility to reschedule the meetings to accommodate work schedules, meetings being forced into short periods of time, focus on paperwork compliance rather than participation, use of special education jargon, and the power differential between schools and parents. The educational professionals also acknowledged the power differential and recognized parents perceived the meetings as intimidating. The identified barriers may not be necessarily be unique to African-American parents rather to parents with similar characteristics such as inflexible work schedules or other social capital issues that may prevent them from either attending or meaningfully participating in IEP meetings. The overemphasis on compliance **from** the paperwork took the focus of meeting discussion from the needs of the student and placed it on procedural issues.

Well, what would one expect? The backbone of IDEA is due process through the 14th amendment.

Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder (2000) studied parents' perceptions of their involvement in IEP meetings. A survey was administered to 82 parents of students with disabilities in a mid-

Western state. The four questions on the survey had a four point Likert scale Likert scales have five points. When other than five, it is a "Likert-type" scale. and focused on IEP meeting attendance, perceptions of how the parent was treated at IEP meetings, and the value of the parental input at IEP meetings. Each item had an open-ended component that allowed the parent to explain their response on the Likert scale. The majority of the parents indicated they attended most of the IEP meetings though typically only one parent attended. Forty-five percent of the parents indicated they felt they were treated as an equal part of the team and forty-six percent of the parents reported their input was valued in the IEP meeting. Twenty-seven percent of the parents indicated they were usually treated as equal members of the IEP team with the remaining parents reporting they were sometimes (20 percent) or never (six percent) treated as equal members. Twenty four percent of the parents reported their input was valued with the remaining reporting their input was either sometimes (22 percent) or never (five percent) valued. Parents who reported they were always treated equitable and their input was value tended to have positive responses to the open-ended items. However, the remainder of the parents (including those were usually treated as equals or perceived their input as valued) tended to have negative responses to the open-ended questions. The negative responses included issues of the school personnel not knowing their child, school personnel being unprepared to work with a specific disability, IEPs being prewritten and predetermined prior to the meeting, and lack of respect for the parent. Though approximately half of the parents perceive themselves as having active roles in IEP meetings, the intent of the law is for all parents to be active parents. School personnel need to recognize this issue and work towards soliciting participation and valuing parental input in IEP meetings. Wouldn't it be interesting to see what the reasons that a parent felt that they were not treated as equals. In cases where there are disagreements between schools and parents

and school personnel express their opinions, some parents could easily conclude that they were disrespected because they did not get everything that they wanted when they wanted it. That would be a different case than if the parents were treated in a truly dismissive manner. That is something that I know happens as well. With a value as small as five percent, the chance that it is something about the parent needs to be considered as well as the school issues.

The experiences of the parents from CLD backgrounds were similar to the parents who believe their input is not valued. Parents reported not understanding the jargon (Childe & Chamber, 2005; Fish, 2006), having to fight with the school for services (Fish, 2006; Simon, 2006; Stoner et al, 2006), and did not understand enough about special education rights and services to actively participate in the meetings (Fish, 2008; Spann Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). The research also indicated schools did a poor job of educating parents about special education (Fish, 2006) and scheduling meetings in a manner that made it easy for parents to attend (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). The research reviewed indicates the parents from non-CLD backgrounds are similar to the experiences of parents from CLD backgrounds and therefore CLD may not be a factor contributing to this issue.

Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, which attempted to educate parents so that they could actively participate in IEP meetings, parents reported they did not actively participate in IEP meetings (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). Based on the goals regarding parents and the establishment of the parent centers, it would be reasonable to expect parents to perceive they were actively participating in IEP meetings such as found in Fish (2008). However, the parents in the majority of the studies reviewed reported either they were not able to actively participate (Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004; Simon, 2006), they were not adequately informed about special education to meaningfully participate (Childe & Chambers, 2005; Fish, 2006), or their input was

dismissed by the rest of the IEP team (Lo, 2008). I wonder if it has something to do with the way that we ask them to participate. There are some issues that require professional training, and some that are more open. I wonder if the kinds of requests that we make of parents have a part of this puzzle.

Discussion

Given that IDEA is implemented to its policy recipients by being channeled through state and local interpretations, there is no direct federal authority (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005) over its implementation. The direct implementation of IDEA occurs in the local context with school personnel following the procedures at a local district. This is a new idea. Can't introduce now stuff in the discussion, only tie things together. That's why I wanted you to bring this idea up earlier. Therefore, when it comes to studying an abstract concept such as parental participation in special education decision making, it is challenging to study beyond the local context. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to parental participation making the concept subject to state, local, and school level interpretation. I agree with that.

The parents in the one study where data was collected prior to the implementation of IDEA 1997 reported IEP meetings were only procedural in nature and did not allow time for parental input (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1998). Given the intent of both IDEA 1997 (H. R. Rep. 105-95) and IDEA 2004 (H. R. Rep. 108-77) were to increase parental participation and collaboration in special education decision making, it can be assumed that subsequent research would report increased parental participation in special education decision making. However, the majority of the studies reviewed suggested parents continued to perceive themselves as passive participants in IEP meetings. Interesting in that we seem to expect parents to have as much to say about the IEPO as those who go to school and study this stuff for a long time.

Based on the research reviewed, though some parents report satisfaction, there is still progress to be made regarding parental participation in special education decisions. This paper will conclude with recommendations to increase parental participation.

Understanding of Special Education

Greater efforts need to be made to educate parents of the language of special education and the types of services that are available. School personnel need to be sensitive to the excessive use of special education jargon in IEP meetings. It would be beneficial for school personnel to take the time to explain to parents in the meeting the recommendations they are making. Do you have any verification of that? Seems I recall only that people complain that they did not understand some of the things said. Though the parent centers are attempting to educate parents about special education rights and services, it appears that not every parent has had the benefit of interacting with them. It would be beneficial if school personnel provided information about the parent centers to parents when their student is initially found eligible for services. How do you know that it would be beneficial? Might be is the more proper term there.

Collaboration is a Two Way Street

Though many of the parents in the studies above reported their input was not valued, it is important to recognize that collaboration is a two way street. Good, I am glad that you are touching upon this! The intent of the law is to decrease the dominance of one party over the other to come to mutual agreement. Just as schools are not supposed to enter IEP meetings with a predetermined IEP, collaboration can be facilitated if the parent does the same. School personnel have the benefit of years of experience in working with children with exceptional learning needs. Parents have the benefit of years of experience in knowing the nuances of their child. Given that both parties can learn from the other in providing special education services, the IEP meeting

should include healthy dialogue about the parent's perspective on the student's needs, the school's perspective on the student's needs, and the appropriate services for meeting those needs so that FAPE can be delivered in the LRE.

Clarification of Roles

The role of parents in IEP meetings has been unclear since the original EAHCA (Yoshida et al., 1978). Yep, the same points I was bellyaching about along the way! It is possible that the role of parents still lacks clarity to school personnel when entering an IEP meeting. Clarifying the roles of parents in IEP meetings at the state and local level will help school personnel understand the need to solicit information parents and take their input into account.

Conclusion

There has been progress towards increasing parental participation in special education decisions. However, it is important to recognize that parents who have been empowered may not necessarily be educated about how to appropriately educate their child. It is the responsibility of school personnel to provide resources for parents to help them become educated about the best practices for education their child. In addition to providing information about resources, part of the education should include explaining school recommendations rather than dictating them. Though the explanation may take more time in the short-term, it will help develop a collaborative relationship and may potentially reduce the probability of having to dedicate resources to a due process hearing in the long term.

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