

Parents' Perceptions of Their Roles in Special Education Decision-Making

David Blaiklock

George Mason University

## **Parents' Perceptions of Their Roles in Special Education Decision-Making**

### **Background and History**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law designed to provide an education to students with disabilities. In 2009, approximately 6.4 million elementary and secondary students were receiving services through IDEA representing 13.2 percent of the entire student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Prior to the original version of IDEA, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), the majority of students with disabilities were excluded from schools due to lack of sufficient programs that met their needs.

The original passage of EAHCA fits within the Kingdon (2003) Multiple Streams model. According to the Kingdon Multiple Streams model, policy makers are looking for policy windows to open. When the policy window is open, if they can align their policy stream with both the political stream (interest groups) and problem stream (their ability to apply their policy to a problem) then they will likely be able to get their policy passed. For EAHCA, the policy window was the passage of the Equal Protection Clause in the Civil Rights legislation. The policy problem was that public schools were not adequately funded to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities were not receiving an appropriate education resulting in an inability to gain employment and potentially becoming institutionalized. The consequence of being unemployed and institutionalization made students with disabilities tax burdens. The policy solution was to provide federal funding to create programs where students with disabilities could have equal access to an education as their nondisabled peers. By receiving an education, students with disabilities would have a better chance at becoming employed changing them from tax burdens to tax contributors (Ong-Dean, 2009). The political stream aligned with the policy and problem streams when the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens

(PARC) won a court case in 1972 against Pennsylvania which determined students with intellectual disabilities in Pennsylvania could not be excluded from public schools. Several similar cases followed which set the precedent for future cases that prevented the exclusion of students with disabilities from public schools (Yell, 2012). The alignment of the problem, policy, and political streams, when the Civil Rights policy window was open created a policy climate that allowed EAHCA to become law.

The EAHCA was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1975 to provide educational opportunities to all students with disabilities. The four primary goals of the EAHCA were to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all students, allow due process through procedural safeguards which protect parental rights and provide a system of due process for parents and schools to resolve disagreements regarding education services, provide federal funding to states to support the cost of educating students with disabilities, and develop an evaluation system for the previous three goals. Providing FAPE to students with disabilities means the student has access to specialized supports and related services designed for their individual needs (U.S. Office of Special Education, n.d.). The specialized supports and services include classroom aides, counseling, and speech language pathology. These services are designed to help students with disabilities access the curriculum. Due process is a conflict resolution procedure that utilizes impartial hearing officers to resolve disagreements between parents and schools on issues such as eligibility for related services or the type of educational setting where the student with disabilities will be successful. Federal funding is provided to states for the additional cost of educating students with disabilities. States must be compliant in all areas of the EAHCA in order to receive the federal funding (Ong-Dean, 2009; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

The EAHCA required FAPE to be provided to students with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). LRE means the setting where students will have the greatest amount of inclusion in general education classes with their nondisabled peers while still being able to receive FAPE. LRE is a continuum of education placement options where students with disabilities receive their education. At the least restrictive end of the continuum, the student receives their education in a general education classroom with supports such as modified assignments or the help of an instructional aide. The most restrictive end of the continuum is residential placements where students live at a facility with no access to nondisabled peers and receives their education at the residential program (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006).

The EAHCA has been amended several times and the name of the law was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). The amendments have provided services for children with disabilities starting at birth and have required older students with disabilities to develop a transition plan to help them access postsecondary opportunities. Additional amendments to IDEA have required reporting of progress for students with disabilities to be consistent with their nondisabled peers (U.S. Office of Special Education, n.d.) and for students with disabilities to have access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997; Hehir, 2009).

The most recent reauthorization, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004, is commonly referred to as IDEA 2004. IDEA 2004 aligned the special education law with the general education law, No Child Left Behind. The 2004 reauthorization was also intended to reduce bureaucratic processes that shifted resources away from providing direct service (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004) and to develop trust

between parents and schools (H.R. Rep. 108-77, 2003). The bureaucratic process refers to the assurance that the detailed requirements of the procedural safeguards were being met. Due to the litigious nature of due process schools expended an abundance of energy to ensure they had evidence supporting their decisions in a due process hearing. This practice placed the focus of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings on procedural compliance rather than discussion of the educational needs of the student (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). A potential consequence of failing to discuss the educational needs of the child is that it impedes the parents' ability to actively participate in the IEP meeting leading to disagreement with the proposed IEP and subsequently resulting in a due process claim over their disagreement.

### **IDEA Implementation**

In order to receive federal IDEA funds, states are required to develop regulations and procedures for the appropriate implementation of IDEA. The state education agency is responsible for ensuring state regulations are in compliance with IDEA and distributing the federal IDEA funds to local school districts (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The state regulations are monitored by the Office of Special Education Programs at the United States Department of Education. The state education agency also is responsible for monitoring the local education agencies or school districts to ensure compliance with the state regulations. The local education agencies are responsible for developing their own policies and regulations to ensure they remain in compliance with the state regulations. The local education agency monitors the schools in the district to facilitate the appropriate implementation of the state regulations. The implementation of IDEA occurs in schools with school personnel being responsible for determining eligibility in collaboration with district personnel and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) being developed with school personnel (Manasevit &

Maginnis 2005). Therefore, the implementation of IDEA occurs at the federal, state, local, and school level with school personnel having the majority of responsibility for determining eligibility, developing IEPs, and providing special education services.

IDEA is translated into practice at the school level through the interactions of the IEP team. The IEP team is composed of a school administrator, special education teacher, general education teacher, related service providers (e.g. counselors, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, etc.) parents and the student. Parents are welcome to include outside professionals on the IEP team such as advocates or educational consultants (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2005).

The IEP team meets to develop and modify educational programming for the student with a disability. The team works together to make eligibility determinations and develop the IEP for the student. A student is referred for special education services through the eligibility process. The initial eligibility process includes evaluations of the student to determine a specific eligibility category. When the student is identified as a student requiring special education services, an IEP is developed for them (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The IEP contains the student's present levels of performance, goals to address deficits, related services to help access the curriculum, classroom accommodations, supplemental services, and for older students, a transition plan. The least restrictive environment for the student to receive a free and appropriate public education is also part of the IEP. (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). The IEP is a guiding document that details the special education services the school will provide for the student with disabilities.

### **Parents and IDEA**

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 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 amendment to EAHCA in 1983 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. 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).

The process of schools making decisions and parents challenging those decisions through due process created many conflicts between schools and parents (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). The time, effort, and money, required to exercise due process requires social capital that some families of students with disabilities may not possess. The lack of social capital may exclude 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

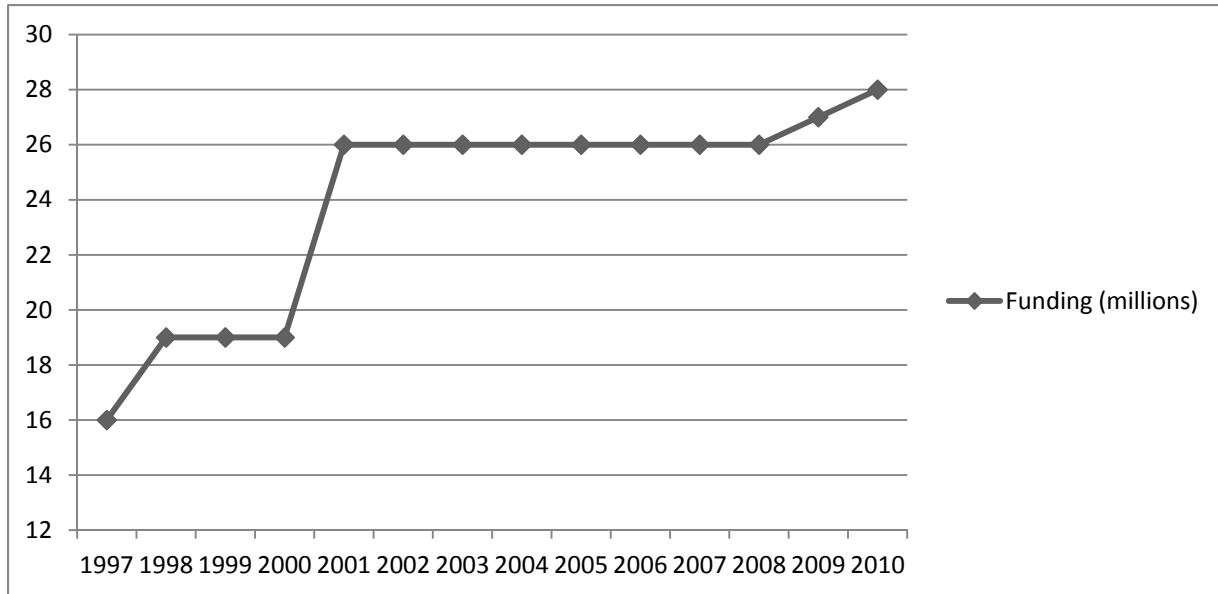
legal fees and time the special educators and related service providers must spend engaged in due process proceedings instead of providing services (Hehir, 2009). Therefore, the lack of collaboration between schools and parents can result in a process that is costly in time, money, and effort, that is shifted away from direct service to students with disabilities.

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 exercise due process (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 (H. R. Rep. 108-77, 2003a). 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 (H. R. Rep. 108-77, 2003).

### **Parent Centers**

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 omitted the regional parent training centers but allowed grants to organizations to develop parent training centers. The intent of having organizations develop the parent training centers was to reach a larger number of parents of students with disabilities (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 to include mediation. 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).



*Figure 1.* Allocations in Federal Budget for grants to Organizations for Parent Training Centers from 1997-2010 (U.S. Government Printing Office, n.d.)

The funds allocated for the parent training centers are specified within the federal budget. Figure 1 displays the amount of funds (in millions) allocated to parent training centers from 1997-2010. Figure 1 displays an increasing amount of funding to the parent training centers from their inclusion in IDEA to present day. The amount of funding has almost doubled which potentially demonstrates that the U. S. Congress recognizes the importance of the parent training centers for parents of students with disabilities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

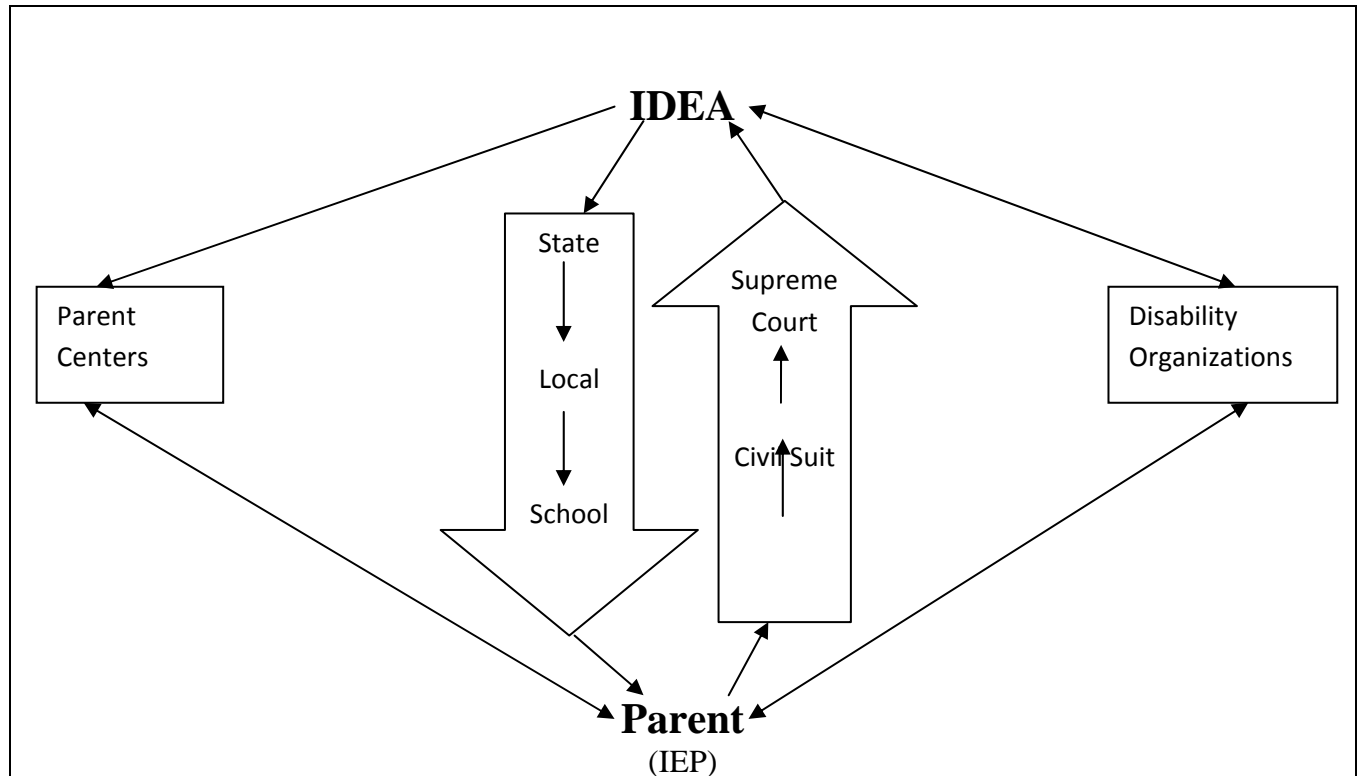


Figure 2. Co-constructive Framework of IDEA

Though the original passage of IDEA fit within the Multiple Streams model (Kingdon, 2003), the evolution of IDEA pertaining to parental involvement in the special education decision process fits within co-construction as demonstrated in Figure 2. The top-down model of IDEA implementation trickles down from the federal level to parents of students with disabilities who are the policy recipients of IDEA. The implementation of IDEA at the school level is based on the individual student's needs and the collaboration of the members of the student's team represents a series of contextualized layers that must align for the team to agree on the best educational program for the student.

Despite the top-down model described above, the tension created by conflict between parents and schools has influenced change in IDEA. The influence of the tension on the law demonstrates the law is not only top-down but also bottom-up making it bi-directional. Parents who are not satisfied with the outcome of a due process hearing have the right for their claim to

be heard at the district court level. Parents have the right to continue appealing court decisions to the U.S. Supreme Court (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). Federal court decisions potentially influence future reauthorizations of the law (Mead, 2009).

Beyond the school level implementation of IDEA and the parent influence through due process and there are bidirectional relationships between the parent centers and parents and disability organizations and parents. The parent centers have the potential to influence IEP meeting by providing parents with information about special education. Informed parents may also help the parent centers by volunteering to help other parents. Disability organizations may also provide information to parents on special education. Parents make donations and provide information to disability organizations who serve as interest groups to influence reauthorizations of IDEA.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School personnel were unclear about parental roles in decision-making when IDEA was originally passed (Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). Educators were considered to be the experts and therefore should make the appropriate decisions for students with disabilities regarding provision of FAPE in the LRE (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). Parents who disagree with these decisions were provided the right to challenge them through resolution, mediation, or due process as outlined in the procedural safeguards (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Parental roles have evolved in special education in an attempt to decrease litigation by improving trust between schools and parents to allow them to work together in a collaborative manner (H. R. Rep. 108-77, 2003).

The original EAHCA minimized the role of parents in educational decision making by providing the ability to challenge decisions rather than participate in making them. The attempt

to increase the role of parents in special educational decision making emerged in IDEA 1997. 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 dispute resolution options (H.R. Rep. 108-77, 2003a). Developing collaborative relationships means educating parents on special education services and processes. Thus, it follows that educating parents should allow them to make informed choices and provide meaningful discussion to collaborate during IEP meetings.

The changes to IDEA 1997 and 2004 were intended to better inform parents of special education services to facilitate collaboration with schools. Increasing collaboration allows schools and parents to agree on special education decisions resulting in a decrease of due process (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). Decreasing due process allows schools to use their resources to provide direct services for students with disabilities (Hehir, 2009).

There are three issues with having parents resolve conflict solely through due process. The first issue is that the IEP meetings were focused on procedural compliance which left little time for parents to provide input regarding the needs of the child (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1998; Hehir, 2009). Parents may have unique insight into the specific strengths and needs of their child they can share with the school personnel. The consequence of focusing solely on procedural compliance is that parents are not able to share that insight which may provide school personnel with information that would help them educate the student. The second issue is that due process requires an abundance of fiscal and time resources for school personnel, which detracts from the ability to provide direct service to students with disabilities (Hehir, 2009). Finally, due process requires social capital that may prevent it from being available to families from specific demographics (Hehir, 2009).

Using due process to resolve conflict in special education decision-making creates tension between parents and school personnel (Manasevit & Maginnis, 2005). School personnel and parents may need to communicate frequently in order to appropriately serve the needs of a student with a disability (Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen, 2003). Tension between parents and school personnel may impact that communication and therefore decrease the quality of services the child receives. Therefore, to optimize services for children with disabilities, parents and school personnel must develop trusting and collaborative relationships.

One intention of the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations of IDEA was for school personnel to develop collaborative relationships with parents. A collaborative relationship would mean parents actively participating in IEP meetings. Parent centers have been established through IDEA with the goal to educate parents about special education so that they can actively participate in IEP meetings. The initial funding for the parent centers was approximately \$16 million per year with the most recent budget reflecting \$28.1 million dollars per year for the parent centers. Therefore, given the intention of the reauthorization and the establishment of the parent centers, it can be expected the literature will reflect that after 1997, parents will have the perception they are actively participating in IEP meetings.

### **Literature Review**

Most research in parental roles in special education decision-making has focused on and parental perceptions of their participation in IEP meetings (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1998; Lo, 2008) and issues related to due process (Ahearn, 2002; Fish, 2008; Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006; Zirkel & Gischlar, 2008). This section will summarize and critique research related to due process issues, parental perceptions of their participation in IEP meetings, and the parent centers.

### **Family Perceptions of IEP Meetings**

The research on family perceptions of IEP meetings focuses on issues related to special education decision-making. One of the common issues is related to parents' from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) ability to interact with the IEP process. This section will discuss both parental perceptions related to CLD issues and compare it to the IEP meeting experiences of non-CLD parents.

**CLD parents.** 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 educational advocates or filing due process. Several of the mothers were aware of the special education training but did not attend because it was only offered 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. Cho and Gannotti (2005) interpret the interview data to mean the difficulty with the

special education process was attributed to cultural and linguistic differences. Though it also the perception of the mothers in the study, the authors fail to consider alternative explanations for the mothers' experiences.

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 they were not treated with 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 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. 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. 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.

Lo (2008) attempts to make the claim that the lack of respect for parental input is the result of the parents being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Though there is a reported language barrier and an issue with interpretation services, the remainder of the results demonstrated the parents were able to request services and ask for explanations when they were denied. Therefore, with the exception of the language barrier, the CLD background may not have played a role in the experiences of these families. Lo cites Fish

(2006) regarding the language barrier when the barrier in that study focused more on special education terminology than on English proficiency.

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.

Salas (2004) provides an excellent description of the researcher's perspective and the bias associated with that perspective. However, validity issues associated with the interpretations are not described. Member checking, triangulation, or any of the common mechanisms for determining validity in qualitative inquiry are not discussed in the study. Furthermore, though the mother in the study described the language barrier as an issue of being treated respectfully and their opinions not being valued, there is no evidence to indicate the lack of respect is a result of their lack of proficiency in English.

The research on parents from CLD backgrounds being able to participate in IEP meetings focuses on language barriers and marginalization (Lo, 2008). However, some parents were able actively participate in the IEP meetings (Cho & Gannotti, 2005). Parents from CLD backgrounds reported the barrier to participation was that they were not treated respectfully, did not always understand the meeting, and were blamed for the child's behavior (Cho & Gannotti,

2005; Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004). Each of these studies had a small number of participants making it difficult to generalize their experiences to other families from CLD backgrounds.

**Non-CLD.** Childre and Chambers (2005) 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 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.

Though the Childre and Chambers (2005) reported parents had positive perceptions of student centered IEP meetings, there may be several issues with their conclusions. First, Childre facilitated development of three of the six IEPs including the meeting. Therefore, Childre may have promoted more parental input in the IEP meeting than the parents had previously experienced. Second, the value of parental input itself, rather than the use of the student centered process may have been responsible for the improved perception. Third, the timing of the initial interview and the student centered forms being sent home is unclear. Parents may have attributed the initial interview as part of the student centered process and felt their dissatisfaction was heard when the IEP meetings ran contrary to what they initially reported. Fourth, the authors claim to have collected interview data from other school personnel but do not report their

method. School personnel reports were used in the results section and were also listed as a source for triangulation. Fifth, though the authors briefly listed tools to rule out threats to validity (triangulation and member checks) they did not discuss in detail how this occurred. Finally, the authors used qualitative techniques to assess the effectiveness of a technique they developed and implemented. Though the bias of Childre's relationships with the families and the facilitation of the process are addressed, the authors fail to acknowledge the bias of studying their own intervention. Addressing the bias or discussing alternative explanations for the change in perception would have been beneficial.

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 indicate that for the seven students and their families in this study, the schools

represented in this study were not adhering to the requirements for parental participation in IEP development.

The recommendations from Fish (2006) of the parents may be biased based on every parent being connected to an advocacy center. A group of parents without the advocacy background may report different results. Another source of bias is the questions and research structure appeared to be rigid which did not allow the researcher to discover phenomenon beyond their own perception of the interaction between parents and schools regarding IEPs. The author did not identify their own biases in collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, the author did not report any sort of validity check to their conclusions such as triangulation or member checking. Future research should allow for a more open structure and use a larger and more diverse sample.

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 Likert scale. The parents were sampled from a family resource center. The survey data were 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 in this study 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.

Though Fish (2008) concludes parents are knowledgeable of the special education process and are active participants in IEP meetings, the data do not completely support that claim. Fish used the percentages on the Likert scale of agree and strongly disagree to support the conclusions. Though in some cases those who marked agree or strongly agree compose 50-60 percent of the sample, there may be at least 40 percent of the respondents who do not understand special education law or who do not feel they are active participants in the IEP meeting. Furthermore, the sample was drawn from people who had already accessed an education center and therefore had the capital to self-educate about special education. .

Simon (2006) studied school personnel and parental perceptions of IEP requirements to determine if their perceptions were the same. 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 their 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.

The intent of Simon (2006) is to study the perceptions of meetings in correspondence with the IEP document generated from those meetings. However, the evaluation of the IEP document is lost. The author attempts to explain away the perceptual disparities independently of the data used from the survey. Finally, there is not external validation of the survey used in the study.

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. Because the parents had to fight for services, trust was diminished which prevented a collaborative relationships from developing between the parents and the schools.

Stoner et al. (2006) used a variety of techniques to help ensure the validity of their findings. They identify the appropriate limitations including small sample size. The most noteworthy limitation of the generalization of these findings is that all parents were recruited from a support group meaning they may have more knowledge of special education rights and services than the average parent of a student with a disability. Another identified limitation is that all of the students attended schools within the same districts. Only the policy of that school district is represented in the findings of this study.

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 Mideastern 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.

The three major limitations of this study are acknowledged by Spann et al. (2003). First, the small sample size only provides insight into six different counties. Therefore, the perceptions of the parents reflect a narrow perspective of local policy. The second limitation is that the sample was drawn from a support group that focuses on advocacy regarding parental rights in special education. Based on the reported activities of the group it can be assumed that the parents in this study are better informed about the IEP process and the legal requirements than the average parent of a child receiving special education services. Finally, students in different disability categories may have different experiences in special education and the sole focus on Autism in this study may not generalize to students with other disabilities.

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. 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.

Harry et al. (1995) sought to describe the experiences on low to lower-middle class African-American parents in navigating the special education process. However, the experiences of the parents in this study may be similar to parents from other demographics. Similar research that studied the experiences of a broader demographic and then disaggregated the experiences by demographic type could determine which demographics were having similar experiences to the parents in the Harry et al. (1995) study.

Parents from non-CLD backgrounds shared some of the same experiences as the parents from CLD backgrounds. 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.

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 (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Fish, 2006), or their input was dismissed by the rest of the IEP team (Lo, 2008).

The studies reviewed in this section had several common issues that limit their external validity. First, many of the studies draw their samples from advocacy groups (i.e. Fish, 2006). Parents who are members of advocacy groups may have attended workshops and classes on special education rights and services as part of their activity with the group. Parents associated with advocacy groups are potentially better informed than the average parent about special education. Being more informed may allow parents from advocacy centers be more likely to recognize issues with the special education process that those who are not informed may not recognize. Therefore, parental perceptions of participation in special education decision making could be better understood by drawing the sample from non-advocacy oriented sources. The second common issue is most of the studies focus on parental perceptions of their participation in IEP meetings. The parental perceptions of the amount of participation can be validated through interviewing school personnel. Several of the studies reviewed also had validity issues associated with analysis of qualitative data.

### **Due Process**

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. However, Ahearn (2002) looked at the aggregated due process data for the entire nation and did not examine the data by state.

Zirkel & Gischlar (2008) extended Ahearn's research and surveyed states for the number of adjudicated due process hearings from the years 1991 to 2005. They found that the decreasing trend identified by Ahearn (2002) did not continue and the number of due process hearings remained steady as a plateau of approximately 3,000 cases being adjudicated each year from 1996 to 2005. Zirkel and Gischlar (2008) disaggregated their data by state and found the majority of due process hearings were isolated to several states with New York and New Jersey representing 56 percent of all due process claims adjudicated from 1991-2006. Zirkel and Gischlar also calculated a per capita estimate of adjudicated due process claims based on 10,000 students with disabilities. The per capita calculation demonstrated the same upward trend as Ahearn with approximately 125 cases per 10,000 students with disabilities being adjudicated in 1991 and 185 cases per 10,000 students with disabilities being adjudicated in 1997. The per capita cases being adjudicated decreased and remained stable with approximately 145 to 180 cases per 10,000 students with disabilities being adjudicated from 1998 to 2005 (Zirkel & Gischlar, 2008). Therefore, despite any changes in the number of students receiving special education services, the proportion of due process claims being adjudicate declined slightly and

remained stable. Unlike Ahearn (2002), Zirkel and Gischlar did not collect data on the number of due process claims filed that were not adjudicated. Knowing the number of claims not adjudicated would be beneficial for knowing the effectiveness of mediation and pre-resolution sessions between parents and school personnel.

The proportion of due process claims being adjudicated has fallen slightly and remained stable since the implementation of IDEA 1997 (Zirkel & Gischlar, 2008). However, the proportion of due process claims either being filed or adjudicated is not an appropriate metric for parental participation in IEP meetings. The ability to file a due process claim assumes that every parent who is dissatisfied will choose to file a claim, has the social capital to file a claim (Hehir, 2009), and is able to interact with the procedural safeguards.

Fitzgerald & Watkins (2006) studied the readability level of procedural safeguards based upon 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 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

Though Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) are able to argue the procedural safeguards are written at too high of a reading level, the researchers assume the parents attempt to read the procedural safeguards when trying to learn about their rights. Research regarding what parents know about the procedural safeguards document and how they interact with it when they receive it will provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of the procedural safeguards provided by IDEA.

Though IDEA guarantees procedural safeguards which provide due process for parents who disagree with school decisions, not every parent who disagrees with the school understands their right to due process (Fish, 2008) or will file a claim (Hehir, 2009). As Fitzgerald and Watkins (2006) argue, the reading level of the procedural safeguards may make them unavailable to every parent. Therefore, it is beneficial to have a better understanding of both parents' perceptions of their legal protections under IDEA and how they interact with the procedural safeguards when they are distributed in a meeting.

### **Parent Centers**

There is limited research on the efficacy of the parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA. The proposed study will attempt a comprehensive search of the literature to identify and evaluate research on the parent centers. The comprehensive search will be conducted by searching the research databases of *ERIC*, *PSYCInfo*, and *JSTOR*, for the following terms, *parent center*, *special education information*, *special education parent resource*, and *special education guidance*. The research resulting from the literature search would be reviewed to determine if the effectiveness of the parent centers have been studied.

The outcomes of the parent training centers were evaluated by the ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center in 2011. The ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center is the national coordinator for the 107 parent training centers operating in the United States. A third-party provider conducted a telephone survey to a random sample of 25 parents who received technical assistance from each center and a random sample of 25 parents who had attended a parent center workshop from each center for a total of over 5000 participants. Outcome data was also collected using an online survey and several individual stories were reported in the evaluation. The outcome data was collected from October 1, 2009 through September 30, 2010 (ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center, 2011).

The evaluation indicated that approximately 801,000 parents had received individual assistance and 174,000 parents had attended trainings or presentations held by the parent centers. Parents of all students with every disability category were represented with the highest (22.13 percent) being parents of students with autism and the second highest (12.87 percent) being parents of students with learning disabilities. The ages of the students ranged from birth to beyond high school with the largest percentage being for students between the ages of 6 and 11 (34.25). Parents from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds were represented as thirty-percent of people receiving assistance which is consistent with their representation in the general population. The parent centers distributed approximately 5.7 million newsletters, had approximately 14 million visits to their websites, made contact with 25 thousand parents through media activities and 901 thousand parents through poster session and resource fairs. Representatives from the parent centers provided assistance by attending 11,615 IEP meetings, facilitated 382 IEP meetings, and helped with 323 mediations and 338 resolutions (ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center, 2011).

The outcome data for parents who received individual assistance and parents who attended workshops is summarized in Table 1. The evaluation concluded the data indicate a benefit to parents that justifies the cost for the parent centers (ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center, 2011).

**Table 1****Summary of Outcome Evaluation**

Parent Center Outcome	To a Great/Some			
	Extent (percentage)		Yes (percentage)	
	Individual	Workshop	Individual	Workshop
Help Children more Appropriate Services	-	-	80	79
Parents more knowledgeable about how to work with schools	94	97	-	-
Help Address Child's Critical Needs	-	-	89	88
Provide Relevant Information to Make Decisions	-	-	93	94
Parents Share Information with Received with Other Parents	83	88	-	-
Provide Useful Information to Parents (Very Useful/Not Useful)	-	-	95	97
Materials are High Quality	-	-	97	97
Help Resolve Disagreements with Schools	-	-	84	-

ALLIANCE Parent Technical Assistance Center (2011)

The overall goal of the parent centers is to help educate parents of their rights, teach them how to effectively collaborate with schools, and to inform parents about alternative conflict resolution strategies (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Though the data from the outcome evaluation suggest the parent centers are effective, there are issues with the data and how they are being reported. Despite the large sample for the evaluation, there is an assumption that every parent of a child with a disability knows the parent centers exist and how to access them. The second issue with the evaluation was though they used a third party to conduct the survey, the final report was written by the national parent center resulting in a risk to the objectivity of the report. The third issue is that in reporting the survey data, two parts of the scale appear to be aggregated (to a great extent/to some extent).

In addition to the aforementioned issues, there was no description of how the survey was administered or how the questions were framed. The time of day the calls were made may have influenced who was able to respond to the survey (i.e. working parent versus stay at home parent). Though the sample consisted of over 5000 parents, there was no response rate recorded in the evaluation. The manner in which the questions were posed may have also influenced parental response in favor of the parent centers. Finally, without the proper introduction to the survey, parents may have felt pressured to report positive interactions due to fear that negative reports would adversely affect the parent centers.

**Summary.** The reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 attempted to increase the role of parents in special education through developing collaborative relationships with schools. However, parents of students with disabilities in the studies analyzed in this review perceive they are not actively involved in special education decision-making. Parent centers have been established through IDEA to help educate parents so that they can actively participate in special

education decisions. The funding for the parent centers has steadily increased since their inception in 1997. However, there is limited research on the effectiveness of the parent centers beyond their own self-evaluation. Future research should continue to study the implementation of IDEA in the local context in conjunction with evaluating perceptions of the parent centers.

### **Research Questions of Proposed Study**

The proposed study will attempt to accomplish two goals. The first goal of the proposed study is to explore the implementation of IDEA in a local context. The co-construction model in Figure 2 demonstrates the hierarchical structure through which IDEA is implemented with the origin at the federal level and the direct implementation occurring within the school. The local context is where the policy recipient interacts directly with the policy. The local implementation of federal policy is complex because school districts serve several roles in implementing IDEA. The first role is that they are policy initiators in that they must develop their own special education policies based on the state regulations to distribute to the schools. The second role is as policy interpreter in that the school district must interpret the state's regulations in developing their district policies. Finally, as policy enactor, the school district is responsible for both interpreted and initiating policies that were initially created outside of their schools (Sykes, O'Day, & Ford, 2009). Therefore, the requirements of IDEA may be challenging to implement based on the school district's needs/

The second goal of the proposed study is to explore perceptions of the effectiveness of the parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA. The parent centers were established to inform parents about special education rights and services so that they can actively participate in special education decision making. The funding for these centers has almost doubled since their inception in 1997. There has been limited to no external evaluation of the parent centers.

The research questions of the proposed study are:

1. What are school personnel perceptions of parental participation in IEP meetings as IDEA is implemented through local policy?
2. What are parental perceptions of parental participation in IEP meetings as IDEA is implemented through local policy?
3. Do parents who have used the resources of parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA report different perceptions of special education processes than those who have not used them at all?
4. Do parents who have used the resources of parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA multiple times report different perceptions of special education processes than parents who have only used them one time?
5. Is there a difference in parent center involvement based on demographics?

### **Method**

Studying perceptions of the special education process in a local context and the utilization of the parent centers will require a mixed method design. The proposed study will utilize both interviews and document analysis. Table 2 displays each research question, the proposed sampling technique, proposed data collection, and proposed data analysis. The remainder of this section will focus on describing the sampling, data collection, and data analysis techniques associated with each research question.

**Table 2**

#### **Research Question and Data Matrix**

Research Question	Data Source	Sampling	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1: What are school personnel perceptions of parental participation in IEP	A. School Personnel	Convenience	Interview	Thematic Analysis

meetings as IDEA is implemented through local policy?	B. District Special Education Policies				Document Analysis
RQ2: What are parental perceptions of parental participation in IEP meetings as IDEA is implemented through local policy?	A. Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services	Convenience	Interview		Thematic Analysis
RQ3: Do parents who have used the resources of parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA report different perceptions of special education processes than those who have not used them at all?	A. Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services	Convenience	Interview		Thematic Analysis
RQ4: Do parents who have used the resources of parent centers funded under Part D of IDEA multiple times report different perceptions of special education processes than parents who have only used them one time?	A. Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services	Convenience	I Interview		Thematic Analysis
RQ5: Is there a difference in parent center involvement based on demographics?	A. Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services	Convenience	Interview		Thematic Analysis

## Sample

The first goal of the proposed study is to explore the implementation of federal policy in a local context. The target population for the proposed study will be individuals who interact with the special education process within the Fairfax County Public School district. The Fairfax County Public School District is a large suburban school district with approximately 13.9 percent of the students eligible for special education services (Common Core Data, 2010). The sample

would include both parents of students receiving special education services and school personnel who interact with the special education process.

Permission to conduct the study would be requested from the Human Subjects Review Board of both George Mason University and Fairfax County Public Schools. Once permission is granted by both entities, two elementary schools would be chosen for inclusion in the study. The first elementary school would represent students from high socioeconomic backgrounds as evidenced by less than five percent of the students being eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The second school would represent students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as evidenced by greater than 50 percent of the students being eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

The names and contact information of parents of students receiving special education services would be requested from each school. A letter explaining the study will be sent to each parent on the list. Accomplishing the second goal of the proposed study requires parents who have utilized the parent centers be included in the study. Parents will be called and asked if they are willing to participate in the study. A short list of questions will be asked during the telephone call to determine both if they have used the parent centers and the frequency with which they have. The calls will continue until two parents have been identified from each school that fit into the categories of never used the parent centers, have used the parent centers once, and have used the parent centers multiple times. It is assumed that the data from the 12 parents interviewed will provide an accurate portrayal of parental perceptions of the special education process differing by both socioeconomic status and utilization of the parent centers. If it is discovered that additional data is necessary during analysis to appropriately answer the research questions, then a third parent from each school in each of the aforementioned categories will be interviewed. The process will be repeated until saturation occurs.

Each school would also be asked to identify school personnel familiar with the special education process to be interviewed. The school personnel will include an administrator, special education teacher, general education teacher, and related service provider. Triangulating the data from the eight school personnel interviewed will provide a perspective of school personnel perceptions of the implementation of special education policy.

### **Interviews**

It is estimated that each interview will last one hour. Interviews in the proposed study would be semi-structured and utilize open ended questions. Interviews with parents and school personnel will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient to them. If both parents wish to participate in the interview, then they will be interviewed simultaneously. Each interview will be recorded electronically to be played back during analysis. The interview will begin with a brief description of the purpose of the study. For parents, it will be noted that the interview will focus on their perceptions and experiences to determine the local implementation of IDEA. For each interview, the researcher will be identified as a doctoral student who is not employed by Fairfax County Public Schools.

The parent interview questions will focus on parents' experiences in IEP meetings, their perceived barriers to participation, perspective on the procedural safeguards, parents' perceptions of how schools communicate information about special education rights and services, and utilization of the parent centers. Parents will also be asked some basic demographic questions such as household income and length of time their child has received special education services. The school personnel interview questions will focus on familiarity of district policies, perceptions of parental roles in IEP meetings, and perceptions of the parent centers. The semi-

structure format allows the interview to be more of a conversation which may reveal phenomena that does not already exist in the current literature.

### **Interview Data Analysis**

Each interview recording will be transcribed and the transcription will be analyzed by the researcher. The transcript will be analyzed for substantive themes through thematic analysis. As each transcript is analyzed the constant comparison method will be used to modify the identified themes. Additional evidence from each interview will be sought from the transcripts to support the theme. The constant comparison method will be continued until saturation, where no more information can be gained from the qualitative data, occurs. Researcher bias will be addressed through member checking. The researcher will clarify the meaning of different statements with each of the interview participants. The researcher will also engage in member checking where the analysis and transcripts will be shared with specific doctoral students familiar with educational policy, university professors, and special education professionals, to determine if alternative interpretations of the data exist.

### **Document Analysis**

The local education policy on the implementation of IDEA will be requested from Fairfax County Public Schools. The document will be reviewed and the sections relating to parental participation will be noted. The sections on parental participation in the local policy will be compared to the sections in both IDEA and the Code of Federal Regulations. The local education agency regulations will also be compared to the interview responses of the school personnel to determine awareness of the local policy.

### **Syntheses**

The document analysis will provide information on the local interpretation of IDEA. The school personnel interviews will be triangulated with the document analysis to explore awareness of the local policy. The parent interviews will also be triangulated with the school personnel interviews to explore if the perceptions of parental participation are consistent between the two. Finally, the data regarding parental participation will be explored in the context of the utilization of the parent centers to gain perspective on their effectiveness in helping parents be active participants in IEP meetings.

## References

- Ahearn, E. (2002). Due process hearings: 2001 update. *Quick Turnaround Forum*. Retrieved on February 27, 2011 from <http://nasdse.org/Portals/0/Documents/Download%20Publications/DFR-0266.pdf>
- ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center (2011). Retrieved on March 29, 2011 From <http://www.parentcenternetwork.org/assets/files/national/2009-10%20Parent%20Centers%20Helping%20Families.pdf>
- Childre, A. & Chambers, C. R. (2005). Family perceptions of student centered planning and IEP meetings. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 40(3), 217-233.
- Cho, S. J. & Gannotti, M. E. (2005). Korean-American mothers' perceptions of professional support in early intervention and special education programs. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 2(1), 1-9.
- Common Core Data (2010). Retrieved on November 27, 2011, from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district\\_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=Fairfax&State=51&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=5101260&details=](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=Fairfax&State=51&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=5101260&details=)
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act 20 U.S.C. §1401 (1975).
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act 20 U.S.C. §1401 (1983).
- Fish, W. W. (2006). Perceptions of parents of students with Autism towards the IEP meeting: A case study of one family support group chapter. *Education*, 127, 56-68.
- Fish, W. W. (2008). The IEP meeting: Perceptions of parents who receive special education services. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(1), 8-14.

Fitzgerald, J. L. & Watkins, M. W. (2006). Parents' rights in special education: The readability of procedural safeguards, *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 497-510.

H.R. Report 105-95 at 107 (1997).

H.R. Report 105-95 at 119 (1997a).

H.R. Report 108-77 at 84-86(2003).

H.R. Report 108-77 at 114(2003a).

Hallahan, D. P. & Kauffman, J. M. (2006). *Exceptional learners: An introduction to special education, tenth edition*. Pearson Education Inc.

Harry, B., Allen, N., & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Communication versus compliance: African-American parents' involvement in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 61(4), 364-377.

Hehir, T. (2009). Looking forward: Toward a new role in promoting educational equity for students with disabilities from low income backgrounds. In Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D.N. (Eds.). *Handbook of Education Policy Research* (pp. 831-841). New York: Routledge.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997). Retrieved on February 26, 2011 from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-105publ17/pdf/PLAW-105publ17.pdf>.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004). Retrieved on February 26, 2011 from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ446/pdf/PLAW-108publ446.pdf>

Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies, second edition*. New York: Longman.

Lo, L. (2008). Chinese families' level of participation and experiences in IEP meetings.

*Preventing School Failure*, 53(1), 21-27.

Manasevit, L. M. & Maginnis, A. M. (2005). *IDEA: New expectations for schools and students*.

Tampa, FL: Thompson Publishing Group.

Mead, J. F. (2009). The role of law in educational policy formation, implementation, and research. In Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D.N. (Eds.). *Handbook of Education Policy Research* (pp. 286-295). New York: Routledge.

Ong-Dean, C. (2009). *Distinguishing disability: Parents, privilege, and special education*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002). A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and families. Retrieved on February 26, 2011 from [http://www2.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/images/Pres\\_R ep.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/images/Pres_R ep.pdf)

S7836: A bill to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Retrieved online from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2003-06-12/pdf/CREC-2003-06-12-pt1-PgS7834.S.Rep.pdf>.

Salas, L. (2004). Individualized education plan (IEP) meetings and Mexican American Parents: Let's talk about it. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 3(3), 181-192.

Simon, J. B. (2006). Perceptions of the IEP requirement. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 29(4), 225-235.

Spann, S. J., Kohler, F. W., & Soenksen, D. (2003). Examining parents in and perceptions of special education service: An interview with families in a parent support group. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 18(4), 228-237.

Stoner, J. B., Bock, S. J., Thompson, J. R., Angell, M. E., Heyl, B. S., & Crowley, E. P. (2005).

Welcome to our world: Parent perceptions of interactions between parents of young children with ASD and education professionals. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 20(1), 37-51.

Sykes, G., O'Day, J., & Ford, T. G. (2009). The district role in instructional improvement. In Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D.N. (Eds.). *Handbook of Education Policy Research* (pp. 767-784). New York: Routledge.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2011). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2010*. Retrieved on November 13, 2011 from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64> .

U.S. Government Printing Office (n.d.). Retrieved on March 19, 2011 from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionGPO.action?collectionCode=BUDGET>.

U.S. Office of Special Education (n.d.). *History: Twenty-five years of programs in education children with disabilities through IDEA*. Retrieved on February 21, 2011 from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history.pdf>

Yell, M. L. (2012). *The law and special education: Third edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Yell, M. L., Rogers, D., & Rogers, E. L. (1998). The legal history of special education: What a long, strange trip it's been!. *Remedial and Special Education* 19(4), 219-228.

Yoshida, R. K., Fenton, K. S., Kaufman, M. J., & Maxwell, J. P. (1978). Parental Involvement in the special education pupil planning process: The school's perspective. *Exceptional Children*, 44(7), 531-534.

Zirkel, P. A. & Gischlar, K. L. (2008). Due process hearings under the IDEA: A longitudinal

frequency analysis. *Journal of Special Education Leadership* 21(1), 22-31.