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A 3-Year Study of Middle, Junior High, and High School IEP Meetings

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the perceptions of 1,638 secondary individualized education program (IEP) meeting participants from 393 IEP meetings across 3 consecutive years. Results indicate significant differences between the survey answers and participant roles, when students did or did not attend their IEP meetings, and when different professional team members attended the meetings. Special education teachers talked more than all team members. Students reported the lowest scores for knowing the reasons for the meetings, knowing what to do at the meetings, and five other survey items. General educators rated themselves lowest on three of the survey questions. Student and general educator attendance at the IEP meetings produced value-added benefits for IEP team members, especially parents.*

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) established that individualized education programs (IEPs) guide the educational experience of public school students with disabilities (Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982). This legislation mandated that parents, special education teachers, and administrators attend IEP meetings to develop IEPs for students with disabilities. For the first time in public school educational history, parents of students with disabilities attained formal educational planning status equal to that of teachers and administrators.

The required addition of parents to the educational planning process met with immediate skepticism. Farber and Lewis (1975), for example, thought the inclusion of parents into the IEP planning process represented a symbolic gesture rather than an effective means for improving educational planning and teaching. Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell (1978) surveyed the professional members of IEP teams and found that a majority of professional team members wanted parents to only gather and present information at the IEP meeting, and not to become involved in actual educational planning.

Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980) studied IEP meeting interactions of students with mild learning problems who had been mainstreamed into general education classes. They found that special education teachers talked on average twice as much as parents, and parents talked more than anyone else at the IEP meeting. Educators and administrators directed most of their comments to the parents. These results suggest that parents had indeed become actively involved in the educational planning process. No students in Goldstein et al.'s study attended any of the IEP meetings.

Pub. L. 94-142 directed that students, whenever appropriate, could participate in their own IEP meetings and take an active role in the educational planning process (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983). Strickland and Turnbull (1990) considered the inclusion of students into the educational decision-making process as one of Pub. L. 94-142's fundamental premises. Unfortunately, most parents and children with disabilities did not know that students could attend their IEP meeting, even though parents and students who did know overwhelmingly supported the concept (Gillespie, 1981). Because of the lack of knowledge, the past practice of not including students in the IEP meeting, and the paucity of literature on student involvement in their IEP process, few students actively participated in their own IEP meetings (Gillespie & Turnbull; Strickland & Turnbull).

The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), building on the earlier Pub. L. 94-142 foundation, added four innovative transition reforms designed to improve student postschool outcomes (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998a; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Storms, O'Leary, & Williams, 2000). First, students 14 years old and older must be invited to attend their IEP meetings. Second, the IEP discussions and decisions must reflect student interests and preferences. Third, students' postschool dreams provide the direction to develop a plan of study and needed transition ser-

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vices. Fourth, students' general education teachers must attend the IEP meetings. Twenty-two years after the passage of Pub. L. 94-142, students, parents, and general education teachers finally all meet to develop secondary educational plans.

These transition reforms should promote active student engagement at IEP meetings and facilitate the development of increased student self-advocacy, decision making, and other self-determination skills (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998b; Furney & Salembier, 2000; Halpern, 1994; Martin, Huber Marshall, & DePry, 2001). However, implementation of these transition reform efforts has been slow, with most states failing to achieve even minimal levels of compliance (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997; Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999). The National Council on Disability (2000) reported that "88% or 44 states failed to ensure compliance with transition requirements" (p. 89). Williams and O'Leary (2001) found that many schools do not invite students to their own IEP meetings. Johnson et al. (2002) indicated that secondary education must improve student attendance at IEP meetings and prepare students to actively participate in their meetings so they can lead discussions about their plans and goals. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, Expert Strategy Panel Report indicated that today's secondary schools provide too few opportunities for students to learn and practice IEP leadership skills prior to their IEP meeting (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Even so, a growing number of students do attend their IEP meetings. Many of the statewide transition system change grants

TABLE 1
Participants by School

<i>School</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Admin</i>	<i>SPED Teachers</i>	<i>Gen ED Teachers</i>	<i>Related Services</i>	<i>Others*</i>	<i>Total</i>
Jr. High	79	96	38	83	16	81	24	422
Middle School	49	57	24	59	78	51	42	360
High School	154	183	68	168	66	125	132	907
Total	282	336	130	310	160	257	198	1689

* Participants self-identified their role.

sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education encouraged student involvement in their IEP meetings (Williams & O'Leary).

Emerging studies report that when students attend their IEP meetings without specific IEP meeting instruction, students do not know what to do, lack understanding of the meeting's purpose or language, feel like no one listens to them when they do talk, do not know the goals or other outcomes of the meeting, and think that attending the IEP meeting would be a meaningless activity (Lehmann, Bassett, & Sands, 1999; Lovitt, Cushing, & Stump, 1994; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995; Powers, Turner, Matuszewski, Wilson, & Loesch, 1999; Sweeney, 1996). These studies suggest that asking students to attend their IEP meetings without prior IEP meeting instruction may actually cause educational harm and result in more students becoming disillusioned with their formal education (Lehman et al.; Powers et al.).

IEP meetings occur for every student who is eligible for special education and related services. Much has been written on IEP procedural details and their impact on educational outcomes (Smith, 1990), but little information exists on participant perceptions. For example, we don't know the value-added benefit of students and general educators attending the IEP meeting, or the perceptions of IEP team members to student participation in the IEP meeting, and whether their perception differs when students do or do not attend the meetings. Answers to these questions may facilitate implementation of IDEA's secondary transition reform measures. Thus, this study examined the perceptions of IEP team members. Specifically, we wanted to determine if perceptions of IEP meetings differ by IEP team members' role, and if their perceptions changed

when different team members, including the student, attended the meetings.

METHOD

SUBJECTS AND SETTING

The 1,638 participants in this study attended 393 IEP meetings held over 3 consecutive, academic years. The number of participants at each IEP meeting ranged from 1 to 18, with a mean of 4.3 participants per meeting. Table 1 depicts the number of participants by role and school. Participants self-identified their role. As identified by the students' school name, 25% of the participants came from junior high schools, 21% from middle schools, and 54% from high schools. We did not collect other demographic data, such as student disability, age, and meeting topics in order to preserve confidentiality per the requests of the cooperating school districts. Participants came from five school districts from four cities or towns in one southwestern state. Two school districts located in one metropolitan area contributed more than 57% of the data. The rural school district contributing the least amount of data provided 4.4% of the total surveys. Each district had participated in a statewide transition system change project, which strongly encouraged student attendance at IEP meetings.

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURES

A two-part, 10-item questionnaire provided the data for this study (see Figure 1). Part one asked the participant to check one of the following seven IEP team member roles: (a) student, (b) parent, (c) administrator, (d) special education teacher, (e) general education teacher, (f) related

FIGURE 1
IEP Meeting Participant Survey

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP) MEETING
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Person completing form (check one):

Student
 Parent
 Administrator
 Special Education Teacher
 General Education Teacher
 Related Services
 Other

People who attended the meeting (check all):

Student
 Parent
 Administrator
 Special Education Teacher
 General Education Teacher
 Related Services
 Other

Mark the box that fits what you think about each statement.

	<u>Comments</u>
1. I knew the reasons for the meeting.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
2. I knew what I needed to do at the meeting.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
3. I talked in the meeting.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
4. I felt comfortable saying what I thought.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
5. I talked about (student's) strengths and needs.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
6. I talked about (student's) interests.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
7. I helped make the decisions.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
8. I understood what was said.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
9. I know what I'm supposed to do next.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	
10. I feel good about this meeting.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little <input type="checkbox"/> Some <input type="checkbox"/> A lot	

Date of Meeting _____

services, or (g) other. Part one also asked the participants to indicate who attended the meeting: (a) student, (b) parent, (c) administrator, (d) special education teacher, (e) general education teacher, (f) related services, or (g) other. Part two, which consisted of 10 survey items, asked respondents to answer by marking “not at all,” “a little,” “some,” or “a lot.” Three secondary special educators and one special education administrator assisted with writing the survey items, and then reviewed them for wording, clarity of expression, and how each matched the purpose of the study.

Each year we provided the special education chair at each participating school with a packet of surveys. We asked the chairs to distribute them at the end of the IEP meetings for all of their students with mild to moderate disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, mild to moderate mental retardation, and emotional disabilities. We made follow-up phone calls or visits to the chairs during each year to answer questions and to offer encouragement. If an IEP participant could not read the questions, another participant read the questions and possible answers and facilitated marking an answer.

RESULTS

We converted the answers to each survey item into a number, with 1 representing “not at all,” 2 representing “a little,” 3 representing “some,” and 4 representing “a lot.” A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) determined the effect of who completed the survey items across the 10 survey questions. We then used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) as a follow-up test to the MANOVA, and the conservative Scheffé’s *F* procedure to determine the meaningful post hoc mean comparisons.

DIFFERENCES BY QUESTION AND BY WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY

A one-way MANOVA determined significant differences between the roles of those who completed the survey, $\Lambda = .55$, $F(70, 9, 283.9) = 14.16$, $p < .01$. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for each survey item by participants’ role. An ANOVA was then conducted on each survey item as a follow-up test to the

MANOVA. As depicted in Table 3, we found significant differences in how the IEP meeting participants answered each survey item.

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVAs consisted of pairwise comparisons to determine the IEP team participants who answered the survey items differently from one another. Table 4 depicts the significant pairwise comparisons by each survey item. Special education teachers reported talking significantly more at the IEP meetings (Item 3). Special education teachers also reported helping make decisions (Item 7) than all participants but the administrators. Parents reported talking more about student interests (Item 6) than all participants but students and special education teachers.

Out of the 95 significant pairwise comparisons, students responded differently than other IEP team members 45 times—far more than any other team member. Students reported knowing the reasons (Item 1), knowing what they needed to do (Item 2), and understanding what was said at the meetings (Item 8) significantly less than all other participants. Except for the general education teacher, students also reported feeling significantly less comfortable saying what they thought (Item 4) and knowing what to do next (Item 9) than all other IEP team members. Students reported talking significantly more about their interests (Item 6) than the general education teachers and the “other” category of IEP meeting participants.

Table 4 also indicates that general education teachers reported helping make decisions (Item 7) significantly less than all IEP meeting participants. General education teachers knew what to do next (Item 9) less than all other IEP meeting participants except students. General education teachers reported talking about student strengths and needs (Item 5) at a level equal to that of parents and special education teachers, but less about student interests (Item 6).

WHEN STUDENTS DID OR DID NOT ATTEND THEIR IEP MEETINGS

Students attended 70% of the IEP meetings (277 out of 393). We found significant differences between the responses of IEP team members when students did or did not attend their meetings,

TABLE 2
Mean and Standard Deviation by IEP Meeting Participant Role and Survey Item

Item	Students		Parents		Admin		SPED Teachers		Gen ED Teachers		Related Services		Others		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1	3.46	.70	3.83	.46	3.90	.35	3.93	.29	3.72	.52	3.95	.23	3.91	.37	3.81	.48
2	3.18	.89	3.64	.57	3.85	.51	3.91	.35	3.72	.51	3.88	.34	3.83	.48	3.69	.62
3	2.88	.71	3.21	.56	3.38	.64	3.55	.6	3.08	.58	3.13	.69	3.11	.73	3.20	.68
4	3.17	.87	3.75	.55	3.86	.39	3.86	.39	3.74	.58	3.81	.47	3.74	.61	3.68	.63
5	2.88	.97	3.34	.75	3.10	.97	3.50	.81	3.33	.71	3.10	.90	3.08	.99	3.21	.90
6	2.92	.87	3.13	.77	2.71	1.1	3.13	.89	2.46	.95	2.65	.99	2.60	1.1	2.87	.95
7	2.90	.88	3.27	.78	3.38	.72	3.53	.72	2.60	.85	3.15	.81	2.96	.94	3.15	.86
8	3.52	.68	3.88	.37	3.88	.39	3.97	.19	3.81	.44	3.95	.23	3.94	.26	3.85	.43
9	3.45	.72	3.73	.55	3.88	.35	3.94	.28	3.41	.82	3.87	.34	3.78	.52	3.73	.56
10	3.36	.81	3.80	.51	3.79	.49	3.78	.47	3.43	.73	3.75	.49	3.79	.48	3.7	.61

$\Lambda = .973$, $F(10, 1589) = 4.44$, $p < .0001$. We then conducted t -tests for student presence at the IEP meeting by questions, split by who completed the form, and found several significant findings. When students attended, parents reported significantly higher scores ($t = 2.36$, $p = .02$) on Item 1, "I knew the reason for the meeting." When students attended, responses to Item 4, "I felt comfortable saying what I thought," produced three significant results. Parents ($t = 4.21$, $p < .0001$), general educators ($t = 1.98$, $p = .05$), and related services personnel ($t = 2.36$, $p = .02$) felt more comfortable saying what they thought. When students attended, administrators talked significantly more about student strengths and needs (Item 5; $t = 2.36$, $p = .02$) and about their interests (Item 6; $t = 2.68$, $p = .008$). In the meetings that students attended, attendees in the "other" category reported helping to make decisions less when students did not attend (Item 7; $t = -2.55$, $p = .01$). When students attended, parents indicated that they understood what was said at the meetings significantly more (Item 8; $t = 4.81$, $p < .01$). Parents and general educators also knew significantly more of what they needed to do next (Item 9; $t = 2.49$, $p = .01$; $t = 2.19$, $p = .03$). And when students attended, general educators felt better about the meetings (Item 10; $t = 2.29$, $p = .02$).

*WHEN DIFFERENT TEAM MEMBERS
 ATTENDED THE MEETINGS*

Significant differences existed between the responses of IEP team members when general educators attended the meetings, $\Lambda = .957$, $F(10, 1538) = 6.98$, $p < .0001$. When general educators attended the meetings, participants reported significantly higher scores on five questions. First, participants talked more at the meetings (Question 3; $F(1, 1547) = 4.02$, $p = .05$). Second, participants talked more about student strengths and needs (Question 5; $F(1, 1547) = 6.78$, $p < .01$). Third, participants reported feeling more empowered to make decisions (Question 7; $F(1, 1547) = 9.11$, $p < .003$). Fourth, participants reported increased knowledge of what to do next (question 9; $F(1, 1547) = 8.93$, $p < .003$). Fifth, participants reported feeling better about the meeting (Question 10; $F(1, 1547) = 12.92$, $p < .003$).

Attendance of related services personnel also made significant differences in how participants answered the questionnaire, $\Lambda = .974$, $F(10, 1491) = 3.98$, $p < .0001$. Team members reported knowing the reason for the meeting better, $F(1, 1500) = 12.58$, $p < .01$, and talking more about student interests, $F(1, 1500) = 4.78$, $p = .03$.

The attendance of the "other" category of IEP participants also produced significant differences in how participants responded, $\Lambda = .98$, $F(10, 1452) = 3.48$, $p = .0002$. Team members knew the reason for the meeting better, $F(1, 1461) = 9.9$, $p < .01$, knew more of what do to at the meetings, $F(1, 1461) = 10.58$, $p = .001$,

TABLE 3
ANOVA Results as Follow-Up to MANOVA

Dependent Variable	DF	F-Value	P-Value	Partial Eta
1. I knew the reasons for the meeting.	7, 1600	32.50	<.001	.125
2. I knew what I needed to do at the meeting.	7, 1600	46.13	<.001	.168
3. I talked in the meeting.	7, 1600	24.82	<.001	.098
4. I felt comfortable saying what I thought.	7, 1600	38.28	<.001	.143
5. I talked about (student's) strengths and needs.	7, 1600	13.48	<.001	.056
6. I talked about (student's) interests.	7, 1600	16.43	<.001	.067
7. I helped make the decisions.	7, 1600	26.27	<.001	.103
8. I understood what was said.	7, 1600	34.94	<.001	.133
9. I know what I'm supposed to do next.	7, 1600	28.32	<.001	.110
10. I feel good about this meeting.	7, 1600	20.43	<.001	.082

talked more about interests, $F(1, 1461) = 6.16$, $p = .01$, understood more of what was said, $F(1, 1461) = 14.19$, $p < .01$, and felt better about the meeting, $F(1, 1461) = 4.29$, $p = .04$.

DIFFERENCES BY GRADE LEVEL

Students' grade level produced significant differences in how participants responded to the questionnaire, $\Lambda = .94$, $F(20, 3192) = 5.3$, $p < .0001$. Middle school participants knew the reasons for the meeting significantly better than junior high school team members ($p = .03$). Junior high and high school participants reported talking more, talking more about interests, feeling that they helped make decisions, understanding what to do next better, and feeling better about the IEP meetings than did middle school attendees ($p < .01$ to $p = .04$).

SURVEY RELIABILITY

We conducted an item analysis on the 10 survey items. Each item was correlated with the total score (with the item removed), and all the correlations were greater than .81. Coefficient alpha for the survey was .83. The Guttman split-half reliability test produced a .86 correlation.

DISCUSSION

Parents, students 14 years old or older, educators, and administrators for the first time in special education history now meet together to develop the IEP. But, the literature on secondary IEP meetings contains little quantitative information on participants' perceptions. IDEA transition reforms center on active student engagement at IEP meetings (Field et al., 1998a; Martin et al., 2001). We conducted this 3-year study to increase understanding of what IEP team members think of secondary transition IEP meetings and to determine if their perceptions differ when particular participants attend the meeting. We found significant differences between the answers to each of the 10 survey questions and the role of the meeting participant who completed the survey.

VALUE-ADDED BENEFIT OF STUDENTS AND GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

The presence of students at the IEP meetings resulted in many value-added benefits and validates the usefulness of the legal requirement that added students and general education teachers. Parents understood the reason for the meetings better, felt

TABLE 4
Post-Hoc Pairwise Comparisons Using the Conservative Scheffe's F Statistic Tested at .05 Level

<i>Item</i>	<i>Team Members</i>	<i>P Value</i>	
1. I knew the reasons for the meeting.	student, parent	<.01	
	student, administrator	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	student, gen ed teacher	<.01	
	student, related Services	<.01	
	student, other	<.01	
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	.004	
	gen ed, related services	.003	
2. I knew what I needed to do at the meeting.	gen ed teacher, other	.045	
	student, parent	<.01	
	student, administrator	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	student, gen ed teacher	<.01	
	student, related services	<.01	
	student, other	<.01	
	parent, SPED teacher	<.01	
3. I talked in the meeting.	parent, related services	.001	
	student, parent	<.01	
	student, administrator	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	student, related services	.008	
	parent, SPED teacher	<.001	
	administrator, gen ed teacher	.044	
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	<.01	
4. I felt comfortable saying what I thought.	SPED teacher, related services	<.01	
	SPED teacher, other	<.01	
	student, parent	<.01	
	student, administrator	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	student, related services	<.01	
	student, other	<.01	
	student, gen ed teacher	<.01	
5. I talked about (student's) strengths and needs.	student, parent	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	student, gen ed teacher	.001	
	administrator, SPED teacher	.01	
	SPED teacher, other	<.01	
	SPED teacher, related services	<.01	
	6. I talked about (student's) interests.	student, gen ed teacher	.001
	parent, administrator	.008	
parent, gen ed teacher	<.01		
parent, related services	<.01		
parent, other	<.01		
administrator, SPED teacher	.012		
SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	<.01		
SPED teacher, related services	<.01		
SPED teacher, other	<.01		
7. I helped make the decisions.	student, parent	<.01	
	student, administrator	<.01	
	student, SPED teacher	<.01	
	parent, SPED teacher	.033	
	parent, gen ed teacher	<.01	
	parent, other	.016	
	administrator, gen ed teacher	<.01	
	administrator, other	.008	
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	<.01	
	SPED teacher, related services	<.01	
	SPED teacher, other	<.01	
	gen ed teacher, related service	<.01	
	gen ed teacher, other	.024	

TABLE 4
(Continued)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Team Members</i>	<i>P Value</i>
8. I understood what was said.	student, parent	<.01
	student, administrator	<.01
	student, SPED teacher	<.01
	student, gen ed teacher	<.01
	student, related services	<.01
	student, other	<.01
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	.04
9. I know what I'm supposed to do next.	student, parent	<.01
	student, administrator	<.01
	student, SPED teacher	<.01
	student, related services	<.01
	student, other	<.01
	parent, SPED teacher	.001
	parent, gen ed teacher	<.01
	administrator, gen ed teacher	<.01
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	<.01
	gen ed, related services	<.01
gen ed teacher, other	<.01	
10. I feel good about this meeting.	student, parent	<.01
	student, administrator	<.01
	student, SPED teacher	<.01
	student, related services	<.01
	student, other	<.01
	parent, gen ed teacher	<.01
	administrator, gen ed teacher	.001
	SPED teacher, gen ed teacher	<.01
	gen ed, related services	<.01
	gen ed teacher, other	<.01

more comfortable saying what they thought, understood more of what was said, and knew better what to do next. When students attended, administrators talked more about the students' strengths, needs, and interests. General educators also felt more comfortable saying what they thought, knew better what to do next, and felt better about the meeting. The "other" IEP participants, however, reported that when students attended, they helped less with decision making than when students did not attend.

The presence of general educators, related services personnel, and the "other" category of participants at the IEP meetings also produced value-added benefits. When general educators attended, participants reported talking more, talking more about strengths and needs, feeling more empowered to make decisions, having better knowledge of what to do next, and feeling better about the meeting. When related services personnel attended, team members knew the reason for the meeting better and talked more about interests. Presence of the "other" category of participants produced increased knowledge of the reason

for the meeting, more understanding of what to do at the meeting, more knowledge of what was said, and increased positive feelings about the meeting.

MEANINGFUL STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

IDEA secondary transition reform places the student at the center of the IEP process. Partial fulfillment of this requirement can be seen because 70% of the students in this study attended their IEP meetings. Yet, meaningful student participation at their IEP meetings appears lacking. Students reported the lowest scores on 70% of the questions and second lowest on 20%. Students knew the reasons for the meetings, knew what to do at the meetings, talked at the meetings, felt comfortable saying what they thought, talked about strengths and needs, understood what was said, and felt good about the meeting less than any other IEP meeting participant. Students reported helping to make the decisions and knowing what to do next less than everyone except the general education teachers. Unfortunately, we did not obtain information to determine if students

The presence of students at the IEP meetings resulted in many value-added benefits and validates the usefulness of the legal requirement that added students and general education teachers.

received IEP meeting instruction prior to their actual meeting. Because of this lack of data, we could not determine the relationship between IEP meeting instruction and answers to the survey questions. Follow-up conversations with the special education chairs indicated that only a few of the students received IEP meeting instruction prior to their IEP meeting.

Student interests should drive the transition-age IEP (Halpern, 1994). Students reported participating the most during discussions about their interests. Yet, student responses on this question ranked third behind parents and special education teachers. This means that parents and special educators reported talking more about student interests than the students did. This question also produced the lowest combined mean score for all the participants. These results do not match the importance IDEA places on student interest within the secondary IEP process.

The data from this study support Morningstar et al.'s (1995), Powers et al.'s (1999), and Lehmann et al.'s (1999) qualitative findings and offer suggestions as to why students passively participated at their IEP meetings. Powers et al., for instance, indicated that students thought that their meetings were boring, they did not understand much of what was said, and they felt ignored or that the adults didn't respect student viewpoints. The findings in this study and those from the Power et al.'s study may be related. Perhaps students in Power et al.'s study felt ignored, considered their meetings boring, and did not participate because they did not know the reasons for the meeting, did not know what to do, felt uncomfortable saying what they thought, and did not help make decisions.

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

General educators scored the lowest ranking on 30% of the questions and second lowest on 40%. They talked less about students' strengths and

needs, believed they helped make decisions less, and knew what to do next less than all other participants. They ranked second lowest in knowing the reason for the meetings, talking at the meetings, understanding what was said, and feeling good about the meetings. For each item in which they ranked second lowest, student scores ranked lower.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Special education teachers lead the IEP meeting process. They reported talking more than all team members. In comparison to the general education teachers, special education teachers reported higher scores on all items and significantly higher scores on seven survey items. In comparison to administrators, the special education teachers reported significantly higher results in talking about student strengths, needs, and interests. In comparison to parents, the special education teachers reported significantly higher survey scores in knowing what to do at the meetings, talking at the meetings, helping to make decisions, and knowing what to do next.

LIMITATIONS

Five issues limit this study. First, the likelihood of obtaining significant post hoc pairwise comparisons increased due to the rather large number of comparisons. We attempted to limit spurious significant results by using the Scheffé's *F*-test for our post hoc analysis, which is a conservative significance test. The significance of most pairwise comparisons was $<.01$, which suggests that we did not obtain spurious results. Second, the first part of the survey form asks participants to identify their role and the roles of others attending the meeting. We had planned to verify each participant's list of who attended to those identified by the special education teacher. But, special education teachers in particular and many of the other participants did not identify who attended the meetings. Third, we did not determine the student's disability and the topics discussed at the meetings. The survey results may vary by disability and topic—we simply don't know. Fourth, we simply don't know why the middle and junior high school students answered differently. Future research needs to examine this area. Finally, the high number of students who attended their IEP meetings most likely does not represent what typically occurs across the country (Williams &

O'Leary, 2001). The districts in the study had participated in a transition system change project that encouraged student attendance at IEP meetings. Thus, this may limit the power of these results to generalize to another setting.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research needs to address issues raised by this study and questions that this study did not examine. More than six participant roles attended secondary IEP meetings, and we condensed them into just six categories. Future research also needs to examine the perceptions of grandparents, counselors, speech therapists, and other specific categories. Future research also needs to determine if perceptions vary by disability. Survey items need to be expanded to include all the major transition and IEP-related topics. Direct observation methodologies need to be used to record actual IEP meeting behaviors and compare these findings to the survey results. The impact of school culture and socioeconomic status on the IEP process need to be examined as well. Finally, future research needs to determine if student instruction in IEP participation and leadership will impact team member perceptions and educational outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate how perceptions vary by IEP participant role. Students and, to a lesser extent, general education teachers reported significantly lower scores on the survey items than the other participants. Both students and general education teachers reported the lowest scores on Item 10 (I feel good about this meeting). These and other findings suggest specific practice recommendations.

STUDENT IEP INSTRUCTION

Educators and parents need to explain the IEP process to students, facilitate student understanding of their disability, teach students IEP terminology and the different roles the participants play, and provide students with skills to actively participate in their own meetings prior to the actual IEP meeting taking place. Numerous lesson

packages exist to facilitate teaching student IEP participation skills (see Field et al., 1998b for a review of these materials). Two readily available and research-supported lesson packages teach active student involvement in their IEP meetings: The Self-Advocacy Strategy (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1994) and Self-Directed IEP (Martin, Huber Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1996).

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Just as students need instruction in the IEP process and the meeting, so do general education teachers. Most importantly, general educators need to leave the IEP meeting feeling good about their contributions and the IEP meeting. Pre- and inservice programs need to teach general educators IEP terminology, explain the IEP process and the different roles the participants play, and show how they can become involved in the decision-making process.

STUDENT INTEREST

Student interest drives the development of a transition IEP. General education teachers, administrators, related services personnel, and the other category of IEP participants reported lower scores in response to this survey item. Through class activities, pre-IEP meeting discussions, or other creative means, all IEP team members need to discuss this crucial aspect that frames the foundation of the secondary transition IEP.

SUMMARY

Student involvement at the IEP meeting, and changing the IEP for secondary-age students to be driven by interests and strengths instead of just deficits, represent major IDEA transition reforms. Axiomatically, these reforms begin with students being invited to attend their own IEP meetings. The results of this study suggest that students and general educators need to learn their new roles and become acclimated to the IEP process. Personal and value-added benefits will most likely be enhanced when students and general educators learn to actively participate in the IEP meetings and IEP participants accept students and general educators as equal partners to the educational planning process.

Educators and parents need to explain the IEP process to students, facilitate student understanding of their disability, teach students IEP terminology... and provide students with skills to actively participate in their own meetings

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