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Perceptions of Regular Education and Special Education Professionals Regarding Involvement in the IEP Process

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Perceptions of Regular Education
and Special Education Professionals
Regarding Involvement in the IEP Process

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Running Head: PERCEPTIONS OF THE IEP

Abstract

Special education and regular education professionals in public high schools in Virginia were surveyed regarding their perceptions of student, parent, special and regular educator involvement in the IEP conference. The survey aimed to compare the teachers' perceptions on the ideal level of involvement with what actually occurs in the schools. Students and regular education teachers had lower levels of actual involvement in the IEP conference than the teachers believed it should be. Furthermore, both groups of teachers indicated that the primary responsibility for developing the IEP should fall to the special education professional.

Acknowledgements

It has indeed been a long road that I have traveled to reach the conclusion of my education. As I reflect on the many paths that have converged at this point, I am reminded of the many people who have supported and encouraged me along the way. The faces are too many to mention, but there are a few who deserve a special thank you.

* to Mom and Dad who taught me the value of education, afforded me the opportunity, and to my family for their love and support;

* to all my friends throughout the years, who have touched my life and taught me the value and meaning of friendship;

* to Ross, who helped me to discover my true strength and taught me to be better than I am; and

* to Amy, who helped to sustain me through the frustration and the struggles with the tears of laughter and love.

This is the culmination of a fifteen year dream for me. To all the teachers who have taught me through the years, you have my deepest gratitude and admiration. You have inspired me to join a profession which I have grown to respect and value. The importance of education cannot be measured. I feel honored to call myself a teacher.

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Perceptions of Regular Education
and Special Education Professionals

Regarding Involvement in the IEP Process

The passage of Public Law 94 - 142, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, established the guidelines for individuals receiving special education services by mandating federal funding to those states which organized their special education agencies in accordance with the statutes of the EAHCA. One of the most fundamental regulations specified in the law is the Individualized Education Program, or IEP. Intended as the cornerstone of the EAHCA, the IEP was created to provide administrators with proof of compliance, teachers with formalized plans, parents with a voice, and students with an appropriate education. For these reasons, the importance of the IEP cannot be measured (Smith, 1990).

Since its inception PL 94 - 142 has guaranteed the rights of students with disabilities. The IEP protects the due process rights of the student, because the intent of the law is for the IEP to ensure each student receives an individualized education appropriate to their needs. The spirit of the law is for the IEP to act as a guide for developing the curriculum and classroom instruction for all educators who work with students with disabilities (Smith, 1990).

PL 94 - 142 was amended in 1990 and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. As an amended law, IDEA broadened the age eligibility requirements, added the categories of autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impaired as eligible for services, modified existing categorical definitions, and redefined the spirit of the law by changing the terminology from 'handicapped' to 'persons with disabilities'. With specific regard to the IEP and its process, IDEA mandated that the IEP must include transition services for students no later than age 16 and by age 14 or earlier when necessary. IDEA continues to ensure that the student with disabilities will receive an appropriate education, and now also provides students with appropriate services as they transition from school into society.

The IEP: The Document and the Process

IDEA mandates that an Individualized Education Program must be prepared for each student who is identified and placed in a special education program (Reiher, 1992). According to Gerardi, Benedict, Coolidge, and Grohe (1984)

The Act contains a specific definition describing the components of an IEP as a written statement for each handicapped child developed...by a representative of the local

education agency...who shall be qualified to provide... specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of handicapped children...which statement shall include: (A) a statement of the present levels of educational performance of such child; (B) a statement of the annual goals, including short term instructional objectives; (C) a statement of the specific educational services to be provided to such child, and the extent to which such child will be able to participate in regular education programs; (D) the projected date for initiation and anticipated duration of such services; and, (E) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved (p. 40).

The IEP will also include the biographical information of the student, related services such as speech therapy, and any adaptable materials the student may require.

Originally, the document is drawn up at an IEP meeting after the student has undergone a battery of psychoeducational tests and is eligible for special education services. Once the IEP is developed, it should become the basis for the educational programming of that student (Lynch & Beare, 1990). Once developed, however, the IEP

should not be viewed as a static document. Instead, the IEP is a document which should be continuously revised. Legally, the IEP must be revised at least annually and whenever any 'substantial' change is made in the child's program (Gerardi et al. 1984). In addition to the annual evaluation, every three years a triennial meeting reassesses the student with a new battery of tests so that the IEP can be redeveloped and reflect the progress of the student.

The IEP is developed by a multidisciplinary team which includes the special education teacher, school psychologist, a special education supervisor or director, any regular education teachers the student may have, the parents or legal guardians, and, as stated by Gillespie and Turnbull (1983), the student, 'whenever appropriate'. According to IDEA, both the student and the parents are required to be present at the IEP meeting because it is their due process right to participate in the development of the program. Legally, due process can be defined as the school's obligation to secure parental permission not only to test and evaluate a student but also to implement any placement decision (Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). Due process gives both the student and the parents or guardians the right to contest the IEP if they disagree with the multidisciplinary team. All the team members must sign the

document once the IEP has been developed. The parents or legal guardians must also sign the IEP before any services can be provided because their signature indicates their participation in due process, as mandated by IDEA, as well as their consent to the services the child will receive.

General Concerns with the IEP

According to Kaye and Aserlind (1979) “much of the success (or failure) of PL 94 - 142 in achieving its main goal of providing quality education for all handicapped children lies in the effectiveness of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) - how it is perceived, conceived, and carried out” (p. 138). Smith and Simpson (1989) argue that the IEP, as it is currently functioning, does not meet the intent of the law, and therefore, PL 94 - 142 is not meeting its goal of providing quality education. According to IDEA, the IEP should be an essential component of the instructional design and delivery that enhances and accounts for the students’ learning and teacher’s teaching (Smith, 1990).

In determining the characteristics of a quality IEP, Morgan (1981) argues that the IEP can be viewed as serving two purposes, an administrative function and an instructional function. As an administrative document the IEP satisfies various local, state and

federal mandates. As an instructional tool, the IEP should emphasize that children with disabilities differ from each other in terms of their needs, capabilities, and receptivity to alternative instructional methods (Morgan, 1981).

One of the concerns surrounding the IEP is the debate over whether the IEP is a valuable tool for classroom instruction or is merely administrative paperwork. Both regular and special educators, as well as other school personnel, often complain about the time required by the IEP process. Researchers conservatively estimate that the amount of time involved in the planning, writing, and meeting stages of the IEP is nearly five hours per child (Gerardi et al. 1984). For this reason, Banbury cites concerns that the IEP may be viewed as an administrative chore rather than a useful tool of instruction and evaluation (cited in Lynch & Beare, 1990). Furthermore, Shaw, Bensky, Dixon, and Bonneay (1979) also argue that the time and effort required to write the IEP contributes greatly to teacher burnout and high attrition rates (cited in Morgan, 1981).

According to IDEA, the IEP is meant to ensure that the student with disabilities receives an appropriate education (Smith, 1990). In 1978, Schipper and Wilson reported the results of a national study evaluating the implementation of the Education for all Handicapped

Children Act conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. In regard to the IEP, the authors note several important findings including teacher concern about increased time demands, lack of teacher training, difficulty with the IEP team process, and misunderstandings by teachers and administrators regarding their roles and responsibilities (cited in Smith, 1990).

Morrissey and Safer (1977) expanded on the potential for problems when dealing with a multidisciplinary team. They proposed that the multiple interpretations or expectations inherent in this type of group meeting can potentially undermine the success of the IEP process (cited in Smith, 1990). The goal of the multidisciplinary team is to work as a collaborative unit to develop a document that targets the individual needs of the student. Research, however, indicates that the multidisciplinary team does not collaborate, rather each member contributes information to a specific component of the IEP. In analyzing who influences IEP committee decisions, Gilliam and Coleman (1981) found that the psychologist was perceived to have the most influence in diagnosing the student; the special education teacher, in planning and implementating the curriculum; the director, in determining placement and services; and the supervisor, in decisions of due process.

Smith (1990), asserts that the IEP is considered the necessary component from which to monitor and enforce the law. However, he also notes that without the proper staff development, the IEP may end up as a document of legal compliance rather than the real implementation of the appropriate education intended by IDEA (Smith, 1990). In the past, attention has focused on the procedural correctness of the document (i.e. whether or not the required IEP components are present) rather than whether or not the IEP is indeed a functional plan for instruction (Smith & Simpson, 1989). For this reason, some researchers feel that the IEP process does not work as well in practice as was intended in theory (Reiher, 1992).

Another major problem with the document is the discrepancy that is often found between the IEP goals and objectives and the student's education. The IEP should reflect what is and what should be happening with the student (Lynch & Beare, 1990). Many studies have raised concerns about the incongruence between the goals and objectives on the document and actual classroom instruction. IEPs should include objectives across academic, vocational, basic living, and behavioral domains. The objectives should also reflect the generalization of the skills to be learned, as well as the importance of peer interaction (Lynch & Beare, 1990). Upon examination, Lynch

and Beare found that on the IEPs for students with mental retardation and behavioral disorders, 55% of the objectives were academic in nature and 31% involved the management of behavior. There was a lack of emphasis on skills relevant to life outside the classroom including domestic, community, hygiene, recreation and leisure, and vocational activities.

This discrepancy between the IEP and actual classroom instruction raises questions about the usefulness of the document. In a study which surveyed the teachers of students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbances, Dudley-Marling (1985) found that most teachers felt that the IEP did have some usefulness, but that the inaccessibility of the document often discourages its utility for planning daily instruction. Over half of the teachers surveyed responded that the IEP assisted their planning less than half the time. Furthermore, 86% said that the document was kept in a locked file cabinet, 55% refer to the document less than monthly, 36% consult it less than weekly, and only 9% refer to it at least once a week. In short, many professionals feel that the IEP has failed to become a working document which is valuable in influencing the instruction of children with disabilities on a daily basis (Dudley-Marling, 1985).

Given this overall perception that the IEP is not useful for daily instruction, it is important to address the concerns and pressures felt by the educators involved in its development. Morgan and Rhode (1983) found that although teachers viewed the IEP as valuable in helping them organize their time, they also felt that IEP preparation was time consuming and made little difference in the quality of education students received. Furthermore, when asked to indicate their dislikes regarding the IEP process, teachers cited excessive demands on time and the lack of involvement by regular classroom teachers and parents (Dudley-Marling, 1985).

The Lack of Involvement by the IEP Participants

The problems inherent in a multidisciplinary team approach to IEP development can be further compounded by the lack of involvement in the process by regular education professionals, parents, and students. The push toward inclusive education means that students with mild disabilities are often educated concomitantly in both a special education classroom and a regular education setting. The IEPs of these students should reflect the joint participation of both the regular and special educator. A study conducted by Goldstein, Curry, Strickland, and Turnbull (1980) found that the regular classroom teacher of mainstreamed students was present at

less than half of their students' IEP conferences. Research also indicates that the regular classroom teacher's lack of participation in the IEP process lowers the probability for a student with disabilities to be mainstreamed effectively and receive full opportunity to interact with other peers in other regular education settings (Scanlon, Arick & Phelps, 1981).

Pugach (1982) stated that the likelihood of achieving the IEP goals and objectives is maximized when IEPs are developed by those individuals most familiar with the settings in which they will be implemented. Having both teachers collaborating in the IEP process can result in enhanced communication and understanding of student strengths and needs, a more relevant document for instruction, increased likelihood of skill generalization, and an increased commitment to collegial efforts to serve students with learning and behavioral problems in mainstream settings (Bauwens & Korinek, 1993).

Parents or guardians can be valuable contributors in developing the IEP. In a review of recent literature on parent participation in the IEP process, Gartner and Lipsky (1987) found that many parents are not involved in making decisions or advocating for their child's needs (cited in Van Reusen & Bos, 1994).

The lack of parental involvement can be attributed to several factors. Typically, scheduling problems are a difficult obstacle to overcome. Often the multidisciplinary team members talk in educational jargon with which many parents may not be familiar. The IEP conference should be an avenue of communication between parents, students, teacher(s), and resource professionals (Scanlon, Arick, & Phelps, 1981). However, in many instances, parents have found that the IEP conference turned out to be a meeting with an all powerful school staff whose only purpose was to tell them about the shortcomings and failures of their child (cited in Goldstein, 1993).

A common misperception which can affect parent participation is the view of the parental role as passive. In the past, both professionals and parents have seen the parental role in the IEP conference as one of information giving, not decision making (Lusthaus, Lusthaus & Gibbs, 1981). In fact, parents are seen as poorly equipped to contribute to the development of the IEP. (Nadler & Shore, 1980). Simpson (1982) argued that some educators actively discourage educational decision making by both parents and students based on the perception that educational decisions should fall solely within the domain of those in the educational profession (cited in Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1989).

Ideally, the conference should be a mutual planning session between school and home, during which the professional defines his or her role as one of consultant to the parent, helping to set realistic goals for the child (Goldstein et al., 1980). In reality, however, the IEP conference is too often a formalized gathering for document signing rather than a working conference between home and school to plan a student's education (Shevin, 1983). Communication, both prior to the conference as well as during the meeting, has been emphasized as a major need by both parents and professionals in forming an effective alliance during the IEP conference as well as throughout the student's education (Goldstein et al. 1980).

Although IDEA mandates that the student should be involved in the IEP process 'whenever appropriate', most students enrolled in special education programs are not being given the opportunity to participate in the development of their IEPs (Van Reusen & Bos, 1994). The potential for this involvement to further students' growth, maturity, and exercise of appropriate power over their own lives is tremendous (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983).

One of the problems which may cause the lack of student involvement is the vagueness of the term "whenever appropriate". What is considered appropriate has not been adequately defined by

the law and often results in the exclusion of the student. Winslow (1977) suggested several factors which educators need to consider when determining a student's attendance at an IEP conference. These factors include the age of the student, the severity of the disability, and the student's ability to handle social situations (cited in Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983). Student interest must also be a criterion in determining student participation in the IEP conference, as stated in the following quote by a thirteen year old student with emotional disturbances: "The teachers and parents get everything out and students have feelings and want to get them out too" (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983, p. 27).

Another problem which can factor into the lack of student involvement may be the inadequate communication between students and school personnel. Many students are not aware of their right to participate in the conference. A study which examined involving students in the educational planning process found that over 75% of the students sampled were unaware of the possibility of being included in IEP meetings but agreed with the idea of student involvement (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983).

Compelling research exists (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Perlmutter & Monty, 1977, 1979) which argued that excluding or

limiting student involvement in the educational planning process undermines the student's motivation to participate in the educational program that is developed. In addition, excluding or limiting IEP conference involvement may increase the students' perception that they have little choice, control, or personal responsibility for their academic plan or success in school, all factors which play an important role in intrinsic motivation (cited in Van Reusen, Deshler & Schumaker, 1989). One way the motivation of these students can be addressed is by involving them in planning and advocating for their own education. As quoted by the guardian of a seventeen year old student with emotional disturbances, "If she were told it was to help her, it would give her a sense of importance in planning her own life. She is maturing and she needs to feel some responsibility for her education and her life" (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983, p. 27). This involvement can empower students by providing opportunities to make decisions concerning their future (Van Reusen & Bos, 1994).

Providing students with a strategy and opportunities for participating in decision making conferences can have an immediate effect on their involvement and communication in determining their educational goals (Van Reusen & Bos, 1990). One study demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching students instructional

strategies to involve them in the development of the IEP. In the study, students who were instructed in the IEP participation strategy were found to contribute more information regarding their educational needs than students who did not receive the strategy. Furthermore, for students who did use the strategy, 86% of the goals found on the IEP were specified by the students during the conference (Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1989). Although researchers have been conducted only a limited number of studies, their results do support student involvement in the IEP process.

Statement of Purpose

The spirit of PL. 94-142 is for the IEP to be the guarantee of an appropriate education for students with disabilities. The law requires that the IEP be developed in a collaborative effort between education professionals, the student, and the parents of the student; however, the literature indicates that this is not a reality. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to survey both regular and special education professionals regarding their perception of the ideal and the actual level of involvement of the required participants in the IEP process. Significant differences between the teachers' views on involvement and the ideal/actual levels of involvement were hypothesized.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were divided into two separate categories. The first group of subjects was special education professionals, and the second group was regular education teachers with students with mild disabilities mainstreamed into their class. The subjects were drawn from public high schools in Virginia. Approximately 25% of the school districts in Virginia were randomly selected from the current Virginia Education Directory.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate administrative office of the school district. (See Appendix A) Participation in the study was completely voluntary and subjects could withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty. The results were anonymous and confidential. No names of teachers, schools, or school divisions were disclosed. Confidentiality was assured through the following measures. Once permission was obtained from the appropriate office, the researcher was provided with the number of regular and special education teachers eligible to participate in the study. The appropriate number of surveys was mailed to the participating schools and distributed to

the teachers. The teachers were provided with a self-addressed prestamped envelope which was mailed directly to the researcher to ensure that the answers remained confidential.

Instrument

The instrument for this study was self developed. The instrument was a survey questionnaire with answers on a likert scale. (See Appendix B + C) The survey had questions pertaining to participation of individuals in the IEP conference based on the important concerns drawn from the literature review. The survey was divided into three parts. The first section provided instructions for the participant as well as demographic information. The second section addressed the teacher's perception on the ideal level of involvement while the last section focused on the teacher's awareness of actual involvement of individuals in the IEP conference. The instrument was field tested on a group of special education graduate students at a small college in Virginia.

Data Analysis

Once the results were collected, the data were analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. The demographic information was calculated using means and percentages. An analysis of variance, and a Tukey HSD test were also used in the analysis.

Results

The researcher contacted fifty-four school superintendents to request permission to conduct research within the school division. Out of fifty-four school divisions, fourteen superintendents responded, seven of the fourteen granted permission. A total of 235 surveys were mailed to the high schools in these school divisions. The researcher received 113 surveys, a response rate of 48%. However, only sixty-four, or 27%, of the surveys were usable in the data analysis.

The first section of the survey provided the researcher with demographic information. Of the sixty-four surveys, thirty-nine were completed by regular education professionals and twenty-five were completed by special education professionals. Thirty-seven females and twenty-seven males participated in the study. The teachers' mean years of experience was fifteen, with a range of one to thirty-four. The mean number of IEP conferences that the special education professional attended in a given year was twenty-eight; however, some professionals have attended up to sixty. The regular education teachers provided services to approximately 204 special education students, yet 40% of these teachers were not invited to the IEP conferences for their students.

The questions in the next two sections of the survey focused on three areas of involvement: attendance at the conference, participation in development of the goals, and signature of the document. Three core questions addressed these areas for each of the IEP participants. The scale for the questions was as follows: 1=strongly agree/always, 2=agree/frequently, 3=neutral/sometimes, 4=disagree/rarely, 5=agree/never. Therefore, a low score (three-six) would indicate strong involvement, and a high score (twelve-fifteen) would indicate little or no involvement. As seen in Table 2, the mean scores for the ideal and actual level of involvement were as follows: student (I=6.8, A=9.5), parent (I=4.7, A=6.4), special education teacher (I=3.8, A=3.6), and regular education teacher (I=6.0, A=8.9).

A three way analysis of variance was performed on the data collected from the last two sections of the survey. The ANOVA compared the following three variables: special education professional vs. regular education professional, ideal vs. actual level of involvement, and involvement of the individual (i.e. student, parent, special education teacher, and regular education teacher). The data showed no main effect for the type of teacher; therefore, these two levels were collapsed and their means were computed together for each of the remaining variables. (Refer to Figure 1)

Main effects were evident for both the ideal/actual variable, and the involvement of the individual. A two way interaction between the ideal/actual variable and the involvement variable was also apparent. (Refer to Table 1) Further analysis was conducted on the two way interaction. A Tukey HSD test (criterion value 2.14) was conducted to examine specific pairwise comparisons. As illustrated in Figure 1, the actual level of involvement for the student and the regular education professional was significantly lower than the ideal level. The actual level of involvement for the parents was also lower than their ideal level of involvement, but not at a significant level. In contrast, the actual level of involvement for the special education professional was higher than the ideal level.

When focused on the ideal level of involvement for each of the participants, significant differences were found between the special education professional and the regular education teacher (difference=2.2). When examining the actual levels of involvement for each of the participants, significant differences were found between each group. (Refer to Table 2)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare special and regular education professionals' perceptions of the ideal level of involvement with the actual level of involvement of each of the required IEP participants. The researcher hypothesized that there would be statistically significant differences between the special education and the regular education teachers' perceptions on IEP involvement, and that there would be significant differences between the ideal and actual levels of involvement for each of the participants. Put simply, the researcher expected the results to indicate that everyone was less involved than they should be, and that one's perceptions on involvement would be affected by teacher status (i.e., special education vs. regular education).

A significant difference was found between the ideal and the actual level of involvement for the regular education teacher. Both groups of teachers felt that the regular teachers are less involved than they should be. This finding is accurate when compared to the past research. In one study, for example, Goldstein et al, (1980) found that regular education teachers were present at less than half their students' IEP conferences. Furthermore, a lack of collaboration between special and regular education professionals has been cited

as a factor which can lower a student's probability of being successfully integrated into regular education settings (Scanlon et al., 1981).

A significant difference was also found between the actual and ideal level of involvement for the student. Although the teachers' responses indicated that the students should be involved more than they actually are, they also felt the involvement of the student should be age and disability appropriate. Younger or more severely impaired children, for example, should be less involved. This result also followed the past literature which clearly states that when considering student involvement, a teacher should consider the age of the student, the severity of the disability, and the student's ability to handle social situations (cited in Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983). Compelling research also exists however, that indicates that if students are taught strategies and decision making techniques, they are more likely to participate in planning and advocating for their own education (Van Reusen & Bos, 1994).

No statistically significant difference between the ideal and actual level of parental involvement existed, indicating that educators feel that parents are involved in the IEP conference to an appropriate degree. In fact, the involvement score for the actual

level of parental involvement was the second lowest, reflecting a strong level of involvement that was second only to the special education professional. This result was contrary to the previous literature, in which teachers cited the lack of involvement by parents as one of their chief complaints (Dudley-Marling, 1985).

When comparing what educators perceive as the ideal level of involvement for each individual, significant differences were found only between the special education professional and the regular education professional. Both groups of teachers felt that developing the IEP should be the responsibility of the special education teacher, and, in reality, both placed the primary responsibility for developing the IEP on the special education professional. This result reinforced data in the previous literature which also shows that the special education professional has the most responsibility for on the planning of the IEP and the implementation of its curriculum (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981).

Contrary to the expected hypothesis, there was no main effect for the teacher variable, a result which the researcher found very surprising. These data indicated that both special education and regular education professionals are experiencing approximately the same levels of actual involvement by the required participants.

Furthermore, the lack of a main effect also showed that no significant difference existed between special and regular educators, on what these teachers consider to be appropriate levels of involvement.

A number of notable observations were discovered while tabulating the scores for the data analysis. In some instances, the scores of individual questions added up to represent a total which could lead to inaccurate conclusions. The specific question of “The parents should participate/do participate in developing the IEP goals and objectives?”, was often answered with a high score (four or five). Yet, the remaining two questions concerning parental involvement could be answered with a score of one, thus resulting in a combined low score of six. According to the scale, six would represent fairly strong involvement, without accounting for the individual questions. So, although the data indicated that teachers are satisfied with the level of parental involvement, closer examination of individual questions also indicated that educators consider ‘involvement’ to be attending and signing the IEP, but not participating in the development of the goals. Education professionals’ believe that the development of the goals and objectives should be primarily the school’s responsibility, a finding which is deeply supported by the literature.

In further examining the individual questions, it was also apparent that the data could be similarly misleading in reference to the involvement of the regular education professional. In this case, specific questions seemed to indicate that the regular education teacher should always sign the IEP, but that this professional does not necessarily have to attend the conference or participate in the development of the goals.

Forty nine surveys were not viable for data analysis for several reasons. The most common problem was the respondent's failure to answer one or more of the questions. In fact, a large number of the respondents did not answer the last section of the survey, which dealt with the educator's awareness of the actual involvement of the participants in the IEP conference. Several teachers cited that they could not complete the survey because they were unaware of when IEP conferences were held. A teacher with thirty years of experience commented that in the six years that she had worked with special education students she had never been invited to a conference. Other teachers complained that they are not provided with the necessary documentation prior to the conference, and, after they sign the document, they never see it. Some teachers are even unaware what services their special education students are receiving.

The most prominent limitation of this study was the poor response rate from the school superintendents. The researcher's goal in choosing survey research was to gather a large amount of information from a sample that would be representative of a larger population. However, the researcher received permission from only 13% of the school divisions contacted, making the sample size much smaller than intended (25%).

Another limitation was the number of surveys that were not usable in the data analysis. Although the total response rate from the teachers was excellent (48%), almost half of the surveys were not included in the data analysis, a factor which could have significantly affected the results.

Finally, the last notable limitation lies within the survey itself. Because the survey was self-developed, the questions were written with some amount of bias. Although the researcher intended to write questions that were as objective and clear as possible, it was apparent during the data analysis that some of the questions had multiple interpretations. One example of this limitation was the questions that address the ideal level of involvement for the students. Although the researcher intended the question to mean 'the student' in the most general sense, some teachers responded

based on specific students. In this case, teachers may have indicated a low level for involvement based on teaching younger or more severely disabled children, even though that is not their general belief.

Even though there were several important limitations on this study, this researcher feels that this is a very important area of research. The IEP is not only a legal document, it is based on the guiding principle on which special education is founded: the concept of an individual education that is appropriate to each student's needs. There is a long history of research that indicates the IEP is not meeting IDEA's intended guarantee of an appropriate, individualized education, but more importantly, recent research has begun to address these problems that are confronting the IEP. This recent research gives strong indication that a more collaborative and involved effort between the participants in the IEP process will result in the document intended by the law. Therefore, factors which may affect the involvement of any of the IEP participants is an area which needs more research.

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Appendix A
Letter of Permission

Box 681
Longwood College
Farmville VA 23909
September 25,1995

School Division

Dear Superintendent :

I am a graduate student at Longwood College currently working on my master's degree in special education. I am conducting research for my thesis in the area of the Individualized Education Program. The survey addresses the perceived versus actual involvement of the student, parents/guardians, regular education teacher, and special education teacher in the IEP process. I am writing this letter to ask permission to include the high schools within your school division in my research. All the results will be confidential. No names of any of the subjects, schools, or school divisions will be disclosed. I have attached a copy of the survey for you to review. I would be happy to provide you with a copy of the results from my study upon your request. Please let me know by October 9 if I may include your school division. If you have any questions concerning the survey, please feel free to contact me at (804) 395-4126.

If you agree to include your school division in my research, please indicate the number of high school teachers who are eligible to participate in the study. In order to obtain the correct demographic information, please identify the eligible teachers as two separate groups: (1) regular classroom teachers with mainstreamed students in class, and (2) special education teachers. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Donna B. Howland

Appendix B
Survey Questionnaire
Special Education Professional

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Do not put your name on any of these papers. Please answer all the questions as honestly as you can, all your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

The survey involves three parts and should take five to ten minutes. When you are finished, place the survey in the attached envelope and it will be mailed directly back to me. Thank you, your participation is greatly appreciated.

I. Demographic Information - Special Education Professional

1. Gender _____ Male
 _____ Female
2. Years of Special Education Teaching Experience _____.
3. Area(s) of Certification _____.

4. What grade level(s) do you teach ?
 _____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th
5. What subject(s) do you teach ? _____

6. Number of Students served in your classes:
 MR _____ LD _____ E/BD _____ Other (Please List) _____

7. Classroom Description : Self-Contained _____.
 Resource Room _____.
 Other (Please specify) _____

8. In a typical school year, how many IEP conferences for your students do you attend ? _____ ?

II. DIRECTIONS: Using the scale below, please circle the number which you think best answers the question according to what you perceive as the ideal level of involvement in the IEP conference.

1. SA=STRONGLY AGREE 2. A=AGREE 3. N=NEUTRAL
 4. D=DISAGREE 5. SD=STRONGLY DISAGREE

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The student should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parents/guardians should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The regular education teacher should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The student should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parents/guardians should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The regular education teacher should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The student should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The parents/guardians should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The regular education professional should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5

12. I should sign the IEP. 1 2 3 4 5

III. Please answer these questions according to what you feel accurately describes the realistic situation in your school.

1. A=ALWAYS 2. F=FREQUENTLY 3. S=SOMETIMES
4. R=RARELY 5. N=NEVER

	A	F	S	R	N
1. The special education student attends the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parents/guardians attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The regular education teacher attends the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The student participates in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parents/guardians participate in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The regular education teacher participates in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I participate in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The student signs the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The parents/guardians sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5

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11. The regular education teacher signs the IEP.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I sign the IEP.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix C

Survey Questionnaire

Regular Education Professional

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Do not put your name on any of these papers. Please answer all the questions as honestly as you can, all your answers will be confidential and anonymous.

The survey involves three parts and should take five to ten minutes. When you are finished, place the survey in the attached envelope and it will be mailed directly back to me. Thank you, your participation is greatly appreciated.

I. Demographic Information-Regular Education Professional

1. Gender _____ Male

_____ Female

2. What grade level(s) do you teach ?

_____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th

3. What subject(s) do you teach ? _____

4. Years of Teaching Experience _____.

5. Area(s) of Certification _____

6. How many of your students receive special education services ?

_____. Please list the services these students receive. _____

7. Are you invited to the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) conferences for your special needs students ?

_____ Yes _____ No.

8. In a typical school year, how many of your students IEP conferences do you attend ? _____.

II. DIRECTIONS: Using the scale below, please circle the number which you think best answers the question according to what you perceive as the ideal level of involvement in the IEP conference.

1. SA=STRONGLY AGREE 2. A=AGREE 3. N=NEUTRAL
 4. D=DISAGREE 5. SD=STRONGLY DISAGREE

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The student should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parents/guardians should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The special education teacher should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I should attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The student should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parents/guardians should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The special education teacher should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I should participate in developing the IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The student should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The parents/guardians should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The special education professional should sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5

12. I should sign the IEP. 1 2 3 4 5

III. Please answer these questions according to what you feel accurately describes the realistic situation in your school.

1. **A=ALWAYS** 2. **F=FREQUENTLY** 3. **S=SOMETIMES**
 4. **R=RARELY** 5. **N=NEVER**

	A	F	S	R	N
1. The special education student attends the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parents/guardians attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The special education teacher attends the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I attend the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The student participates in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parents/guardians participate in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The special education teacher participates in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I participate in developing the goals and objectives on the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The student signs the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The parents/guardians sign the IEP.	1	2	3	4	5

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11. The special education teacher signs the IEP.

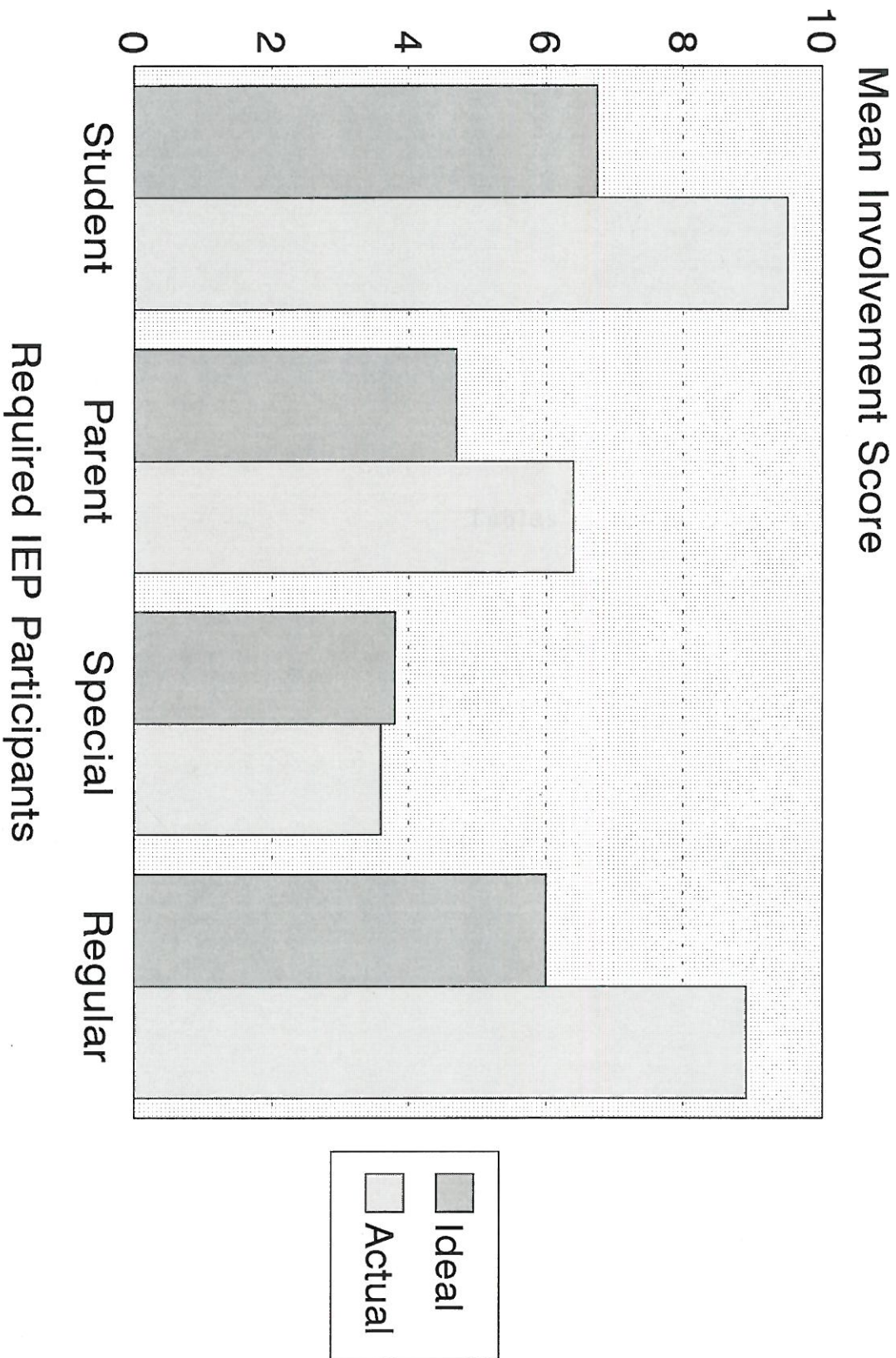
1 2 3 4 5

12. I sign the IEP.

1 2 3 4 5

Figures

Figure 1
Teacher Perceptions on Involvement in the IEP Conference



Tables

Table 1
 Analysis of Variance Summary Table

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>
MAIN EFFECTS		
Teacher	1	2.84
Ideal/Actual	1	55.84
Involvement	3	84.835
INTERACTIONS		
Teacher/Involvement	3	0.637
Ideal-Actual/Involvement	3	9.508
Teacher/Ideal-Actual	1	0.029

Table 2

Mean Involvement Scores

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Ideal</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Student	6.8	9.5	2.7
Parent	4.7	6.4	1.7
Special	3.8	3.6	0.2
Regular	6.0	8.9	2.9

n = 64