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Examining the Need for an Elementary/Middle to Secondary School Level Transition Plan for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Examining the Need for an Elementary/Middle to Secondary
School Level Transition Plan
for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Abstract

The need for a transition plan to ease the progression of students with learning disabilities from the elementary and middle school grades to the secondary environment was examined in this study. Surveys were distributed and completed by 30 special education teachers in grades 5-8, 10 special education-learning disabilities teachers in grades 9-10, and 42 regular education-content area teachers in one school system. In addition to demographic data on respondents, information was gathered on instruction and student ability in the areas of academic skills, academic support skills, and social/behavioral skills. The characteristics of current modes and levels of planning were also examined. The results of analyses of various dimensions suggest that low levels of planning and communication pertaining to student competencies and teacher expectations exist between regular education teachers at the secondary level and elementary/middle school special education teachers. A need for greater emphasis on academic support skills in the elementary and middle school special education classroom is indicated. In addition, the need and desire for increased levels of communication in the form of a structured plan is demonstrated.

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Examining the Need for an Elementary/Middle to Secondary School Level Transition Plan for Students with Learning Disabilities

Research has documented that the special education system has not adequately met the long-term needs of students with disabilities (Dowdy & Smith, 1991). A contributing factor may be the lack of common goals across settings. Often, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may not reflect goals that are needed for success in the receiving classroom (Dowdy & Smith, 1991). Typically, writing IEPs has been the responsibility of the special educator with little input from the regular educator or parent (Bauwens & Korinek, 1993). However, special educators often hold inaccurate perceptions of the demands and needs of the regular classroom environment (Gans, 1987).

As students with disabilities make the transition from the elementary/middle to the secondary setting, problems associated with disparate goals may become more pronounced. The lack of an appropriate match between the student's abilities and the demands of the new environment may create confusion and frustration in the adolescent as he/she attempts to integrate into the new setting (Gresham & Elliott, 1989).

Collaborative planning may help ease the transition process for students with mild disabilities. It is believed that regular education and special education teachers working cooperatively could meet most students' needs in the mainstream setting by identifying and planning for the acquisition of competencies necessary for success in the regular education classroom (Howell, 1991). A transition plan for students with disabilities entering the secondary school environment will facilitate the establishment and implementation of common goals and instructional objectives (McKenzie & Houk, 1993). This mechanism will allow the characteristics of the receiving environment and the performance level of students entering that environment to be identified (Wood & Miederhoff, 1989). The "sending teacher" at the elementary or middle school level will gain critical information about the environmental variables in the new setting that may affect the student's performance (Salend & Viglianti, 1982, p. 137). Differences in the two school levels will be identified and the potential impact on the student determined. Shared goals can be addressed and an intervention plan developed that will specifically target identified skill areas deemed necessary for success in the secondary setting. Without such a plan, adolescents moving into the secondary setting may experience a myriad of changes for which they are insufficiently prepared.

In order to determine the perceived need for and viability of a transition plan for elementary/middle school students, a review of the literature on programs and services available at the secondary level to adolescents with learning disabilities was conducted and a survey distributed to regular education and special education teachers within one school district.

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The Case for an Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transition Plan

Increasing Demands at the Secondary School Level

Wood and Miederhoff (1989) found that students entering the secondary educational level face "increased class size, less individualized attention, a faster instructional pace, different evaluation procedures, and more demanding social skills" (p. 66). Secondary regular education teachers expect students to possess the skills necessary to work independently with low levels of teacher feedback. Deshler, Schumaker, Alley, Warner, and Clark (1982) found that, in the secondary classroom, seatwork comprises 47% of the class format. Lecture encompasses 21% of class time and discussion is utilized during only 10% of class time. Very little student-teacher interaction occurs (p. 7). Students are also expected to be able to utilize auditorily presented information, complete work assignments, take notes during lecture, demonstrate knowledge through testing, be skilled in writing and spelling, and pass minimal competency examinations (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984).

Conversely, adolescents with learning disabilities generally lack the skills necessary to adapt to these demands. For example, demonstrated weaknesses in retaining information presented auditorily directly impact the

student's note-taking ability. Students with learning disabilities also display deficits in knowing how to prepare and take tests and in understanding how to locate and memorize answers to study questions. While strong study skills have been found to be a high priority among teachers, few special education programs are designed to enhance these skills (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984). Too often, teachers assume students will pick up these skills on their own. However, weaknesses in study skills, motivation to achieve, and social behavior directly contribute to learning disabled students' weak performance in the secondary classroom (Schumaker & Deshler, 1988).

In addition to weaknesses in skill areas, learning disabled adolescents' deficiencies in content knowledge may pose great difficulty as they attempt to receive new material in the mainstream classroom. In the secondary environment, regular education teachers anticipate that students will enter the senior high level possessing a wealth of information in the content areas. However, students with learning disabilities do not generally have the skills necessary to master content material and may have had less exposure to content information as a result of greater emphasis on skill development in the elementary/middle school resource classroom (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984).

Research on learning disabilities in the adolescent population has shown that students must be able to read and understand materials written at a secondary readability level or be able to apply strategies to comprehend such materials (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984). However, actual reading skills of high school learning disabled students appear to be at a much lower level. Schumaker, Deshler, Alley, and Warner (1983) found that by the time these students reach senior high school, their skills in reading and in written language have reached a plateau at the fifth grade level. Similarly, their math skills plateau at a sixth grade level. On tests of achievement, learning disabled adolescents typically score below the tenth percentile in reading, written language, and mathematics, and exhibit low levels of performance in all achievement areas. In a study sponsored by the Kansas University Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities (KU-IRLD), Deshler et al. (1982) found that of 307 learning disabled adolescents studied, 200 scored at or below the tenth percentile on the Written Language Cluster of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery. Eighty percent of the students scored equally as low in the Reading Cluster and 72% scored at the same low levels in the Math Cluster (p. 2).

These profound weaknesses in reading skills may be due in part to learning disabled students' deficits in developing and applying reading strategies. Schumaker and Deshler (1984) found that learning disabled adolescents were able to answer only 36% of questions accurately after scanning reading materials in contrast to the 81% rate of correct answers exhibited by their nonhandicapped peers (p. 32). Because the secondary level classroom typically places heavy reading and writing demands on students whose skills may have reached a plateau at five grade levels or more below expected levels, continued skill remediation may not be indicated. Instead, instruction in specific strategies to cope with the increased demands may be more effective (Deshler et al., 1982). Training for the acquisition and successful use of these skills will enhance students' self-esteem and self-image, both important factors in academic achievement (Clark, Carlson, Fisher, Cook, & D'Alonzo, 1991).

The gap between teacher expectations and students' ability to cope widens as students progress through high school (Schumaker & Deshler, 1988). These discrepancies may be compounded by scheduling at the secondary level. Unfortunately, secondary classroom teachers are not allocated sufficient time to teach complex skills necessary

for academic success or to pursue skill mastery for every student (Schumaker & Deshler, 1988). High school teachers typically spend less time with each student (e.g., one class period) than elementary teachers and may not develop an understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses (Ryan & Price, 1992; Schumaker & Deshler, 1988). Students may be stereotyped as lazy and unmotivated (Siperstein, 1988), making appropriate accommodations less likely to occur.

Learning Strategies as Tools for Independent Learning

Research indicates that students with learning disabilities lack skills in learning strategies such as note-taking, listening skills, identifying main idea, self-correction, and error monitoring (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Schumaker & Deshler, 1988). Schumaker and Deshler (1984) found that students with learning disabilities have difficulties in the precise areas where demands increase at the secondary level. They advocated the use of various strategies designed to help students cope with everyday classroom tasks. Strategies such as Multipass for reviewing textbook material; COPS, an error-monitoring strategy used with writing exercises; and LINKS, a listening/note-taking strategy, have all proven to be

effective with adolescents with reading levels as low as fourth grade (p. 35).

The goal of these and other learning strategies is to enable learning disabled adolescents to become independent learners, acquiring learning strategies that will allow them to function independently in different situations (Deshler, Schumaker, & Lenz, 1984). The use of strategies to increase learning effectiveness may be especially helpful with tasks involving memorization. Students with learning disabilities typically adopt a passive approach to memory tasks and are less likely to automatically use specific cognitive operations to memorize material. Many of these students exhibit immature executive functioning, experiencing difficulty in approaching a task, analyzing it, and developing procedures to attack it (Deshler et al., 1982). Although some studies indicate that these difficulties may be a result of lower levels of intrinsic motivation to perform well, efforts to increase motivation will not, in itself, be likely to improve performance. Cognitive strategies must also be addressed. (Deshler et al., 1982).

In a study of the effectiveness of learning strategies instruction, the KU-IRLD adopted a learning strategies approach designed to teach students how to learn. After implementing a learning strategies curriculum for secondary

schools, significant gains were demonstrated by students with learning disabilities (Schumaker et al., 1983).

In order to achieve maximum benefit from learning strategies instruction, students must be provided opportunities to use these skills in nonacademic as well as academic settings. Special educators must give priority to teaching students how to generalize learning strategies to other environments in order to compensate for their learning deficits (Bauwens & Korinek, 1993). Students' failure to use learning strategies or to use them efficiently has been shown to directly impact their learning (Welch & Link, 1991, p. 91). Students with learning disabilities often meet with failure in new settings because they are unable to transfer knowledge gained in the special education setting (George & Lewis, 1991). Adolescents typically need to practice skills repeatedly and in different settings to facilitate this transfer of skills (George & Lewis, 1991; Kish, 1991; McKenzie & Houk, 1993). The repeated reinforcement of learning strategies will help in developing students' abilities to adapt to new and stressful situations. Consequently, learning disabled students may become better able to cope with changes in instructional environments, teacher expectations, and teaching styles (Welch & Link, 1991), thereby leading to higher levels of confidence. This

aspect is especially important in helping students deal with social interactions encountered during adolescence.

Social-behavioral Skills Training

Social-behavioral skills may be critical to a student's success in the mainstream. The profound influence of deficiencies in social skills received greater recognition as a result of the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities' decision to view social skills deficits as a primary learning disability (Gresham & Elliott, 1989). Special education students typically hold a lower social status than their non-special education peers (Madge, Affleck, & Lowenbraun 1990). Research indicates that these students will generally experience increasing difficulty with interpersonal relationships and in complying with classroom behavior demands (Lowenthal, 1987). Problems with peer relationships and social behavior add to the negative self-concept held by many adolescents with learning disabilities and create difficulty in integrating into the secondary school environment (Brandt & Berry, 1991; Kish, 1991). As students progress in the educational system, their desire to "blend into the crowd" seems to peak during adolescence. Students with learning disabilities must learn how to merge into their environments as unobtrusively as

possible. However, their lack of appropriate social-behavioral skills may interfere with this goal (Lowenthal, 1987).

Learning disabled students typically are deficient in social as well as academic skills (Deschler, Schumaker & Lenz, 1984). The long-term effects on psychological and social adjustment caused by social deficits may be more debilitating than academic deficits to these students (Gresham & Elliott, 1989). Research suggests that social and academic deficiencies are inextricably intertwined. Thus, social dysfunction may be a product of continuing academic failure which causes children to be rejected and isolated from their peers, resulting in delays in development of social skills (Silver, 1988).

Studies have demonstrated that many adolescents with learning disabilities drop out of school at the secondary level. Parker and Asher (1987) found a strong relationship between poor social adjustment in the upper elementary grades and the drop out rate at the secondary level. Because of the ramifications of poorly developed social skills, social-behavioral competencies should be an important component of any assessment of the secondary setting. In a survey of regular and special education teachers at the junior and senior high levels, Salend and

Salend (1986) found that 29 social skills were judged "very important" by all teachers surveyed. As competencies are identified, clearly defined criteria can be established and goals developed to remediate these skill areas.

Early Intervention

McKenzie & Houk (1993) developed a transition model which underscored the need for planning to occur prior to entry into secondary school. Early intervention was deemed as critical in order that sufficient time be allotted for acquiring skills necessary for smooth integration into the new setting. Their model involved a three-stage process designed to identify secondary school mainstream standards, evaluate instructional priorities, and instruct and monitor. Academic and non-academic skills were identified during the initial phase of the transition planning through structured communication with content area secondary teachers. The employment of systematic checklists to identify methods of instruction, evaluation, classroom management, and accommodations was utilized. In addition, the teacher's receptivity to other forms of instructional accommodations was determined (pp. 18-19).

Information gleaned from checklists and other forms of structured communication will provide the guidelines needed

to establish pre-transition instruction and ensure a more appropriate placement for the student. The planning process suggested by McKenzie & Houk will also allow comparisons to be drawn between a student's performance level and the requirements of the secondary setting in addition to enabling instructional remediation to be prioritized. Beginning with the initial stages, the communication and collaboration of all educators involved with the target student at each school will be an essential component in the overall effectiveness of the process (McKenzie & Houk, 1993).

The importance of early intervention among students with disabilities is evident. Too often, motivation levels plummet during the elementary school years. Students eager to learn at the primary level may leave the upper elementary grades frustrated and overwhelmed by academic and classroom expectations. Problems associated with low levels of motivation and acceptance of an external locus of control may affect learning disabled students' interpersonal relationships as well as their attitude toward learning. "Learned helplessness" (a condition where the student's lack of confidence in his or her ability and frequent failures create a perception of helplessness to determine academic outcomes) (Brandt & Berry, 1991) is pervasive among students

with disabilities. Deshler et al. (1984) suggest that this lack of motivation and acceptance of failure is crippling to the learning disabled adolescent and hinders the student's ability to acquire new skills. As the demands of the secondary school environment are encountered, these students will typically lack confidence in their abilities to deal successfully with new situations (Deshler et al., 1984). This lack of confidence may be exacerbated by their inability to apply effective learning strategies which might enable them to deal with unfamiliar situations more constructively.

Clark et al. (1991) underscored the critical need for learning strategies instruction to begin in elementary school in order to avoid serious delays in developing the skills needed for success in the secondary and adult environments. With statistics indicating that over 30% of students in secondary special education programs drop out of school (Edgar, 1987), the need for early intervention is essential. In the 11th Annual Report to Congress in 1989, the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services found that during the 1985-86 school year, 25% of special education youths dropped out of school, 15% of special education youths left school for "other reasons," and 3% left after reaching the maximum age. Of these numbers, 26%

were classified learning disabled, 42% behavior disordered, and 21% mentally retarded. The Stanford Research Institute had similar findings in a study of former special education students. During the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years, 36% of learning disabled youths dropped out, along with 55% labeled emotionally disturbed, and 34% classified mentally retarded (Kortering & Elrod, 1991). In view of the high drop out rate among students with disabilities, efforts to provide career awareness and development activities at the elementary school level may be warranted. Clark et al. (1991) stressed the need for implementing such services before students become at risk for prematurely exiting the school system. They called for a life-span approach to career development and suggested that IEPs should include goals in independent daily living skills, age-appropriate behaviors and attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and career awareness and orientation (pp. 117-118). The curriculum content for students with disabilities may also need to focus more on functional skills (Halpern, 1992).

The Need for Collaborative Planning

The many difficulties faced by students making the transition from elementary to secondary school were outlined in a study of students in a Chicago school district (Howell,

1991). Students with learning disabilities experienced particular difficulty with the new environment, specifically in keeping up with the pace of instruction and the expectations of multiple teachers. In response to the findings generated by this study, the Chicago educational system developed the Academic Intervention Model (AIM) program. This program encouraged the collaboration of regular and special education teachers to promote success for at-risk students in the mainstream setting. Goals for student success included promoting academic achievement, enhancing self-esteem, minimizing labeling, increasing opportunities for peer modeling, and reducing the number of potential dropouts (p. 44).

The teaming of both regular and special educators may foster a better understanding of student strengths and weaknesses, provide clearer and more specific goals to be used in instruction, increase the probability of transfer of skills to the regular classroom setting, and enhance the joint effort to serve the student in the mainstream (Bauwens & Korinek, 1993, p. 303). A team approach will enable teachers who generally work in isolation to work as a group, sharing expertise and strengthening communication, mutual respect, and trust (Bauwens & Korinek, 1993; Biklen & Zollers, 1986; Idol & West, 1991).

The need for educational collaboration as a vehicle for change was stressed by Idol and West (1991) who defined it as a "catalytic process used in interactive relationships among individuals working toward a mutually defined, concrete vision or outcome" (p. 72). Studies of collaborative decision-making have found team interactions to be characterized by a focus on issues from an ecological perspective, consensual decision making, and a feeling of joint ownership (West, 1990).

As teachers embrace the collaborative process, special education teachers can begin to address more appropriately the skills and behaviors that will contribute to success in the secondary environment. Knowing the likes and dislikes of the receiving teacher, the special education instructor can train the student to engage in teacher-pleasing behaviors (George & Lewis, 1991). More importantly, the collaboration of the regular education and special education teachers will facilitate development of common goals (Cosden, 1990). Only through this partnership can shared goals be established, agreed upon, and accepted as a school-wide responsibility.

Student/Parent Involvement

Research has examined the effectiveness of training students with disabilities to become stronger self-advocates as a way of increasing their ability to function more successfully in the secondary environment. Neubert, Tilson, and Ianacone (1989) noted that the goal of transition programs should be to lead students to academic self-sufficiency. Typically, students with learning disabilities lack metacognitive skills and may be unaware of their own disability (Herr, 1988; Levine, Clarke, & Ferb, 1981). Understanding the nature of one's own disability and how that disability manifests itself in different settings is extremely important in overcoming and compensating for its negative effects (Ryan and Price, 1992).

Welch and Link (1991), in their research on assessing mainstream environments, advocated the use of an Instructional Priority System (IPS) designed to include all involved parties in prioritizing instructional interventions. Under this plan, regular education teachers, in consultation with special education teachers, would identify classroom demands and specific skills required for success. The student's performance and ability levels would be assessed. Comparisons would be drawn between the two analyses, and all areas ranked in order of priority. The

student would also complete an analysis of his/her skills and the competencies he/she believed contributed to success in the classroom. By comparing the student generated list to the teacher list, students would build awareness and insight into areas of weakness needing improvement and would build on identified strengths. From these analyses, the actual plan would be developed to specify roles, goals, and outcomes.

Welch and Link found that implementation of the IPS not only benefitted students but also improved communication between special and regular educators. It provided for the establishment of instructional priorities, and enabled the special education teacher to teach learning strategies which assisted students in becoming independent learners (Welch & Link, 1991).

Siperstein (1988) suggested that the active involvement of the student in the transition process may serve to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the transition plan. Student involvement is considered to be essential in building motivation to acquire and apply learning strategies (Aune & Johnson, 1992). Historically, the objectives included in IEPs have seldom reflected the student's individual goals or the future demands he/she may face. Generally, the student is excluded from the IEP process.

The disability is often the determining factor in the educational plan rather than the student's individual needs or desires (Dowdy & Smith, 1991). Conversely, Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) typically involve all affected parties, including the student, in decision making. This inclusion fosters a stronger commitment to setting and achieving goals and heightens the motivation levels of the student. It also enhances the student's awareness of his/her disability, leading to an increased sense of responsibility for overcoming weaknesses.

Phillips (1990) recommended the implementation of a Self-Advocacy Plan which would begin with a planning and placement team preceding entrance into high school. Students would be provided practice in planning and decision-making in addition to learning to identify and understand their own learning styles and how to communicate these learning styles to others.

Phillips' model is based on the premise that students will achieve greater success if they employ their own strategies to adapt to situations. By learning to compensate for deficiencies, students may gain more control over their behaviors and their environment. As they begin to view themselves in positions of greater power, the

feelings of helplessness may begin to subside and motivation to achieve greater academic success may increase.

More extensive training in self-advocacy may be an important tool in assisting students to become actively involved participants in the educational process. Such training may help students with disabilities develop a deeper understanding of their own weaknesses and strengths, thereby becoming better equipped to interact effectively in academic and social situations (Dowdy & Smith, 1991).

Much of the strength of Phillips' plan and other collaborative models lies in the shared commitment to outcomes (Fiechtl et al., 1989). The perception of ownership in the problem or situation strengthens the student's desire to achieve the goals established in the plan. This type of intrinsic motivation helps increase the student's ability to learn new skills and generalize these skills to other areas (Deshler et al., 1984; Welch & Link, 1991).

An equally important component of this interactive process is the involvement of parents in goal-setting and decision-making. The parent-professional collaboration may be a critical link in establishing and meeting shared goals (Brandt & Berry, 1991). Fiechtl, Rule, and Innocenti (1989) found that placement and services in new settings were a

major concern of parents. Parents want active involvement and a negotiated, rather than assigned placement, indicating that the goals of transition planning should include an appropriate placement supported by the parents.

Components of an Elementary to Secondary Transition Plan

Students' success in the academic environment is due in large part to the school's willingness and ability to adapt to different learning styles and minimize the stigma felt by students with special needs (Biklen & Zollers, 1986, p. 584). However, research has documented the historical ineffectiveness of the educational system in achieving these goals. The high dropout rate among students with learning disabilities indicates a need for a more comprehensive, effective program focusing on early intervention. Such a program will require collaboration and cooperation of professionals, parents, and students and focus on equipping each student with the tools to achieve success in the academic and social arenas they encounter.

Special educators can provide advance preparation in the special education classroom in order to avoid the potential loss of self-esteem that may occur in unfamiliar settings (Lowenthal, 1987). By evaluating and replicating the demands placed on students in the secondary environment,

special education teachers can provide training in skills and behaviors that will provide increased opportunities for success at the secondary level.

Since students with learning disabilities typically spend the majority of the school day in regular education classrooms (Aune & Johnson, 1992), it will be vital that competencies be identified in order to provide specific criteria by which to develop the instructional plan and to evaluate performance. With many school districts lacking clearly defined criteria for determining placement, and competencies varying across districts (Salend & Salend, 1986), the need for a school-based comprehensive planning team will be needed.

Through a structured elementary to secondary transition plan, students can receive training in competencies that have been identified as essential through a formal communication process. Major components of this plan will be the involvement of professionals at both educational levels, the parents, and the student; the identification of competencies required at the secondary level; the implementation of training in these competencies and in learning strategies to promote independent learning; the application of skills across settings to promote generalization; and a system of follow-up to provide insight

into the effectiveness of the plan and identify areas in need of adjustment (Brandt & Berry, 1991).

Collaboration among all parties will be necessary as the first step in identifying and matching student skills and the demands of the secondary setting. This collaborative model may take many forms depending on the needs and goals of the school system and its teachers. The levels of participation and commitment of student, parents, and educators will be the determining factor in the success or failure of the model.

Structured communication and collaboration has been supported by research on transition processes. Because few studies have been conducted in the area of an elementary to secondary transition plan, transition plans at the secondary level and transition processes for students entering the mainstream may serve as models for development of an elementary to secondary plan. Many of the same transition considerations needed for college entry are needed for entry into the secondary level (Siperstein, 1988). In addition, many of the same elements involved in the mainstreaming of students with learning disabilities may be necessary components of an elementary to secondary transition plan.

The educational partnership that has proven successful in ITP development may serve as a prototype for creation of

an elementary to secondary transition plan. Collaborative goal-setting is expected to promote interventions that will stimulate academic and social growth (Taymans, 1989). Only through this sharing of knowledge and expertise can an adequate ecological assessment be developed (Heron & Heward, 1982) and the best match between student and educational setting be determined (Brandt & Berry, 1991).

The first step in predicting the probability of success of such a process may be to evaluate teachers' perceptions regarding the need for a structured elementary to secondary transition plan, to assess their willingness to become actively involved in this plan, and to determine the format which would ensure the widest acceptance among both regular education and special education teachers. In order to measure these areas, a survey was conducted of special education and regular education teachers in a single school district to determine if a structured transition plan should be developed and implemented for elementary and middle school students with learning disabilities.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Method

Subjects

Subjects in this study were special education teachers in grades 5-8 (N=37), special education teachers teaching learning disabled students in grades 9-10 (N=10) and regular education content area teachers in grades 9-10 (N<62; an exact number could be provided for grades 9-12 only) in the South Boston/Halifax County Public School System. Special education teachers at the fifth and sixth grade levels were included because early intervention is considered an important component of an elementary to secondary transition plan. Because middle school is viewed as a transition period or "bridge" between the elementary and secondary school levels, special education teachers at this level were surveyed with the same instrument used for elementary special education teachers. This form was designed to assess specific aspects of the upper elementary/middle school special education environment and current levels of preparation for students as they move between the elementary/middle and secondary levels.

The survey of secondary teachers was limited to 9th and 10th grade teachers who deal most directly with learning disabled students struggling to integrate into the mainstreamed secondary classroom. The survey form used for this level was designed to assess specific aspects of the

secondary environment and the level of preparedness among students with learning disabilities for the academic and social demands inherent in this setting.

Procedures

Two surveys were distributed, one to special educators currently teaching grades 5-8 (Appendix A), and one to regular educators in the content areas and special education teachers currently teaching students with learning disabilities in grades 9-10 (Appendix B). In addition to determining levels of student preparation, both surveys were designed to determine the perceived need for an elementary to secondary transition plan, the necessary components of such a plan, and the attitudes toward active participation in the transition process.

The elementary/middle school teachers' survey consisted of 39 questions which employed a variety of responses. The questionnaire contained ten demographic items and 29 attitudinal variables designed to assess student characteristics, teacher and classroom characteristics, and planning characteristics.

The secondary teachers' survey consisted of 41 questions. The questionnaire contained 15 demographic items and 26 attitudinal variables designed to assess the same

three areas included in the elementary/middle school teacher survey.

Surveys were distributed through the Central Office of the Halifax County/South Boston Public School System (Appendix C) via the "Pony Express." A memorandum to each principal accompanied the surveys, explaining the purpose and requesting assistance in dissemination (Appendices D-F). A sign-in sheet was also included in each school packet, and teachers were directed to sign their name to this sheet once the completed survey was returned to the school office. It was anticipated that this measure of accountability would increase the overall response rate.

The surveys were pilot tested with six special education teachers, and three secondary regular education teachers to determine if questions needed clarification. Suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the survey when they did not alter the scope of the survey.

Measurement

Survey data was compiled into six tables under the following headings: Demographic Data for Special Education Teachers, Grades 5-10; Demographic Data for Regular Education-Content Area Teachers, Grades 9-10; Student Characteristics; Teacher/Instructional Characteristics; Communication Characteristics; and Characteristics of the

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transition Plan. Bar graphs and pie charts were also used to compare relevant data. Where appropriate, percentages were calculated for comparison purposes. Comparisons were drawn between responses from teachers at different grade levels (i.e. grades 5-6, grades 7-8, and grades 9-10) and between regular education teachers and special education teachers.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Results

The regular educators submitting completed surveys meeting specific criteria (i.e., content areas only, including foreign language and health/physical education) (N=42) included teachers in grades 9 and/or 10. Seventeen of these respondents also taught grades 11 and/or 12. Curricular areas included English/reading, math, science, social science, health/physical education, and foreign language.

Special education teachers at the elementary level returning completed surveys (N=30) recorded teaching learning disabled, emotionally handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, and trainable mentally handicapped students (where it could be determined, speech teachers and teachers in the severely and profoundly handicapped category were excluded from the data compilation). All special education teachers in grades 9 and 10 responding (N=10) reported teaching learning disabled students in a variety of settings. Survey data indicated that special education respondents held 19 positions in the Resource or Comprehensive Support Skills (CSS) classroom and/or as a Monitor and 23 positions in the self-contained classroom (Figure 1). These figures included special education teachers in grades 9 and 10 who occupied four positions in the CSS classroom, seven as a monitor, and ten in the self-

contained classroom. It appeared that over 50% of all special education teachers in the grades surveyed had teaching responsibilities in the self-contained classroom compared to approximately 25% in the Resource or CSS classroom and 25% in the Monitor category.

Demographic data (Tables 1-2) showed that a much higher percentage of regular educators surveyed had more than ten years teaching experience compared to special educators in grades 5-10 (Figure 2). However, a higher percentage of special education teachers held master's degrees than their counterparts in regular education (Figure 3).

In assessing student characteristics (Table 3), 60% of special education teachers felt their students were adequately prepared for their instructional and classroom demands (Figure 4). However, 80% of special education teachers in grades 9 and 10 stated that these students were not adequately prepared for the demands of the regular classroom (Figure 5). This figure contrasted sharply with regular educators' perceptions. Only 35% felt that their students with learning disabilities were not adequately prepared for the regular classroom. Forty-five percent responded that they were adequately prepared, and 19% responded that the level of preparation was variable among students.

Special education teachers in grades 5-8 responded differently from special education teachers in the upper grades. Twenty-six percent felt their students were prepared for the regular classroom and 30% felt they were not. It is important to note that 40% of the special education teachers in grades 5-8 did not respond to this answer. Since the question specifically referred to mainstreamed students, many of those who chose not to respond may be self-contained and not exposed to mainstreamed students.

Both special education and regular education teachers classified their learning disabled students as dependent learners (Figure 6). Frequent teacher comments were that the students required extra help in following instructions, taking notes, recording assignments, beginning and completing tasks, and solving math problems. Teachers also noted that these students had weaknesses in critical thinking skills and learning strategies and needed constant monitoring, encouragement, and repetition. A few teachers characterized their learning disabled students as lazy, unmotivated, immature, behaviorally disordered, and helpless.

In a comparison of skill levels to non-handicapped peers, 80% of special education teachers felt their academic skills were significantly weaker, 90% felt their academic

support skills (ex., outlining, summarizing, note-taking, etc.) were significantly weaker, and 60% felt the social/behavioral skills were significantly weaker (Figure 7). Regular educators differed, with 57% indicating that social/behavioral skills were believed to be on the same level as non-handicapped peers (Figure 8). Sixty-one percent felt their academic skills were somewhat weaker, and 42% felt their academic support skills were somewhat weaker. The majority of all teachers felt that learning disabled students' skill weaknesses had a negative impact on students' ability to meet instructional objectives (Figure 9). Reasons frequently cited were weaknesses in note-taking and test review skills, retaining information presented orally, reading levels, and general academic skills. The most commonly named reason was behavioral problems.

An examination of the teachers' instructional focus in the skill areas of academic skills, academic support skills, and social/behavior skills was included in the survey (Table 4). Elementary and middle school special education teachers generally believed that they had adequate knowledge of the academic and academic support skills needed for success in the secondary environment and that their knowledge of the social/behavioral skills needed was strong (Figure 10). It is important to note that 43% of teachers in this category reported teaching experience at the secondary level.

In a comparison among educators of the order of importance each skill area held in their classroom, the results were mixed (Figures 11, 12, and 13). Approximately 56% of both elementary/middle school special education teachers and secondary regular education teachers reported that academic skills were most important for success in the classroom. In contrast, only 10% of high school special education teachers reported academic skills as most important in their classroom. Approximately 40% ranked these skills as second in importance and 50% recorded academic skills as third in importance.

Academic support skills were considered most important by the majority of high school special education teachers (50%). Only 6% of elementary/middle school special education teachers viewed these skills as a priority, and 66% ranked them as third in importance. Although only 23% of regular education teachers rated these skills first in importance, 54% ranked them as second.

Between 30 and 40% of all special education teachers ranked social/behavioral skills as first and second in importance for success in their classroom. High school regular education teachers overwhelmingly rated social/behavioral skills as third in importance (64%).

Despite the differences among elementary and middle school special education teachers' academic and academic

support skills ratings, approximately 35-40% spend between 25 and 50% of class time on each of these skill areas (Figure 14). Another 35% reported spending between 50 and 75% of class time on academic skills. However, a majority (46%) reported spending less than 25% on academic support skills. Social/behavioral skills also received a low level of class time among this group (30%).

Among special education teachers in grades 9 and 10, 70% reported spending between 25 and 50% of class time on academic skills (Figure 15). The remaining 30% spend between 50 and 75% of time on these skills. In the area of academic support skills, 40% rated time spent on these skills in the classroom at the 0-25% level, 30% in the 25-50% level and 20% in the 50-75% level. Forty percent of these teachers spend less than 25% on social/behavioral skills, 30% spend 25-50%, 20% spend 50-75%, and 10% reported spending over 75% of class time on these skills.

Not surprisingly, 61% of regular education high school teachers who responded to the survey reported spending over half of class time on academic skills (Figure 16). In the area of academic support skills, 42% spend between 25 and 50% of their class time and 28% spend below 25% of class time on these skills. Social/behavioral skills received the lowest priority in the regular education secondary

classroom, with 33% dedicating 25-50% and 38% spending less than 25% on this skill area.

Approximately 75% of regular education high school teachers who responded reported that they used instructional accommodations in their classroom for students with learning disabilities (Figure 17). Types of accommodations employed included: providing repeated explanations; rewriting or providing notes; not lowering grades for spelling errors; providing extra time for assignments and reducing quantities of assignments; using manipulative activities and group exercises; repetition; reading tests orally and allowing oral responses; re-testing; extensive use of visual aids, including the blackboard; disregarding lowest grades; assigning peer helpers; adapting textbook material; and providing individualized attention whenever feasible.

In the assessment of communication characteristics between elementary and secondary teachers (Table 5), it was found that about 50% of special education teachers at the elementary and middle school levels receive informal communication from other special education teachers at the secondary level (Figure 18). Communication with high school regular education teachers was minimal. Similarly, about 40% of high school special education teachers reported participation in some form of planning with elementary/middle special education teachers about student

needs, whereas 71% of high school regular education teachers did not participate in planning with elementary/middle school special education teachers.

An overwhelming majority of all groups surveyed reported a need for additional input from educators across categories and grade levels. One hundred percent of special education teachers at the high school level agreed more input was needed along with 83% of high school regular education teachers (Figure 19). Over 50% of each group responded that this communication should be available through meetings planned for the specific purpose of sharing information about needs and competencies of students in the secondary environment. Approximately one-third of each group felt that informal communication would be more appropriate (Figure 20).

Responding to the best format for providing information on competencies required for success in the secondary classroom, 66% of elementary and middle school special education teachers stated that collaborative teams were the most preferred method. Regarding the method educators would be most willing to participate in, a high percentage of special education teachers cited teams as the most preferred, and checklists were almost equally divided as the top choice among high school regular education teachers. Classroom observation and personal interviews with teachers

were least favored, although teacher interviews were included as most preferred by 40% of the elementary and middle school special education teachers (Figure 21).

In assessing the need for a structured transition plan for elementary and middle school students preparing to be mainstreamed in the secondary classroom (Table 6), approximately 69% of all teachers favored such a plan (Figure 22). Many who responded positively to the implementation of this plan noted that it may help make the move to the secondary environment less traumatic and might also help develop clearer and more consistent expectations for students and educators. A common reason cited for not implementing a transition plan was that it would add more paperwork and would not have a significant effect on learning disabled students' performance.

All 66% of elementary and middle school special education teachers who responded that a transition plan was needed also indicated that transition goals for elementary/middle school students currently were not adequately addressed in the IEP (Figure 23). Seventy-two percent of teachers who responded to the question of whether transition goals should form a part of the IEP or be specified in a separate plan chose the IEP as the preferred medium (Figure 24).

Over 80% of all teachers surveyed agreed that parents should take an active role in establishing school goals for their children, and over 70% agreed that students should also be active participants in this process (Figure 25). Reasons specified for inclusion of both groups included clarifying expectations, providing varying perspectives on students' problems and weaknesses, promoting parental encouragement and reinforcement at home, and increasing student motivation by strengthening their position as a partner in the learning process.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Discussion

Survey response rates equalled 81% of special education teachers in the elementary and middle school grades, 100% of special education-learning disabilities teachers in grades 9 and 10, and at least 67% of regular educators in grades 9 and 10. Because of the high response rate, it is believed that the information received was representative of the attitudes of teachers in the Halifax County/South Boston Public School System in the grade levels and categories surveyed.

Overall responses to this survey support the hypothesis that structured transition planning is needed for elementary and middle school students with disabilities in order to ensure a more successful placement and educational and social experience at the secondary level.

The assessment of learning disabled students' readiness for the demands of the secondary regular education classroom indicates that although 45% of secondary regular education teachers feel these students are adequately prepared, at least 35% do not. Fifty-two percent classified these students as passive or dependent learners, lending support to the premise that students with learning disabilities are not sufficiently prepared to take an active role in the learning process. A significant percentage of special education teachers at the secondary level classified their

students as dependent learners and not adequately prepared for the demands of the mainstreamed classroom.

A wide discrepancy in responses among special educators and regular educators was noted in comparing skill levels of learning disabled students to their non-handicapped peers. Regular educators in grades 9 and 10 generally view social/behavioral skills as equal among these two groups of students but find academic and academic support skills to be somewhat weaker. Conversely, special educators at the same grade levels believe all three skill areas are significantly weaker.

Interestingly, special education secondary teachers reported that academic support skills are the most important component for success in their classroom, with social/behavioral skills a close second. Academic skills are considered least important by 50%. These findings contrast significantly with the attention given to the three skill areas in the secondary special education classroom. While 70% spend between 25-50% of class time on academic skills, only 30% spend equal time on academic support skills and on social/behavioral skills, and 40% spend even less time (0-25%) on these two areas.

Although these teachers recognize the importance of academic support skills to students' success, their actual instructional time is devoted to strengthening academic

skills. These findings are supported by research on secondary special education programs which indicates that instructional priority is placed on remediating basic skill deficits (Deshler, et al., 1982; Schumaker & Deshler, 1984).

Predictably, regular education teachers view academic skills as most important for success in their classroom and spend the majority of their class time on this area. However, academic support skills are most often viewed as second in importance and 42% spend at least 25 to 50% of their class time on these skills. These findings contrast with special education teachers at the elementary and middle school levels who bear responsibility for preparing their students for the secondary environment. Sixty-six percent of these teachers view academic support skills as the least important of the three skill areas assessed and 46% spend less than 25% of their instructional time in this area.

In light of the research on learning disabled adolescents and their significant weaknesses in designing and applying learning strategies (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Schumaker & Deshler, 1988), these findings raise questions about instructional priorities in the elementary and middle school special education classroom. Survey data and research in learning strategies instruction suggest that levels of instruction in academic support skills (or learning strategies) should be increased at the

elementary and middle school levels. Early intervention is indicated in order for students to have sufficient time to acquire learning strategies and to ensure generalization of skills (Clark et al., 1991; McKenzie & Houk, 1993).

The differences in perceptions among special education and regular education teachers may be reflective of the low levels of communication which currently exist among these groups. At least 50% of special education teachers in the elementary and middle schools do not receive any communication from teachers at the secondary level. Of the 50% who do communicate with secondary teachers about competencies, this communication is almost exclusively with special education teachers and is received through informal communication. It is presumed that communication and planning occur at greater levels among special education and regular education teachers at the same grade level because they may be serving the same students. However, this question was not specifically presented in the survey, so any conclusion is speculative.

Although most special education teachers at the elementary and middle school level consider themselves to have adequate or strong knowledge of the skills needed for success in the mainstream secondary classroom, a significant number still desire additional input in this area from secondary teachers. Likewise, a significant number of

teachers surveyed at the secondary level believe that communication needs to be increased with teachers at the elementary and middle school levels in order to expand the awareness of secondary classroom and teacher expectations. Sixty-eight percent of respondents want their school system to implement a structured plan to facilitate the transition of students with learning disabilities to the secondary level. Most agree that parents and students should assume an active role in this process by sharing in the establishment of common goals. Sixty-two percent agree that this planning should begin by 7th grade or earlier.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Conclusions

The development and implementation of a transition plan for elementary/middle school students preparing to be mainstreamed at the secondary level may be especially critical at this time in history. Contemporary thought in the State of Virginia and the nation is moving toward educational reform with emphasis on performance testing and minimal competency testing (Schumaker, 1984). The educational system may respond by increasing focus on instruction in basic skills, regular assessment, and graduation rates and may result in the "teach to the test" syndrome (Kortering & Elrod, 1991, p. 153).

Continuing efforts to educate students with learning disabilities in the least restrictive environment have resulted in high levels of mainstreaming where academic training is central. With increases in academic standards and proficiency tests for graduation an integral component of the reform movement, the learning disabled student will face greater external demands and expectations (Edgar, 1987). Without the skills to cope with these added pressures, increasing numbers of learning disabled adolescents may become "at risk" for prematurely exiting the school system.

Utilization of a transition plan and establishment of common goals across settings may mean the difference between

failure and success for the learning disabled adolescent.

As Clark et al., (1991) stated:

The ultimate question of what schools want students to know or be able to do when they leave high school is critical. It is equally as critical that schools ask what they want their students to know or be able to do when they reach middle school, or junior high school, or high school. (p. 117)

A transition plan will assist in opening a dialogue among special and regular educators and in encouraging their collaboration to provide the best opportunity for success for students with learning disabilities. As viewpoints and expectations are shared and valued and commitments are made to mutual goals, a renewed spirit of camaraderie may develop among all participants in the process. With the inclusion of parents and students, it is hoped that outcomes will be measured in increased motivation, reduced anxiety and helplessness, and greater success among the learning disabled student population in addition to greater levels of awareness, compassion, understanding, and cooperation among all educators.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Limitations of the Study

This study was a nonrandomized investigation of a comparison of attitudinal variables among educators in special education and regular education at specific grade levels in one school district. In order to respond to a number of the questions posed, generalizations were required to be made. It is plausible that perceptions and characteristics may change over time and across settings, thereby making replication of the data obtained in this study questionable.

Because of the diverse nature of special education, the survey may have been flawed in that it did not specifically ascertain categories among teachers in self-contained classrooms. This information would have been particularly helpful in developing an appropriate perspective on responses from special education teachers at the elementary and middle school levels.

Because of the small sample size and primarily rural student population of the school system surveyed, this study is not intended to be indicative of other school systems.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Implications for Future Research

The findings in this study support McKenzie & Houk's (1993) theory that transition planning is needed for students with learning disabilities at the elementary level. Research with more diverse populations and larger sample groups may reveal whether the need for such a plan is restricted to specific school systems or if it is reflective of a widespread need for the target student population. Further research into specific competencies critical for success in the secondary environment is indicated in order that valid assessments can be made of whether these competencies are targeted for remediation at the elementary and middle school levels. In addition, studies of the magnitude of the effect of deficits in learning strategies on successful progression through high school is suggested. Finally, research in the types and levels of communication experienced between regular educators and special educators across settings is warranted.

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

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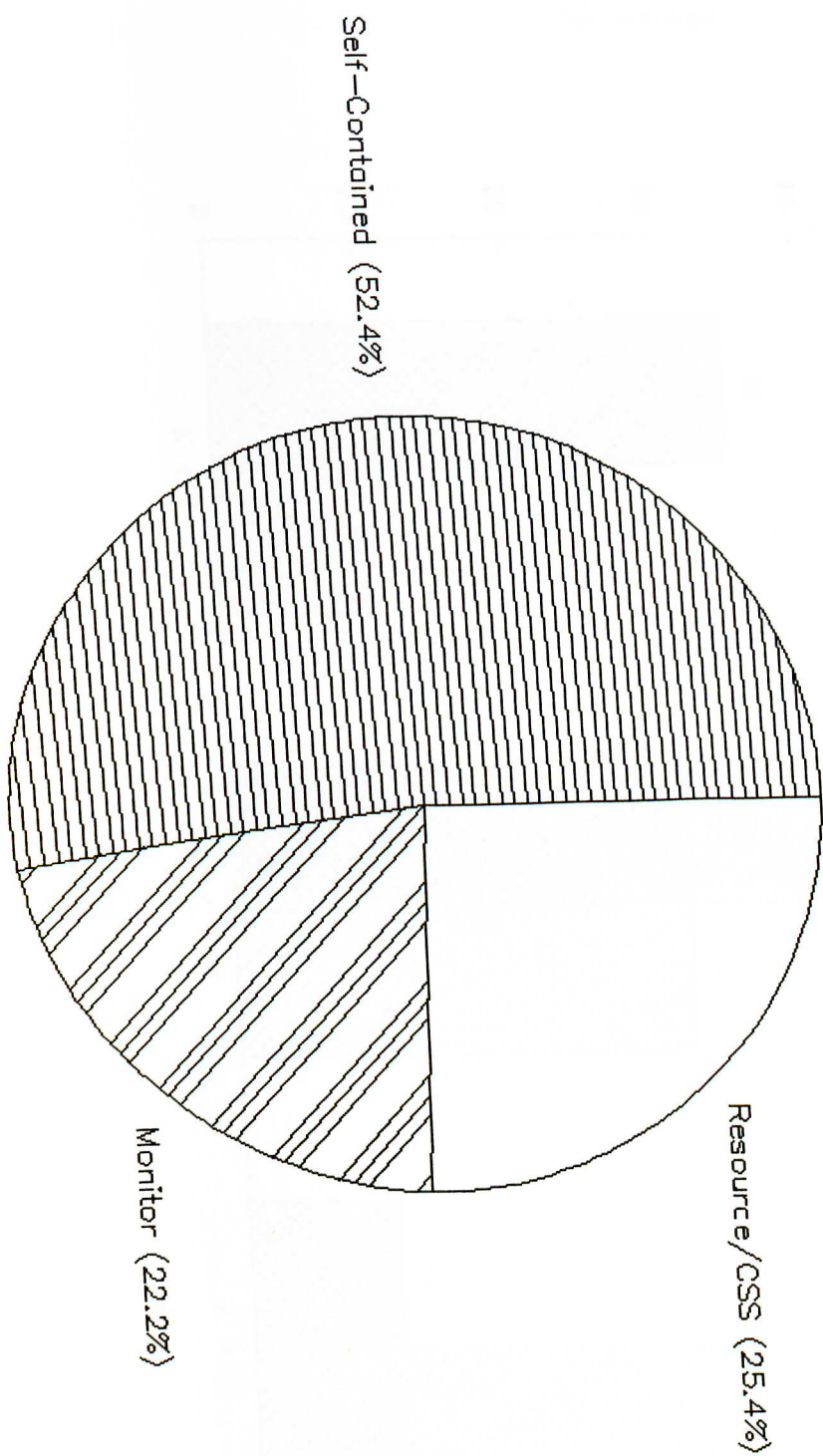
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Teacher Category, Special Education

Figure 1



Percentage

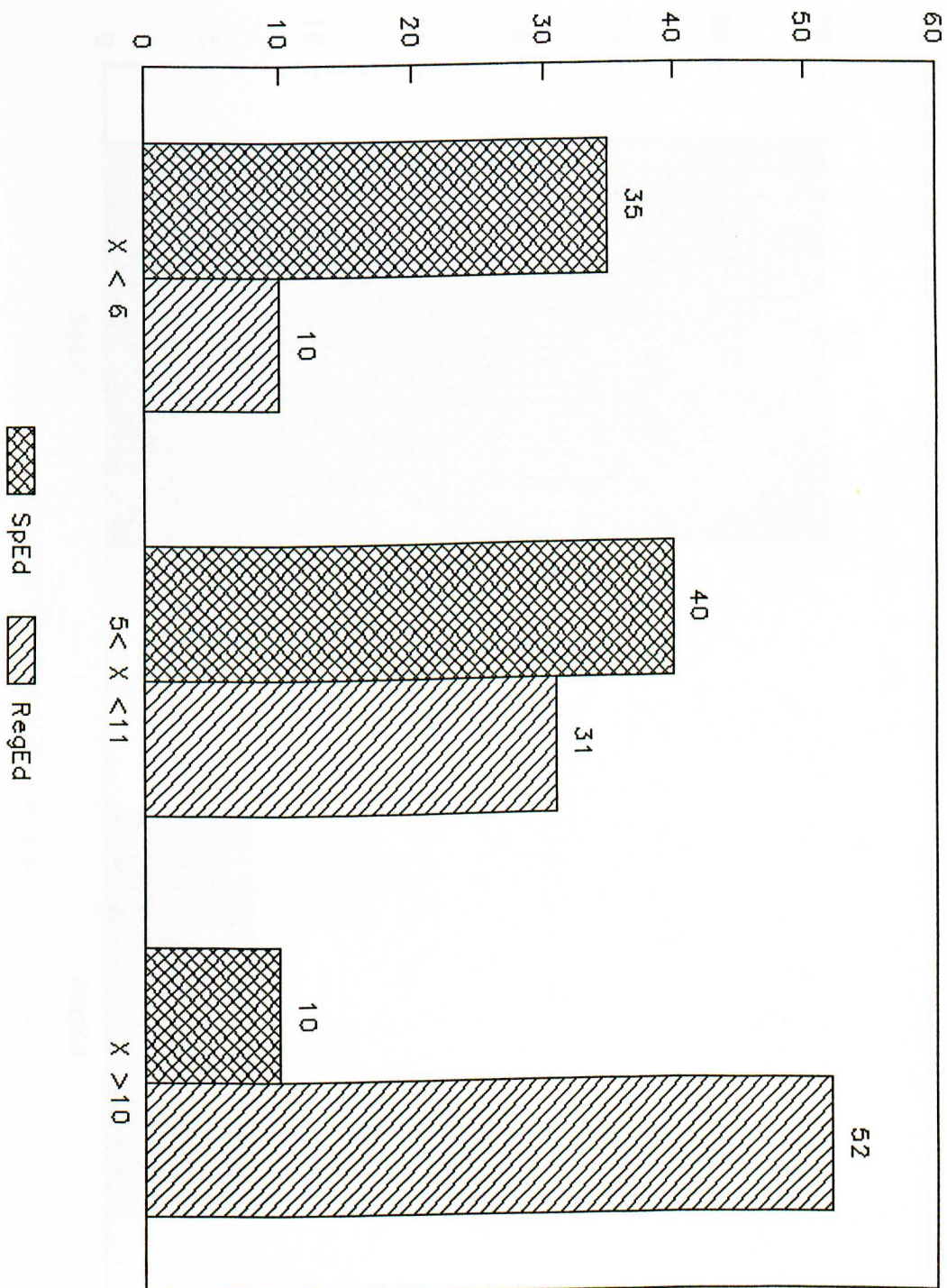


Figure 2

Total Years Teaching

(X = Years)

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Percentage

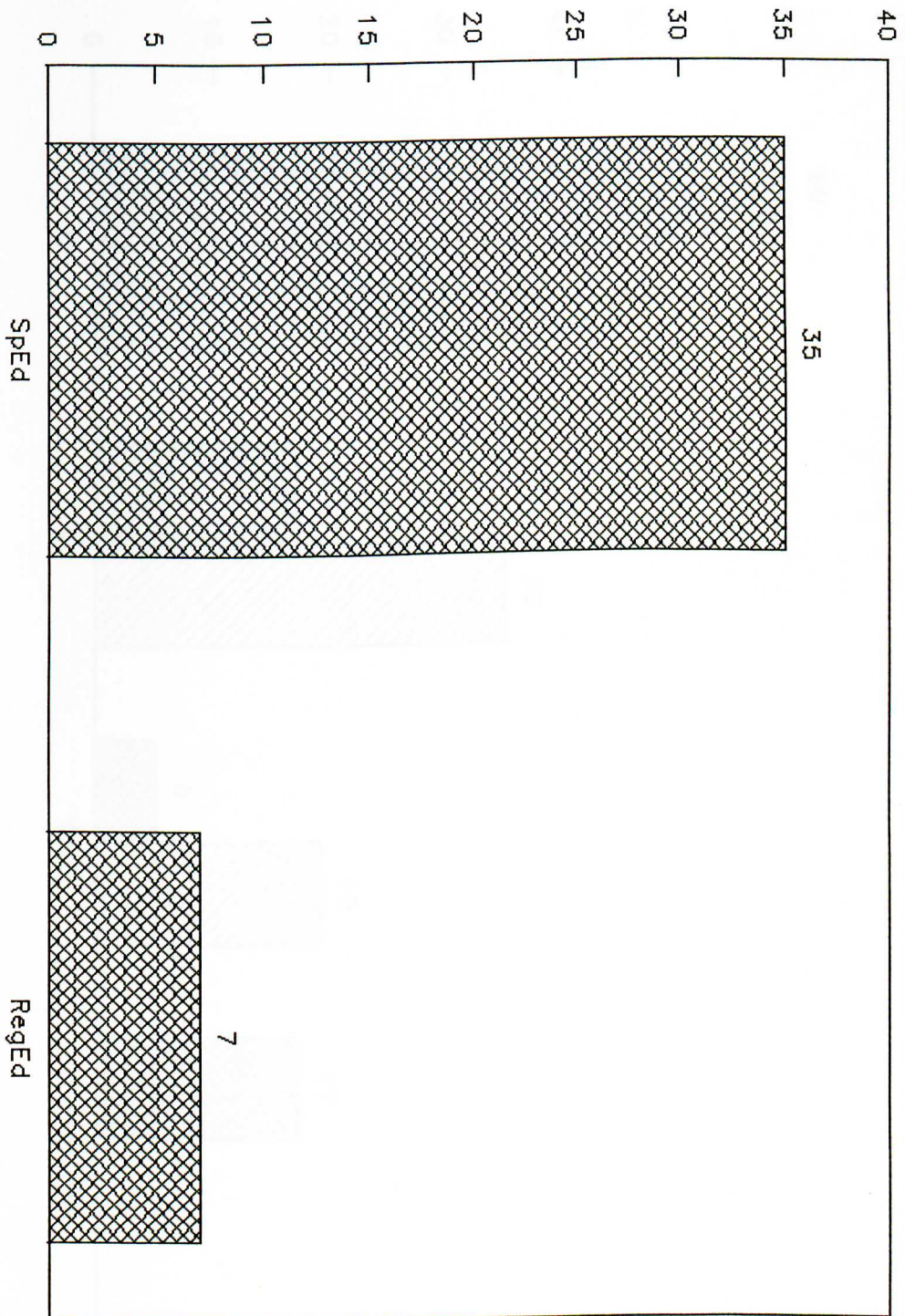
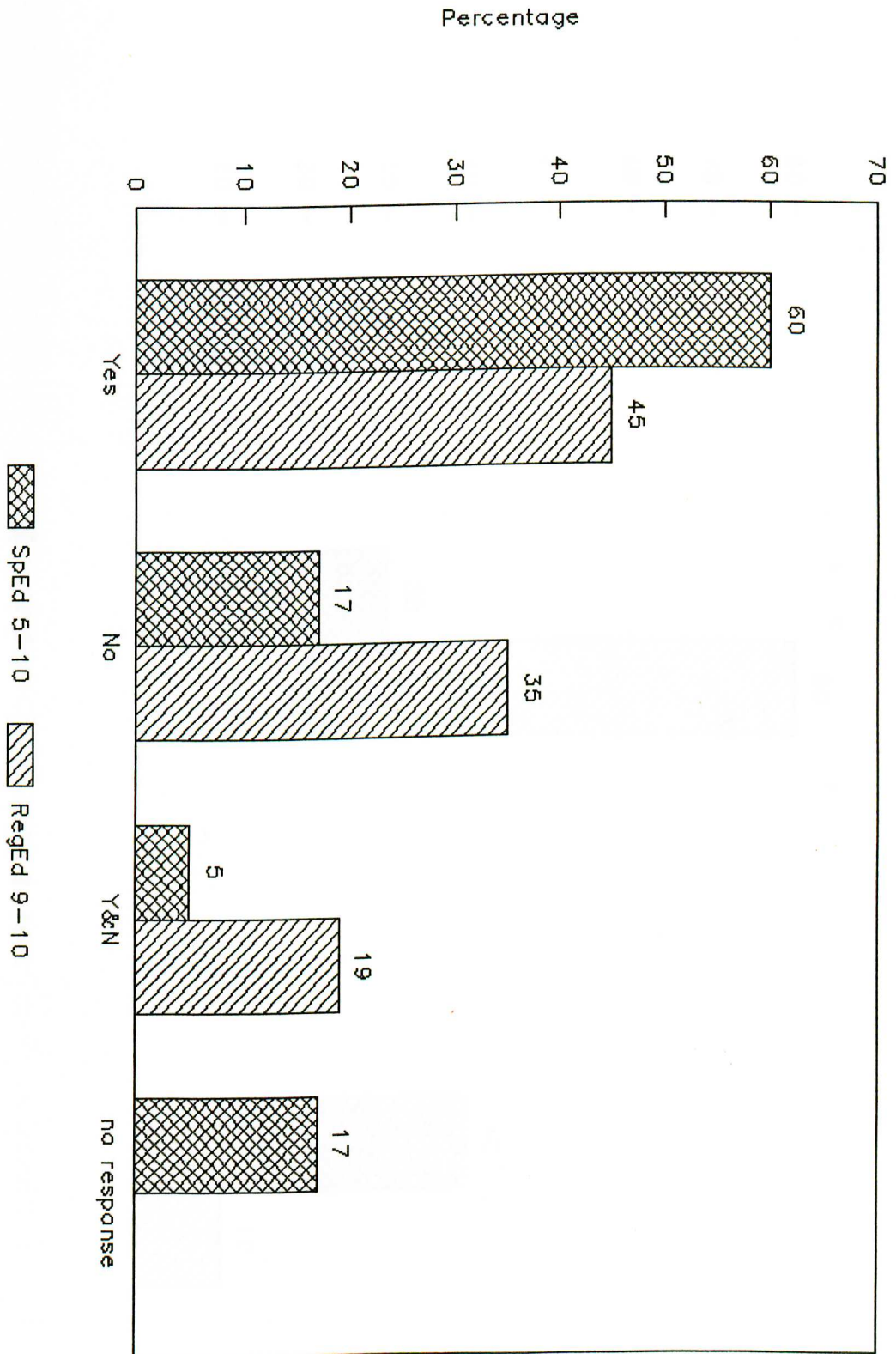


Figure 3

Master's Degrees Held

LD Students Prepared for Your Demands

Figure 4



Percentage

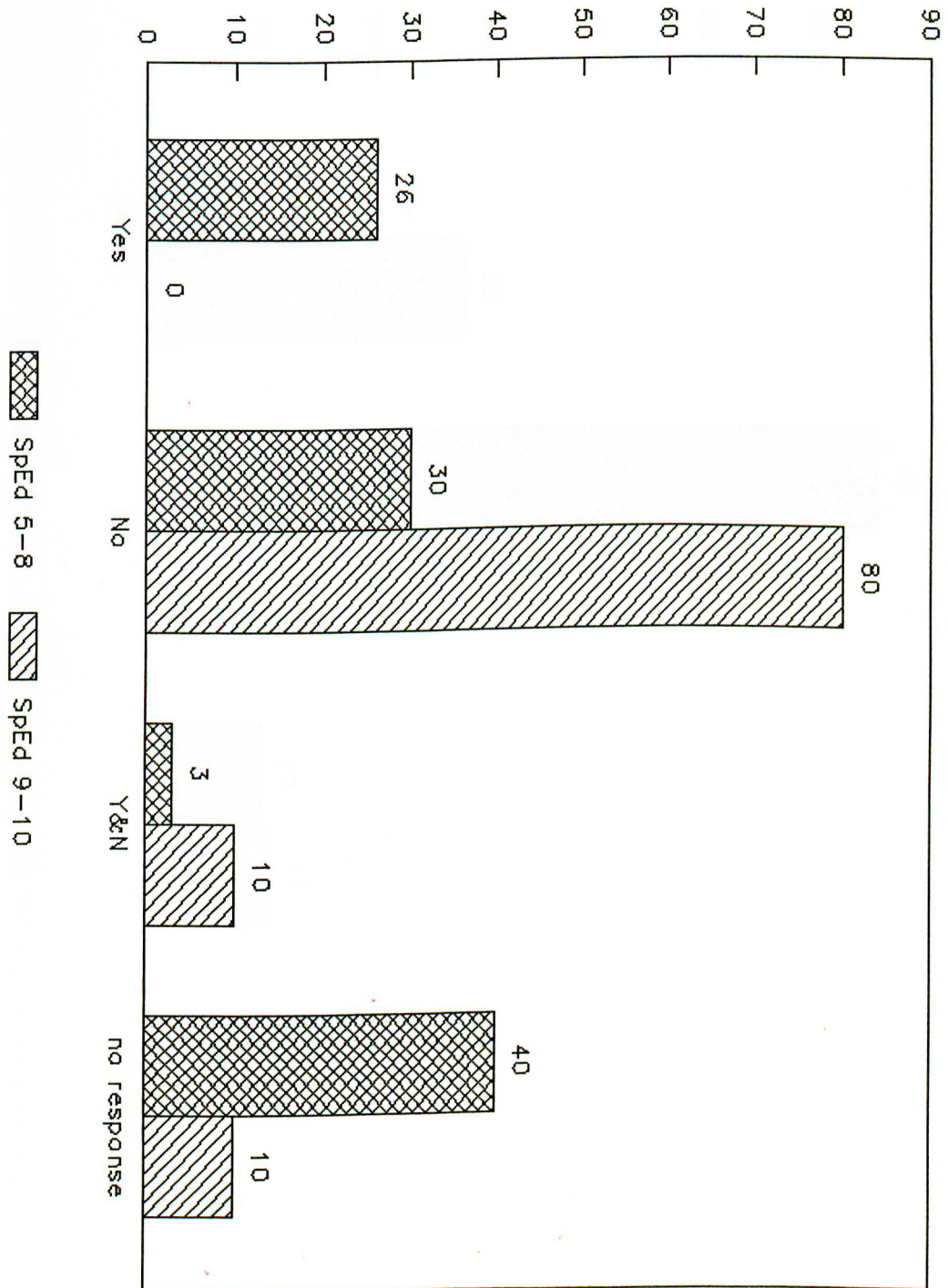


Figure 5

LD Students Prepared for Mainstream

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

70

Percentage

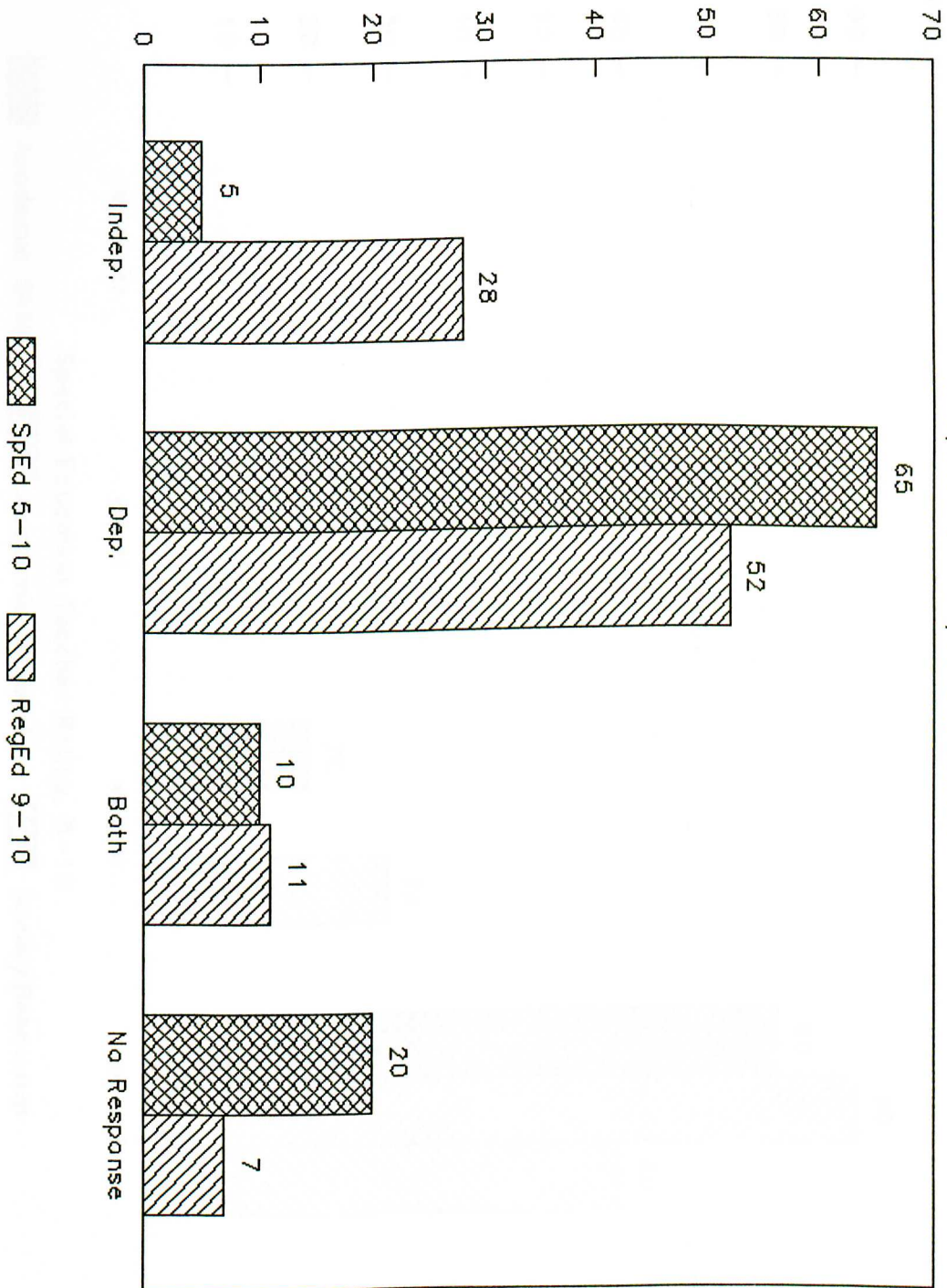


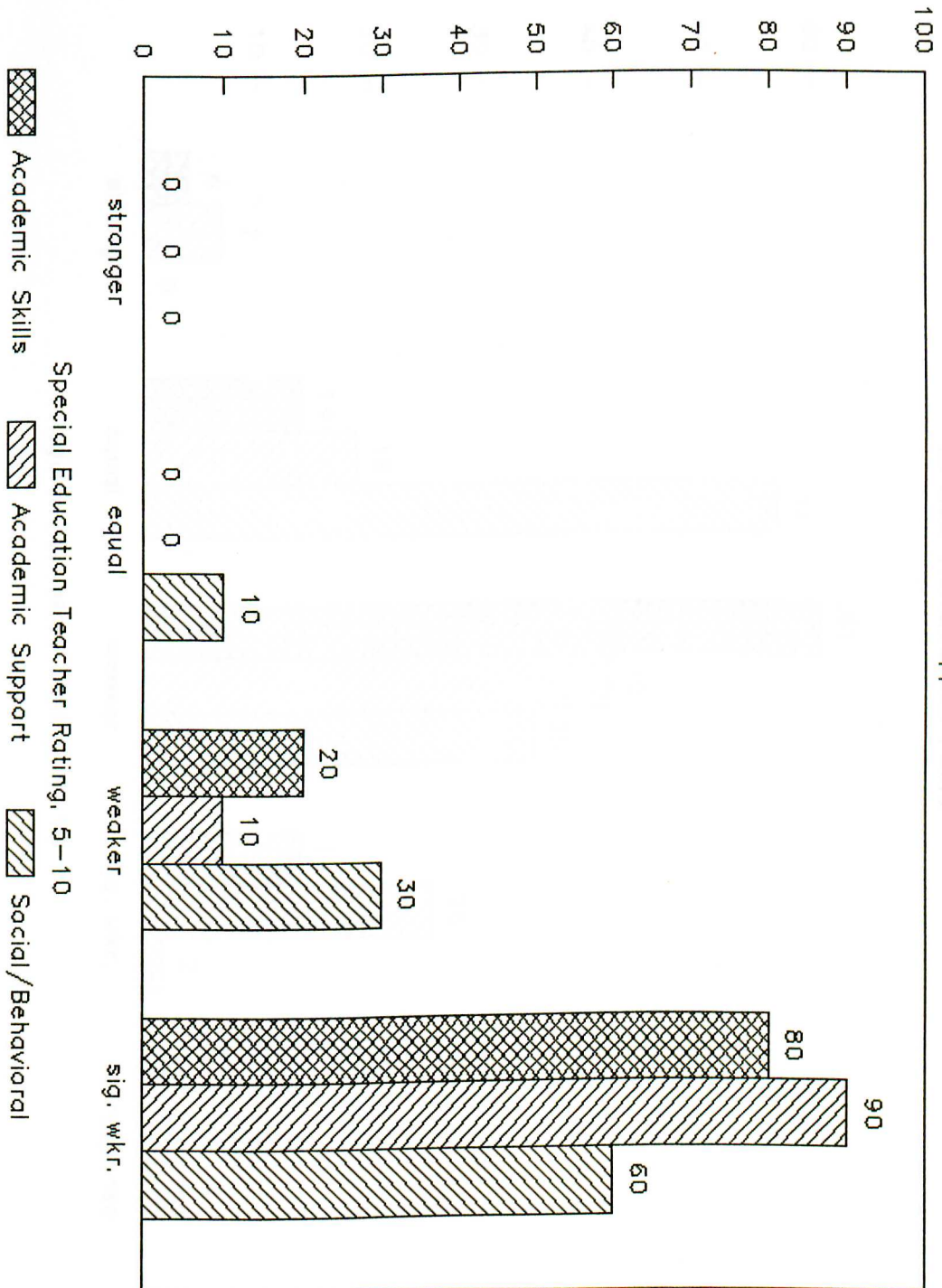
Figure 6

LD Students

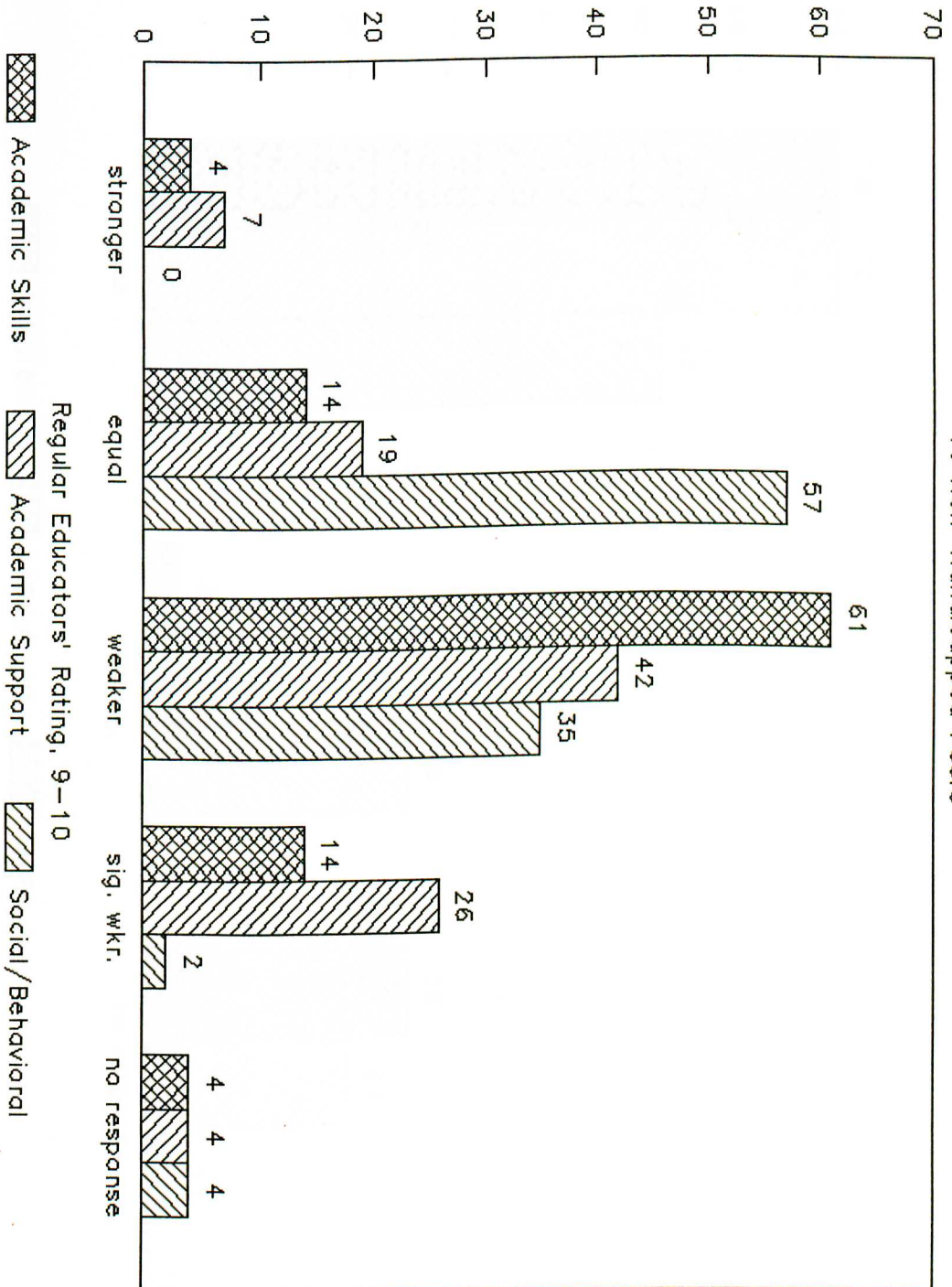
Independent or Dependent Learners

Figure 7

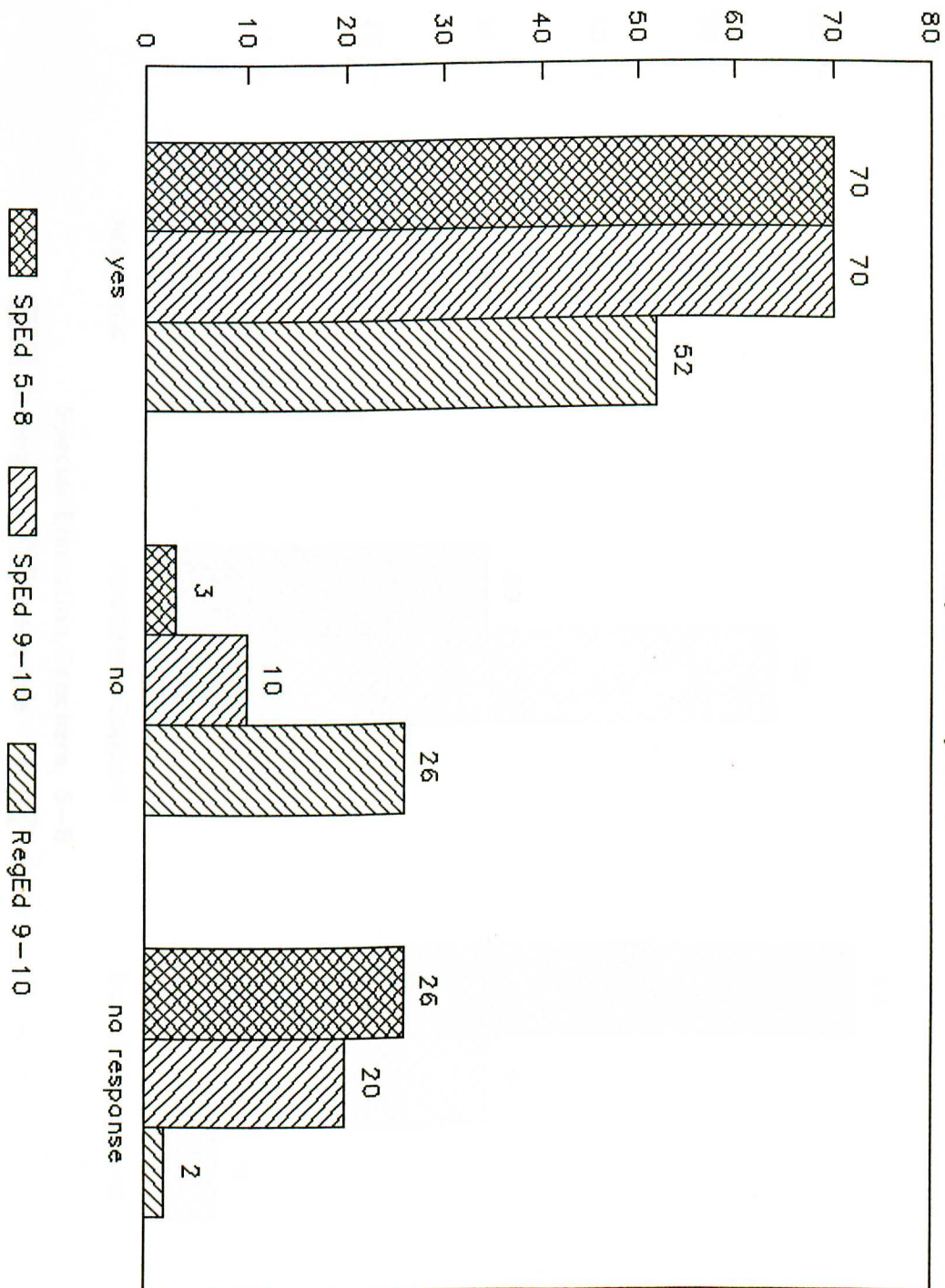
Comparison of Skill Levels To Non-Handicapped Peers



Skill Levels Compared
To Non-Handicapped Peers



Percentage



Skill Weaknesses Negatively Affect

Student Meeting Instr. Objectives

Figure 9

Percentage

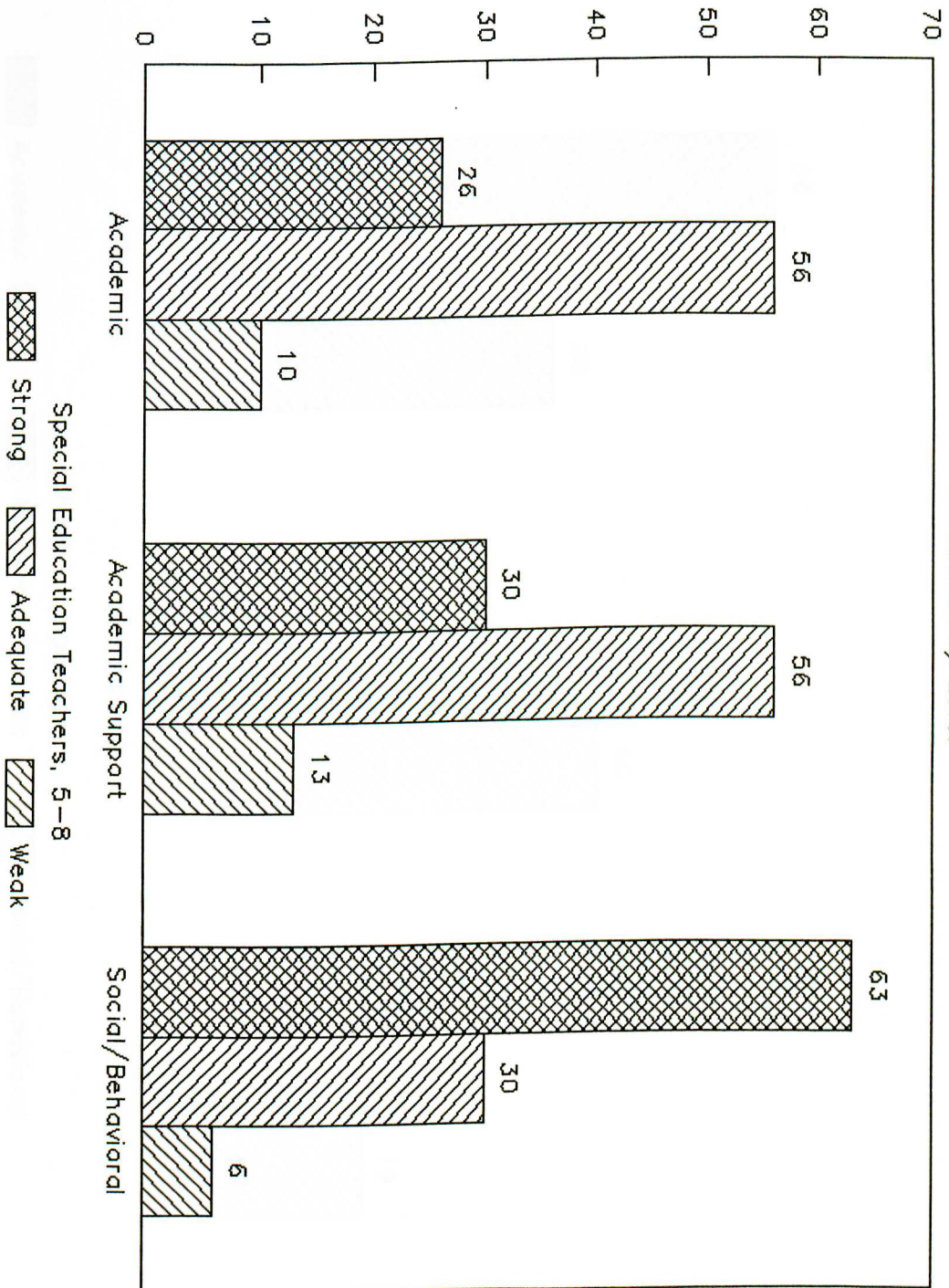


Figure 10

Knowledge of Skills Needed for Success
At Secondary Level

Percentage

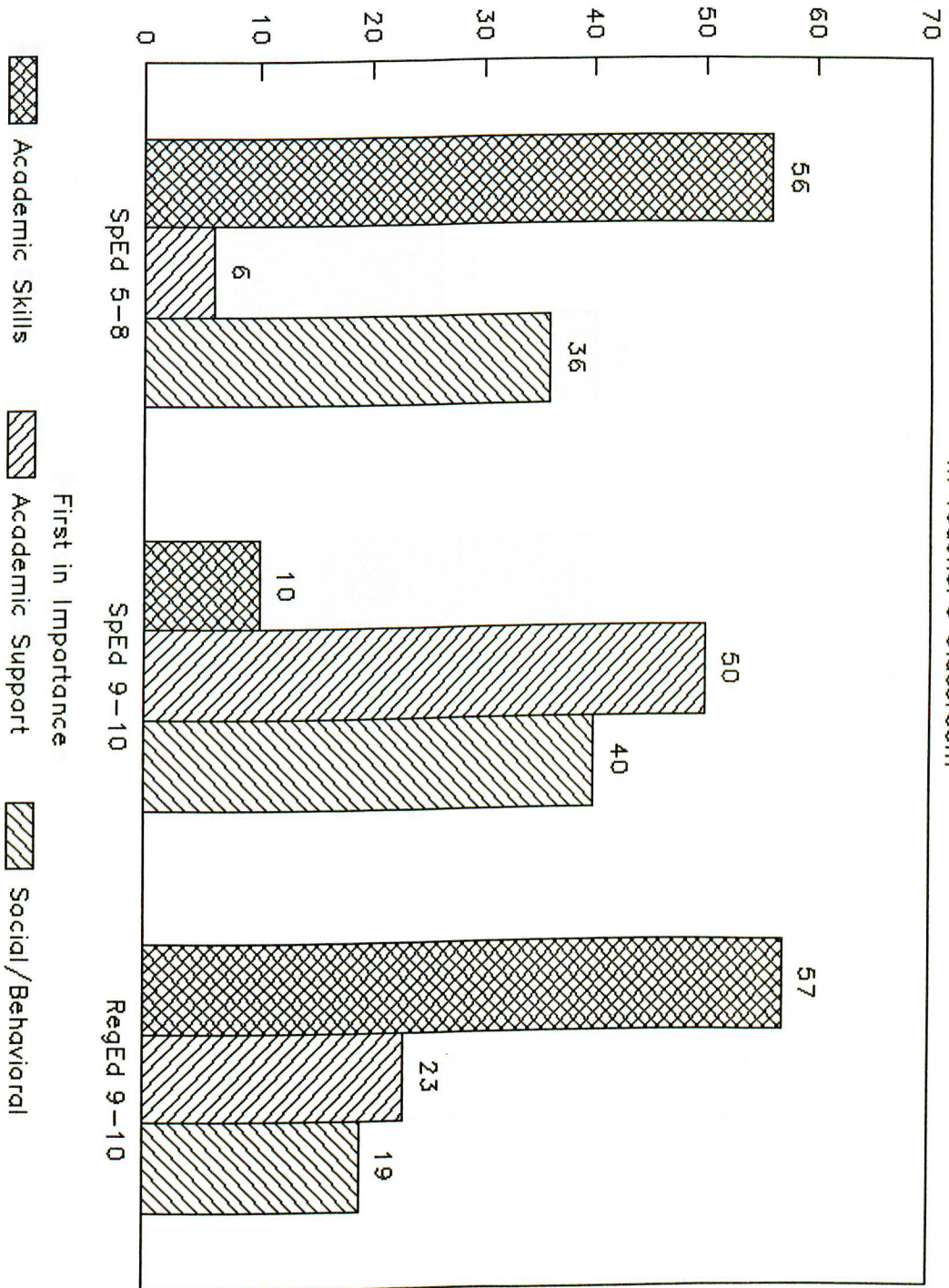


Figure 11

Percentage

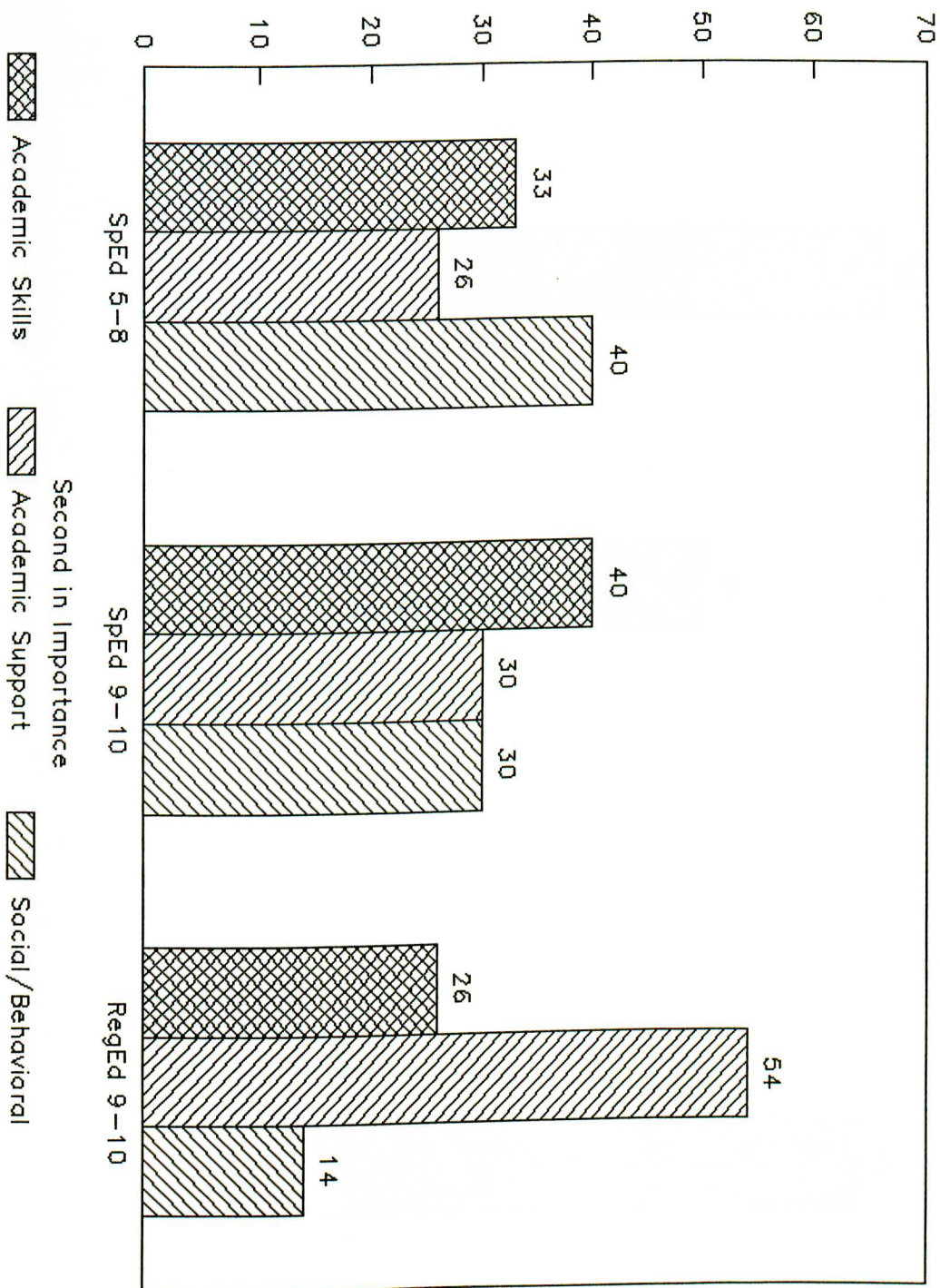


Figure 12

Percentage

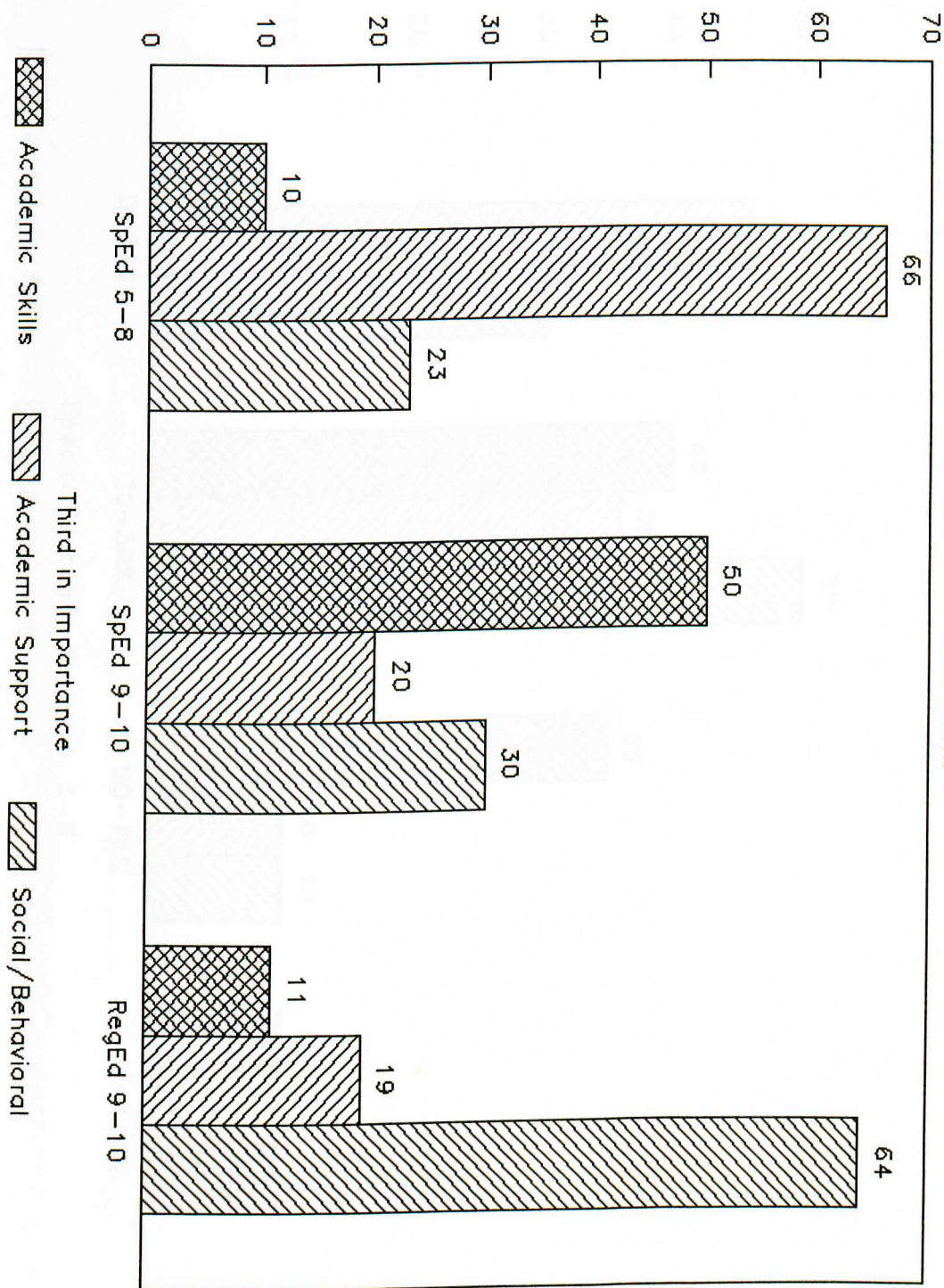
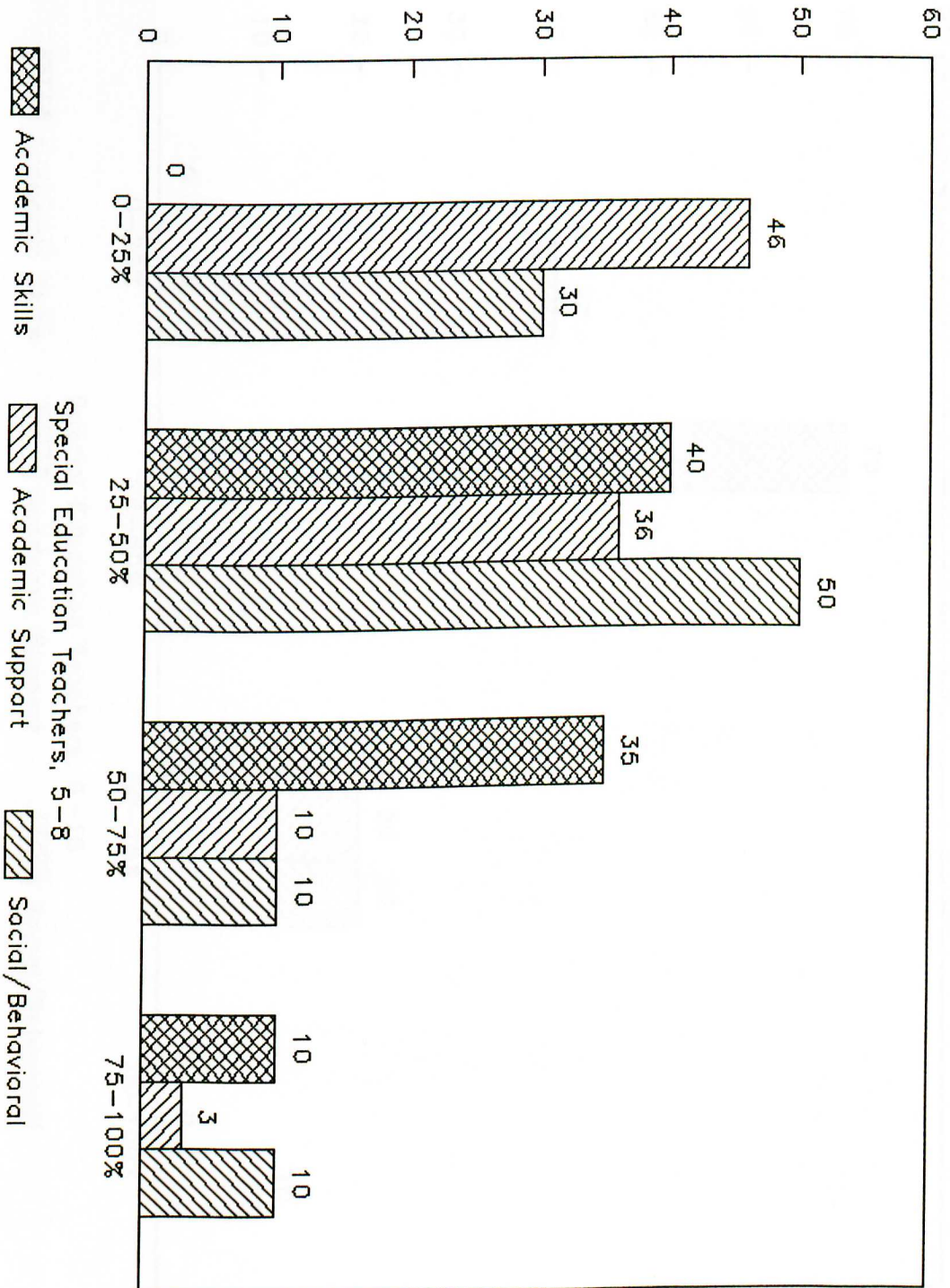
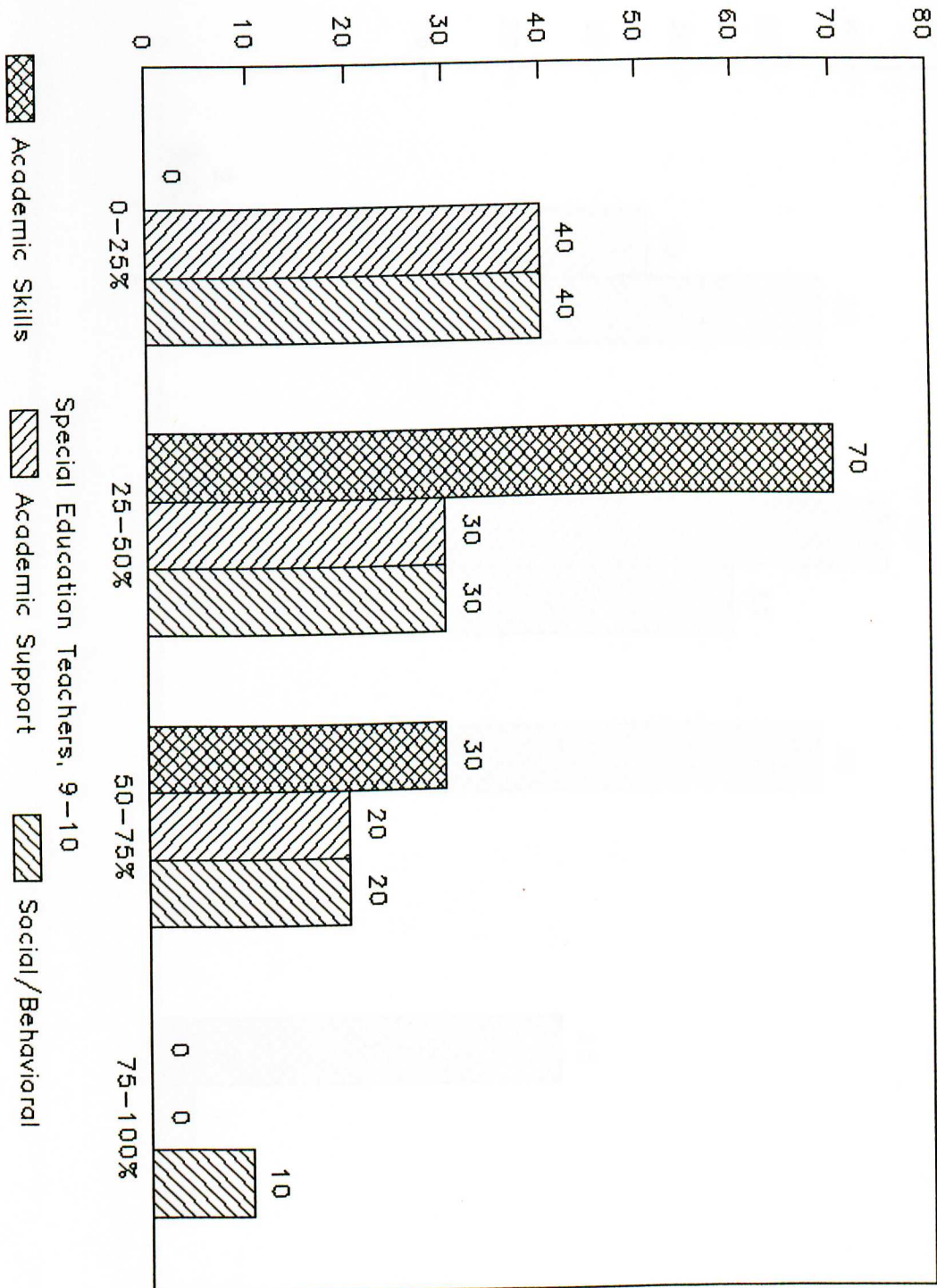


Figure 13
Order of Skill Importance for Success
In Teacher's Classroom

Average Classtime Spent on Skill Areas



Percentage



Average Classtime Spent on Skill Areas

Figure 15

Percentage

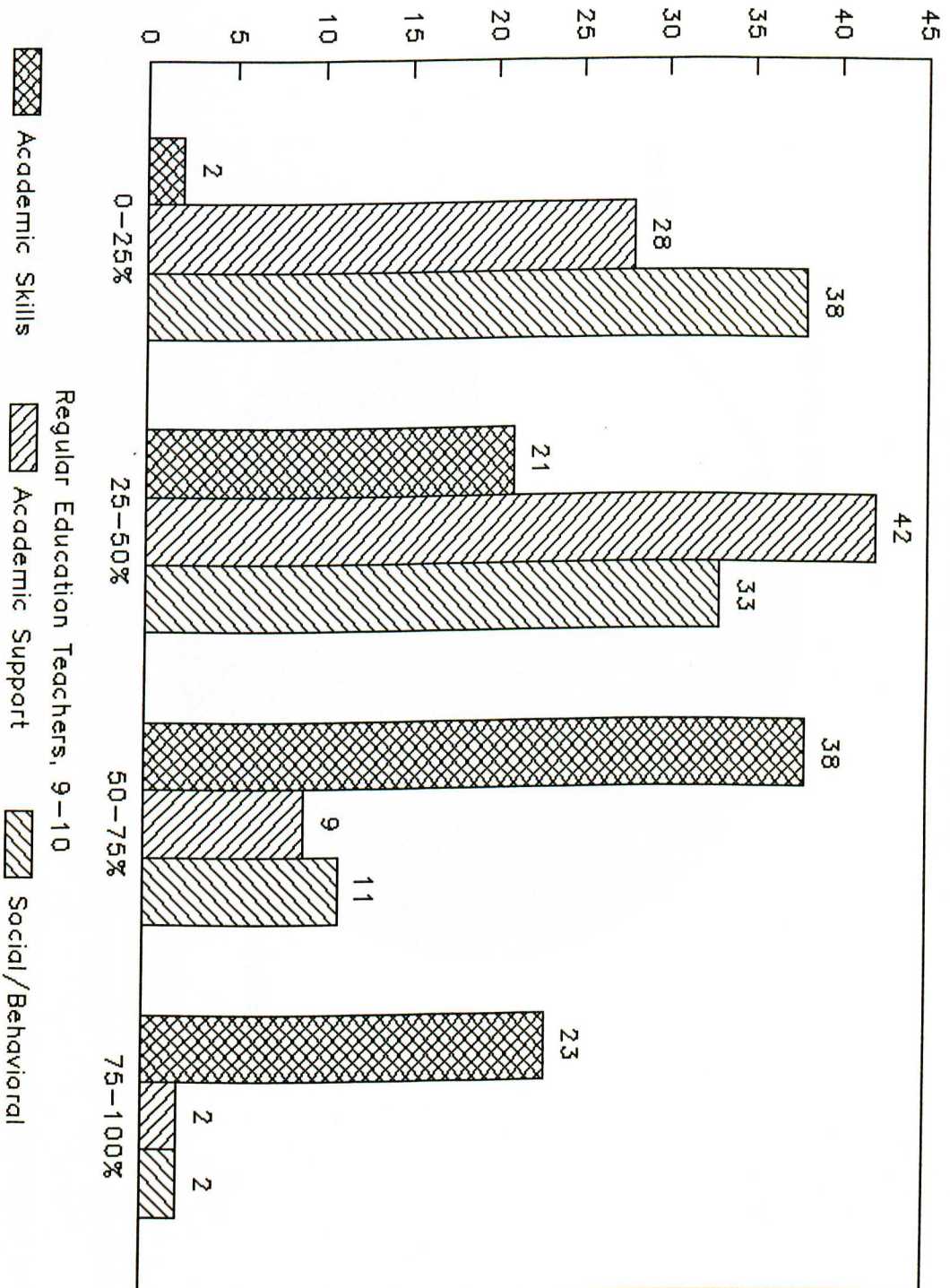
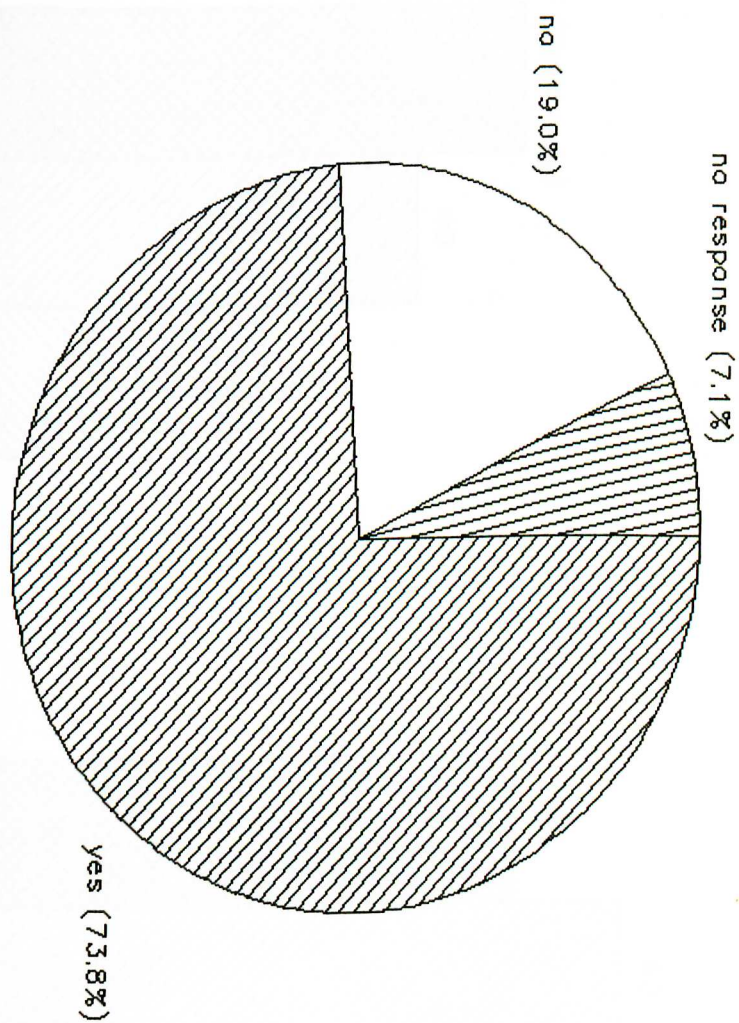


Figure 16

Average Classtime Spent on Skill Areas

Figure 17
Instructional Accommodations Used
Regular Education Teachers, 9-10



Percentage

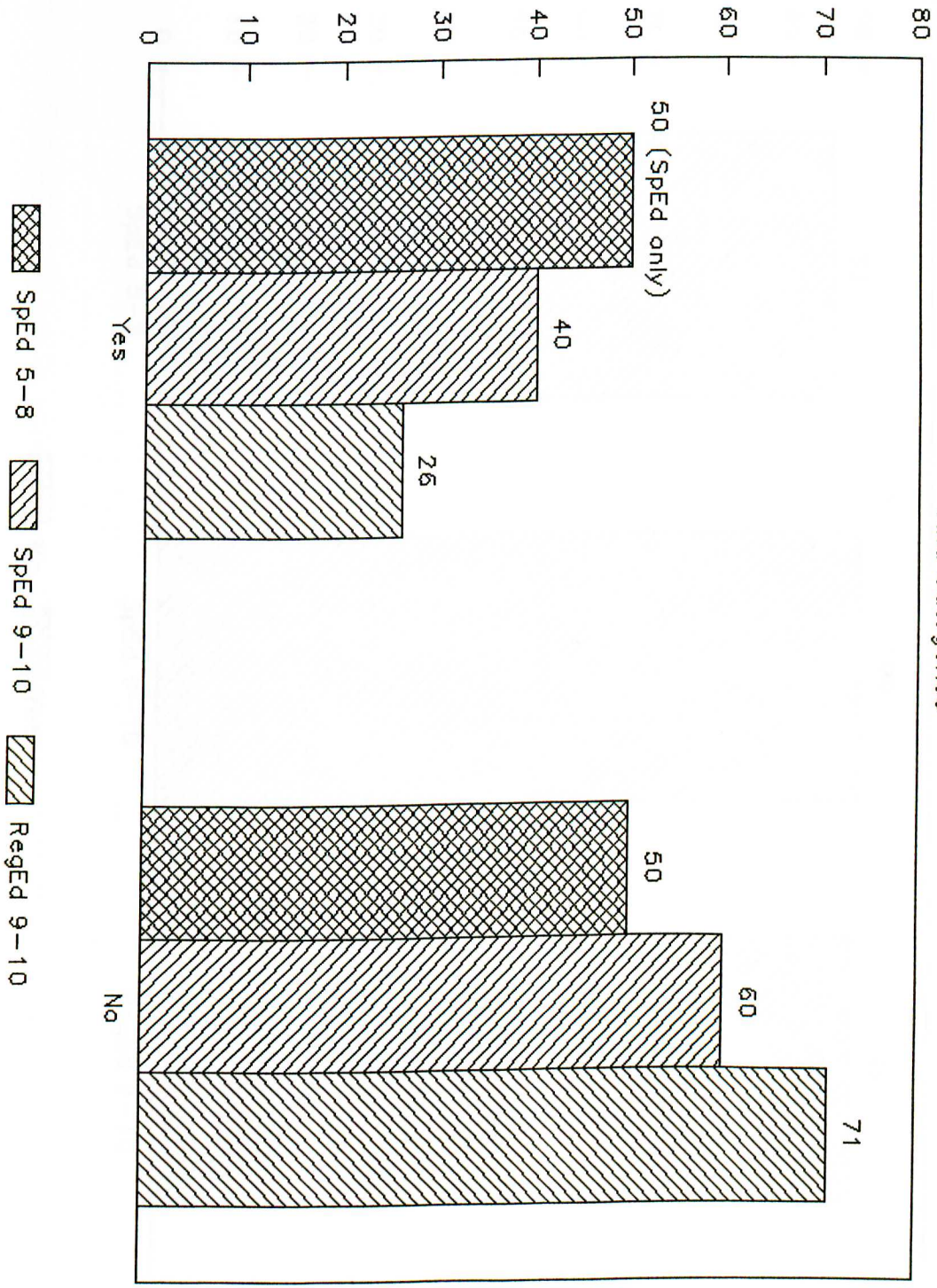
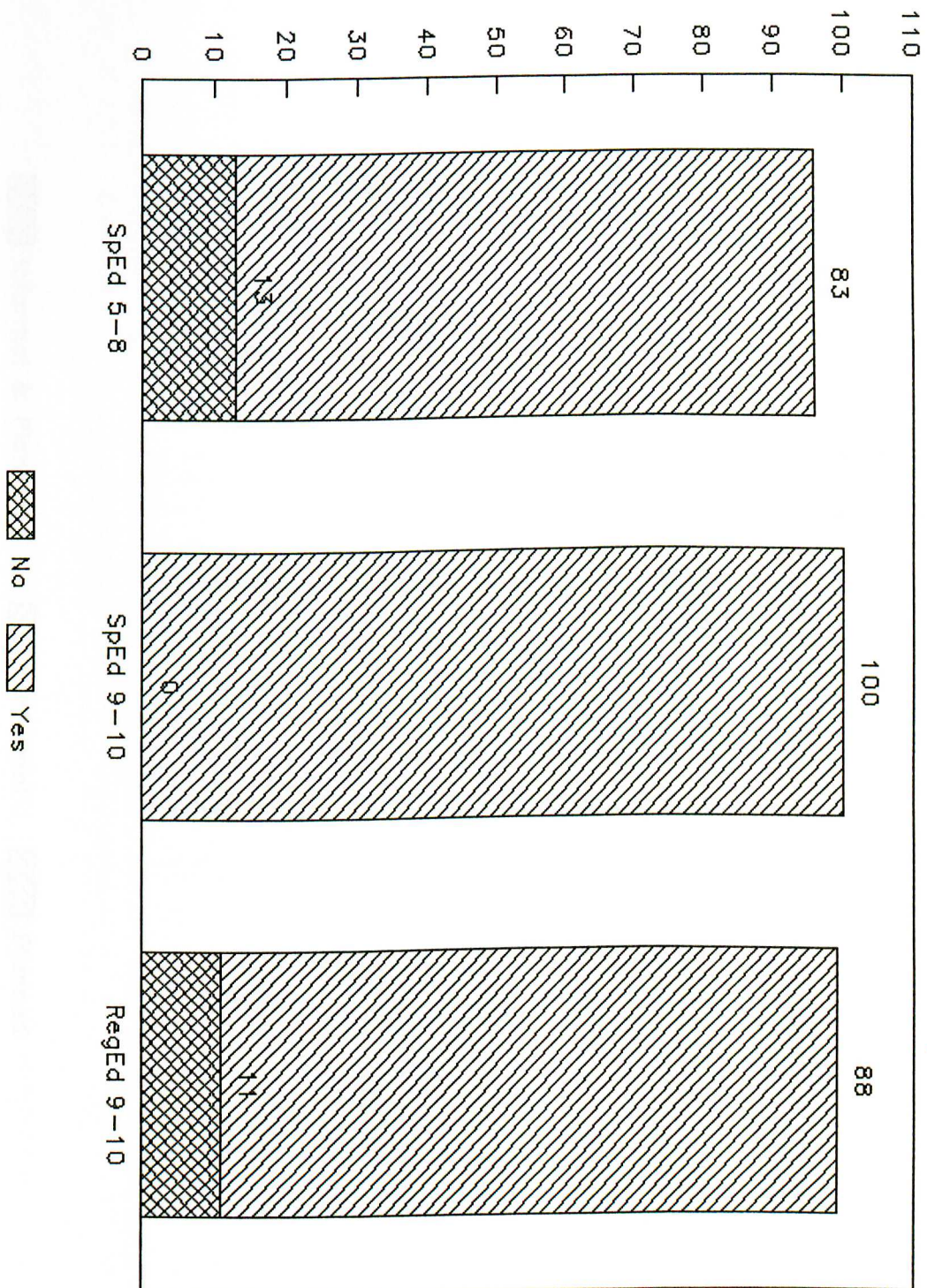


Figure 18
Planning Across Grade Levels
And Categories

Additional Input Needed

Figure 19



Percentage

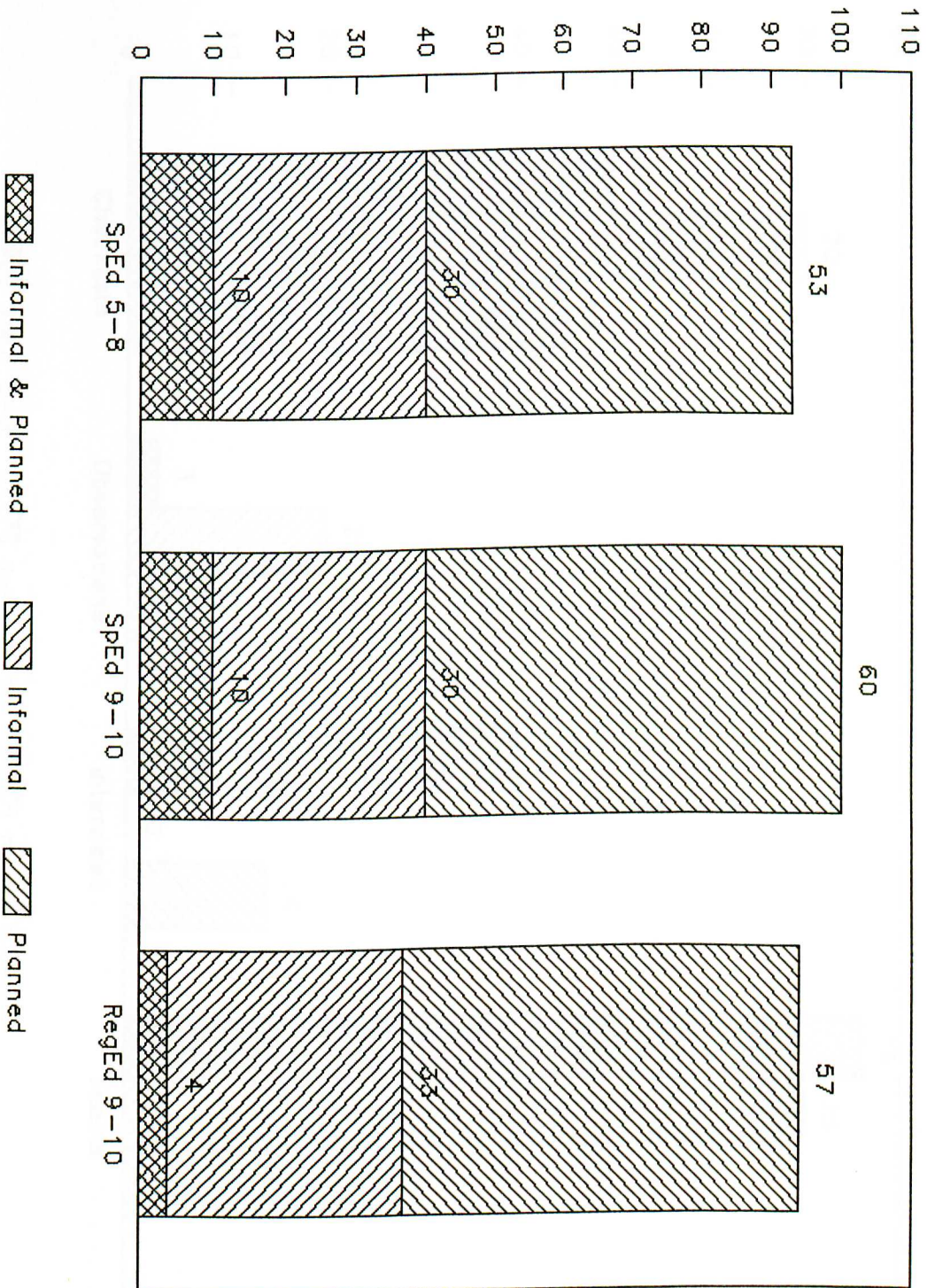


Figure 20
Type of Input Needed

Method Most Willing to Participate In

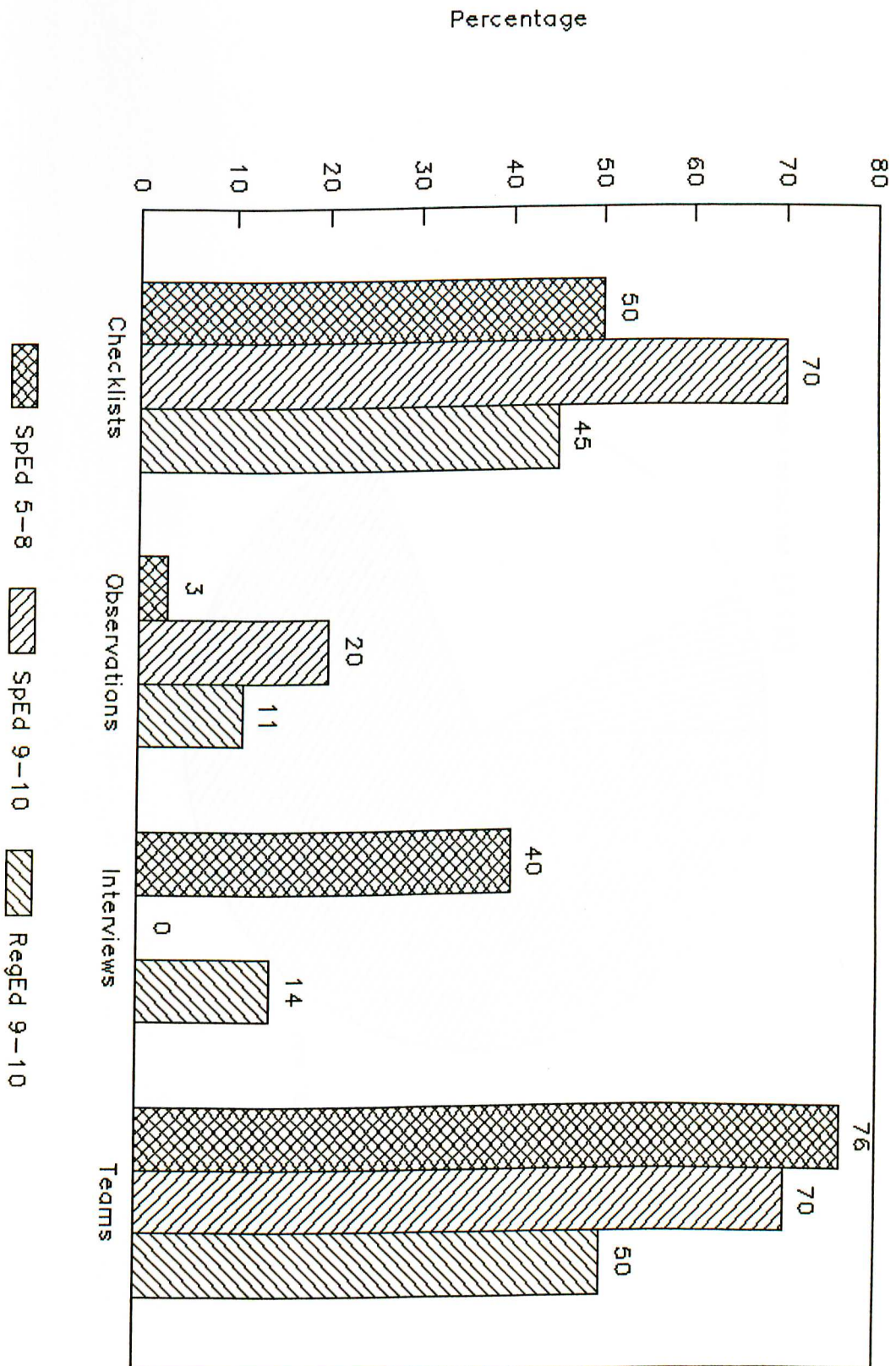


Figure 22
Need for Elem./Middle Transition Plan
(Total Responses)

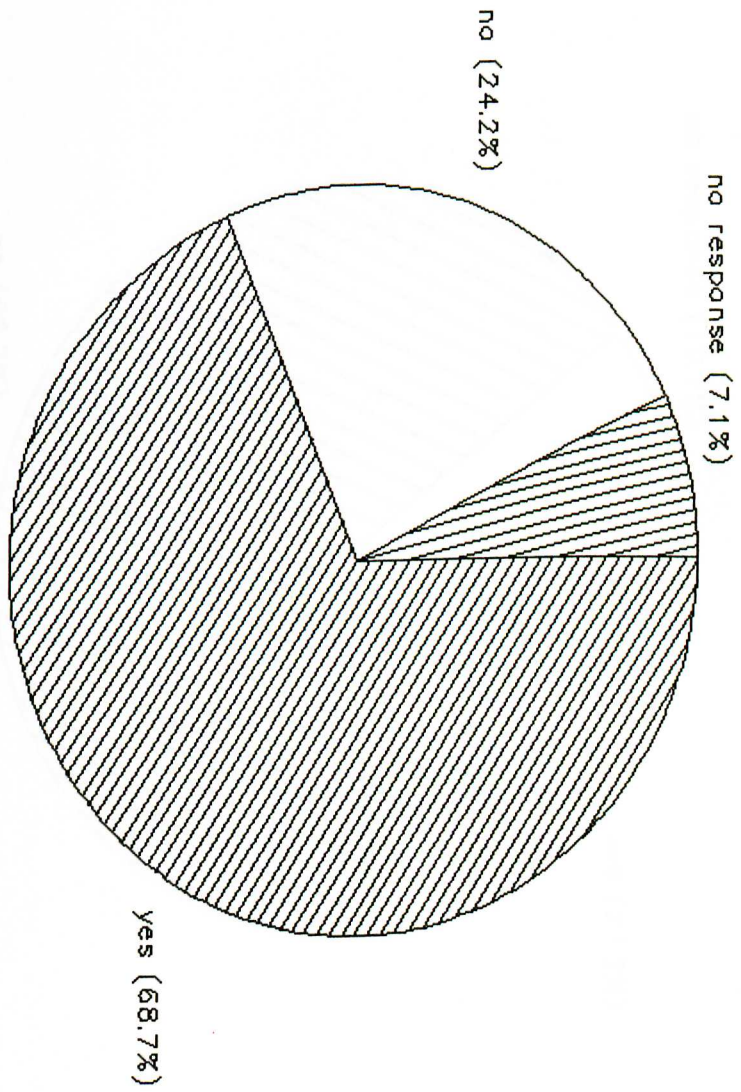


Figure 23

Transition Goals Addressed in IEP
(SPED 5-8 Response)

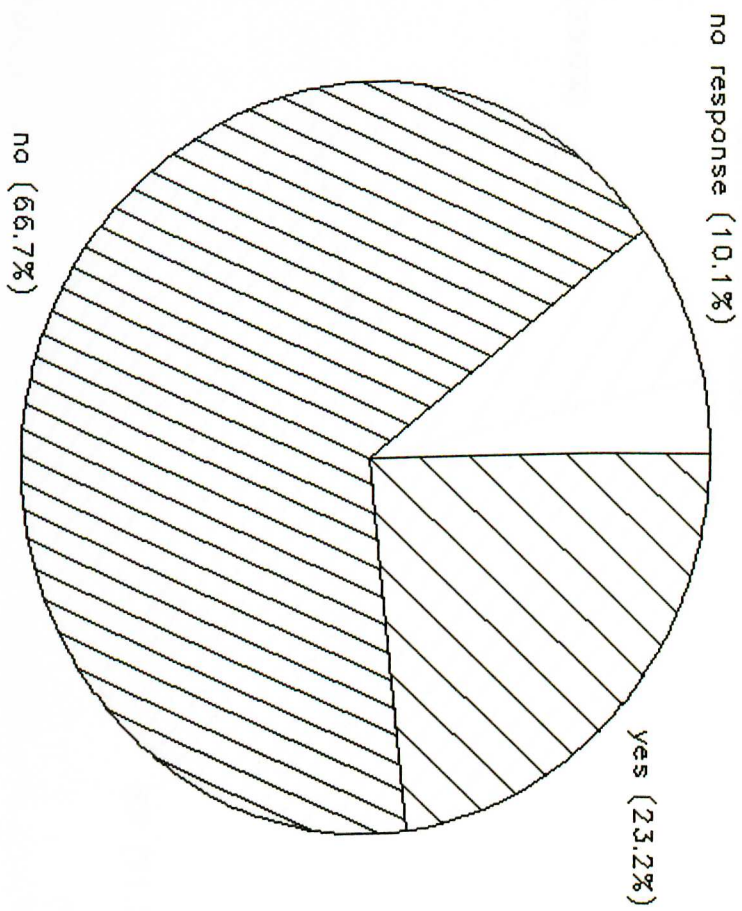
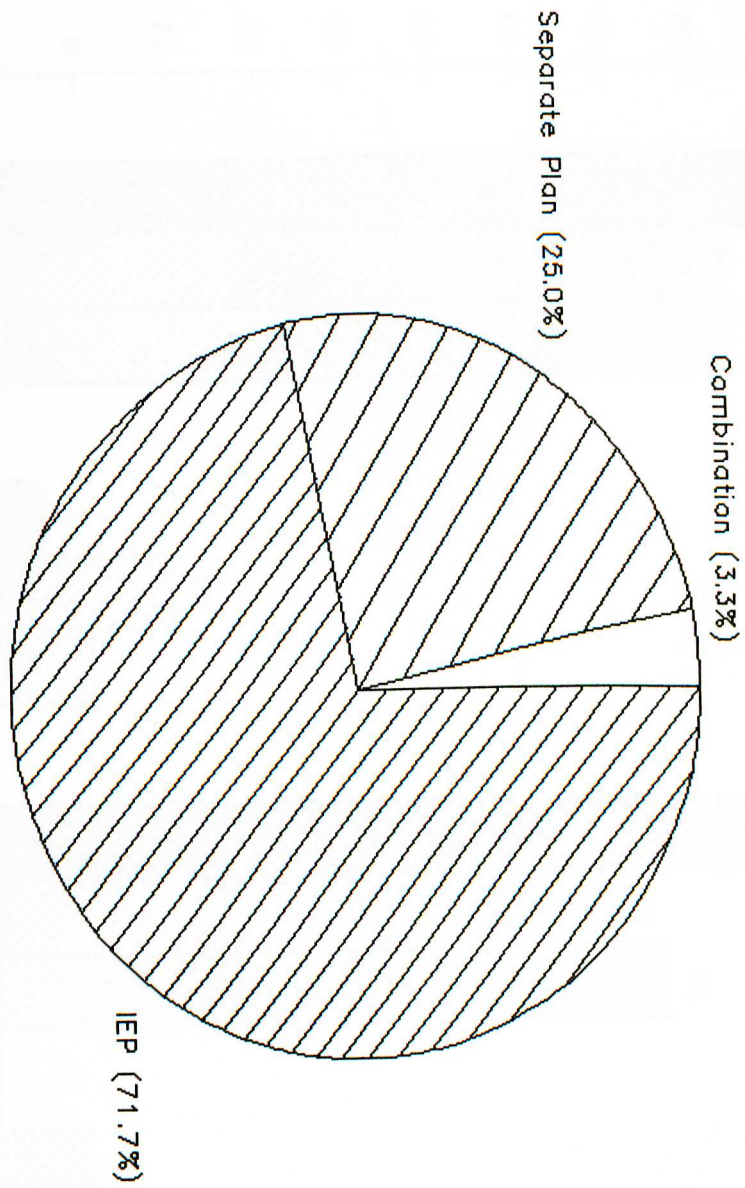


Figure 24
Elem./Middle Transition Goals
IEP or Separate Plan (SPED 5-8)



Percentage

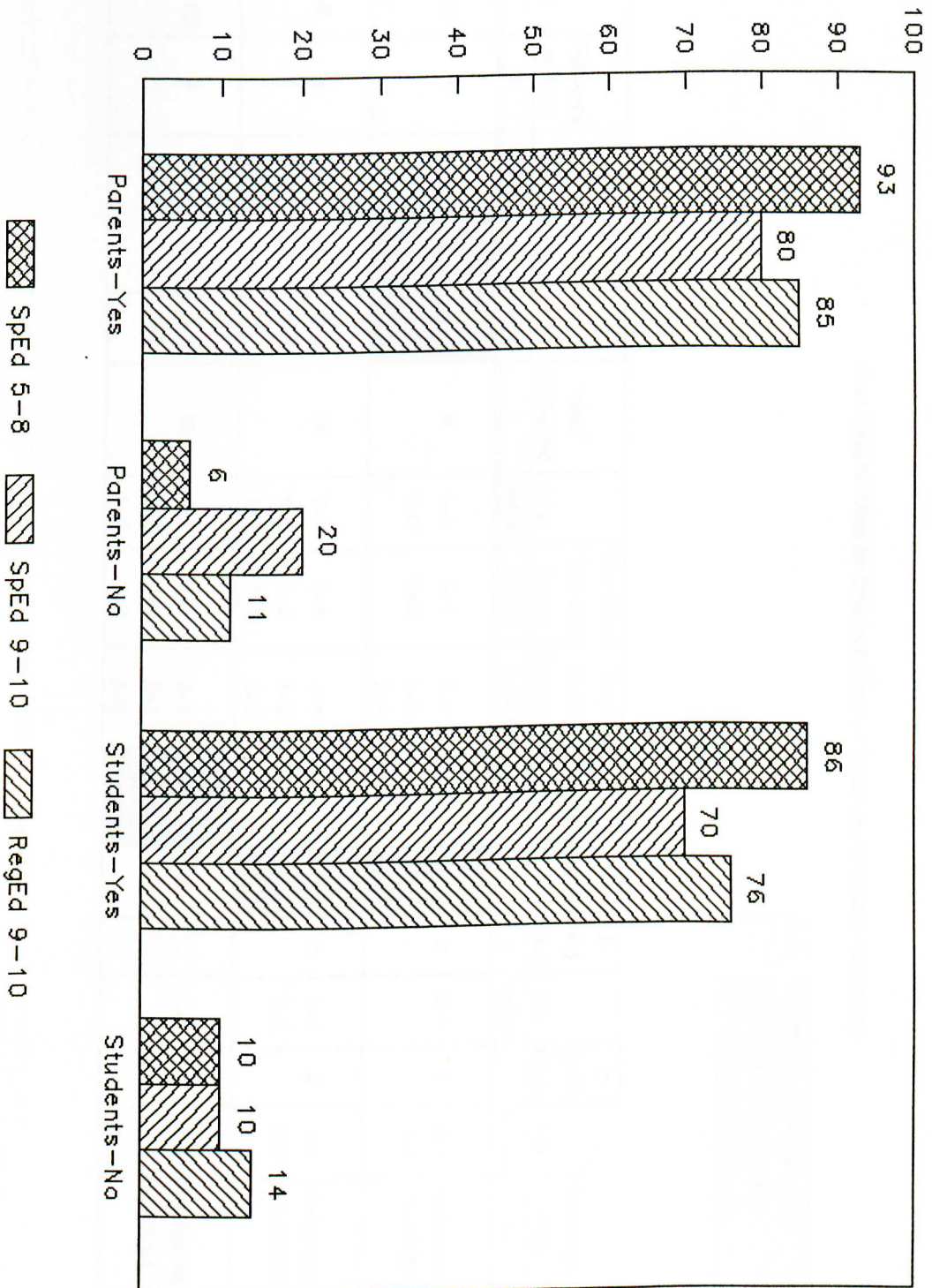


Figure 25
Included in Goal-Setting

Table 1

Demographic Data for Special Education Teachers, Grades 5-10 (N=40)

Key: 1 = teaching 5 or less years
 2 = teaching 6 to 10 years
 3 = teaching over 10 years

Grades	Resource or CSS n	Yrs. n=Key	Monitor n	Yrs. n=Key	Self/Contained n	Yrs. n=Key	Yrs. With This Age Group n=Key	Total Years Teaching n=Key	Grade 8 Or Above n	Grades 5 to 8 n	In Reg. Educ. n	Yrs. n=Key	In Spec. Educ. n	Yrs. n=Key	Degree(s) Held n =	Added Endorsements n
5-6 (N=14)	6	6=1			9	4=1 5=2	9=1 5=2	7=1 5=2 2=3	5		2	2=1	3	2=1 1=2	4=Masters 10=BS/BA	12
7-8 (N=16)	6	5=1 1=2	7	6=1 1=2	14	7=1 6=2 1=3	8=1 6=2 2=3	4=1 9=2 3=3	8		3	1=1 2=2	6	1=1 5=2	6=Masters 10=BS/BA	9
9-10 (N=10)	4	3=1 1=2	7	3=1 1=2	10	4=1 2=2 1=3	6=1 2=2 2=3	3=1 2=2 5=3		8	1	1=3	7	7=1	4=Masters 6=BS/BA	6

Table 2

Demographic Data for Regular Education--Content Area Teachers, Grades 9-10 (N=42)

Key:
 1 = teaching 5 or less years
 2 = teaching 6 to 10 years
 3 = teaching over 10 years

Yrs. In Current Content Area	Yrs. With This Age Group	Total Years Teaching	Experience Teaching Gr. 5-8	In Regular Educ.	Yrs. Special Educ.	In Special Educ.	Yrs. Held Degree(s)	Additional Endorsements	Currently Teaching LD Students	Taught LD Students Past 5 yrs.	
n=Key	n=Key	n=Key	n	n	n=Key	n	n=	n	n	n=Key	%
9=1	7=1	4=1	18	18	8=1	0	13=Masters	11	31	41	97
14=2	15=2	13=2			3=2		28=BS/BA				
16=3	19=3	22=3			3=3						

Table 3
Student Characteristics

Key:
 S = Stronger
 E = Same Level
 W = Somewhat Weaker
 G = Significantly Weaker

 Y = Yes
 N = No
 X = No Response

Teaching Category	LD Students Prepared For Your Demands	%	LD Students Prepared for Reg. Class	%	Independent (I) or Dependent (D) Learners	%	Skill Levels Compared to Non-Handicapped Peers				Skill Weaknesses Negatively Impact Students' Ability to Meet Instructional Objectives	%			
							Academic Skills	%	Academic Support Skills	%			Social-Behavioral Skills	%	
SpEd 5-8 (N=30)	18=Y 4=N 1=Y&N 7=X	60 13 3 23	8=Y 9=N 1=Y&N 12=X	26 30 3 40	1=I 18=D 3=I&D 8=X	3 60 10 26	n=Key	%	n=Key	%	n=Key	%	n=Key	21=Y 1=N 8=X	70 3 26
	6=Y 3=N 1=Y&N	60 30 10	0=Y 8=N 1=Y&N 1=X	0 80 10 10	1=I 8=D 1=I&D	10 80 10	0=S 0=E 2=W 8=G	0 0 20 80	0=S 0=E 1=W 9=G	0 0 10 90	0=S 1=E 3=W 6=G	0 10 30 60	7=Y 1=N 2=X	70 10 20	
	19=Y 15=N 8=Y&N	45 35 19				12=I 22=D 5=I&D 3=X	28 52 11 7	2=S 6=E 26=W 6=G 2=X	4 14 61 14 4	3=S 8=E 18=W 11=G 2=X	7 19 42 26 4	0=S 24=E 15=W 1=G 2=X	0 57 35 2 4	22=Y 11=N 1=Y&N 8=X	52 26 2 19

Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transitions

Table 4
Teacher/Instructional Characteristics

Key:
 1 = 0-25%
 2 = 25-50%
 3 = 50-75%
 4 = 75-100%

 S = Strong
 A = Adequate
 W = Weak

 X = No Response

Teaching Category	Teacher Rating of Own Knowledge of Skills Needed For Success at Secondary Level			Order of Import. in Classroom (1st = most important)			Average Classtime Spent on Skill Areas						Utilize Instructional Accommodations n=Key	%						
	Academic Skills	Support Skills	Social-Behavioral Skills	Academic Skills	Support Skills	Social-Behavioral Skills	Academic Skills	Support Skills	Social-Behavioral Skills	Academic Skills	Support Skills	Social-Behavioral Skills								
SpEd 5-8 (N=30)	8=S 17=A 5=W	26 56 10	9=1 17=2 4=3	30 56 13	19=S 9=A 2=W	63 30 6	17=1st 10=2nd 3=3rd	56 33 10	2=1st 8=2nd 20=3rd	6 26 66	11=1st 12=2nd 7=3rd	36 40 23	0=1 12=2 14=3 4=4	0 40 35 10	14=1 11=2 3=3 1=4 1=X	46 36 10 3	9=1 15=2 3=3 3=4	30 50 10 10		
SpEd 9-10 (N=10)							10=1st 4=2nd 5=3rd	10 40 50	5=1st 3=2nd 2=3rd	50 30 20	4=1st 3=2nd 3=3rd	40 30 30	0=1 7=2 3=3 0=4	0 70 30 0	4=1 3=2 2=3 0=4 1=X	40 30 20 0 10	4=1 3=2 2=3 1=4	40 30 20 10	9=Y 0=N 1=X	90 0 10
RgEd 9-10 (N=42)							24=1st 11=2nd 5=3rd 2=X	57 26 11 4	10=1st 23=2nd 8=3rd 1=X	23 54 19 2	8=1st 6=2nd 27=3rd 1=X	19 14 64 2	1=1 9=2 16=3 10=4 6=X	2 21 38 23 14	12=1 18=2 4=3 1=4 7=X	28 42 9 2 16	16=1 14=2 5=3 1=4 6=X	38 33 11 2 14	31=Y 8=N 3=X	73 19 7

Table 5

Communication Characteristics

Key:
 Y = Yes
 N = No
 X = No Response
 --
 C = Competency Checklists
 O = Classroom Observation
 I = Teacher Interviews
 T = Collaborative Teams

Teaching Category	N=Teachers	Communicate With Secondary Teachers Regarding Skills Needed At Secondary Level		Is This Communication With Regular Or Spec. Ed. Teachers		Participate In Planning With Elem. Spec. Ed. Teachers to Specify Skills Needed At Secondary Level		Is Communication Informal Or Planned		Additional Input Needed		Informal Or Planned		Method Most Willing To Participate In	
		n=Key	%	n=	n=	n=Key	%	n=	n=Key	%	n=	%	n=Key	%	
SpEd 5-8 (N=30)	15=Y 15=N	50	50	16=Special 3=Regular 1=Both		13=Informal 2=Planned 1=Both	25=Y 4=N 1=X	83	9=Informal 16=Planned 3=Both 2=X	30	53	15=C 9=O 12=I 23=T	50		
SpEd 9-10 (N=10)							4=Y 6=N	100	3=Informal 6=Planned 1=Both	30	60	7=C 2=O 0=I 7=T	70		
RgEd 9-10 (N=42)							11=Y 30=N 1=X	26	7=Informal 3=Planned 2=Both	37=Y 5=N	88	14=Informal 24=Planned 2=Both	33	19=C 5=O 6=I 21=T	45

Table 6

Characteristics of Elementary/Middle to Secondary Transition Plan

Key:
 Y = Yes
 N = No
 X = No Response

Teaching Category	Include Parents In Goal-Setting	%	Include Students In Goal-Setting	%	Does School System Need To Implement Transition Plan	%	Grade Level To Begin Transition Planning	n =	Transition Goals For Elem./Middle Students Adequately Addressed in IEP		Transition Goals Part of IEP Or Separate Plan	
									n=Key	%	n=Key	%
SpEd 5-8 (N=30)	28=Y 2=N	93	26=Y 3=N	86	20=Y 8=N 2=X	66	5=6-7th 5=8-9th 8=5th or below 2=Other	7=Y 20=N 3=X	23	20=IEP 7=Separate 1=Both	66	23
		6		10		26			66		23	3
SpEd 9-10 (N=10)	8=Y 2=N	80	7=Y 1=N 2=X	70	7=Y 2=N 1=X	70	3=6-7th 3=Other 3=X					
		20		10		20						
RgEd 9-10 (N=42)	36=Y 5=N 1=X	85	32=Y 6=N 4=X	76	29=Y 10=N 3=X	69	12=6-7th 3=8th 4=5th or below 3=Other					
		11		14		23						
		2		9		7						

Appendix A

SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS, GRADES 5-8

This survey is being conducted as part of a graduate thesis examining the need for a transition plan for elementary/middle grade level students with learning disabilities preparing to be mainstreamed at the secondary level. The survey will assess the current levels of communication between special education elementary/middle teachers and secondary content area regular education and special education teachers. It will specifically examine whether the skills or competencies needed for success in the secondary classroom are being communicated to special education teachers through a structured process.

You are under no obligation to provide your name or any other identifying features. Your participation and prompt return of this questionnaire to the school office is greatly appreciated.

Please provide the following information based on your experience in the classroom:

- 1) Check the category that applies to your current teaching position:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Resource/CSS
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-Contained
<input type="checkbox"/>	(specify content area)

- 2) How long have you been teaching in this category?

- 3) Check the grade level in which you are currently teaching:

<input type="checkbox"/>	5th-6th
<input type="checkbox"/>	7th-8th

- 4) How long have you been teaching this age group?

- 5) In all, how many years have you taught?

- 6) Have you ever taught grades eight or above?

<input type="checkbox"/>	yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	no

- 7) If yes, in which of the following categories:

<input type="checkbox"/>	regular educ.
<input type="checkbox"/>	special educ.

- 8) How many years did you teach in that category? _____
- 9) What degree(s) do you hold? _____
- 10) What other endorsements or certifications have you completed? _____
- 11) Do you consider your students adequately prepared for your instructional/classroom demands?
 ___ yes
 ___ no
- 12) If your students are mainstreamed, do you consider your students adequately prepared for the instructional/classroom demands of the regular classroom?
 ___ yes
 ___ no
- 13) Would you characterize your students with learning disabilities as independent learners or dependent learners?
 ___ independent
 ___ dependent
- 14) Explain:

- 15) How would you rate your knowledge of the academic skills needed for success at the secondary level?
 ___ strong
 ___ adequate
 ___ weak
- 16) How would you rate your knowledge of the academic support skills needed for success at the secondary level (i.e. note-taking, summarizing, outlining, etc.)?
 ___ strong
 ___ adequate
 ___ weak
- 17) How would you rate your knowledge of the social skills/behaviors needed for success at the secondary level?
 ___ strong
 ___ adequate
 ___ weak

- 18) Does your classroom instruction focus on academic skills, academic support skills, or social-behavioral skills? (check all that apply)
- academic
 academic support
 social-behavioral
- 19) Rank order (1,2,3) these skill areas in order of importance in your classroom (1 = most important)
- academic
 academic support
 social/behavioral
- 20) Using percentage quartiles (i.e. 0-25%; 25-50%; 50-75%; 75-100%), determine the quartile that best represents the average amount of class time you spend on each of the following skill areas:
- academic
 academic support
 social/behavioral
- 21) Do your students' weaknesses in these skill areas negatively impact their ability to meet instructional objectives in the regular classroom?
- yes
 no
- 22) Explain:
- _____

- 23) Do you receive communication from secondary teachers regarding the skills or competencies students will need at the secondary level?
- yes
 no
- 24) If yes, is this communication typically through informal means (e.g., phone call or casual conversation) or through meetings planned for that specific purpose?
- informal
 planned meetings
 other (specify)

- 25) Does this communication come from regular education teachers or special education teachers?
 regular educ.
 special educ.
- 26) If you receive this communication through formal planning, please specify the type and frequency of this planning:

- 27) Would you benefit from additional input from secondary teachers regarding skills or competencies needed for your students to experience success at the secondary level?
 yes
 no
- 28) Do you believe this input should be through informal means or formal planning?
 informal
 formal planning
- 29) Research has suggested several methods for gathering information on competencies required at the secondary level. Which would be most helpful to you?
 checklists completed by secondary educ. teachers
 observation of secondary classrooms
 interviews with secondary educ. teachers
 collaborative teams of regular and special educ. teachers
- 30) Which of the above methods would you be most willing to participate in?
 checklists
 classroom observation
 teacher interviews
 collaborative teams
- 31) Do you believe the inclusion of parents in goal-setting would enhance its effectiveness?
 yes
 no

32) Why or why not: _____

33) Do you believe the inclusion of students in goal-setting would enhance its effectiveness? _____yes
_____no

34) Why or why not? _____

35) Do you believe that transition goals for elementary/middle students preparing for the secondary environment are being adequately addressed in the IEP? _____yes
_____no

36) Do you believe transition goals should form a part of the IEP or be specified in a separate transition plan? _____IEP Supplement
_____Separate Plan

37) Do you believe your school system needs to implement an elementary/middle to secondary transition plan for students with learning disabilities? _____yes
_____no

38) Why or why not? _____

39) At what grade level do you believe this type of transition planning should begin?

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please return the completed survey to your school office no later than November 5th and make sure you sign your name on the survey completion list provided at the office.

Appendix B

**SURVEY OF REGULAR EDUCATION CONTENT AREA TEACHERS
AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

GRADES 9-10

This survey is being conducted as part of a graduate thesis examining the need for a transition plan for elementary/middle grade level students with learning disabilities preparing to be mainstreamed at the secondary level. The survey will assess the current levels of communication between special education elementary/middle teachers and secondary content area and special education teachers. It will specifically examine whether students with learning disabilities in your classroom have mastered the skills or competencies needed for success in the secondary environment.

You are under no obligation to provide your name or any other identifying features. Your participation and prompt return of this questionnaire to the school office is greatly appreciated.

Please provide the following information based on your experience in the classroom:

- 1) Do you teach regular education or special education?

_____	regular education
_____	special education

- 2) If you teach in the regular education classroom, specify the content area(s):

- 3) If you teach in the special education classroom, please specify in what capacity:

_____	monitoring
_____	CSS
_____	self-contained

- 4) If you teach in the self-contained special education classroom, please specify the content areas you teach:

- 5) How long have you been teaching in your current capacity?

- 6) What grades do you teach? 9th
 10th
 Other (specify) _____
- 7) How long have you been teaching this age group? _____
- 8) In all, how many years have you taught? _____
- 9) Have you ever taught grades five through eight? yes
 no
- 10) If yes, in which of the following categories: regular educ.
 special educ.
- 11) How many years did you teach in that category? _____
- 12) What degree(s) do you hold? _____

- 13) What other endorsements or certifications have you completed? _____

- 14) To your knowledge, are you currently teaching students with learning disabilities? yes
 no
- 15) Have you taught students with learning disabilities at any time during the past five years? yes
 no
- 16) Do you consider your students with learning disabilities adequately prepared for your instructional/classroom demands? yes
 no
- 17) If you are a special education teacher, do you consider your students adequately prepared for the instructional/classroom demands of the regular classroom? yes
 no

18) Would you characterize your students with learning disabilities as independent learners or dependent learners?

- independent
- dependent

19) Explain:

20) How would you compare their academic skill levels to those of their non-handicapped peers?

- stronger
- same level
- somewhat weaker
- significantly weaker

21) How would you compare their academic support skills (i.e. note-taking, summarizing, etc.) to those of their non-handicapped peers?

- stronger
- same level
- somewhat weaker
- significantly weaker

22) How would compare their social-behavioral skills to those of their non-handicapped peers?

- stronger
- same level
- somewhat weaker
- significantly weaker

23) Rank order (1,2,3) these skill areas to show which areas you consider to be most important for success in your classroom, with "1" having the greatest importance:

- academic skills
- academic support skills
- social-behavioral skills

24) Rank order (1,2,3) these skill areas to show the areas which require the greatest amount of your attention, with "1" requiring the most time:

- academic skills
- academic support skills
- social-behavioral skills

25) Using percentage quartiles (i.e. 0-25%; 25-50%; 50-75%; 75-100%) determine the quartile that best represents the average amount of class time you spend on each of the following skill areas:

- academic
- academic support
- social/behavioral

26) Do learning disabled students' weaknesses in the above skill areas negatively impact their ability to meet instructional objectives?

- yes
- no

27) Explain:

28) Do you employ instructional accommodations for students with learning disabilities?

- yes
- no

29) Describe or list the type of accommodations used:

30) Do you participate in some form of planning with elementary/middle special education teachers to communicate skills needed for success in your classroom?

- yes
- no

31) Would you categorize this planning as informal (e.g., a phone call or casual conversation) or does it occur in meetings established for that purpose?

- informal
 - planned meetings
 - other (specify)
-
-

- 32) Do you feel there is a need for greater communication between secondary teachers and elementary/middle special education teachers regarding skills students need at the secondary level? yes
 no
- 33) Do you believe this communication should be provided through informal means or planned meetings? informal
 planned meetings
- 34) Research has suggested several methods for providing information on competencies required of students at the secondary level. Which method(s) would you be most willing to participate in? checklists that specify competencies
 classroom observation by elem./middle special educ. teachers
 interviews by elem./middle special educ. teachers
 collaborative teams of regular and special educ. teachers
- 35) Do you believe the inclusion of parents in goal-setting for elementary/middle students preparing to enter the secondary environment would enhance its effectiveness? yes
 no
- 36) Why or why not?

- 37) Do you believe the inclusion of students in goal-setting would enhance its effectiveness? yes
 no

38) Why or why not? _____

39) Do you believe your school system needs to implement an elementary/middle to secondary transition plan for students with learning disabilities? _____yes
_____no

40) Why or why not? _____

41) At what grade level do you believe this type of transition planning should begin? _____

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please return the completed survey to your school office no later than November 5th and make sure you sign your name on the survey completion list provided at the office.

Appendix C

511 Bellwood Lane
South Boston, VA 24592
October 25, 1993

Dr. Bobby Hall
Assistant Superintendent, Personnel
Halifax County Public Schools
P. O. Box 805
Halifax, VA 24558

Dear Dr. Hall:

Attached are copies of surveys I would like to disseminate to specific groups of teachers as part of my graduate thesis. Also included are copies of the cover letters to principals that will accompany the surveys.

As we discussed earlier, I would greatly appreciate your permission to disseminate and collect these surveys through each school office. I hope to recognize a high rate of return in order to draw conclusions about the need and desire for elementary/middle to secondary transition planning. I will be happy to share the results with you if you agree that the information gathered will be beneficial to the schools.

Unfortunately, I am working under a deadline in order to complete all degree requirements by the end of the Fall Semester. Once these surveys reach all schools, I am allowing approximately one week for them to be disseminated among teachers and received back in the school office. Therefore, I will need to pick them up from the school offices by November 5th or the following Monday, at the latest.

Thank you for your help in this project.

Sincerely,

Debbie Roller

Appendix D

TO: Elementary School Principals
FROM: Debbie Roller, Graduate Student at Longwood College
DATE: October 25, 1993
SUBJECT: Distribution of Attached Survey to Special Education Teachers,
Grades 5-6

I am currently completing a graduate thesis in a M.S.Ed. program concentrating in Curriculum and Instruction in Learning Disabilities through Longwood College. My thesis focuses on establishing the need for a transition plan for learning disabled students which would be implemented at the elementary school level. The transition plan would be designed to "bridge the gap" between the elementary/middle and secondary schools in regard to skills/competencies identified as crucial to success in the secondary environment.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in promptly disseminating this survey to your special education teachers in grades 5 and 6 and collecting the completed surveys in your office. A Survey Completion sheet is attached that should be signed by each teacher when they return their completed survey to the school office. All surveys should be returned to your office no later than November 5th. I will arrange for them to be picked up on that date or the following Monday.

I have received permission from Dr. Bobby Hall at Central Office to ask for your assistance in this project. Please be assured that you have my sincere gratitude for your help in this project.

Appendix E

TO: Mr. Bristol Martin, Principal, Halifax County Middle School
FROM: Debbie Roller, Graduate Student at Longwood College
DATE: October 25, 1993
SUBJECT: Distribution of Attached Survey to Special Education Teachers

I am currently completing a graduate thesis in a M.S.Ed. program concentrating in Curriculum and Instruction in Learning Disabilities through Longwood College. My thesis focuses on establishing the need for a transition plan for learning disabled students which would be implemented at the elementary school level. The transition plan would be designed to "bridge the gap" between the elementary/middle and secondary schools in regard to skills/competencies identified as crucial to success in the secondary environment.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in promptly disseminating this survey to your special education teachers and collecting the completed surveys in your office. A Survey Completion sheet is attached that should be signed by each teacher when they return their completed survey to the school office. All surveys should be returned to your office no later than November 5th. I will arrange for them to be picked up on that date or the following Monday.

I have received permission from Dr. Bobby Hall at Central Office to ask for your assistance in this project. Please be assured that you have my sincere gratitude for your help in this project.

Appendix F

TO: Mr. Larry Clark, Principal, Halifax County High School
FROM: Debbie Roller, Graduate Student at Longwood College
DATE: October 25, 1993
SUBJECT: Distribution of Attached Survey to Regular Education Content Area
Teachers and Special Education Teachers, Grades 9-10

I am currently completing a graduate thesis in a M.S.Ed. program concentrating in Curriculum and Instruction in Learning Disabilities through Longwood College. My thesis focuses on establishing the need for a transition plan for learning disabled students which would be implemented at the elementary school level. The transition plan would be designed to "bridge the gap" between the elementary/middle and secondary schools in regard to skills/competencies identified as crucial to success in the secondary environment.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in promptly disseminating this survey to your regular education content area teachers and special education teachers in grades 9 and 10 and collecting the completed surveys in your office. A Survey Completion sheet is attached that should be signed by each teacher when they return their completed survey to the school office. All surveys should be returned to your office no later than November 5th. I will arrange for them to be picked up on that date or the following Monday.

I have received permission from Dr. Bobby Hall at Central Office to ask for your assistance in this project. Please be assured that you have my sincere gratitude for your help in this project.

Biography

Deborah Crews Roller enrolled in the Longwood College Master of Science in Education degree program with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction Specialist in Learning Disabilities in June, 1991. Prior to that, she earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration-Management from Averett College.

Deborah has long been interested in the field of education, teaching in a private pre-school for two years and substitute teaching in the elementary schools. She joined the Halifax County/South Boston Continuing Education Center of Longwood College in 1986 and was named director in 1992.

Deborah holds a special interest in learning disabilities research and hopes to establish an advocacy program in her community for parents of children with learning disabilities.