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Benefits of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities

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Benefits of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities

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Senior Capstone

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Abstract

This capstone research project examines the benefits of educational services that schools offer to students with disabilities for a smooth transition from elementary school level to middle school and high school level. Federal and state laws, e.g. the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) of 2004, ensure that students with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) specifically designed to provide services to meet the needs of individual student with disabilities through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Through the use of relevant literature review and surveys with special education teachers, principals, and parents, various types of educational services have been identified and recommended to schools and various organizations serving students with disabilities in the Monterey County Area.

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Introduction

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was enacted because millions of kids with disabilities were not in school, therefore their needs were not being met educationally. As for the children with disabilities in school, they did not receive appropriate services. They were excluded from participating with their peers. Many students with disabilities went undiagnosed and there was a lack of resources in the school system which forced parents to seek help outside of school (Public Law, 2004, p. 3). This law guaranteed that all children with disabilities get free appropriate public education (FAPE) which would improve their educational lives. There are set backs as there are low expectations for students with disabilities. All the research on state and federal laws such as the Individuals with Disability Education Act of 1997, 2001, and 2004 shows that students with disabilities will be more successful if the public-school system have high expectations of them and allows them to have access to the general education curriculum (U.S Department of Education, 2002). Students with disabilities will be more successful if public schools improving the role of parents by allowing them to participate in their child's education not just at home, but in school too.

I remember when I first found out my son has special needs. At the age of 1 year old he was diagnosed with Infantile Spasms, which is a form of epilepsy. Most children outgrow this disorder by the age of 4. The seizures were occurring once an hour and since nobody else in my family had ever had any disabilities, this was certainly a scary time in my life. I remember doctors telling me about potential side effects being short term and long term. I also remember being told by the doctor that I should put him into an early start program for children with special needs. Being a first-time parent to a son with special needs, this was all too overwhelming.

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By 1 and a half years old, my son Elijah was enrolled in an early start program once a week. After a month or two, he was moved to a more structured environment. This means that he went to school from Monday through Friday for 3 hours a day. By the age of 4, Elijah's seizures had slowly vanished like a hurricane, leaving a permanent scar on his neurological part of the brain, leaving him Intellectually Disabled in educational terms. Currently, Elijah has autism and traumatic brain injury. Since the age of 4, he has been enrolled in classrooms that are beneficial to students with autism. Elijah is also nonverbal and uses Modified Sign Language to convey his needs and wants.

I quickly learned that I needed to be my son's biggest advocate if he was to get services that would meet his needs. To get services, he must have an Individualized Educational Plan which is put together by the student's IEP team consisting of his teacher, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Psychologist, Principal, Adaptive Physical Teacher, and the parents of the student. This is where yearly goals are agreed upon and services are integrated into the IEP to further the student's academic year for success. By chance, if the parents and the rest of the IEP team cannot come to an agreement, then the case would be referred to special education court by means of mediation and due process which both parties will need a lawyer as representation. These issues can change depending on the school district where the child is involved with. With all this knowledge and experience giving me strength, I wondered what happens next? What happens when a student transitions from elementary school to middle school or from middle school to high school?

I remember when I began working in the Monterey County area as a one to one paraprofessional for a high school autistic classroom setting, my eyes were opened to accomplishments beyond the low-level expectations I had for my son. Autistic students were

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meeting IEP goals, one step at a time. Every little milestone got them closer to clearing the goal. These were huge accomplishments. My first-hand experience in the classroom challenged me to believe in my son when no one else did. When I worked for the elementary school in a mild to moderate classroom setting, I saw IEP goals and milestones closer to my son's age being achieved. This only served to deepen my inspiration for working with students with disabilities. As my son begins a new journey into middle school, I was left to ponder on the realization that I had no clue what I was getting myself into.

What programs and services existed for my son? Years of experience as part of my son's IEP team has taught me that there are plenty. As a parent, doing research and asking questions are key to getting the information I was looking for. Elementary school and middle school are two very different environments. Students go from being in a single classroom all day to possibly having multiple classrooms with different teachers. What kind of classrooms would my son be in? Would he be able to keep the accommodations he has now, or would his new school remove them? These experiences motivated me to move away from those questions and seek the answers. Moving away from the shadow and into the light was a breath of fresh air, like the calm before the storm, peaceful yet terrifying. The whole time my champion of a son is looking forward to attending his new school, under a new district.

The purpose of this capstone project is to see what services schools have to offer to those parents with special education students who are in transition from elementary school to middle school or high school. I also wanted to see how parents felt about services they were getting and if they were aware of how the different school levels were operating. Even though the teachers interviewed for this project are in different districts, this research project will serve as a bridge to all personnel involved in special education. My objective is to enlighten parents who didn't

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know about how special education programs worked and to allow other special education staff to see what other schools offer their students with disabilities in which to foster growth and academic success. With an extended bridge to meet the needs of all members included on the IEP team: public school staff, parents, and special needs organizations, surely we can come to a more successful way to secure the academic future for all students with disabilities.

As a promising near future teacher of our public school system, my primary research question I propose to seek the answer to in my research is: How do educational services benefit students with disabilities? My secondary related questions are: What does the legislation – Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) say about the education services for students with Disabilities, both federal and state? What does research say about the kinds of educational services that will benefit students with disabilities? Are there any differences in educational services provided to students with disabilities that benefit students with disabilities at the various levels of education? How do schools in the Monterey County area provide educational services that benefit students with disabilities? What could be done to improve the educational services for students with disabilities in the Monterey County area?

The first step I took to seek the answer to my research questions in this project was to research what the special education laws were at both the state and federal levels. This research consisted of literature review and online websites. To discover answers to my secondary questions in my project, I then emailed teachers, principals and parents from different educational levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school across the Monterey County Area who were involved with special education. I then met with everyone who was willing to participate in my project and interviewed them. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours depending on the depth of knowledge everyone wanted to give.

Literature Review

Like anything else, there are issues and people who stand on the benefits side of educational services for students with disabilities and people who stand on the side of disadvantages. The following subsequent paragraphs will discuss the state and federal laws along with a court case regarding the benefits of educational services for students with disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504

Children with disabilities did not go to school and sometimes went undiagnosed prior to the 1973 school year when the Rehabilitation Act was made into a Federal Civil Rights Law. Section 504 was known as an access law because it didn't allow any school to deny a child access to an educational program. "Public Law (PL) 93-112: required states who offered educational services to nonhandicapped preschool children to also service children that were handicapped also. This guaranteed no discrimination" (Linder, 1983, p. 5). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act has been used to for example to require public schools to make their facility to have wheelchair accessible ramps, restrooms, and other features such as interpreters at meetings. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act also gives a broad definition of what a disability is, so any disability can qualify for educational services such as learning or attention issues under the Rehabilitation Act. Not all public schools were in a hurry to deliver services to students with disabilities and as such, many public schools did not fully participate in giving top quality education required of the law to these newly identified students with disabilities. This law was for student who has a disability, but does not require special education, accommodations are made. According to Burns (2007), "The Council for Administrators of Special Education (CASE) developed a four-step-sequence for Section 504. The plan should describe: the nature of the concern, the basis for the determination of handicap (if any), how the handicap affects a

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major life activity, and the reasonable accommodations that are necessary” (p. 224). As a teacher in the classroom, you use a 504 plan to meet the needs of a student with disabilities as adequately as you do the students without disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was created as an extra measure that broadened protection for students with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act. “Both Section 504 and ADA are intended to prevent discrimination against children with disabilities, although the laws impose different procedural requirements” (Siegel, 2017, p. 32). It is the responsibility of the public-school agency to accommodate and modify the rules, classroom work, policies and any barriers so the student may be successful. According to Wrightslaw, “Schools have the burden of demonstrating that any removal from regular education is appropriate” (Wright, 2008). Data collection through assessment and observation must be kept for a period of time, proof must be given that the student with disabilities is unsuccessful and it is not in his or her best interest to remain in a general education classroom.

The Re-Authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act of 2004

“Congress enacted IDEA because public schools were either ignoring children with disabilities or putting them in inferior or distant programs” (Siegel, 2017, p. 4). Students are entitled to receive what is known as Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This means that they get the same education as their peers without disabilities or any handicaps. Under IDEA there is something called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which is a Federal Special Education Law. There are thirteen (13) specific disabilities that qualify for an IEP under IDEA.

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According to Siegel (2000), IDEA defines “children with disabilities” as individuals between the ages three and 22 with one or more of the following conditions:

Mental retardation, hearing impaired (including deafness), speech or language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, specific learning disability, ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), other health impairment (p. 4).

Due to all these disabilities, “child find” was put in place by a law known as the Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act of 1975. This act also mandated the role of parents as an equal partner to the public-school system when it came to the education of their children. The purpose was to identify all handicapped children from birth to age 21. “Public Law (PL) 94-142: made it so that states had to service all students ages 3-18, then followed by ages 18-21” (Linder, 1983, p. 4). This act would then be known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 which was then re-authorized in 2001 and then again in 2004. It would finally be known as Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

The student’s disability must affect their ability to learn in a general education classroom with the help of an aide and/or other support. According to Siegel (2000), under IDEA, related services include the following:

Speech-language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation including therapeutic recreation, social work services, counseling services including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes, sign language or oral interpreter, psychotherapy, one-to-one instructional aide, transportation, art therapy, technological devices such as fm/am systems or special computers, and nursing care (p. 6).

These supports, and related services are key to success for these students with disabilities. These are the kinds of services that students with disabilities need to be receiving because they have a disability. Why is it necessary for the teacher or parent to suggest something at an IEP,

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only to have data or compelling evidence to shoot it down. The law says this is what is necessary. There is a continuum of options for placement for students with disabilities. There are regular classes where students go for part of the day, they have special education in public schools, they also have public and private schools that only teach students with disabilities, there are charter schools, residential programs, there is the option of home instruction, and hospital or institution placements as last resorts. These are for more significant behaviors that are difficult to manage in public agencies mentioned above. In many cases, these behaviors are seen in students with disabilities who qualify for an IEP under IDEA.

Once it is decided that a student qualifies for an Individualized Education Plan, a education team consisting of the parents of the child, one general education teacher, one special education teacher and special education provider, a representative from administration of the public agency, someone who can interpret evaluation reports, someone who knows the student with disabilities can be on the IEP team at the discretion of the parents and public school, and whenever appropriate the student with disabilities may also be in attendance. The goal is to allow the student with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum. As a result, from the student's disability, the IEP team also would want to meet the student's other educational needs. In many cases, classroom behavior is a factor in the student's participation in general education. According to Burns (2007) "if a behavior is either a direct manifestation of the child's disability or impacted by the child's disability, the regular classroom teacher should participate in the development of the functional behavior assessment (FBA) that determines what causes the behavior and what strategies and interventions are effective for addressing the behavior" (p. 171). Burns also goes on to say that the regular classroom teacher should be a part of the Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) to address the behavior as it affects the teacher's classroom

directly. Here is what Burns (2007) says on the importance of attending IEP meetings and Congress:

The committee has heard from many individuals that the amount of time spent preparing for and attending IEP meeting, and the number of individuals required to attend such meetings, reduces the amount of time that personnel spend with students. Scheduling IEP meetings involves coordinating the schedules of a number of individuals, including parents, who are balancing work and family demands. At the same time, a certain member of the IEP Team may not be needed at an IEP meeting if the topics of discussion do not involve that member. Or, an IEP meeting may be scheduled, but an IEP member later learns that they have an unavoidable scheduling conflict, which could force the cancellation of the IEP meeting (p. 181).

This may not always be the case. IEP meetings can continue without the parents as long as the rest of the IEP team agrees to continuing and signs a form that agrees to their dismissal. If a member of the IEP team is not needed that day, for example the speech therapist may be excused if the parents are okay with the notion to dismiss them from the meeting. This would most likely happen if the speech therapist has already covered their part. Overall, it is in the best interest of the student with disabilities to have every member of the IEP team present during and IEP. A big part of the IEP is to figure out the student's goals for the entire year in all subjects.

Once the student with disabilities is in the public-school system, part of the school systems job is to teach and reinforce basic skills. Smith (1997) says "students with learning disabilities often have trouble keeping on top of subjects like health, science, and social studies, either because material is presented in a way that is inaccessible to them (for example, texts are beyond their reading capabilities, or lectures and demonstrations are too fast-paced for them to follow) or because getting special help removes them from the classroom for substantial periods of time" (p. 160). Reasons a student with disabilities leaves the classroom is usually for speech therapy or occupational therapy which is known as a pull-out method. Although this technique is still occurring, more districts are resorting to a push-in method. The push-in method allows the

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student with disabilities to stay in the class for the full amount of time for the main subject which is math, English, history, and science. There are two (2) extra periods allotted for tutoring and help with course work if the student with disabilities is falling behind. According to a veteran high school teacher, Teacher B, “there is a co-teaching program for students with disabilities that has para-educators to give extra support with exams and taking notes. If extra time is needed, there is two (2) extra periods available in the student’s schedule to seek assistance, this also allows for teacher prep time and more flexibility” (Teacher B, personal communication, 5 March 2018).

IDEA was re-authorized in 2004 by President Bush. Although part b talks about education for all students with disabilities, another important part is part a which clearly states the general provisions for a highly qualified special education teacher. Although a student with disabilities who has a 504 plan or an IEP does not always need to be in a special education classroom, it is important that they have support from highly qualified special education teachers to ensure they are on the right path to success. IDEA is constantly making sure that students are achieving the goals set forth by the IEP team. According to Glenchur (2003), IDEA does two things: “prepare children with disabilities for employment and independent living and protect their rights as individuals with disabilities” (p. 24). This holds true today as teachers are mainstreaming students with disabilities into full inclusion lessons and environments. According to veteran middle school teacher, Teacher A, “Functional academics on the certified track involves skills to become independent (basic life skills, writing and math skills – helps get a job, better quality of life)” (Teacher A, personal communication, 1 March 2018) (See Appendix B). Thus, this validates that IDEA is still being practiced in public schools today no matter the model of teaching the school follows to get there.

Methods and Procedures

The population in this study are public school district administrators, public school special education teacher across all levels of education, parents who have children with disabilities, and staff from the Monterey County Office of Education. The reason for this population is because they are the most experienced in their field when it comes to how public schools provide educational services to students with disabilities. After countless hours of research, reading literature on my topic, and time spent doing interviews, I wanted my topic to come together in a way that would be informative and as a means to action.

There are four phases to this project: 1. The key to making it all happen would be my raw data from the educational professionals and parents as well who know about current procedures in special education. The importance of my research was to start at the top and work my way down to the bottom. You could think of it like a domino effect. One piece leads directly into the other. 2. Collecting the data. 3. Analyzing the data. 4. Creating recommendations to put my findings into action. The justification for this project is to create a bridge that all parents, students, and educational staff could cross as a perfect means to success.

Because of this project, I was able to interview four elementary special education teachers, four middle school special education teachers, six high school special education teachers, four special education parents and three principal/directors in relation to special education at their schools. The participants answered questions from a questionnaire that targeted how programs in special education benefited students with disabilities. I did ask follow up questions in response to their answers to get a more thorough insight into what was offered and why. All participants requested that their names not be included in this research project. All participants were made

aware prior to the interview that any data collected would be used for educational purposes. Per their authorization, all data collected will be used for this research alone.

Every interview was conducted in the Monterey County Area. I asked every participant for a face to face interview, those who could not meet with me in person opted to do the interview via email. Face to face interviews with the principals were conducted in their office (See Appendix A). Interviews with teachers were conducted in their classroom (See Appendix B). Interviews with parents were either conducted in their home or at a Starbucks (See Appendix C). Interviews with staff from the Monterey County Office of Education was conducted in their office or via email (See Appendix D). The interviews began February 2, 2018 and through April 2, 2018.

This approach to research data collection helped by allowing me to talk one on one with educational professionals in special education and see what positive and negative aspects are to servicing students with disabilities. All interviews ranged in time from 30 minutes up to 3 hours. For each individual there were a set of 8 or 9 questions they had to answer, but each question depending on the interviewer's responses led to further questioning. The information gathered is not just a public-school issue but transcends to the district which is enforced at the state and federal level. I chose this approach because it was the fastest approach to getting the information necessary to answer my research questions.

Results and Discussion

In this section, you will learn exactly how state and federal laws benefit students with disabilities in an educational setting. How public-school agencies receive the laws and propose accommodations to help students with disabilities be successful with key terms such as: FAPE and LRE. Through data collection from teacher interviews, you will learn methods used today

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that benefit students with disabilities and what exactly is still missing. You will learn how administrators decide to make programs for students with disabilities and how they are placed at schools. You will also learn about parental concerns and their IEP experiences. Overall, you will understand just how much of a role legislation play in lives of students with disabilities.

What does the legislation – Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) say about the education services for students with Disabilities, both federal and state?

Laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disability Education Act of 2004 ensure that students are receiving proper services to be successful in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE means that students with disabilities should be allowed to be educated along with their peers who do not have disabilities and have access to a general education curriculum. The importance of the Rehabilitation Act is its 504 plan for students with disabilities, but don't necessarily need to be in special education. The public-school agency needs to accommodate the student so that they may participate in a general education classroom to the full extent possible. The Rehabilitation Act also ensured that students with disabilities were not being discriminated by public agencies thus giving students with disabilities access to facilities and an education where appropriate.

IDEA was originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This is important because they created the “child find” law which meant if potential students between the ages of three (3) and twenty-one (21) with disabilities were not in school, the state had to find them and make sure they were being enrolled in public school and starting special services for their individualized education. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 helped refine the laws already in place by the Rehabilitation Act, which was to not let public schools discriminate against students with disabilities. There wasn't a high expectation for students and

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they were also getting a low-level education. They were not being challenged. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 was re-authorized in 2004. A higher level of education was promised by President Bush by attaining highly qualified teachers to teach special education. One thing IDEA did different than the previous laws is that it guaranteed Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) along side their peers who are non-handicapped in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) meaning that the student's must have and special education aide and support services and still not be able to function in a regular education classroom before being removed. Every chance available must be given to succeed in a general education classroom.

These laws set the tone for the questions asked to each individual. All services provided in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) can be amended by public school staff and parents on the IEP team. The data collected will suggest plans for action by either the special education teacher or the parents of the student with disabilities.

What does research say about the kinds of educational services that will benefit students with disabilities?

There are many services that a public-school agency can provide. In most cases they are specifically given to meet the student's needs. Most common are speech-language pathology, psychological services, adaptive physical education and occupational therapy, social work services, sign language or oral interpreter, one-to-one instructional aide, and transportation services. An IEP describes the special education and related services. These services are intended to meet the needs of the student with disabilities. According to Anderson (1990), related services include:

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Audiology, counseling services, early identification, medical services, occupational therapy, parent counseling and training, physical therapy, psychological services, recreation, school health services, social work services, speech pathology, and transportation (p. 110-112).

After interviewing sixteen educational professionals in special education, 4 parents with children that have different disabilities, reading articles and literature, the data corresponds to the research questions previously mentioned. The data provided by the above-mentioned resources is broken down and transmitted from six research questions proposed in this project. The questions will go in order from administrators in appendix A, special education teachers in appendix B, parents of students with disabilities in appendix C, and Monterey County Staff in appendix D to show the data collected. Overall there were fourteen special education teachers, four parents, one middle school principal, one high school principal and one director of special education covering the whole Monterey County Area.

Are there any differences in educational services provided to students with disabilities that benefit students with disabilities at the various levels of education?

Data collect from all interviews prove to have similar responses for services given to students with disabilities in the elementary school setting, then changes when transitioning to middle school. If the student with disabilities is transitioning to high school, unless it is a different district that implements different methods of instruction, services usually remain the same. According to another veteran middle school teacher, Teacher C, their school uses a “fluidity model, for functional academic students with disabilities that can be in regular history class for example” (Teacher C, personal communication, 16 February 2018) (See Appendix B).

At the elementary school level, services are special day class (sdc), life skills, speech therapy (pull out to separate room), occupational therapy (usually in class), adaptive physical

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education (ape), psychologist (observation), and a Monterey County Behavioral Health program. For sdc, a student with disabilities is typically in the same classroom for the entire day with modified work to meet their individual needs. Speech therapy is given in a separate room for individual services that last up to thirty (30) minutes each and group services are usually done in class. Ape is adaptive to each student's needs and goals on their IEP's.

In the middle school, they offer similar services, but the way they offer them changes. For example, there is no longer a single room (sdc) where students with disabilities stay for the entire day. This is known as life skills, usually the students with disabilities learn to take care of themselves by going out into the community and applying some academics. Now, if the disability of the student is such that they can't be included in general education classrooms, they're in a modified version of sdc for four (4) periods of the day. Then they have two (2) periods where they go to an elective like music or art with their nonhandicapped peers accompanied by their special education paraprofessionals and to physical education where they are expected to participate with their nonhandicapped peers. This is known as functional academics. Although physical education is modified, it is not adaptive to the student's individual needs. So many special education teachers felt that students with disabilities were entering middle school unprepared as it is a huge educational change and a bit more prepare when entering high school as they educational system is usually the same. It was entering to see what administrators and Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) staff had to say about these changes in services.

How do schools in the Monterey County area provide educational services that benefit students with disabilities?

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It was no surprise to get a similar response from teachers and administrators in this area. According to a veteran high school principal, Principal A, “the district determines what SPED programs are placed at my school by looking at the facilities and the space that is available for each class” (Principal A, personal communication, 2 March 2018) (See Appendix A). Apparently, once space is approved, an assistant principal is assigned to oversee the department. Their job is to make sure all IEP’s are being implemented such as accommodations and modifications, that IEP’s are being completed on time, and that parents are receiving their Notice of Procedural Safeguards. Although a bit strange, administrators offer special education teachers training opportunities that helps them complete their jobs. With that being said, administration offer their teachers the support necessary to help them complete their duties in regard to IEP’s.

The director of special education sends an assistant to a transitional IEP capable of making judgement calls at the district level. In a sense, the assistant speaks on behalf of the special education department of the middle school and high school districts. According to veteran high school principal, Principal B, “an assistant principal meets with feeder schools on transitional IEP’s to learn about the support necessary for transitional students into their school” (Principal B, personal communication, 7 March 2018) (See Appendix A). Each student also has a case manager in which they create a spread sheet listing what is needed for each individual student with disabilities.

The Monterey County Office of Education is a vendor to all educational levels. They assist and provide services if the public-school agency can no longer continue to do so. Services are provided in much of the same way as elementary schools or middle schools, but MCOE allows their administration a bit more leeway in their involvement with staff and the students with disabilities. According to Monterey County Staff A, “I travel to counties to teach

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superintendents about handicap laws, supervise related services, email all districts and provide physical therapy services where necessary as only the county has that service available, I attend IEP's and support all my special education staff where needed" (Monterey County Staff A, personal communication, 26 March 2018) (See Appendix D).

What could be done to improve the educational services for students with disabilities in the Monterey County area?

From all the interviews done for this research project, there was one common necessity, the lack of highly trained quality paraprofessionals. If school agencies wish to improve the services they offer, then they not only need to hire Paraprofessionals, but they need to give them more working hours to guarantee benefits or just give benefits at their regular part time shifts worked. Public school agencies should allow for more co-teaching. This method of instruction would allow for more scaffolding in the classroom as well as a certified professional to assist students with disabilities if they are having a challenging time on class work while the other teacher gives the instruction.

It is essential that parents be more involved in their student's education and teaching them to advocate for the needs of their student is currently lacking. According to parent A, "I don't know the therapist on my daughter's IEP team this year, communication is so-so, better than the last IEP team I was on, but there is still no real explanation of what I'm signing" (Parent A, personal communication, 5 March 2018) (See Appendix C). Parents also had a common wish and that was that communication among the IEP team, more specifically with their child's teacher should be more open. Maybe having a journal that goes home every day and returns to school the next morning to communicate all transitions after leaving school would be a good

thing. Both parents and school staff need to be on the same page, communication about how the day starts and finishes is always a good thing to relay.

Students with disabilities should stop being labeled when introduced as it tends to have a negative stigma. Simply introduce the student by their name and if necessary for health or behavior concerns, then add their disability. It is important to be aware of signs to look out for. Give instructions based on individual needs and not as a group. Every student varies in need even if they have similar disabilities. It is important to meet IEP goals, but the IEP team should aim to surpass them. Assess the student with disabilities to make sure they are retaining what they are learning. As students with disabilities transition to the next phase in their lives, they need to be prepared and ready to learn.

The findings from the educational staff corroborate and do suggest that although they do their best and even go beyond what is asked of them, there are services and programs not yet provided by the public-school system. In some cases, parents are seeing the same thing, although communication on both ends is lacking. Some parents have a better experience, that could be due to the district the student is in, the school they are attending or their unique needs. There is also a lack of advocacy for students. Even though many state and federal laws, public schools and teachers provide several services to parents and their children with disabilities in which they benefit from, many parents are not receiving all essential services and schools are still lacking programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Problems and Limitations

Although the research yielded results that support the problem questions, there were a few problems and limitations on my end that should be discussed. Originally, I wanted to speak

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to a minimum of four elementary special education teachers, but I only was able to interview three of them. This is a limitation in the sense that I sent out six requests via email for interviews and only three responded. The other three teachers did reply and said they were too busy with IEP's or that they just returned from a leave of absence. I thanked them for their reply. Next, I originally wanted to speak with at least four middle school special education teachers and ended up interviewing five of them. This is only a limitation in the sense that I sent out eighteen requests for interview and only five were able to meet with me. Some teachers did not respond while others also said they were too busy or it wasn't the right time as it was IEP time for the end of the school year. I thanked them for their reply. Next, I originally wanted to speak with six high school special education teachers and ended up interviewing five of them. This is a limitation as I sent out twenty-six requests for interviews and only five were able to meet with me. Some teachers did not respond while others also said they were too busy or it wasn't the right time as it was IEP time for the end of the school year. Some of the female teachers were also on maternity leave. I thanked them for their reply. Next, I originally want to speak with six principals from different schools. This is a limitation as I also sent out eleven requests for interview via email and only two were able to meet with me. Some did not respond to my email and others did saying they were busy. I thanked them for their reply. Next, I wanted to speak with at least six parents, but I was only able to meet with four of them for interviews. Next, I sent out five requests for interviews to the Monterey County program, but I was only able to interview two of them. One did not reply and the other two said they would be willing to interview but could not find time. Our schedules were in conflict. I thanked them for their reply. Only three of these interviews were answered in email format, which I then had to go to their

respective schools to attain their signatures for the interview. Overall, I was able to do twenty-three interviews out of seventy-two requests.

Recommendation

Based on multiple interviews and research done, public schools should hire qualified paraprofessionals with benefits so that there can be higher retention rate overall. This will make it so that every classroom with students with disabilities has at least one teacher and two paraprofessionals. In some cases, co-teaching would be highly desirable for scaffolding purposes. While one gives a lesson, the other can go around and make sure the students are learning and understanding. Again, retention of knowledge is necessary for their success across all educational levels.

Another important part is to eliminate labeling all together. While it is necessary to know and understand individual needs, introducing a student with their disability first could bring negative effects in and out of the classroom. Students with disabilities have so much potential. Every opportunity should be given the opportunity to be successful. Pushing students with disabilities to achieve more than just reaching desirable goals could lead to positive emergent skills not otherwise known if the bare minimum goal is not accepted.

Lastly, there should be more communication available between parents and public-school staff. Every opportunity should be made to inform parents of their child's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, every attempt should be made to include parents in school or classroom activities. If extra help is needed at home, public school agencies should address possible ways to ensure the student with disabilities is continuously getting services that meet his/her individual needs.

Conclusion

Through research and multiple interviews, this research project attempted to seek the answer to the primary research question of *How do educational services benefit students with disabilities?* First, it found that state and federal laws, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, all ensure that students with disabilities are not discriminated by public schools and they are given every chance possible to participate in the general education curriculum. To receive special education services, students need either a 504 plan or an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The 504 plan has a broader range of disabilities listed for those not qualifying for an IEP, as an IEP has 13 specific disabilities listed under IDEA that qualify for educational services.

Results collected from literature review in the related topic and interviews with twenty-one professionals who work with students with disabilities were examined in detail. In general, the findings support the aspects of special education. There is a positive correlation between services provided and learning outcomes. Specifically, when it comes to advocacy on the teacher's behalf and the continuing services on each student's IEP seem to have the biggest impact on how much students with disabilities retain each passing year. Instructors that were interviewed reported that having paraprofessionals in class all day was key to success; however, they also reported that, although it is necessary to have trained paraprofessionals to follow through on lessons, there is a payroll issue, such as benefits that make it difficult to keep full time paraprofessionals on board.

Overall, instructors in the field all agree that if the academic ability of students with disabilities is lower than the work they were asked to do, the professionals could accommodate,

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meaning they could co-teach and scaffold to each student individual learning style. However, student's academic performance and budget cuts on programs could hinder progress in the field. This could leave teachers' attitudes towards their own profession a bit sour. There needs to be more collaboration amongst public school personnel, such as administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and the district in charge of each school. With more communication and collaboration to address potential disadvantages, a forward motion can remain. All professionals going in the same direction for a common goal, this may only be a recipe for success.

This research project is important because it attempted to address the benefits of educational services across every level of education for students with disabilities. What is available in public institutions and how do parents and professionals alike access them? There is still more research to be done on the effects of educational services provided in the field and what other services can be provided to accommodate an uprising in students with disabilities. Additional research can assist organizations, such as Easter Seals, Special Kids Crusade, Tucci, Bay School, San Andreas Regional Center (SARC) and all schools working with students with disabilities in the Monterey County Area. These future practices will lead to positive educational experiences for all parties involved, especially instructors, parents, and students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Questions for Principals Across All Levels

1. What role do you play when it comes to the students with disabilities at your school?
2. What role do you play when it comes to the special education teachers at your school?
3. How does the district determine what special education programs are placed at your school?
4. What kind of special education programs do you have at your school?
5. In what ways do these special education programs benefit the students with disabilities at your school?
6. In what ways have you advocated for the students with disabilities at your school?
7. What other programs or services is your school needing to better serve the students with disabilities?
8. What is one thing you would do if you could that would make educational life for the students with disabilities at your school more enjoyable?

APPENDIX B

Questions for Special Education Teachers Across All Levels

1. How does your district decide which schools will provide certain type of programs for students with disabilities?
2. What programs for students with disabilities does your school level provide?
3. How are these programs beneficial to students with disabilities in your program?
4. Does teacher advocacy play a significant role in the services a student with disability gets?
5. In what ways do you advocate for your students?
6. What extra services or support would you like to have in your classroom to benefit students with disabilities?
7. What support would you like to see in your school to benefit students with disabilities?
8. What support would you like to see across the state to benefit students with disabilities?
9. In your opinion, is it important that the district have different programs at different schools or should it be a “one size fits all” type of service at every school in the district?

APPENDIX C

Questions for Parents Across All Levels

1. How is the communication between the IEP team and yourself?
2. What services has your son/daughter received?
3. Are those services helping with educational success?
4. Have you ever requested more services other than what is in the IEP?
5. If so, how was the request received?
6. Is there anything you would change about the school setting?
7. How have the services helped at home?
8. How have the services helped in the community?
9. What is one thing you wish the school would do for you as a parent of a student with disabilities?

APPENDIX D

Questions for Monterey County Office of Education

1. How does the county get its funds to provide services to students with disabilities?
2. How does the county determine what special education programs are placed at each school?
3. What role do you play when it comes to the special education teachers?
4. What role do you play when it comes to the students with disabilities?
5. What kind of special education programs does the county provide for students with disabilities?
6. In what ways do these special education programs benefit the students with disabilities?
7. In what ways have you advocated for the students with disabilities?
8. What other programs or services does the county need to better serve students with disabilities?
9. What is one thing you would do if you could that would make educational life for the students with disabilities more enjoyable?