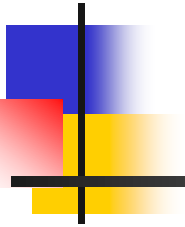# Students in Need: Benefits and Challenges of a Special Education School

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Education 400

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Background

- Cary Grant School
  - K-12 private day school for students with special needs
  - Referred by LEA's and tuition is paid for by the district
  - Therapeutic day school
- Overall Goal: To return the student back to their district school

Research Question

- According to administrators, what are the benefits and challenges for students in a Special Education private school?

Why is this research important to the field of education?

- Implementation of IDEIA in 2004
- New programs- Positive Behavioral System

Thesis

- My research on the Cary Grant School shows that students in special education schools have a severe lack of academic confidence and self-esteem due to factors from their home life and previous school setting. I discerned from my interviews that, according to administrators, if a positive reinforcement system is enforced in the schools and at home, students can have a better chance of academic and social success in their home school districts.

Literature Review

- Dunlap, Glen, et al. "Prevent-Teach-Reinforce: A Standardized Model of School-Based Behavioral Intervention." Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions. 12.1 (2010): 9-22. Print.

- Brewer, Katherine. "Time Out! Behavior Modification for Children with Special Needs: The Case of the Elizabeth Woodford School." Senior Research Project. Trinity College, 2006. Print.

- Spann, Sammy J, Frank W Kohler, and Delann Soenksen. "Examining Parents' Involvement in and Perceptions of Special Education Services: An Interview With Families in a Parent Support Group." Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities. 18.4 (2003): 228-237 Print.

Methodology

- Conducted 4 in-depth interviews with three top administrators (all names of people and schools have been changed)
  - Elementary administrator- Shirley Kerr
  - Middle school administrator - Mary Barbor
  - Special education coordinator/vice principal - Jennifer Lentil
- Analyzed two quantitative studies by Wagner et al. (2005 & 2006)
  - Used to support and back up my qualitative findings

"What's Going on at Home?"

- "I have a kindergartner who's probably been sitting in front of a TV for the past 5 years, and if Sesame Street worked, we'd all be geniuses…Most of learning that occurs really is learned in the context of a relationship, it really comes back to that." (Personal Interview, Shirley)

- "We have a parent contact sheet that goes home everyday which talks about the kids day…and we ask the parents to sign off on it so that we know they've seen the daily report. And they don't come back signed, or 'my mother saw it but she didn't care'…We need the parents to see that school and the families need to work together." (Personal Interview, Jennifer)

Lack of Structure and Lack of Self Esteem

- "Districts have tried everything to keep kids in their district schools for as long as possible…And it's sad, at that point their situation could not be worse" (Personal Interview, Jennifer)

- "So they're sitting next to the straight A kid in their public school and they maybe are an an anxious kid who earns C's, so already their self-esteem is kind of off" (Personal Interview, Mary)

- Students get nervous when school vacations arrive because they don't like the lack of structure at home. They need the structure that the school provides

Confidence is Key- Academics

- "School is a place where kids expect to come and learn, and should come and learn. They don't have to do it in such a traditional way here. You know, if they want to lay on the floor to do a lesson, then they can lay on the floor to do a lesson!…as you build the academic skill you're also gonna build self-esteem and how they feel about what they're doing" (Personal Interview, Mary)

- "If a student is two or more years below grade level, in whatever subject, we use a direct intervention program that includes the testing so that we can address those lacking skills" (Personal Interview, Jennifer)

Confidence is Key- Social

- "If they broke a chair or they hit somebody or they ripped up a book, once they restore that issue with somebody they go right back into class and they go right back to green…And every day is new, so they could have an atrocious day one day and then they come back and they're starting fresh everyday." (Personal Interview, Jennifer)

- "You can mess up and restore that and move on" (Personal Interview, Mary)

- I have parents who come and, everyones got an IEP, and parents come for the PPT meeting and say, 'you know this is the most positive meeting I've had." (Personal Interview, Shirley)

Conclusion

- Although outside social factors may impede the learning process for students with ED and other mental disabilities the Cary Grant School works with them to find the best educational program and supports with the hope that they will be ready to return to their district schools as quickly as possible

Limitations

- Only was able to speak to a limited number of staff

- I sent out a teacher questionnaire and only received 2 responses back out of the possible 25

- Was unable to speak with parents

Implications for Further Research

- Speaking with parents would give insight into how both parties (administrators and parents feel about their child's schooling)

- Looking at previous test scores and comparing them to the private school test scores would also show how the students are doing academically

- Observing these programs and tracking student success would show how the program is actually doing