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Abstract

The Tennessee state law as it refers to the gifted and talented is not as specific in the characteristics found in the Federal definition. The purpose of this study was to find if the perceptions of the local teachers agreed with the Federal characteristics. A survey of 80 middle Tennessee teachers was completed. The total number of schools surveyed was 4 public and one private school. The survey was rated using a 5 point Linker scale. The results were analyzed using the SPSS statistical program. A paired samples test was used in the data analysis. It was found that while the majority of the teachers stated that they knew the law, few agreed on the characteristics from the Federal definition.

Keywords

Gifted and talented, teacher perception, federal definition, identification, misidentification, intellectually gifted

Disciplines

Educational Methods | Gifted Education | Special Education and Teaching

Teachers' Perceptions of the Federal Definition of Gifted and Talented

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Abstract

The Tennessee state law as it refers to the gifted and talented is not as specific in the characteristics found in the Federal definition. The purpose of this study was to find if the perceptions of the local teachers agreed with the Federal characteristics. A survey of 80 middle Tennessee teachers was completed. The total number of schools surveyed was 4 public and one private school. The survey was rated using a 5 point Linker scale. The results were analyzed using the SPSS statistical program. A paired samples test was used in the data analysis. It was found that while the majority of the teachers stated that they knew the law, few agreed on the characteristics from the Federal definition.

The requirement for any program to be successful is that all parties involved in the program must have a clear and precise role in such program. Without these formally stated guidelines the overall effectiveness of the mission is compromised. The lack of a solid knowledge base in the understanding and implementation of how gifted and talented students are identified has an effect on not only the number of students misidentified but also on the effectiveness of the very program that it strives to serve. The identification of the gifted and talented student today is at best a shot in the dark. The national average is around 3%; however in other countries the rate is as high as 10%. While on the surface the difference of 7% seems small, when you multiply 7% times the total student population of the United States, you find a very large number of students that are "lost" in the system. One of the reasons for this confusion is the inability of educators to clearly understand what is gifted and talented. Many theorists have set

forth guidelines and concepts for the identification of the gifted and talented student, however the lack of a clear and precise definition is one of the factors that has and continues to prevent the identification of student to admittance to these programs. Each state has the right to define what it considers gifted and talented, for example some states only base their criteria on intelligence scores on achievement tests, while other states use a checklist of specific criteria to measure the entire student. This study used the Federal definition of gifted and talented as set forth by P.L. 100-297, Sec. 4103 *The term gifted and talented students means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities.* Because this study was conducted in a single state

(Tennessee) the participants of this study would have been familiar with the local definition. The state of Tennessee defines gifted and talented as: *Intellectually gifted means a child whose intellectual abilities and potential for achievement are so outstanding that special provisions are required to meet the child's educational needs.* TENN COMP. R & REGS. 0520-1-9-01. The Federal definition of gifted and talented is based on many factors; these include IQ scores, psycho-motor skills, leadership ability, creativity, motivation, sense of humor, potential, artistic ability, visual and performance ability, and an advanced mastery of the English language. It is therefore incumbent on educators to not only know the law but to use these guidelines in the referral process when engaged in the process of identifying the gifted and talented student. The purpose of this research is to find out what are the teachers perceptions of the Federal definition of gifted and talented students as stated in the Federal guidelines for referral to a gifted and talented program. The factors believed to have an effect on these perceptions are (a) the number of years taught, (b) the level of education, (c) the understanding of the laws in regards to gifted and talented, and (d) the experience of having taught a gifted and talented student.

Q1 what is the relationship between the numbers of years taught in the classroom and the teacher's perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented?

Q2 what is the relationship between the level of education of the teacher and the perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented?

Q3 what is the relationship between the understanding of the current laws in regards to gifted and talented and the teacher's perceptions of these laws?

Q4 what is the relationship between having taught the gifted and talented student and the perceptions of the Federal Law for gifted and talented students?

Q5 is there a difference in the perceptions of the characteristics of the Federal law as it pertains to gifted and talented?

Research hypothesis 1: There exists a statistically significant relationship between the number of years taught in the classroom and the teacher's perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Research hypothesis 2: There exists a statistically significant relationship between the level of education of the teacher and the perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Research hypothesis 3: There exists a statistically significant relationship between the understanding of the current law in regards to gifted and talented and the teacher's perception of the of the federal definition of gifted and talented.

Research hypothesis 4: There exists a statistically significant relationship between having taught a student who was classified as gifted and talented and the teacher's perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Research hypothesis 5: There exists a difference in the perception of the components of the Federal definition of gifted and talented as perceived by teachers.

The significance of this study is to probe the knowledge base (in relation to the Federal definition of gifted and talented) of the people who by their positions determine

who is referred to the gifted and talented programs. It is noted by Jenkins-Friedman (1984) that only around 100 universities offer course work or a degree in gifted and talented identification. This lack of a sufficient knowledge base on the characteristics of the gifted is not limited to the United States, in Australia according to the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Center (GERRIC) it was found the considerable majority of teachers currently employed in Australian schools would have had no instruction, or at best less than one hour of instruction, in their pre-service training, on how to identify and respond to gifted and talented students. ("Training Teachers", 2001). Professor K. B. Start in his testimony to the Senate Select Committee stated ("Training Teachers", 2001) that this lack of knowledge resulted in teachers leaving the universities not only ill-equipped to cope with the needs of the gifted and talented student but also with feeling of professional inadequacy and resentment that manifested itself in negative attitudes towards the appropriate provisions for gifted and talented students. These attitudes appear to be more prevalent in regular education teachers as opposed than those who due to their specific fields have received more training in the identification process (Jacobs, 1975; Leyser & Abrams, 1982; Panda and Bartel, 1972). The number of years teaching and the familiarity with the gifted and talented student has been found to be related to the teacher's attitude towards the gifted and talented students (Rubenzer and Twaite, 1979). This lack of training combined with the vastly different definitions from state to state has resulted in a quagmire of laws that are at best a small safety net for the

identification of the gifted and talented. The history of the Federal definition of gifted and talented and its impact on the state laws has been and continues to be a point of disagreement (Karnes and Stephens, 2000). This legal issue has and continues to be resolved in the courts system under such banners as civil rights issues and the redefining of states vs. Federal constitutional rights and statutes (Stephens, 2000). Education in the United States is controlled and regulated by the each individual state government; however with the influx of Federal monies come the required regulations that such monies can only be received with Federal guidelines being met. Therefore the tide of education reform in the gifted and talented community looks toward the Federal definition of gifted and talented as a benchmark from which to build their laws upon.

Method

Participants

The survey was administered to 80 teachers ranging from elementary, middle school, and high school levels. To assure that these findings were valid in all areas of education the survey was administered to four public and one private parochial school. Three of the public schools (elementary, middle and high school) are located in a rural county in the middle Tennessee region. The remaining public school (middle) and the private parochial school (elementary and middle) are located in a county less than 35 mile from a major urban city in the middle Tennessee region. The total student population served by these teachers is estimated to be around fifteen hundred students. The total number of teachers

employed by these five schools is ninety three; the total of surveys completed and returned was eighty. The participants were 25% male and 75% female. The ages of the participants ranged from under 25 years old 13.0%, 26-30 years 15.0%, 31-35 years 13.8%, 36-40 years 10.0%, 41-45 years 15.0%, 45-50 years 3.8%, 51-55 years 11.3%, 56-60 years 10.0%, and over 60 years old 5.0%. The educational levels of the participants were: Bachelor Degree 42.5%, Masters Degree 37.5%, Masters Degree plus 30 15.0%, Doctoral Degree 3.8%, and one case missing. The length of teaching in the classroom was found to be: less than five years 31.3%, 6-10 years 17.5%, 11-15 years 15.0%, 16-20 years 7.5%, 21-25 years 8.8%, 26-30 years 6.3%, and over 30 years 13.8%. The majority of teacher surveyed felt that they did know the law as it applies to gifted and talented: 41% yes, 29% no, 11.3% didn't know, and 1.3% missing.

Apparatus

To conduct this research a 5 point Likert scale survey was used. A total of 24 questions were asked, ranging from demographic data (age, education level, and number of years taught) to specific questions on personal opinions of the various characteristics of the gifted and talented student.

Procedure

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). A reliability coefficient (alpha = .824) was found in relation to the specific characteristics of the Federal definition as listed in the survey. These characteristics

were then compared to the various factors listed (age, number of years taught, knowledge of current laws, and educational level) to see if there was a statistically significant difference. A paired samples t test was used to compare the data. To check for a difference in the perception of teachers about the specific characteristics of the Federal definition of gifted and talented a comparison of mean averages was used.

Results

Null hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years taught in the classroom and the teacher's perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Table 1
Number of Years Teaching and Federal Definition Characteristics

Variables	M	SD
t	df	p
IQ	.61	
2.297	2.385	79
.019*		
Creativity	.83	
2.103	3.508	79
.001*		
Leadership		.35
2.228	1.405	79
.164		
Psychomotor		.27
2.365	1.040	79
.302		

Sense of Humor		-27
2.360	-1.042	79
.300		
Motivation		.44
2.505	1.562	79
.122		
Potential	.17	
2.396	.653	79
.515		
Mastery of English		.25
2.468	.906	79
.368		
Artistic		.58
2.313	2.238	79
.028*		
Visual Performance		.24
2.372	.896	79
.373		

* Significant at .05 level

There is a statistically significant difference in the number of years taught and the teachers perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented. In the areas of IQ (p=.019), Creativity (p=.001) and in Artistic (p=.028) Therefore the null is not retained.

Null hypothesis 2: There is no statistically significant relationship between the level of education of the teacher and the perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Table 2
Level of Education and Federal Definition Characteristics

Variables	df	M	SD
t		p	
IQ			-.78
1.346	-5.182		78
.006*			
Creativity		-.57	
1.082	-4.678		78
.396			
Leadership			-1.05
1.120	-8.340		78
.298			
Psychomotor			-1.13
1.170	-8.560		78
.470			
Sense of Humor			-1.68
1.204	-12.427		78
.799			
Motivation			-.96
1.40	-6.107		78
.186			
Potential		-1.23	
1.219	-8.953		78
.726			

Mastery of English	-1.14	
1.347	-7.519	78
.495		
Artistic	- .83	
1.156	-6.369	77
.473		
Visual Performance	-6.16	
1.170	-8.843	78
.949		

* Significant at .05 level

There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of education and the perception of the Federal definition of gifted and talented. In the area of IQ (p=.006) therefore the null is not retained. It should be noted that in all other areas there was not a statistically significant difference in level of education and the perceptions of the Federal definition of gifted and talented.

Null hypothesis 3: There is no statistically significant relationship between the understanding of the current law in regards to gifted and talented and the teacher's perception of the federal definition of gifted and talented.

Table 3
Understanding of the law and Federal
Definition Characteristics

Variables	M	SD
t	df	p
IQ	-9.6	
.940	-9.009	78
.046*		

Creativity	- .76	
.950	-7.104	78
.177		
Leadership		-1.24
1.089	-10.129	78
.889		
Psychomotor		-1.32
1.081	-10.824	78
.448		
Sense of Humor		-1.86
1.183	-13.961	78
.425		
Motivation		-1.14
1.185	-8.547	78
.684		
Potential	-1.41	
1.193	-10.467	78
.478		
Mastery of English		-1.34
1.218	-9.789	78
.866		
Artistic		-1.05
1.115	-8.324	77
.807		
Visual Performance		- 1.35
1.110	-10.847	78
.607		

* Significant at .05 level

There is a statistically significant difference between the understanding of the law and the Federal definition of the gifted and talented. In the area of IQ (p=.046) therefore

the null is not retained. However only in the area of IQ is there a statistically significant difference. If one were to exclude IQ then the null would have been retained.

Null hypothesis 4: There is no statistically significant relationship between having taught the gifted and talented student and the perceptions of the Federal Law for gifted and talented students?

Table 4
Having taught gifted before and Federal Definition Characteristics

Variables	df	M	SD
t		p	
IQ			-9.6
1.018	-10.758		79
.796			
Creativity		-.76	
.961	-9.422		79
.970			
Leadership			-1.24
1.019	-13.060		79
.90			
Psychomotor			-1.32
.966	-14.470		79
.102			
Sense of Humor			-1.86
1.079	-17.510		79
.838			
Motivation			-1.14
1.063	-11.784		79
.119			

Potential	-1.41	
1.043	-14.261	79
.442		
Mastery of English		-1.34
1.064	-13.349	79
.182		
Artistic		-1.05
1.049	-10.830	78
.871		
Visual Performance		- 1.60
1.026	-13.945	79
.707		

There is not a statistically significant difference in having taught a gifted student before and the teachers perceptions of the Federal definition of gifted and talented. Therefore the null is retained ($p > .05$ in all cases).

Null hypothesis 5: There is not a difference in the perception of the components of the Federal definition of gifted and talented as perceived by teachers.

Table 5
Federal Definition Characteristics

Variables	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
IQ				5.0%	
48.8%	30.0%	16.3%		-	

Creativity		5.0%	
65.0%	20.0%		8.8%
1.3%			
Leadership			3.8%
33.8%	37.5%	25.0%	-
Psychomotor			2.5%
32.5%	40.0%		21.3%
3.8%			
Sense of Humor			-
18.8%	25.0%		47.5%
8.8%			
Motivation			10.0%
35.0%	25.0%		30.0%
-			
Potential		1.3%	
33.8%	31.3%		30.0%
3.8%			
Mastery of English			5.0%
32.5%	30.0%		28.8%
3.8%			
Artistic			3.8%
50.0%	23.8%		21.3%
-			
Visual Performance			2.5%
28.8%	40.0%		28.8%
-			

In looking at this data the following characteristics are perceived as being gifted and talented by the participants in this survey: IQ, creativity, and artistic ability. (The criteria for this is a score of strongly agree and agree that is greater than 50%).

Discussion

The Federal definition of gifted and talented encompasses more characteristics than the state of Tennessee allows. It is not surprising therefore, that teachers in Tennessee do not feel that many of the characteristics of the Federal definition are not applicable to their students. However, given the fact that research tends to indicate that there is more than one area in which a student can be gifted and talented in, the state of Tennessee definition of gifted and talented lags behind the educational research. The majority of the null hypotheses were rejected because of only one or two relationships. It should be noted that over all the majority of teachers in this survey did not agree with the Federal characteristics of gifted and talented. However the majority 51.3% stated they knew the law as it pertains to gifted and talented. This research tends to indicate that until there is a uniform way of defining gifted and talented the confusion of what really is gifted and talented will continue to manifest itself. It further should be noted that the universities that train the new teachers need to have in place a better curriculum that provides more training to allow the new teacher to be better understand the characteristics of the gifted and talented. Some other interesting data did emerge from this study: 65% of the participants were able to correctly identify the percentage of gifted in over all population, 78% strongly agreed or agreed that students who are gifted or talented have higher expectations put on them by parents, teachers, and administration, and 85% responded that gifted and talented students do not have an easier time in school because

of their giftedness. One limitation of this research is the lack of current research literature in this area. Most of the articles found were from 20 to 30 years ago. As the Federal definition has evolved over time the research has not followed. The research on the gifted and talented student continues in

the areas of curriculum and instruction, however until the student is identified he or she can not participate in the program. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to become better informed as to the correct procedures to follow when seeking out gifted and talented students.

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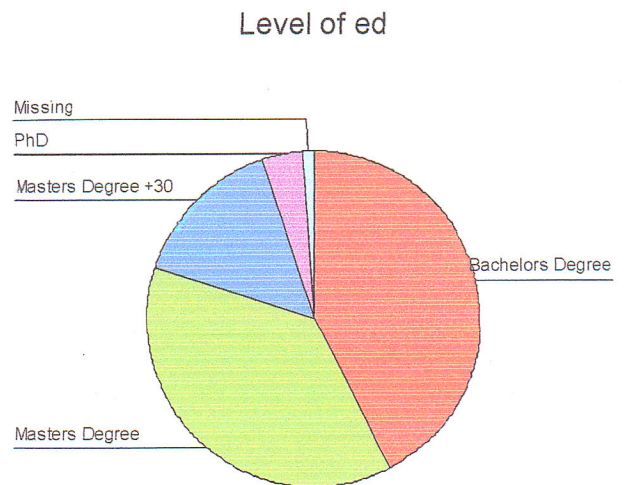
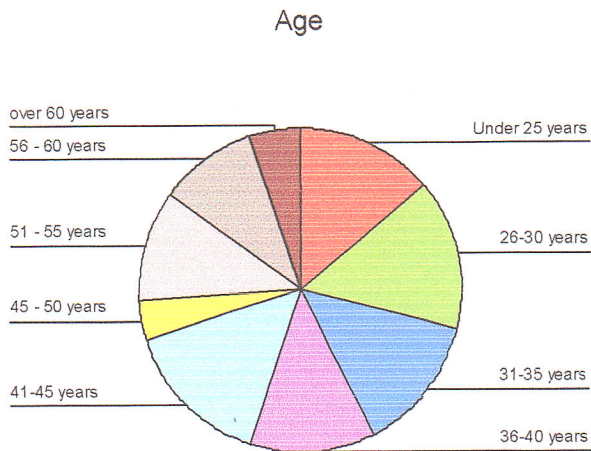
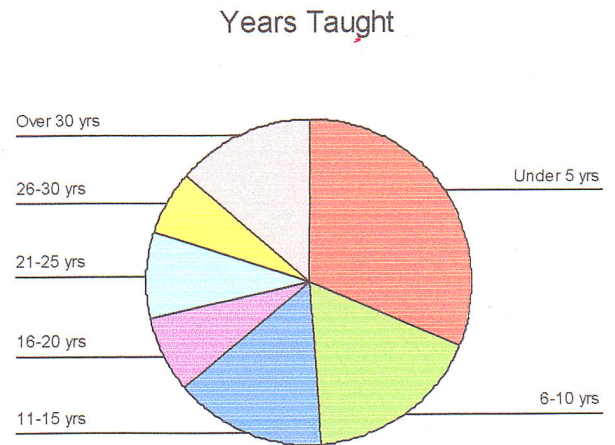
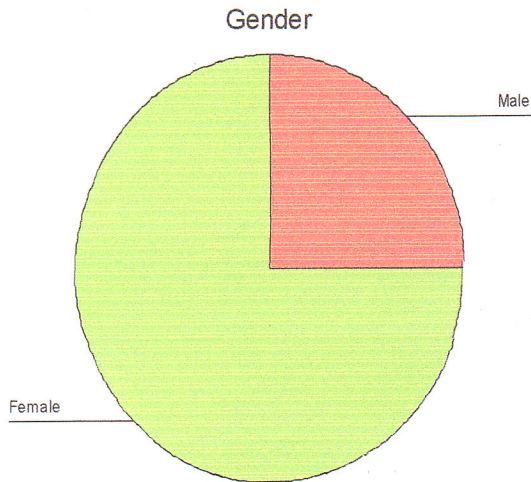
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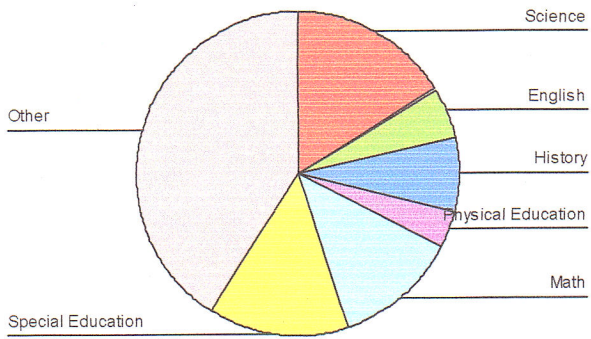
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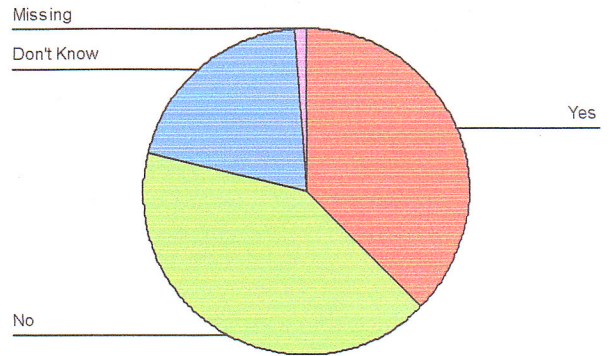
Appendix 1
Graphic presentation of frequency data from surveys.



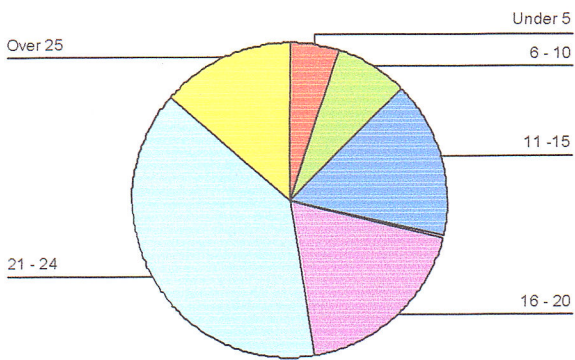
Primary Subject



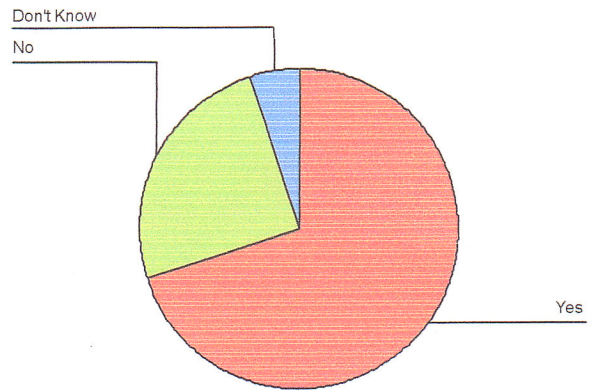
Highly Qualified



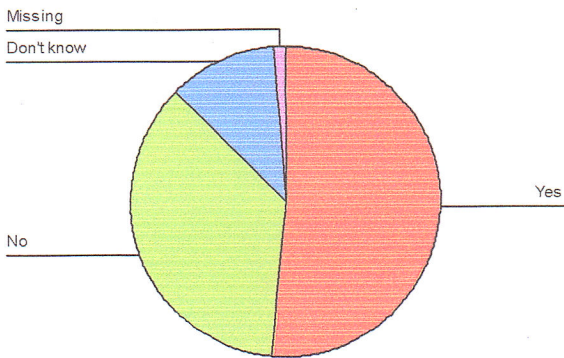
of Students



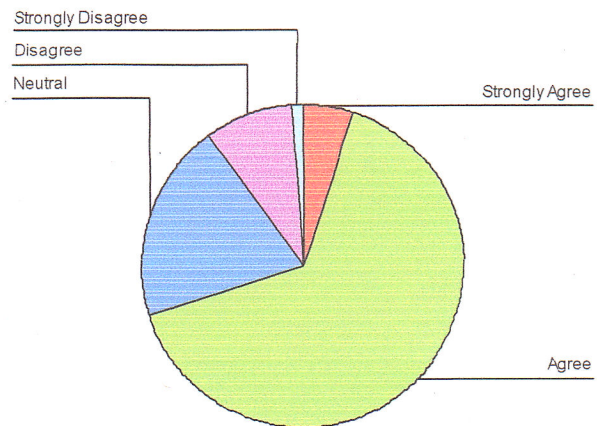
Have Taught



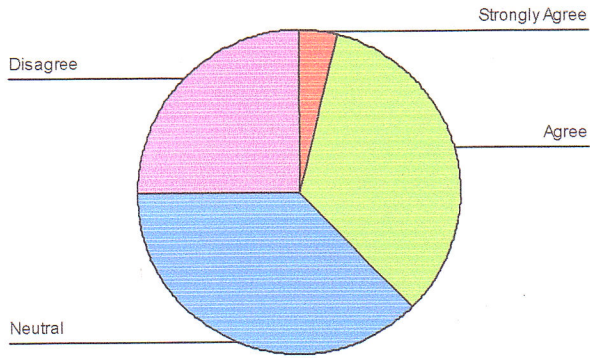
Laws



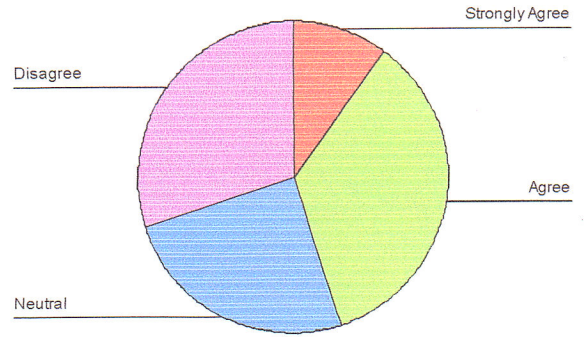
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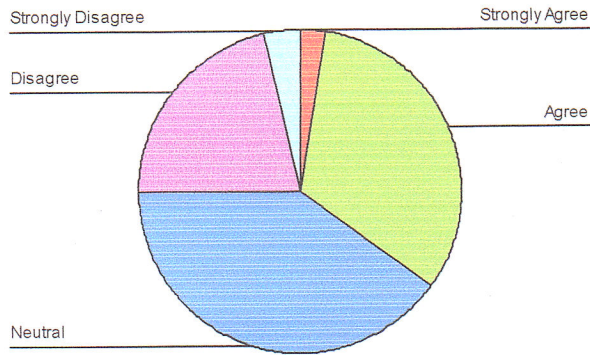
Leadership



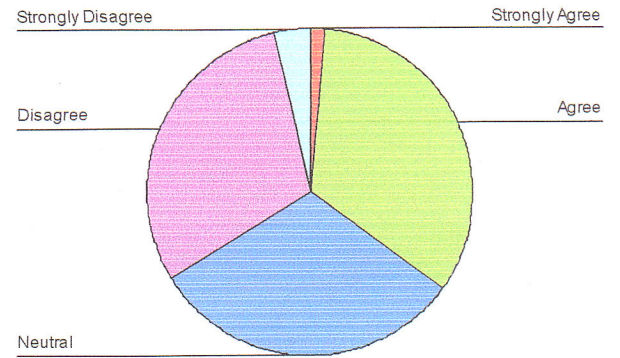
Motivation



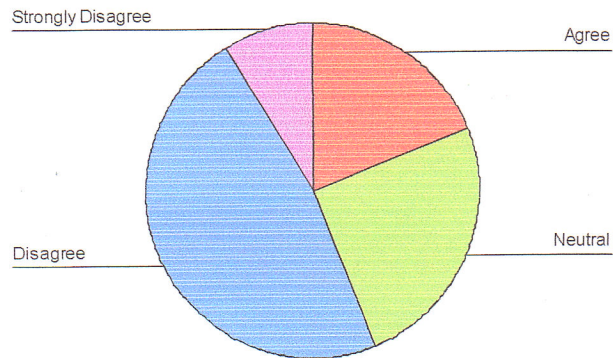
Psychomotor



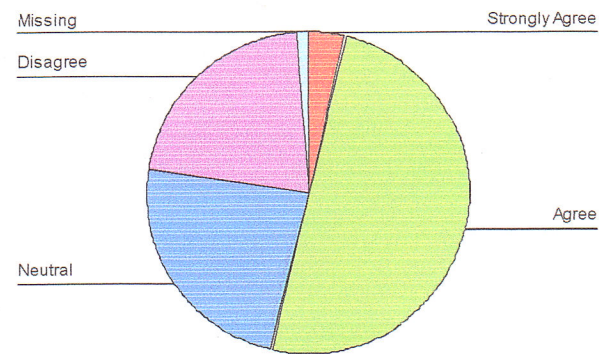
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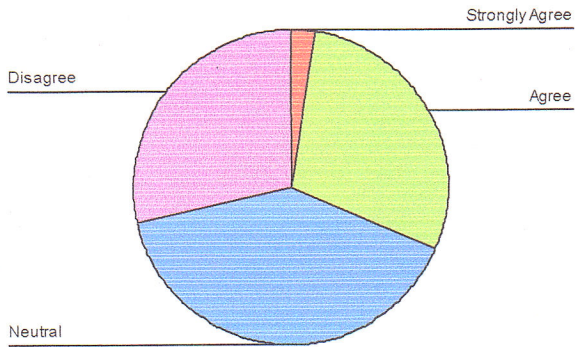
Sense of Humor



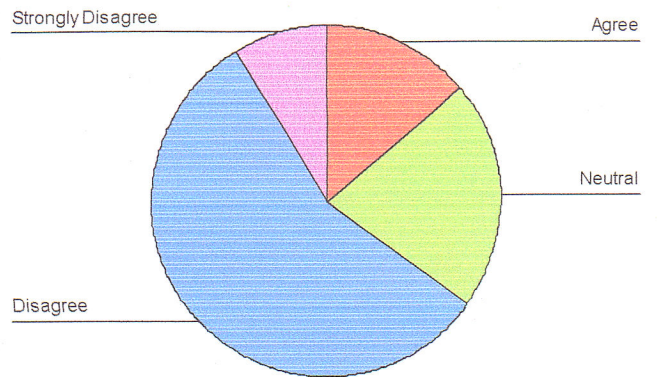
Artistic



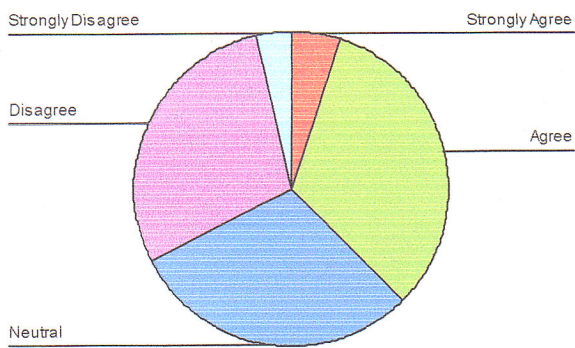
Visual - Performance



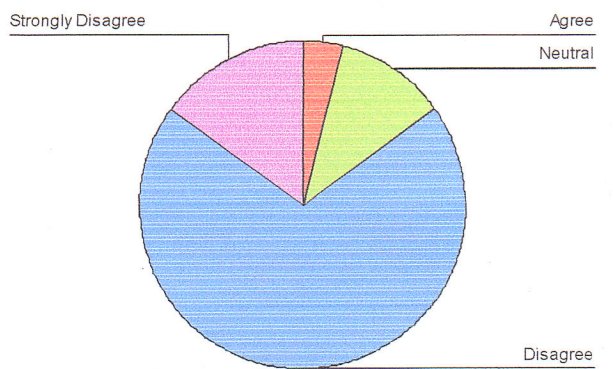
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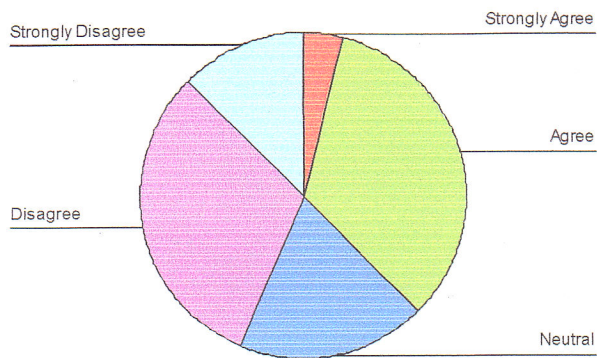
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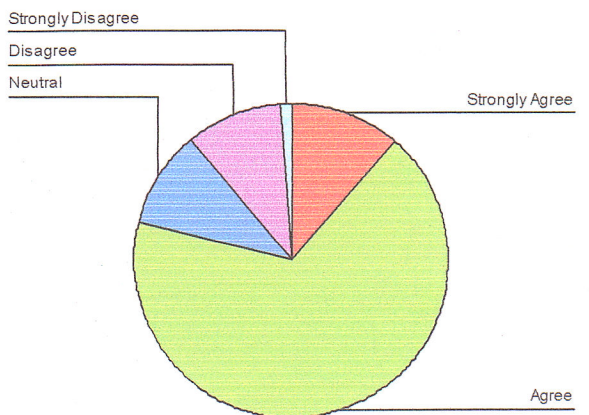
Easier Time



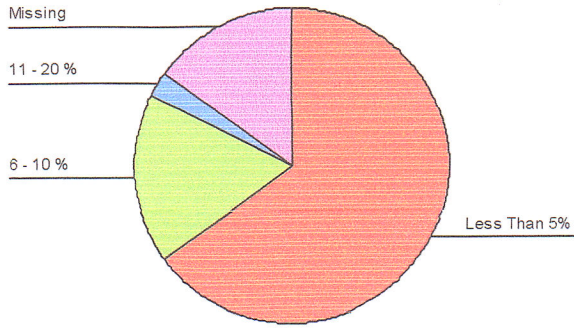
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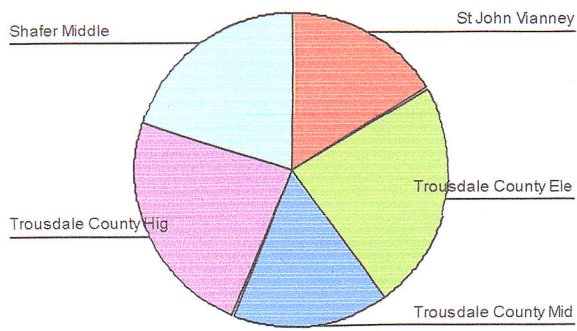
Higher Expectations



% in School



Source



Appendix 2

Date: _____ Certification area(s): _____ Major: _____

List the county where you teach. _____

Please circle where you will be teaching: Elementary, Middle, or Secondary School

Setting (ex. Resource, P.E., Art, Music, Guidance, Speech Pathologist, Regular, or other)

Is this your first year teaching? _____

If no, how many years experience do you have? _____ 1-2 _____ 3-4 _____ 5-6 _____ 7+

Please mark your gender: _____ female _____ male

1. Do you expect to have any students with special needs in your classroom? _____
2. If so, how many students do you expect to receive resource assistance? _____ How many students do you expect to have for inclusion? _____

Please answer the following questions by circling the number based on the following scale:

5 - Strongly agree

2 - Somewhat disagree

4 - Agree

1 - Disagree

3 - Somewhat agree

0 - Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. I feel <i>highly qualified</i> to meet the educational needs of my special education students. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4. I feel <i>highly qualified</i> to meet the disciplinary needs based upon my student(s) disabilities. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 5. The approach to teaching learning disabled students is similar to teaching students who have academic difficulty. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 6. I feel highly qualified to refer someone for special education services. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 7. A student with mental retardation can graduate from college. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 8. A student with a learning disability can graduate from college. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 9. I will modify my special needs student's work only if I am instructed how to do so by the special education teacher. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 10. Students with learning disabilities have average to above average IQs. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 11. Students with learning disabilities interact with peers, teachers, and parent the same as their other classmates. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 12. I feel comfortable referring accommodations for a student with special needs. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

13. Improving a student's self-concept, in most instances, will raise their academic achievement.	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. A student who exhibits behavioral problems in the regular education classroom and stops the educational progress of others should immediately be placed in the resource room.	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. If a student uses a wheelchair, you should place him/her in the back of the room to maximize accessibility.	5	4	3	2	1	0
16. A student with a motor problem will automatically have a learning disability.	5	4	3	2	1	0
17. A student with a vision problem will automatically qualify for special education.	5	4	3	2	1	0
18. A deaf student will academically progress in the regular classroom if they have a cochlear implant (a surgically inserted device that allows a deaf person to hear).	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. All of a special education student's needs can be fulfilled in the regular classroom.	5	4	3	2	1	0

Please answer the following questions based upon your personal knowledge. This is only a survey. Please provide specific short answers.

1. How many special education classes have you attended? _____ in-services? _____

2. Briefly discuss your understanding of Public Law 94-142. _____

3. List some characteristics of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

4. If a student is having academic difficulty in your classroom, what should you do first?

5. If a student is exhibiting a behavioral problem in your classroom, what should you do first?

6. If a student has a motor disability, where should he/she be placed in the classroom?

7. If you expect to have an inclusion classroom what method(s) of communication will you plan to be using with the special education teacher: collaboration, consultation, or both? _____ Whom do you expect to accompany these students (ex. Special Education Teacher, paraprofessional, no one, other)? _____

8. What information should you be able to find in a student's IEP?

9. Do you feel as though you were adequately trained to address all aspects of a special education student's needs (academically, physically, & socially)? (yes or no) _____

If not, please mark your areas of concern on a scale of 1-5 with greatest concern being 1 and least concerned being 5.

_____ Teaching methods accommodation	_____	Classroom
_____ Socialization with peers disabilities	_____	Physical
_____ Visual disabilities disabilities	_____	Auditory
_____ Learning disabilities	_____	Personality traits
_____ Recognition of different disabilities procedures	_____	Consultation
_____ Or disorders paraprofessional(s)	_____	Proper

_____	Collaboration of procedures	_____	Proper
_____	equipment		
_____	Accessibility	_____	Sufficiently
_____	trained personnel		
_____	Correct placement (inclusion, etc.)	_____	Self image
_____	Other		

10. What troubles you the most about having a student with a disability included in your classroom? _____

11. Do you wish that you had received additional information on dealing with students who have special needs? _____ if so, what areas do you feel should be focused on (ex. academics, socialization, recognition, etc.)? _____

12. As a professional educator, will you seek additional information in regards to special needs students or special education (whether through coursework or in-service training)? Please mark the one that applies:

- _____ None at all
- _____ Rarely (1 or 2 in-services)
- _____ To some extent (3 or more in-services)
- _____ Somewhat (1 or 2 college courses)
- _____ Extensive (3 or more college courses)

13. According to IDEA, a student is to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Do you feel that special education students should be mainstreamed into the regular classroom (full inclusion of the student)? _____ Why or why not? _____

Please write any additional comments in the area below: