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**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE
ENVIRONMENT PROVISION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH
DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA) FOR SECONDARY
STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES ON GUAM**

by

Nieves P. Flores

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam. The research questions for the study addressed the following areas: (a) perceptions of the definition of LRE, (b) factors influencing the implementation of LRE, and (c) determination of LRE in relation to the national trends and literature.

This research utilized the qualitative method of collecting and analyzing data that included interviews and review of written documents. Parents and school personnel from the secondary schools, involved in the implementation of the least restrictive environment, were interviewed to obtain their perception of the definition of LRE and the factors influencing its implementation. The responses of the interviews were triangulated with information from randomly selected Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and placement rates for secondary students with learning disabilities from the 1995-96 to the 1999-2000 school years.

A summary of the responses by school personnel to the question related to the definition of LRE resulted in the following: (a) least restrictive environment refers to the needs of the child, (b) least restrictive environment refers to ensuring access to education for the child, (c) least restrictive environment addresses both access to the general education classroom as well as the individual needs of the child, and (d) least restrictive environment refers to the rights of the child to an education. School personnel also identified seven factors as having an influence in its implementation: (a) IDEA requirement of 1997 related to access and progress in the general curriculum, (b) federal

policy, (c) DOE structure and educational delivery system, (d) advocacy, (e) due process and litigations, (f) preparation of individuals involved with the implementation of LRE, and (g) values and beliefs. With the parents, the majority of them indicated they were not familiar with the term least restrictive environment. For the parents, the following were identified as having an influence on the implementation of LRE: (a) the distribution of funds, (b) advocacy, (c) due process and litigations, (d) preparation of individuals responsible for the implementation of LRE, and (e) values and beliefs. School personnel and parents identified the administrator and the consulting resource teacher (CRT) as the individuals most influential in ensuring the implementation of LRE.

A review of the IEPs for the past five years revealed that students with learning disabilities have been placed in more restrictive settings as compared with the national average. IEP committees often did not consider the continuum of placement or, when they are considered, the continuum begins with the resource room. IEPs lacked evidence to support the placement into more restrictive settings due to unsatisfactory results in the general education classroom even with the provision of supplementary aids and services to meet the individual needs of the child.

In conclusion, it is evident that school personnel and parents responsible for the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) do not have a clear understanding of the LRE requirement. In addition, the review of the IEPs and placement rates revealed that Guam secondary schools indicated a preference towards the placement of secondary students with learning disabilities in more restrictive settings. This implies the need for training for school personnel.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the memory of my father, along with my mother who continues to encourage me in my educational endeavors, for instilling in me the value of an education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is to acknowledge all my family and friends who have supported me during the completion of this final document. Thank you, Tom and Maria, for being patient with me during the writing and completion of this document. Without both your support and understanding, it would have been impossible to survive through it all. To my mother, I appreciated the extra hands and the encouraging words. Lastly, to all my friends and colleagues both within and outside the University of Guam, thank you for putting up with me these past three and a half years and for the continued harassment to continue to the end. Thank you all for listening during the good times and the bad times. Lastly, I would like to thank all my committee members, Drs. Ammer, DonMoyer, and Miller for their knowledge and guidance throughout this process. Their continued words of encouragement have brought me to this point today. Dr. Ammer, I could not have asked for a better advisor or chairperson. Your belief in me helped me along this sometimes lonely and unbearable journey.

The activity, which is the subject of this report, has been authorized by the Guam Department of Education. However, the opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the Department, and no official endorsement by the Guam Department of Education or the Government of Guam should be inferred. The author accepts full responsibility for the contents of this document.

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Chapter I The Problem

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), previously named, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA). It is focused primarily on secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, as this is the largest disability category receiving special education services on Guam and the rest of the United States. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) background of the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) research questions, (d) importance of the study, (e) definition of terms, and (f) limitations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background of the Study

Prior to the passage of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the major issue regarding individuals with disabilities was the provision of an appropriate education. For some, the issue focused on access to an education. The priority was on what and how to teach rather than on where to teach. For a majority of students with learning disabilities, the assumption was made that their needs were being met in the general education classroom (Stainback & Stainback, 1991). As the federal, state, and local governments enacted legislation addressing issues related to service delivery, the focus shifted to other areas. With additional research regarding the issues

above and meeting the needs of this unique high-incidence population, questions were raised about the current service delivery system's adequacy to meet the needs of the students (Will, 1986). The service models developed in the early 70's provided examples for the legislation to follow.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.) was passed into law. This act was later reauthorized and amended in 1990 as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.). The law required that every state and territory receiving funds under the Act make available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to eligible children and youth with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21.

In June 1997, President Clinton signed into law the 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A hallmark of this amendment was the strengthening of the participation and involvement of children with disabilities in academic and nonacademic environments with their nondisabled peers. The least restrictive mandate states:

that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular

classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, Section 300.551, page 12457-58).

The law required that each public agency ensure that a continuum of alternative placements be available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services. This continuum requirement included the following placements: “instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions and the provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement” (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, Section 300.551, page 12458). In selecting the least restrictive, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that consideration be given to any potential harmful effect on the student or on the quality of services that he or she needs and that a student with a disability not be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

In the literature, there was an implication that the law implied a preference for instruction in the general education classroom and many professionals as well as parents have interpreted this mandate to mean that all children are to receive instruction in the general education classroom (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Stainback & Stainback,

1991; Gartner & Lipsky, 1991). This concept and belief had surfaced as the concept generally referred to as inclusion. Inclusion was defined as “the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe handicaps, in their neighborhood school, in age-appropriate general education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child and teacher) both to assure the child’s success in academic, behavioral, and social, and to prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of society” (National Center on Educational Restructuring & Inclusion, 1994). To create a challenge to schools in the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA, many debates (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Meyen & Skirtic, 1995; Cramer & Ellis, 1996) had arisen as to whether inclusion is synonymous with the LRE requirement. Mickley (1999) stated that a policy of full inclusion for all students with disabilities endangers the intent of the LRE and, therefore, the delivery of an appropriate education based on the needs of the student.

Problem Statement

Since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (formally known as EHCA) in 1975, the U.S. Department of Education was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that states and outlying areas complied with the provisions and intent of the Act. Their role was and continues to be that of monitoring the implementation of IDEA while the states and outlying areas were charged with monitoring the local school districts’ implementation of the Act. Since 1978, “every state had been visited at least once” (National Council on Disability, January 2000) by OSEP.

After each visit, OSEP issued monitoring reports and worked with each state to develop corrective action plans and address areas of noncompliance.

To underscore the U.S. Department of Education's responsibility to monitor and enforce implementation of the Act, the law clarifies DoED's authority to invoke sanctions against noncompliance states. . . . Withholding 'in part' and referral to the Department of Justice were clarified in IDEA '97 as explicit enforcement options available to DoED in the event of noncompliance by U.S. and outlying areas. (National Council on Disability, January 2000).

During the week of March 7, 1997, the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), conducted an on-site review of the Guam Department of Education's (GDOE) implementation of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that specifically addressed programs and services for students with disabilities ages 3 through 21. The purpose of the review was to determine whether GDE met its responsibility in ensuring that its educational programs for children with disabilities were being administered in a manner consistent with the requirements of Part B of IDEA. The OSEP report included a finding of noncompliance regarding placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE noncompliance finding had been a continuous problem that was previously cited in the GDOE's 1992 monitoring report. At that time, OSEP found that regular education placement with supplementary aids and services and resource room placement were not available as continuum options

for high school students with emotional disabilities in Guam. The 1997 findings stated that the GDOE did not always meet its responsibility under Section 300.550(a) of the IDEA regulations. This section of IDEA required that each educational agency ensure that schools remove a student from the regular educational environment only when the nature and severity of the student's disability was such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, Section 300.550(b)(2)), and that the various alternative placements included under Section 300.551 of the regulations were available and considered to the extent necessary to implement the student's IEP. During this monitoring visit to Guam, OSEP also discovered that special education in a full-time regular education environment is not considered as a placement option for all students with disabilities in the schools visited by OSEP (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Guam Monitoring Report, 9/8/97).

The finding on Guam is symptomatic of broader service delivery problems across the U.S. and outlying areas regarding meeting the least restrictive requirement. In *Back to School on Civil Rights* (National Council on Disability [NCD], 2000), the National Council on Disability cited that only 28% or 16 states were found to be in compliance with the LRE requirement. The report provided data regarding noncompliance of the LRE requirement from 1988 to 1997. Table 1 provides an example of the trend of noncompliance of the LRE requirement. It is clear from the Guam monitoring visits and the NCD report of 2000 that the implementation of the least restrictive environment

continues to be a problem area for those responsible for its administration. However, the factors involved in noncompliance or in compliance had not been thoroughly examined on the local level. A recent study of placements in mainland settings by Hasazi, Johnson, Ligget, and Schattman (1994) reported several factors that influenced

Table 1 States Found in Noncompliance with Least Restrictive Environment Provision of IDEA

State	Start of Noncompliance	Continued Noncompliance
California	7/5/88	2/5/96
Illinois	5/23/91	2/21/96
New York	12/14/83	9/10/96
Oregon	7/5/88	11/15/93
Texas	3/11/87	9/16/97

Note: National Council on Disability (January 2000). *Back to School on Civil Rights: Advancing the Federal Commitment to Leave No Child Behind*. Report to the President, January 2, 2000, pp.140-145 . Washington, D.C: National Council on Disability.

placement in the LRE. These factors included; (a) finance, (b) organization, (c) parent advocacy, (d) implementers, (e) knowledge and values, and (f) state/local context. The individuals interviewed in the study by Hasazi, et al (1994) reported that resources were critical to implementation as intended by IDEA. Without the resources, the participants indicated that the range of options for placement in the general education classroom setting would not have been possible. Lastly, the use of litigation was often used as the “action of last resort” as reported by the researchers to ensure the compliance of placement in the least restrictive environment.

The least restrictive environment mandate under federal law has been in existence for over 25 years. Guam, similar to other U.S. and outlying areas, continues to be

challenged with implementing a service delivery system for secondary students with learning disabilities in order to meet their unique needs. In order to meet these needs under the federal and local mandates, “there must be a conscious and effective leadership effort at the federal, state, and local levels” (McNulty, Connolly, Wilson, and Brewer, 1996, p.160). There was a need to examine the service delivery models on a local level in regards to the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A qualitative investigation of Guam’s educational system provided more insight into the depth of issues presently needing focus and clarification across the country. It was the intent of this study to examine on Guam, the perceptions administrators, general and special educators, and parents have had about the least restrictive environment requirement and the factors that have influenced their selection of a service delivery model for secondary students with learning disabilities to meet their individual needs. It was hoped that markers and research foundation emerged that would provide educators the leadership to assist other departments of education to embellish products that more effectively addresses the intent of the least restrictive environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 has been implemented on the island of Guam for secondary students with learning disabilities.

Research Questions

1. How do individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, perceive the definition of the least restrictive environment?
2. What factors influence the determination of the least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
3. How is the least restrictive environment determined for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
4. How do the perceptions and practices in the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research, or intent of the least restrictive environment?

Importance of the Study

In order to continue to receive funding under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico (hereafter referred to as U.S.) and the outlying areas (includes Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the Freely Associated States) were to ensure that the requirements of IDEA were complied with both at the state and local level. The findings of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the National Council on Disability (NCD) both revealed that a majority of the U.S. and outlying areas were not complying specifically with the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement. As a recipient of federal funds under the IDEA, Guam was required to comply with the LRE requirement. Since its last monitoring visit by the OSEP, Guam had to implement corrective actions to demonstrate compliance of this requirement of

IDEA. However, it was not merely an issue of compliance with mandates. Congress, in Part A of the 1997 amendments to IDEA, stated that the purpose of such mandates was to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living. It is hoped that compliance of such requirements leads to an appropriate service delivery system for students with disabilities.

Definitions of Terms Used in the Study

Specific learning disability. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (Assistance to State for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.7 (c) (9)). In addition, the federal regulations provided specific criteria for determining eligibility as having a learning disability.

. . . (a) A team may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if:

(1) The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age

and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, if provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels; and (2) The team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas:

- (i) Oral expression.
- (ii) Listening comprehension.
- (iii) Written expression.
- (iv) Basic reading skill.
- (v) Reading comprehension.
- (vi) Mathematics calculation.
- (vii) Mathematics reasoning.

(b) The team may not identify a child as having a specific learning disability if the severe discrepancy between ability and achievement is primarily the result of-

- (1) A visual, hearing, or motor impairment;
- (2) Mental retardation;
- (3) Emotional disturbance; or

(4) Environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. (Assistance to State for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.541 (a) (b)).

Implementation. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the definition given in *The Oxford Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus*. As defined in the Oxford Dictionary (1997), implementation means to carry out, execute or accomplish.

Inclusion. In this study, any reference to inclusion is defined as such: “the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe impairments, in the neighborhood school, in age-appropriate general education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child and teacher) both to assure the child’s success—academic, behavioral, and social—and to prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of the society” (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996, p.763).

TASH’s Definition of Inclusive Education. Definition of inclusion begins with the educational and moral imperatives that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms and that they receive the supports and services necessary to benefit from their education in general education settings. Inclusive education is based upon current understandings about how all children and young people are educated, and embraces an acceptance of all children into the school community as active, fully participating members. A commitment to inclusive education views diversity as the norm assures effective teaching and necessary supports to each child in the general education setting.

Full Inclusion. Full inclusion means that all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, will be in a regular classroom/program full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2000).

Mainstreaming. The practice of placing students with disabilities part-time in a general education classroom to the maximum extent that the student can successfully interact with peers and the curricula, while maintaining pull-out specialized instruction and related support services (Mickley, 1999).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). P.L. 105-17, the 1997 amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly known as the P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The federal legislation that mandates a free appropriate public education for children with disabilities. When cited, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act refer to the 1997 amendment unless otherwise indicated.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The office of the U.S. Department of Education that administers and monitors the compliance of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Guam Educational System. Guam is an island in the Pacific and is an unincorporated territory of the United States. The Department of Education is the lead agency for all funds received under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The department functions as a unitary system. It is both the state educational agency (SEA) and the local educational agency (LEA) as defined in P.L. 105-17.

Limitations

This study was limited to secondary school students with learning disabilities on the island of Guam. Though the geography of the study was limited, the results provides individuals in leadership positions, who are responsible for the implementation of the least restrictive environment, strategies for meeting the individual needs of students through appropriate service delivery. In addition, it is conceivable that the findings would easily be transferable to all other disabilities since the mandate for the least restrictive environment is not limited to students with disabilities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

Chapter I provided an overview of the problems surrounding the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This chapter also included the purpose of the study, which was to gather information about the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of IDEA for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam and the research questions guiding the data collection. In addition to the “why” and “what” of the study, this chapter also defined the terms used throughout the study in order to ensure there is a common understanding of the language used in the next four chapters and the limitations of the study.

In Chapter II, the review of literature covered the legislative history of the LRE provision of IDEA and federal mandates and policy related to LRE. In addition, the

literature review includes a clear definition of learning disabilities, the disability category focused on in this study, and previous studies related to the implementation of LRE and placement practices. Lastly, the review of literature examines practices related to special education policy implementation and the future vision and leadership related to least restrictive environment.

Chapter II Review of Literature

Introduction

Since its initial enactment in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) had been a challenge to state and local educational agencies across the country (National Council on Disability, 2000). The reauthorization of the IDEA, as P.L. 105-17, in 1997, strengthened the provision of a service delivery model that emphasized two explicit intent of the mandate: (a) the involvement and progress of the student with a disability in the general curriculum, and (b) the education of students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers. Despite the continued increase in federal funding for administrative and direct services, technical assistance, and other discretionary programs, the ability of states to comply with these intentions of IDEA has failed to become a reality (National Council on Disability, 2000). The Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP's) frequent monitoring of the states also has not had much impact on compliance. In addition, there has been an extraordinary growth in the percentage of children receiving special education, costs of special education have expanded over the years, and the focus has been on process rather than on outcomes (Horn & Tynan, 2000).

In this study, the researcher hoped to gain some insight that would assist in closing the gap between policy and practice that go beyond compliance. The purpose of this study was to examine how the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the IDEA is implemented on the island of Guam for secondary students with learning

disabilities. This literature review begins with an overview of the legislative history of the mandates for the provision of special education as it gives us a picture of the continued struggles and challenges to implementation of a service delivery system that appropriately meets the individual needs of the students with disabilities. These struggles and challenges were symptomatic across the country as well as in the Pacific regions. To follow this section, the researcher identified the specific section of the federal statute and its implementing regulation applicable to the least restrictive environment in order to increase the reader's understanding of the LRE provision, which was the subject of this study. While the IDEA included numerous provisions, this study focused primarily on the least restrictive environment provision of the law as it was implemented by the state education agencies. The researcher also reviewed the origin of this provision. To follow this section, a brief overview of the literature on how individuals in the field had interpreted the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA was provided by the researcher. By providing this information, the researcher concluded that the provision itself as given in the statute and regulations did not necessarily ensure a common understanding by professionals and/or parents. The literature review also includes information on how the least restrictive environment was implemented in other jurisdictions and the factors influencing policy implementation. To provide a futures perspective of where service delivery should lead, the researcher reviewed predictions made by professionals in the field on a vision for an appropriate service delivery system for students with disabilities.

In summary, this researcher's review covered the following topics: (a) history of special education legislation, (b) federal statute mandating the least restrictive

environment, (c) federal regulations related to the least restrictive environment, (d) history of least restrictive environment service delivery system, (e) definition of least restrictive environment, (f) national placement rate data, (g) case law related to least restrictive environment, (h) implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA, (i) general implementation of policy, and (j) future directions regarding service.

Legislative History of Special Education

The roots of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 emerged with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of (ESEA) passed in 1965. For the next three years, the amendments and regulatory policies of the 1965 ESEA provided the foundation for the early special education legislation. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 91-230, 1970) amendments included provisions for a core grant program for local education agencies that were integrated into Part B of the law. Part B is the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that established funding for administrative and direct services for students with disabilities. Almost a decade after its initial roots, the Education Amendments (P.L.93-280, 1974), included Title VI, which was the Education of the Handicapped Amendments of 1974, which provided an appropriate education for all children with disabilities. This was the first time that an appropriate education for children with disabilities was outlined in a statute. The culmination of these minute steps eventually led to the passing of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All handicapped Children Act of 1975, which mandated the following: (a) a free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities, (b) due process rights for parents and children with disabilities, (c) individualized education programs (IEPs),

and (d) least restrictive environment. Through public hearings, congressional debates, and regulatory needs, the original legislation was expanded by several amendments (Refer to Table 2 for a complete listing of special education related statutes).

Eleven years after the passing of P.L. 94-142, another significant statute, P.L. 99-457, was enacted to expand the age group to the younger population. This statute, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, mandated services for preschoolers (ages 3-5) and established the Part H program to assist states in the development of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and statewide system of early intervention services for infants from birth through two (Kupper, 1997). Four years later, P.L. 101-476, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, renamed the law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Finally, P.L. 105-17, the IDEA Amendments of 1997, reauthorized the IDEA and is the current law which mandates services for children with disabilities from birth through 21 (Refer to Table 2).

Based on the chronology of the statutes described in this chapter, related to the provision of special education services under the IDEA, one can conclude that the origin of the mandate for student with disabilities arose out of mandates for elementary and secondary students. Initially, it appears as if the amended statutes described above, promoted more inclusive services and a single service delivery system. Over time, a secondary service delivery was established as a separate system from the general education classroom.

Table 2 Legislative History of Special Education

Statute Number	Year Enacted	Name of Statute	Comments
P.L. 89-10	1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act	Statutory basis for early special education legislation
P.L. 91-230	1970	Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendments of 1970 – also included Title VI, the Education of the Handicapped Act	Established a core grant program for local education agencies, now known as Part B, and also authorized a number of discretionary programs.
P.L. 93-280	1974	The Education Amendments of 1974	One of the mandates included the provision of an appropriate education for all children with disabilities.
P.L. 94-142	1975	The Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975	Mandated the following: (a) free appropriate public education, (b) ensured due process rights, and (c) mandated the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and placement in the least restrictive environment.
P.L. 99-457	1986	Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986	Mandated services for Preschoolers and established the Part H program to assist states in the development of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and statewide system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers.
P.L. 101-476	1990	The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990	(a) Renamed the law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (b) reauthorized and expanded discretionary programs, (c) mandated transition services, (d) defined assistive technology devices and services, and (d) added autism and traumatic brain injury to the list of categories of children and youth eligible for special education and related services.
P.L. 102-119	1992	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1992	The primary focus of this Act was Part H that addressed the Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Program.
P.L. 105-17	1997	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendment of 1997	This is the current law that strongly emphasized the education of students in the general education classroom learning the general curriculum.

Definition of Learning Disabilities

This study focused specifically on the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for secondary students with learning disabilities. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that there is a common understanding of the definition of such a disability. Meyen and Skirtic (1995) stated that defining learning disabilities was difficult. The definition of the term has been debated over the years and has been under scrutiny by professionals in the field. However, the federal government had adopted the definition developed by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities and is the definition used today. The definition is as follows:

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous systems dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient, in appropriate instruction), they are not the result of these conditions or influences (Meyen and Skirtic, 1995).

In addition, the federal definition also included a criteria factor. According to the implementing regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),

A team may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if:

- (1) The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in paragraph (a) (2) of this section, when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels; and
- (2) The team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas: (i) oral expression; (ii) listening comprehension; (iii) written expression; (iv) basic reading skills; (v) reading comprehension; (vi) mathematics calculation; or (vii) mathematics reasoning. (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.7(c)(9)).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, any reference to students with learning disabilities includes components of the definition above as implemented by the Guam Department of Education.

Federal Statute on the Least Restrictive Environment

In order to understand the least restrictive environment provision, it is necessary to first be aware of how P.L. 94-142 came into existence and the driving force behind it.

Stainback and Stainback (1992) provided an overview of the stimuli that changed the world for students with disabilities. Prior to P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act, millions of children with disabilities were provided inappropriate education while others were provided no education. For students with learning disabilities, the former was applicable to them. Parents and advocates of these students were screaming that violations of the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments were being violated. The provision of inappropriate programs and for some, lack of programs and services, was not just an educational issue, but also a civil rights issue. As stated above in the history of special education, there were minute steps taken with other legislation to correct this injustice. However, those earlier legislations did not serve its purpose.

P.L. 93-280, the Education Amendments of 1974, mandated that states adopt a goal of providing "full educational opportunities to all handicapped children." (Stainback and Stainback, 1992, p.46). However, this did not resolve the issues of exclusion and provision of appropriate programs. With the passing of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, two major provisions, along with others, which were intended to protect the civil rights of students with disabilities, were enacted. (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). The first was the least restrictive environment and the second was the provision of a free appropriate public education. In the wording of the section of least restrictive environment provision, it is implied that consideration must first be made for the general education classroom. However, the use of the word also implied that the general education classroom might not be appropriate for all children.

The provision in the original legislation was reaffirmed in the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Once again, the focus was on providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) “prescribes, first, the determination of appropriate education and related services and only subsequently, that the least restrictive environment for the delivery of those services be determined, in all instances, on a case-by-case basis” (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995, p.3). Least restrictive environment is not synonymous with mainstreaming and inclusion (Lovitt, 1997). However, least restrictive environment, mainstreaming, and integration are often “misrepresented, misinterpreted, and misused both in literature and practice” (Salisbury, 1990).

In P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the least restrictive environment provision, “referred to educational instruction that provided a reasonable expectation of benefit from instruction and that was based on the child’s individual needs” (Stainback & Stainback, 1992, p.46). The law required that all handicapped children “to the maximum extent appropriate” shall be educated “with children who are not handicapped.” The states and outlying areas (Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the Freely Associated States) were required to establish procedures ensuring that

... special classes, separate schools, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes

with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 U.S.C. §1400, et seq.).

In 1997, this provision was maintained in the amendment. The least restrictive environment provision read as follows:

. . . to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, §1412(a)(5)(A)).

The historical development of the statute, related to the specific provision that was the subject of this study, is of particular importance as it signifies that the provision had not changed over time. However, despite this lack of change, educational agencies have not yet complied in a manner that was intended by Congress upon the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975.

Federal Special Education Policy on Least Restrictive Environment

Upon enactment of a statute, there is often a government policy to develop and implement final regulations or policy that interprets the statute. Therefore, there was a need to discuss the implementing regulations or policy of the current special education

statute that was finalized in March 1999 despite the fact that the majority of the provisions of the 1997 federal special education statute went into effect immediately after enactment.

The 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) repeated verbatim the primary requirement for meeting the least restrictive provision. Section 300.550 reads as follows:

... except as provided in §300.311(b) and (c), a State shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the State has in effect policies and procedures to ensure that it meet the requirements of §§300.550-300.556.

Each public agency shall ensure:

- (1) That to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily(Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.550).

The above statement is followed by the continuum of alternative placement requirements that reads:

- (a) each public agency shall ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.**
- (b) The continuum required in paragraph (a) of this section must (1) Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under §300.26 (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions); and (2) Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement. (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.551 (a)(b)).**

In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability,

. . . each public agency shall ensure that:

(a) The placement decision:

- (1) Is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options; and**
- (2) Is made in conformity with the LRE provisions of this subpart, including §§300.550-300.554;**

(b) The child's placement-

- (1) Is determined at least annually;
- (2) Is based on the child's IEP; and
- (3) Is as close as possible to the child's home;
- (c) Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled; (d) In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs; and (e) a child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum. (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; Final Regulations/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, March 12, 1999, §300.552).

Least Restrictive Environment Case Law

In this review of the literature, the focus was on court cases in the Supreme Court and in the Circuit Courts. For the Supreme Court, the least restrictive environment issue had not been directly addressed. On the other hand, the federal circuit courts had had differences in opinions, but they also had some similarities. The differences were a result of the differing factors in each case. Thomas and Rapport (1998) identified four major standards in which each of the cases fell under based on the determination of the decisions made by the courts. The standards are: (a) qualified deference, (b) portability, (c) inclusion, and (d) balancing (Thomas and Rapport, 1998).

Qualified Deference. The most well known case that involved the qualified deference standard is the Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District Education v. Rowley (*Rowley*, 1982, pp.3041-3042). This case did not directly address the issue of least restrictive environment placement. In this case, the Supreme Court concluded that if a child was receiving some benefit as a result of the provision of supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom, then a free appropriate public education had been provided and would have been considered the least restrictive environment. The qualified deference standard was applied in which the courts left the issue of implementing educational programs to the expertise of the educational system. Other federal circuit court cases had followed this standard (*G.D. v. Westmoreland School District*, 1991; *Kevin G. v. Granston School Committee*, 1997; *Schreiber v. Ridgewood Board of Education*, 1997).

Portability Standard. The second standard utilized by federal circuit courts was known as the portability standard. This standard acknowledged the need to place students in more restrictive settings other than those provided in the school the child would attend if he or she did not have a disability. The one federal case in the sixth circuit court in 1983 was the *Roncker v. Walter* case (*Roncker*, 1983). This case involved the placement of a 9-year-old child with severe mental retardation in which the school proposed a placement other than the regular public school. The sixth circuit court ruled that “benefits to the children were considered greater in the more restrictive placements offered by the school district” (Thomas and Rapport, 1998). Decisions in the fourth and eighth circuits followed in the footsteps of the standard established by the *Roncker* decision (*DeVries ex rel. DeBlaay v. Fairfax County School Board*, 1989 and

A.W. ex rel. N.W. v. Northwest R-1 School District, 1987). Table 3 provides a listing of the circuit courts with the states under their jurisdictions.

Inclusion Standard. This standard was established by the fifth circuit court in 1989 by the *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* case (*Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education*, 1989). This case established the inclusion standard by rejecting the portability and qualified deference standard. As a result of this case, the courts established its own set of questions in order to determine the least restrictive environment. The questions are: (a) Can education in the general education classroom, with the use of supplementary aids and services, be achieved satisfactorily?, and (b) if it cannot, has the school placed the child with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate? This standard was applied in other circuits such as the third circuit court in the case of *Oberti v. Board of Education of Clementon School District* in 1993 (*Oberti v. Board of Education of Clementon School District*, 1993).

Balancing Standard. The last standard of determining the least restrictive environment based on the court decisions was developed as a result of a case in the ninth circuit. The case is the *Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education v. Rachael Holland* (*Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachael H.*, 1994). This case was heard in 1994 and was known as the Rachael H. case. Though it was one of the four standards, it was only utilized by jurisdictions that fell within the ninth circuit. In cases brought before this circuit, the standard required that the courts find a balance between the benefits and the costs of educating a child with a disability. The questions addressed by the ninth circuit in this standard included:

1. What are the educational benefits available to the child in a regular

classroom supplemented with appropriate aid and services, as compared with the educational benefits of a special education classroom?

2. Are there nonacademic benefits of interaction with children who are not disabled?
3. What effect does the child's presence have on the teacher and other children in the classroom?, and
4. What are the costs of educating the child in the regular education environment?

There are two common elements between the inclusion and balancing standard. Both standards involved consideration of the adverse effect on the education of others while considering the educational benefits for the child with a disability in the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services. However, the balancing standards required that IEP teams consider not only the academic benefits, but the nonacademic ones as well. The major difference between the two standards is that the balancing standard's test requires that the IEP teams consider the cost of educating the child in the general education classroom. In comparing the inclusion standard with the balancing standard, it is obvious that there are some similarities and some differences between the two. Though the two standards had similar questions, in the *Rachael H.* case there was no mention of the placement with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. The *Daniel R.R.* case, on the other hand, did not address the consideration of cost as in the *Rachael H.* court decision.

For the purpose of this study, the *Rachael H.* standard had not been applied with an individual with learning disabilities. However, the related cases have upheld both

general education and segregated placements (Clyde K. v. Puyallup School District, No. 3, 1994; Poolaw v. Bishop, 1995; Seattle School District, No. 1 v. B.S., 1996). The Daniel R.R. had been similar. It, too, had been limited to disabilities other than children with learning disabilities. In a review of all the case regarding the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, very few cases dealt with children with learning disabilities in the federal circuit courts (See Table 3 for list of states under respective circuit court). Out of 48 federal circuit court decisions, only seven or 15% of the total number of cases addressed children with learning disabilities (Thomas and Rapport, 1998).

Crockett and Kaufman (1999) provided a good overview, in *The Least Restrictive Environment-Its Origin and Interpretations in Special Education*, of the case law related to the least restrictive environment requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The authors summarized the outcomes of the various cases and identified the themes as a result of the cases. The themes are as follows:

1. Focus is on the needs of the child;
2. Placement in the neighborhood school is not specifically mandated;
3. The federal mandate does not require that the district try a general education setting with a child before placing them in a separate setting;
4. In determining the least restrictive placement, consideration must be based on a balance between academic and social benefits;
5. Students with disabilities in elementary schools are more apt to be placed in general education classrooms;
6. Placement in the least restrictive environment must also consider the effect

of disruptive students on the learning of other students;

- 7. For students with health needs, courts have considered environments that support the success of these students; and lastly,**
- 8. The maximization and pooling of resources is justified in order to provide services for students with low-incidence disabilities and may require placement in a more restrictive setting.**

Table 3 Circuit Court Regions

Circuit Court	States within the Region
1 st	Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico
2 nd	New York, Connecticut, Vermont
3 rd	Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virgin Islands
4 th	Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia
5 th	Missouri, Louisiana, Texas
6 th	Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee
7 th	Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana
8 th	Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota
9 th	Washington, Oregon, California, New York, Montana, Idaho, Arizona, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
10 th	Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma
11 th	Alabama, Georgia, and Florida

Definition and Understanding of Least Restrictive Environment

In an earlier paragraph of this literature review, the definition of least restrictive environment (LRE) was given verbatim from the statute of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its implementing regulations. Despite the inclusion of the definition, professionals and parents have found the definition to be confusing and had been interpreted in various ways (Meyen & Skirtic, 1995, Crockett, 2000). Bateman and Chard (1995) described the definition as a “complex concept that includes both absolute mandates and qualified placements. The least restrictive environment is the decision that results from following a set of procedural requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (p. 294). They implied that educational personnel only needed to implement procedures as given in the implementing regulations and one would arrive naturally with placement in the least restrictive environment.

For some individuals, least restrictive environment is synonymous with segregated settings. They have used the term mainstreaming synonymously with least restrictive environment even though the law makes no mention of such a term (Villa and Thousand, 1995). For others, inclusion defined least restrictive environment by geography. It was defined as a placement of a student with a disability in a general education classroom for the purpose of social interaction or in an academic or special subject instruction with nondisabled peers (Crockett and Kaufman, 1999, p.27). Pitasky (1996), on the other hand, states that the term is “deliberately brief and vague and left open to interpretation. Therefore, room for confusion”(p.1).

Kaufman and Hallahan (1995) gave us a clearer picture of the definition or an understanding of the least restrictive environment provision. They stated that the IDEA prescribed first, the determination of appropriate education and related services, and only subsequently, that the least restrictive environment for the delivery of those services be determined, in all instances, on a case-by-case basis (p.3). Kaufman and Hallahan (1995) also emphasized the primary mandate of a free appropriate public education first to be followed by a service delivery model in the least restrictive environment. Crockett (2000) stated that the “legal meanings of a free appropriate public education and the least restrictive environment (LRE) remain unchanged but that the complexity of the dynamic LRE concept has defied consistent understanding and application”(p.45). To make things even more confusing, there is a lack of agreement over the purpose of the LRE requirement (Crockett, 2000). Therefore, how individuals understand and interpret the least restrictive environment provision is critical to implementation of the LRE policy that was the subject of this study.

Service Delivery Models

Prior to the passage of P.L. 94-142, emphasis was placed on merely providing students with disabilities an education. There was very little discussion on how to serve students and what types of delivery models would ensure academic and nonacademic benefits. However, as states began to mandate services for students with disabilities and guidelines for implementation, service delivery models started to emerge from the field.

The service delivery models that emerged prior to the enactment of P.L. 94-142 were (a) zero reject model (Lilly,1970), (b) Deno’s cascade model (Deno, 1970), and

(c) **Dunn's inverted pyramid (Dunn, 1973).** The zero reject model focused on placing a student in the general education classroom with no possibility of removal to any other placement. **Meyen and Skirtic (1995)** described the cascade system as proposed by **Deno (1970)**. In this model, there was a hierarchy of service options from the most segregated to the most integrated class placement. This was the most frequently used model and was the original mold of which other models have adapted the major point. In this model, a student was to be placed in a more restrictive setting and the goal was to move him or her as soon as possible to a less restrictive setting by going up the cascade. **Meyen and Skirtic(1995)** reported that it was the service model that aligned with the intent of P.L. 94-142.

Dunn (1973) translated **Deno's** cascade model into an operational service delivery plan. **Dunn (1973)** proposed four different types of students with 8 to 11 placement options. His purpose for such a plan was to provide information for schools to assist them in developing education plans and having criteria for placements.

Today the models may somewhat be termed differently. Some may equate the zero reject model as that which is advocated for by full inclusionists. While the **Dunn (1973)** and **Deno (1970)** models would be that proposed by those emphasizing least restrictiveness. Within the least restrictive model, one would include service delivery options as described by **Meyen and Skirtic (1995)**. It would include regular class placement, self-contained special class placement, part-time special class placement, resource room, class-within-a-class, resource center, itinerant teacher, consulting teacher, center (child, study, diagnostic, evaluation, prescriptive, and teaching), homebound instruction, and hospital instruction.

Though a service delivery model was proposed by full inclusionists or zero reject model, the Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Learning Disabilities, “cautioned that full inclusion in the general education classroom is not necessarily the best educational environment for all children with disabilities” (Meyen & Skirtic, 1995, p.203). This professional organization promoted that any type of placement in any service delivery model should be determined by the individual needs of the student through the IEP process. According to Crockett (2000), “placement decisions are to be child-centered, not system-centered and that the inconsistent terminology and clear communication about placement has hampered effective service delivery”(pp. 47-48).

Implementation of the Least Restrictive Provision of IDEA

Since the enactment of P.L. 94-142 and then recently the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, education officials, service providers, and parents have been confused as to implementation (Hasazii, Johnson, Liggett, and Schattman, 1994). Very few studies have been conducted to examine how the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is implemented either on a national or state level. The need to determine what influences the decision-making process of meeting this requirement is critical to its implementation.

One major study across the country was conducted to provide information to the research in this area. In a qualitative study, Hasazi et al. (1994) investigated the implementation of the least restrictive environment policy on a national level. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe factors and conditions that affected the implementation of the least restrictive environment. The authors were not interested in student outcomes as a result of their placement, but rather in the means used by states and

districts in implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The study was conducted from 1989 to 1992.

Using an analysis of placement rates about each of the fifty states conducted by Danielson and Bellamy (1989), the researchers selected six states to participate in the study. The six states were selected because of their approaches to implementing LRE as described in the analysis of placement rates by Danielson and Bellamy (1989). States were considered either high users or low users based on their usage of residential facilities, separate schools, and special classes. In addition to the state, two local districts were also selected from each state to participate in the study. The local districts were selected based on the recommendation of the state office. This resulted in a total of 18 sites. Of the 18, four of the sites were rural, two were suburban, and six were urban.

To gather data, Hasazi et al. (1994) conducted interviews with the use of a semi-structured protocol. The researchers designed the protocol with input from other experts such as members of the advisory board, the special education attorney, and state policy makers and practitioners. All interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed. Responses were coded and themes were generated from the transcription.

The major protocol question was related to the definition of least restrictive environment.

The responses to this question were then divided into three main categories:

1. LRE as a series of placement options along a continuum;
2. The need of the child as well as the capacity of the system should be considered when making decisions about LRE; and

3. LRE as the delivery of appropriate special education services in neighborhood schools (Hasazi et al., 1994).

In addition, the participants' responses to the factors, which they said were important or influential in the implementation of LRE, were broken down into six major areas. The six major factors were: (a) finance, (b) organization, (c) advocacy, (d) implementors, (e) knowledge and values, and (f) state/local context.

In conclusion, Hasazi et al. (1994) discovered that despite the identification of the six major factors, no one factor can be singled out as the most important factor. All factors contributed in some form or manner to the implementation of LRE. What was critical was the relationship between all the factors. The authors acknowledged that the leadership's perception of LRE at each site was also critical to implementing LRE and moving beyond what currently exists within that site. Their final conclusion was that factors changed from time to time and was highly dependent on circumstances beyond policies.

With the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as P.L. 105-217, the mandate for a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment was strengthened. States and outlying areas awaited the arrival of the regulations that they hoped would provide more guidance regarding the statute. However, despite the delay, states were required to implement most of the requirements of the statute upon enactment. This created a great challenge. Using a qualitative approach, Borden's (1998) study, conducted in New York, was designed to determine and examine the factors that influence the implementation of the least restrictive

environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The research questions addressed the following:

1. What was the profile of local implementation of early childhood special education in two selected counties within New York State?
2. What factors contributed to the understanding of how school districts within the selected counties implement the least restrictive provision for preschool children with disabilities?

Though this study focused on preschool children, there are implications in policy implementation for all levels.

Borden (1998) based her study on a national study conducted by Hasazi et al. (1994) described earlier in this section. The participants for the study were from two upstate-metropolitan counties in the state of New York. Selection was based on proximity of the county to one another. Within each county, individuals representing the following groups were targeted for interviews: (a) chairpersons of the preschool special education committees, (b) county representatives, (c) preschool special education directors, and (d) head start directors.

The researcher utilized a standardized open-ended interview format. For the interview protocol questions, Borden (1998) adapted with permission the questions utilized by Hasazi et al. (1994) that identified factors that influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision. Though, the national study focused on school-age children, the researcher was able to adapt the protocol questions without difficulty for applicability to preschool children. Prior to conducting the actual study, Borden (1998) conducted a pilot study with individuals in the same position similar to

participants in the actual study. The purpose of the pilot was to weed out any inappropriate questions. This resulted in the maintenance of thirteen of the original protocol questions. In conducting the interviews, the researcher recorded all responses. Data collection procedures were one of triangulation. It involved reviewing documents on placement data to support the first question on implementation profile.

The results of Borden's (1998) study were similar to those found in the national study. The majority of the participants (77%) defined least restrictive environment as a placement for children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible. The remaining 21% defined it "as a series of placement along a continuum ranging from least to more restrictive option" (Borden, 1998, p. 128). Two participants indicated that the disability must be considered when determining the least restrictive environment, while another individual stated that children with behavior disorders required a more restrictive environment. Another participant defined it as the "least amount of special education services that the child required in order to be successful in the classroom" (Borden, 1998, p.128).

The responses from the interviews conducted by Borden (1998) resulted in the identification of three major factors influencing the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The factors included (a) costs, (b) state policy, and (c) organization of the preschool special education committees. The responses across the four groups of participants were similar. State policy was considered a great influence in increasing the opportunities for preschoolers to be included in programs with their nondisabled peers. However, the opposite was found for costs. Many of the participants did not consider costs to be an issue. Others felt that

placement in more restrictive settings were considered as a cost-saving initiative. These factors were similar to those found in the Hasazi et al. (1994) national study.

There were several limitations to the Borden (1998) study. The study was limited to participants within two counties of New York State and therefore the results may only be generalizable to other counties within the state. In addition, the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision was only reviewed at the preschool level. The participants in the study did not include all the critical stakeholders such as parents, day care providers serving preschoolers, general education service providers, etc. Their inclusion would have provided a wider range of perceptions on the implementation of LRE.

The above studies reflected current research in the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Other studies were also conducted related to the least restrictive environment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This section of the review describes other studies that have addressed this issue.

Bienenstock (1992) conducted a study entitled *Least Restrictive Environment Policy and Procedure as it Relates to State Implementation in Special Education* to fulfill the dissertation requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy. The purpose of his study was to understand where states and territories were in regards to implementing the federal mandate of the least restrictive environment. The researcher's goal was to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What were each state's policies and procedures regarding the least restrictive environment in relation to the intent of 94-142?

2. What was the enrollment in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico by placement and handicapping condition in using the United States Department of Education classification of students for the 1988-89 school year?
3. What is the effect on least restrictive environment policies and procedures in each State and Territory by the United States Department of Education/Office of Special Education Programs monitoring practices, advocacy groups, due process hearings, the Office of Civil Rights and litigation?

The participants selected for the study included all the fifty states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico. Bienenstock (1992) requested copies of the following documents: (a) state regulations in special education, (b) state monitoring instrument and procedures, (c) state data collection policies and procedures, (d) state's special education enrollment for the 1988-89 school year, (e) federal monitoring report if applicable, and (f) reports or materials produced by advocacy or disability groups which may have impacted the implementation of the least restrictive environment policy. In addition to these documents, the researcher also made an open-ended statement regarding additional materials each state or territory wanted to make available that was related to least restrictive environment. Bienenstock (1992) also utilized the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE) office and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to obtain information that was not obtainable directly from the states and territories.

To analyze the data, the researcher compared the policies submitted with the federal mandate and regulations. A determination was made as to whether the specific state policy was congruent with federal policy. Other data was utilized to respond to the other research questions. Forty-three states and territories responded out of fifty-three. Out of the forty-three, the policies for over half of the states and territories had existing policies in regards to the implementation of the least restrictive environment. However, very few of the states had specific policies and procedures for ensuring its implementation. The policies for the most part were general and monitoring procedures were somewhat lenient. With regards to the collection of data, the data sent to OSEP were often inaccurate and the procedures for collecting and reporting of the data varied across the states and territories.

In conclusion, the study provided information related to the manner in which states implemented the LRE requirement. Implementation varied as a result of variability in policies and procedures and collection and reporting of data. The limitation to this study may have been due to the type of request made by the researcher. The cost of compiling and sending the volumes of data requested may have limited the type of information received even though five dollars was sent to each state and territory as an incentive to respond. There are some clear implications, the least of which, that states and territories require more technical assistance related to implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement.

The fourth study, by Stettner-Eaton (1989), utilized a qualitative research methodology to examine the implementation of the least restrictive environment for students with moderate and severe disabilities in the state of Maryland. The purpose was

to determine the reason why Maryland was utilizing more restrictive settings than other states in the country. This particular study examined the factors perceived by local education agencies to influence the least restrictive environment placement options for students with moderate and severe disabilities. The research question addressed by the study was: What factors influence the ability of a local education agency in the state of Maryland to implement the LRE provision for students with moderate and severe disabilities? Though the study had one major question, it had three subquestions: (a) what was the understanding of selected local special education administrators of the philosophical basis guiding the LRE provision and the legal requirements for its implementation for students with moderate and severe disabilities?, (b) what factors were perceived by selected local administrators to facilitate the implementation of the LRE provision for students with moderate and severe disabilities?, and (c) what factors were perceived by selected local administrators to impede the implementation of the LRE provision for students with moderate and severe disabilities? The study was a forum for evaluating a least restrictive environment project conducted by the state of Maryland.

In the Stettner-Eaton (1989) study, the number of participants for the study was 23 and included various special education personnel and/or their designee. The methodology utilized was person-to-person interviews with each of the participants. Only one participant refused to be interviewed in person, but agreed to a phone interview. The interview questions were open-ended. In addition to the interviews, other information was obtained to examine the extent of the implementation of LRE. The documents included: (a) data on total school population, (b) number of special education students by level of disability, per pupil expenditure, (c) number of special education centers

servicing students with moderate and severe disabilities and the year built/renovated, (d) number of students with moderate and severe disabilities in classrooms on general education campuses, (e) enrollment projections for the next five years, (f) number of schools at or below capacity attendance, and (g) policy document/position paper on LRE for students with moderate and severe disabilities. The purpose of collecting this data was to enrich the information from the interviews.

The use of demographics in the Stetter-Eaton (1989) study did not result in any discrepancy between the districts. Therefore, the information collected did not contribute to the findings. From the analysis of the interviews in this study, it seemed as if a large number of the participants did not have a clear understanding of LRE and how it differed from integration. In demonstrating understanding of the philosophical basis of LRE, most of the participants described the process of integration rather than providing a definition. Unlike studies that were conducted after this one, the approach to determining the participants' understanding of LRE was based on their understanding of integration. This seemed to imply that the researcher considered the terms to be synonymous.

In the Stettner-Eaton (1989) study, the participants used the term LRE and integration synonymously. They made no distinction between the two. LRE was referred to as "a placement or location of the educational setting, and integration, was what addresses programmatic issues"(p.106). Stettner-Eaton (1989) followed up the definition of LRE with the definition of integration. The responses fell into two categories:

1. Integration defined both globally and school specific; and
2. Integration defined as a process.

Stettner-Eaton (1989) concluded that the responses lacked specificity and a level of understanding of the least restrictive environment even though some of the responders mirrored the definition given in the federal regulations.

On the second part of the least restrictive environment issue, Stettner-Eaton (1989) identified three major factors on the local level that had facilitated the placement of students with moderate and severe disabilities into integrated educational settings. The three factors were: (a) attitudes, (b) size of the county, and (c) student performance. Attitudes were divided into four groups: (a) administrative, (b) building level, (c) parents, and (d) other. For some local educational agencies, attitudes were considered both a facilitator and an impediment to the implementation of least restrictive environment.

The second factor which facilitated the implementation of LRE was the size of the county. A finding was that districts with larger number of students were more apt to be flexible in making programmatic decisions (Stettner-Eaton, 1989). Lastly, student performance was identified as the third factor facilitating the LRE implementation.

In her study, Stettner-Eaton (1989) also identified factors that impeded the implementation of LRE at the local levels. The two major barriers were: (a) attitudes and (b) funding issues. For the local level, the categories under attitudes included: (a) administrators, (b) building level, (c) parental resistance, and (d) community pressures. Funding issues were divided into: (a) personnel and (b) facilities.

On the state level, Stettner-Eaton (1989) identified the following factors as impeding the implementation of LRE. The factors were divided into: (a) policy, (b) leadership, and (c) funding. Policy was divided into (a) lack of policy formulation, (b) definition of levels of services, (c) teacher/student ratios, and (d) monitoring and

evaluation process (pp. 133-135). Leadership, as an impeding factor, was related to the lack of the promotion of integration by those in leadership positions in addition to lack of communication with the service providers. The funding issue on the state level, as identified by Stettner-Eaton (1989), included two major areas: (a) funding related to facility modification and (b) lack of financial incentives.

In summary, Stetter-Eaton (1989) noted that there were a larger number of impediments rather than facilitators cited by participants throughout the interviews. These were listed above in the previous paragraphs. So what does this all mean? One thing was clear was that some professionals in the field did not have a good understanding of LRE and the intent of Congress upon the enactment of P.L. 94-142. This study was limited in that it only focused on a specific district and may not be generalizable to other areas. However, the implications for application to other disabilities may be made as the determination of LRE is not dependent on the child's disability, but rather on the unique needs of the child.

U.S. Office of Special Education (OSEP) Placement Delineation

For purposes of the discussion on placement rates, it is necessary to describe briefly the definitions of educational placement used by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The OSEP defines placement as location of where the student with a disability receives the majority of his or her instruction. In order for states and territories to submit a uniform set of data, the OSEP established placement categories to be used by them. A clear and consistent use of terminology related to placement of students with disabilities is important to understanding placement rates. The categories include:

1. Regular class,
2. Resource room,
3. Separate class,
4. Public separate facility,
5. Private separate facility,
6. Public residential facility,
7. Private residential facility,
8. Homebound/hospital environment,
9. Correctional facility, and
10. Private schools not placed or referred by public agencies.

The descriptions are described from least restrictive to most restrictive in Table 4. The OSEP currently still uses the term “regular class” versus “general education class.”

Placement Rates

Literature on the placement of students with disabilities and specifically on learning disabilities is limited. Danielson and Bellamy (1989) took the lead in analyzing the data contained in the U.S. Department of Education’s Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Using the data for the 1985-86 school year, the authors examined the state-to-state variability in use of alternative placements. The questions they posed as a result of the analysis included:

1. To what extent are students placed in environments that remove them from the regular education environment? and
2. What is the state-to-state variability in the use of those placements?

The source for the data were reports states and territories were required to submit which included a count of all students with disabilities, by type of placement, and disability category. The age brackets were broken down into aged 3-5, 6-11, 12-17, and 18-21. The six different placements addressed in the report included: (a) regular class, (b) resource room, (c) separate class, (d) separate day school, (e) separate residential school, and (f) home/hospital. A description of these placements are given in Table 4. The data was submitted each year to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Once the data was received, it was edited and verified. The data was also reviewed and compared from year to year to identify any fluctuations. If unusual fluctuations occur, states were requested to verify and explain. (Danielson and Bellamy, 1989).

To compare the state placement patterns, the researchers computed the cumulative placement rate. This was determined by dividing the state's number of special education students aged 6 through 17 years, who were served in a selected placement, by the state's total population in the age group. The analysis resulted in 44% of the students with disabilities served in resource rooms while 26% were served in regular classes. For students eligible to receive special education services, approximately 70% spend some time in the regular classroom. The remaining 24% spend their time within the typical school, but in segregated classes and the last 6% were educated in programs outside of the school they would attend if they did not have a disability. This added up to 94% of the students educated within a regular school building.

Table 4 Description of Placements

Placement Category	Description	Time Receiving Special Education and Related Services Outside of the Regular Classroom
Regular class	Placement for children with disabilities who receive the majority of their education in regular class.	Less than 21% of the school day.
Resource Room	Placement for children who receive services in resource room.	At least 21% of the school day, but no more than 60% of the school day.
Separate class	Placement for children who receive their education in a separate class. This placement does not refer to students who receive their education programs in public or private separate day or residential facilities.	More than 60% of the school day.
Public separate facility	Placement in public separate day school facilities	Greater than 50% of the school day in separate facilities
Private separate facility	Placement in private separate day school facilities at public expense.	Greater than 50% of the school day in private separate facility
Public residential facility	Placement in public residential facilities.	Greater than 50% of the school day.
Private residential facility	Placement in private residential facilities	Greater than 50% of the school day.
Homebound/Hospital Environment	Placement in homebound or hospital.	100% of the school day.
Correctional facility	Placement in a correctional facility. Counts for these students are duplicative. They would also be counted in one of the first eight categories.	Short-term detention facilities or correctional facilities 100% of the school day.
Private School, Not placed or referred by public agencies	Placement of students who have been enrolled by their parents or guardians in regular parochial or other private schools, and whose basic education is paid through private resources, and who receive special education and related services at public expense from a local educational agency.	100% of the school day.

Note: Source: <http://spot.air-dc.org/ceeccp/resources/stats/defedplc.htm>

Maclaughlin and Owings (1992) examined the relationships between state-level fiscal and demographic variables and identification rates and cumulative rates for certain categories of students with disabilities in 1976, 1980, and 1983. The focus of this study, similar to other studies, was to assess the use of state-level data to determine the individual state's level of implementation of P.L. 94-142. If the study demonstrated that the data provided information related to implementation of the federal mandate for students with disabilities, then the information may be used for evaluation efforts and policy analyses.

For their data, the MacLaughlin and Owings (1992) utilized the Annual Reports to Congress on the implementation of P.L. 94-142 and other government reports from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the U.S. Census Bureau. The data collected reflected information for the 1976-77, 1980-81, and 1983-84 school years. The independent variables were divided into two categories: (a) state financial resources and (b) state demographic variables. The state financial resources category included the following variables: (a) per-capita income, (b) per-pupil expenditures, (c) state's reliance on targeted federal education aid, and (d) percentage of all nonfederal educational revenues that were from state sources. The demographic variables included: (a) rural school-age population, (b) minority public school enrollments, and (c) percentage of children enrolled in schools that are living in poverty.

For the purpose of this study, the analysis of the variables related to integration rates is included in this section. The researchers conducted correlation analyses between the integration variables and the demographic and financial variables. The results reflected that in 1976, there was a significant inverse correlation between cumulative

placement in regular classes and rural school-age population, while the cumulative placement rates for more restrictive setting were related to the independent variables rural school-age population and per-capita personal income. The 1980 and 1983 data analysis indicated that there was an inverse correlation between rural child population and the use of special classes and other more restrictive placements. The opposite was true for per-capita personal income. The other variables demonstrated no relationship to cumulative placement rates.

There is a limitation to this study. Implementation at the local level often does not mirror implementation at the state level. There would be variations in demographic variables as well as fiscal ones. The authors, however, concluded that the data collected annually might be used to examine the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education act on the local level.

Another study conducted by Mcleskey and Pacchiano (1994) investigated placement practices for students with learning disabilities. The study included an analysis of data from 1979 to 1989 using data submitted to the Office of the Special Education Programs (OSEP) for the Annual Reports to Congress. With the increase in the number of students with learning disabilities over the years, it was predicted that the number of students in general education classrooms would increase (Mcleskey and Pacchiano, 1994). The purpose of the study was to examine the trends in placement settings for students with learning disabilities.

Using the data contained in the Annual Reports to Congress, the researchers determined that 98.5% of the students nationwide during the 1989-90 school year were placed in one of three settings: (a) regular classroom, (b) resource room, or (c) separate

class. The authors cautioned the reader of the article not to assume that the data is absolute, but considered “accurate approximations” (Mclesky and Pacchanio, 1994, p.511). Their analysis identified increases in the number of students with learning disabilities placed in both separate and regular/resource settings. The cumulative placement rate (CPR), as defined by Danielson and Bellamy (1989), discussed previously in this section, was 3,472 per million students. In eleven years, the CPR in separate classes for these students increased to 6,581 per million students. This was an increase by approximately 90%.

Lipsky and Gartner (1996) examined data for the 1992-93 school year. The range of placement rates, for students with learning disabilities, varied from 2.37% for California to 93.59% for Vermont. The data obtained by Lipsky and Gartner (1996) and Danielson and Bellamy (1989) implied that states were not implementing the LRE concept in the same manner as demonstrated by the wide variability between some states.

In their study, Lester and Kelman (1997) investigated the relationship between demographic and sociopolitical factors and their correlation with placement practices. The research question was how well could one predict, “on the basis of demographic and sociopolitical factors, the degree to which a particular state would use more mainstreamed settings (general education classrooms and resource rooms) for a higher proportion of LD population, and the inclusion of students who are more cognitively disabled (EMR and LD) into the mainstream since the enactment of P.L. 94-142” (p.4).

The data used to respond to the research question was data from the U.S. Department of Education’s 1st and 13th annual reports on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 1979; 1991).

The dependent variables applicable to this study were: (a) the proportion of a state's school-age learning disabled (LD) population served in more restrictive settings (i.e. the proportion not served in general education classrooms or resource rooms and the proportion of a state's school-age population that consists of children with educable mentally retarded or LD educated outside of general education classes or resource rooms). From the analysis of the data, the researchers attributed mainstreaming practices to a number of demographic variables. Characteristics that predicted placement in nonmainstreamed settings include: (a) higher African American populations, (b) higher populations concentrated in metropolitan areas, and (c) higher average pay. Low crime rates were also determined to be a predictor of mainstreaming practices. The increased use of restrictive placements correlated highly with low crime rate.

In 1998, McLeskey, Henry, and Hodges (1998) examined data on inclusion from the *Annual Reports to Congress* by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department Of Education. Their analysis included data from the 1988-89 through 1994-95 school years. From 1988-89 through 1994-95, there was a gradual increase in the cumulative placement rate (CPR) for all disability categories in general education classrooms. The CPR in 1988-89 was 30 for every 1000 students and increased to 48 in 1994-95. This represented an increase of 60%. However, the CPR for students in all disability categories decreased in resource room settings during these six years. CPR went from 37 to 31, a decrease of 16%. Lastly, the CPR for students with disabilities placed in separate classes increased from 22 to 23 between 1988-89 and 1994-95, an increase of 5% (McLeskey, et al., 1998). The data seemed to indicate that time spent in the general education classroom increased for students with disabilities over these six

years. The disability category that demonstrated the highest increase in general education classroom placement over the six years was the category of learning disabilities. In McLeskey, Henry, and Axelrod (1999), the CPR for students with learning disabilities who were being educated in general education classrooms increased by 151% from 1988-89 to 1994-95. The CPR for students with LD who were educated in resource rooms decreased by 16% while the CPR for students with LD in separate school settings decreased by 31% and increased by 4% for separate classes. As reported in McLeskey, et al. (1999), the CPR for general education class placement ranged from 9 in 1988-89 to 22 in 1994-95. The CPR for resource rooms decrease from 26 to 21 over the same six years and the CPR for separate classes was 9 in 1988-89 and remained stable from 1991-92 to 1994-95 with a CPR of 10.

Whorton, Siders, Fowler, and Naylor (2000) conducted a review of the number of students with disabilities receiving federal monies and the types of educational placements used. The data collection involved an "in-depth review of the Annual Reports to Congress by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and the National Center of Educational Statistics (Whorton, et al., 2000, p.2). The review examined data for the school years between 1979-80 and 1997-98. The number of students with learning disabilities between these years increased by 114% with only students with multiple disabilities exceeding that increase. As for placement in the general education classroom, students in all disability categories increased between 1979-80 and 1983-84 school years. There was a decrease between 1983-84 and 1984-85, but increased the following 13 years.

The data in this review seemed to be consistent with previous reviews and studies. The number of students with disability has increased since the enactment of IDEA. In addition, the number of students in the general education classroom increased between the 1979-80 and 1997-98 school years. Though there has been this change over the years, states continue to utilize the continuum of placements (Whorton, et al., 2000).

Policy Implementation

In 1975, the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the outlying areas were mandated to provide a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment to children with disabilities through the enactment of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act (EHA). For children with disabilities, this opened the doors wider for access to schools with their nondisabled peers. However, Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) in their study of educational reforms write "policy generation is remote and detached from implementation. Policy 'gets done' to people by a chain of implementers whose roles are clearly defined by legislation" (p.7). One would say that this statement definitely applies to the legislation that mandated educational services for students with disabilities. The authors, Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) stated that once a policy is generated, there is a high probability that the policy would be "interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes, and interests which make up any area differ"(p.22). They believe as a result of their exploration into this topic area that it is not as simple to mandate policy. Policy, according to Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) is not simply received and implemented within this area rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated'. Weatherly (1979) agrees with this. He seems to

believe that in order to ensure successful implementation of any policy, careful support must be secured prior to passage and that time must be allotted for planning and preparing before putting the policy into effect. According to Clayton (1994), policy is sometimes reshaped by practice that occurs in schools.

In Garrick (1999), Spector (1985) stated that policies often fail to stimulate change that was intended by the policy because “the theory that guided the design of the policy may have been inadequate”(p.3). Garrick (1999) seems to believe that policies currently in existence today were originally intended to guide educators and practioners’ thinking about where students with disabilities would best be educated.

In summary, it is evident that mere passage of a policy does not ensure implementation as to the exact intent of the policy. On the other hand, if the least restrictive environment policy was intended to merely serve as a guide as suggested by Garrick (1999), then it is expected that different means to achieve the same outcomes may be utilized by the different states and territories.

Future for Special Education Leadership

In 1986, Madeline Will wrote an article titled *Educating Children with Learning Problems: A Shared Responsibility*, which reminded us about the vision we all have for children with disabilities. She wrote that we must refine our vision over time and not destroy what good vision exists today. In this article, she reminds us that yes, there is a critical need for special education strategies. However, the utilization of special education techniques must exist beyond the special education classroom today. Her vision, I believe, is still the vision of special educators today. She envisioned a

partnership with the regular education program in order to effectively meet the individual needs of students with disabilities with the provision of a service delivery system that “means nurturing a shared commitment to the future of all children with special learning needs” (p. 415).

In considering the vision promoted by Will (1986), Lombardi and Ludlow (1996) stated that the implementation of the least restrictive environment requires “service configurations” (p.18) other than the regular classroom. However, they also stated that all students will primarily be integrated into regular schools and that we must be responsible in implementing any type of service delivery models that threatens the provision of appropriate services for students with disabilities. In order to be responsible, Lombardi and Ludlow (1996) state that merely considering placement is not responsible inclusion. Being responsible involves acceptance as well. The authors recommended the following for future special education leadership:

1. There must be a coordination of legislative mandates that compliment rather than conflict with one another;
2. There must be a change of attitude from paper compliance to an outcome-based process or the promotion of student achievement; and
3. The development of a service delivery system that is parent-focused, community-based, and collaborative (Lombardi and Ludlow, 1996).

According to the authors, we must think and act beyond the confines of political terms of office since change takes more years than are available within a typical governmental term of office.

Kauffman and Hallahan (1995) painted a rather dismal picture of the future for special education. They provided us with a warning based on the late Burton Blat (1979). Blat (1979) who cautioned everyone about jumping on the bandwagon of inclusion. Kauffman and Hallahan (1995) took off with this concept. They indicated that this bandwagon of full inclusion is an illusion and in order to avoid a disaster we must “avoid a collision with the realities of school and disabilities” (p.45).

In Kauffman and Hallahan (1995), *The Illusion of Full Inclusion*, Bateman (1995) gave the reader some food for thought. In her closing remarks, she suggested a new way of thinking or rather a different approach to special education. In her view, we should “eschew slogans in favor of data, program advocacy in favor of child advocacy, and process focus in favor of outcome focus if we are to serve children effectively” (Bateman, 1995).

Holt (1997) worded it in a different perspective in *Schools for Everyone: A new perspective on Inclusion*. As stated in her chapter, *Rethinking Inclusion*, Holt (1997) asks us to rethink how we perceive inclusion. The question should not be whether a child is included or not. The question should be what supports are needed for this student to be a part of the classroom. Once we have this mindset, then our focus on service delivery system for students with disabilities does not become a burden, but a system that needs support to exist to meet the individual needs of students. Holt (1997) concluded by describing the roles for leaders. According to the author, “the role of leaders is not to change people, but to create the conditions under which such a natural attitude of inclusion will emerge” (p.104).

Bird (1997) provided us with the opportunity to reflect on where we've been and where we want to be at in the future of special education. The author reminded us of the first public school established in the United States by Horace Mann. Mann's concept of this public school at the time was to develop a public school system that would be available to all people (p.49). Based on the work completed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), Bird (1997) relayed the following policy and action recommendations. The policy recommendations included:

1. All stakeholders are responsible for the education of all students in a community.
2. A unified system of education must prevail to ensure quality inclusive education for all students.
3. All educators are prepared to educate all students.
4. Accountability for all students is guaranteed through a system of unified outcomes.
5. Funding systems that support a unified system emphasize shared resources for all students without label, penalty, or prejudice.

Action recommendations included:

1. Site-based management is the means for building a community of learners responsible for one another.
2. A curriculum framework for a unified system is the means to ' dialogue about organizing schools into learning communities.
3. Staff development in a restructured workplace fosters ad hoc problem solving, shared resources, and continuous improvement.

4. All students and their families have access to integrated community services at or near the school site.
5. All students and staff have access to and training in appropriate technology that supports collaborative decision-making (Bird, 1997).

Despite these recommendations by CASE, Bird (1997) cried out that there is an urgent need for professionals and their associations, as well as governmental entities to “provide the leadership in educating both policy makers and educators regarding the needed ingredients of a successful inclusionary program (p.51). He suggested that any change in service delivery models required training incumbent personnel for their new roles. Bird (1997) stated that this was the vision of Horace Mann when he established the first public school—a vision where the common school was available to all people.

Unlike other visions for the future, Gindis (1999) visualizes the future of special education as a system that utilizes specific techniques, strategies, and methodologies, but remains within the typical sociocultural setting using Vygotsky’s theory of social interaction. He states that special education should not exist solely to compensate for the disability, but to “prevent, correct, and rehabilitate secondary defects (p.334).” He goes on to describe special education as not just a different version of general education, but a specialized setting where all personnel is able to meet the individual needs of the child with a disability.

On the other hand, Sowell (1995) cited in Kavale (2000), describes the issue of placement as a conflict of visions. According to him, the visions regarding placement may be categorized into two groups: (a) The “vision of anointed” and (b) the “vision of benighted.”(p.3). Those promoting full inclusion would be associated with the “vision of

anointed.” while individuals promoting research-based placement would be identified with the “vision of benighted.” Kaval (2000) suggests a third vision – “the vision of the rational.” He describes this as a vision that promotes a milder approach that where policy is developed on the basis of research and evaluation findings as well as ideological and political considerations. Kavale (2000) writes that though the law requires education in the least restrictive environment (LRE), confusion, chaos, and conflict occurs when the general education classroom is presumed to be the LRE for all students with disabilities. The appropriate attitudes, accommodations, and adaptations for students with disabilities need to be in place.

In the *Death of Special Education*, Lieberman (2001) mourns the death of special education programs. The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ironically removed the “I” in *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs). He hints that in order to revive special education and the original intent of IDEA, we must put the “I” back in IEPs and make no presumptions regarding placements and/or services. Lieberman (2001) states that we often ignore the disability and try to work around it rather than facing it head on. He goes on to say that “our response to the disability should be that the special educator emphasize remediation outside the context of the regular education curriculum, while the regular classroom teacher provides opportunities for the child to compensate through alternative requirements for task performance and information acquisition” (p.5). Finally, he states that unless we remove the practice of instruction through group processes in servicing students with or without disabilities, we will never achieve excellence for both these populations of students (Lieberman, 2001).

Lastly, Horn and Tynan (2001), gives us the message, in their chapter entitled *Time to Make Special Education "Special Again"*, that we, as special and general educators should stop deceiving ourselves that students with disabilities are actually receiving a free appropriate education that is different from students without disabilities. They suggest that we focus our reform efforts on the reconstruction of the general education classroom so that we can ensure the effective involvement and progress of students with disabilities. They state that, "efforts both to prevent academic problems through effective instructional strategies" and the teaching of compensatory skills will, in the long run, eliminate the need of special accommodations and/or services by students with disabilities (Horn and Tynan, 2001). To reiterate the title of their chapter, "it's time to make 'special education' special again" (p. 48).

In summary, this literature review was intended to lead the reader back in time and on to the future. It was critical to revisit the original intent of the least restrictive environment (LRE) and examine our errors in its implementation. Unless we evaluate past and current practices, we will not be able to move forward in a positive direction and implement the LRE requirement as intended by Congress in its enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Chapter III includes a description of the site and participants in the study. In addition, the chapter includes an explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter III Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam. The researcher addressed four major questions:

1. How do individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, perceive the definition of least restrictive environment?
2. What factors influence the determination of the least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
3. How is the least restrictive environment determined for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
4. How do the perceptions of practice in the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research, or intent of the least restrictive environment?

In order to adequately capture the implementation of LRE, the researcher selected the qualitative method of conducting the study. Qualitative research studies typically involve (a) interviews, (b) direct observation, and (c) written documents (Patton, 1990). This study only included interviews and written documents.

The design of this research was primarily qualitative and oriented toward providing descriptive types of information. Patton (1990) suggested using qualitative methods under the following conditions: (a) the program emphasizes individualized outcomes; (b) detailed in-depth information is needed about certain clients or programs; and (c) the focus is on diversity among, idiosyncrasies of, and unique qualities exhibited by individuals. The purpose of this particular study, which was to examine how individuals in secondary schools on Guam understand and implement the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was especially consistent with Patton's second condition. It was the intent of this study to obtain specific information of how individuals implemented the LRE provision of IDEA and the factors influencing their decision. This met Patton's third condition for conducting a qualitative study.

Similarly, in a 1992 paper, Peck and Furman (quoted in Mertens and McLaughlin, 1994) concluded that qualitative methods have led to insights into the cultural values, institutional practices, and interpersonal interactions that influence special education practices. For example, placement and categorizing children in special education, the topic of this study, were subject to those influences, and could be understood only through a research process that can look at the meanings operative at different levels of values, practices, and interpersonal interactions (Mertin and McLaughlin, 1994). The qualitative approach is not limited to responses provided on a survey. It allows the researcher to study the real world settings without predetermined outcomes (Patton, 1990).

There are many different approaches to conducting research. The qualitative method used in this study is best classified as “naturalistic inquiry” by Tesch (1990). Naturalistic inquiry is “parallel to the term qualitative research” (p.43) and “qualitative data as any information not expressed in number” (p. 55). Tesch (1990) continues to state that qualitative research is not concerned with variables in their measurement. In this study, the intent was to study the beliefs and practices of the school staff and parents in regards to the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act rather than analysis of numerical data.

Sites and Participants

This study focused on secondary schools located on the island of Guam. Guam, the largest island in the Marianas chain and the largest of the 2,000 islands in Micronesia, is the westernmost territory of the United States. It is located 13 degrees north latitude and 144 degrees east longitude. It is about 30 miles long and varies in points from 4 to 9 miles in width. With a total land area of 212 square miles, the island of Guam is about half the size of Hong Kong, roughly the size of Singapore, and nearly 3 times the size of the District of Columbia. Guam is 9,500 miles from Washington D.C. and 3,500 miles from Honolulu. The Government of Guam, through the Department of Education, provides educational opportunities to approximately 32,000 pupils who attend the K-12 single school district public education system (<http://www.visitguam.org> [7/00]).

Participants for the study were selected from the seven (7) middle and four (4) high school sites on Guam. The minimum number of participants selected to participate

was 122 individuals from the schools and at least five parents for each focus group from each school. Participants for the study at each site included the following individuals:

1. The principal and at least one assistant principal,
2. Consulting resource teacher (CRT) assigned to the school,
3. At least 50% of the Special Education teachers,
4. At least 10% of the general education teachers that have participated in IEP meetings within the past two years in each school, and
5. At least five (5) parents from each school.

The assistant principal selected from each middle and high school was the assistant principal that had seniority within the school. If they were all new or had equal seniority status within the school, then selection would be based on seniority within the system.

The names of the special education teachers for each school were alphabetically placed on a list and every other teacher was selected until the 50 percent mark was reached. The names of the general education teachers that had participated in IEP meetings were selected in this same process until the 10% mark was also reached. In this study, the sample size was intended to obtain a deeper range of information rather than to generalize the information from a sample to a population. In this manner, the researcher was sacrificing breadth for depth (Patton, 1990).

Access

The Research, Planning and Evaluation (RP&E) office had given the researcher permission to conduct the study. The Associate Superintendent of Special Education had also endorsed the study. The researcher had established rapport with the participants, as

she was a former special education administrator and special education teacher. The researcher made an initial contact by fax with each interviewee regarding the study to be followed by a second fax letter. The purpose of the initial fax was to solicit support and confirmation. The second fax letter served as a written follow-up to the initial fax and described in depth the purpose of the study.

Researcher Role

The researcher performed the role of the interviewer. The researcher had a wide knowledge base of the research topic as it related to Guam because of educational background and experience such as current role as higher education special education instructor, former Guam Department of Education employee, special education administrator and teacher. In order to compensate for any biases in the type of questions, the researcher sought expert review for the previously designed question in the Hasazi, Johnson, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) study. For the analysis, the researcher controlled for analysis bias by focusing on direct quotes or responses by the participants. Bias within the role of “researcher as the instrument” (i.e. the researcher was herself the source for information gathering) was controlled by the strict adherence to the protocol questions and avoiding the addition of personal interest questions and comments. In this role, the researcher focused on being an active listener and demonstrated an interest and care about the perspective of the interviewee. As the interviewer, the researcher created a setting in which the interviewee responded comfortably, accurately, and honestly to the questions (Patton, 1990). As the interviewer, the researcher attempted to construct as closely as possible the identified perceptions of each interviewee regarding the

implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Data Collection Methods

The researcher conducted the interviews in all school sites. The data collection involved three procedures. First, the primary data collection procedure involved interviews with the participants identified earlier in this section. Second, to supplement the information gathered from the interviews, the researcher reviewed documents related to the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This included annual reports to the U.S. Department of Education and locally maintained data reports. Lastly, a random sample of *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs) in each school in the sample was analyzed for implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA.

As stated above, the primary data collection procedure was interviews. Merriam (1998) states that the most common form of interview was the person-to-person encounter. She also indicated that interviews were necessary when “we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (Merriam, 1998, p.72). In this case, it was not feasible to observe an adequate sample of individual student Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and conclude from observations how the decision of least restrictive environment was determined for each one.

According to Patton (1990), there are three approaches to conducting interviews in qualitative research. The choices are (a) the informal conversational interview, (b) the general interview guide approach, and (c) the standardized open interview.

For this research, the researcher selected the standardized open interview. In the standardized-open interview, every participant was asked the same set of questions. The interview protocol questions for this study were adapted from interview questions utilized in a national qualitative study conducted by Hasazi, Johnson, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) to investigate how specific states implemented the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A list of the Hasazi et al. (1994) protocol questions is provided in Appendix D. The questions for this national study were developed by members of a research team that included “faculty members in the Department of Administration and Foundational Studies, with backgrounds in educational policy implementation and design, and preparation of educational leadership personnel” (p.493). Other members in the research team included the advisory board, a special education attorney, and state policymakers and practitioners.

Prior to conducting the study, the original questions from Hasazi et al. (1994) were e-mailed to five experts in the special education field across the country. The experts were asked to review the 1994 questions and provide any recommendations for modifications, additions, and deletions to the list of questions. As a result of the requested input, the questions were revised to include three additional questions and the consolidation of two questions into one. There were a total of 15 interview questions. The questions addressed two major areas: (a) participants’ perceptions of the definition of LRE, and (2) factors influencing the implementation of LRE. Examples of the questions were:

1. What is your understanding of the definition of LRE?
2. How does federal policy influence the implementation of LRE at the

school level? and

3. How do values and beliefs influence the implementation of LRE?

A complete listing of the final interview protocol questions is provided in Appendix E.

Before conducting the actual interviews for the study, the questions went through a pilot study to determine if all the questions were appropriate for the participants in this particular study since the conditions varied from those in the national study conducted by Hasazi et al. (1994). The pilot was conducted using the questions with individuals serving in similar positions to the positions of those being interviewed in the actual study. However, the interviewees in the pilot study did not participate in the actual study. As a result of the pilot study, a determination was made as to which questions were retained and if additional questions needed to be added. The outcome of the pilot study was the final interview question protocol for the study of this researcher, which is found in Appendix E.

Once the protocol questions had been finalized, the researcher contacted each participant directly by fax and scheduled the interviews. Once the interviews were scheduled, a follow-up fax was to confirm to confirm the date and time. Interviews for the principals were conducted in their offices. Interviews for the consulting resource teacher and general and special education teachers were conducted in an available room at their respective schools with one teacher's interview conducted at the researcher's office for the convenience of the teacher. Interviews for the parents were conducted at a mutually agreed location at the school. The researcher recorded all interviews and supplemented these recordings with field notes with consent from all participants. There were no objections.

A secondary form of data collection involved the review of student's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and a review of monthly reports of the secondary schools. According to Patton (1990), documents such as these provide the researcher with information about many things that cannot be observed. He also stated that they stimulate questions for the interviews. The purpose of the review of documents "is to get a behind-the-scenes look at program processes and how those came into being" (Patton, 1990, p.234). Mertens and McLaughlin (1995) stated that a review of documents and records are necessary in order to get "background and insights into the dynamics of everyday functioning. They give the researcher the ability to have access to information that would otherwise be unavailable" (p.52). It was the intent of this procedure to validate practice with understanding and interpretation of the least restrictive provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The first phase of the data collection process related to documents involved reviewing the monthly reports of secondary schools (i.e. middle and high schools) generated from the data submitted to the central special education office for the 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 school years. These data were supplemented by data with annual reports to Congress from the U.S. Department of Education. The researcher made the request for copies of these reports to the Department of Education, Division of Special Education that maintains past and current reports. The researcher had requested that all identifying information on the report be removed to protect the confidentiality of the students. However, the Department of Education, Division of Special Education invoked their Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) right to allow examination of records by individuals conducting research for the purpose

of improving programs for students. The researcher examined the placement for each child with a learning disability in each secondary school and recorded on a chart the number and percentage for each specific placement as defined by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The purpose of analyzing these data was to determine what percentage of students at the secondary level is being served in a particular educational placement. According to Danielson and Bellamy (1989), "the least restrictive provision of 94-142 creates a presumption in favor of educating children with handicaps in general education environments" (p.448). These data provided information on the extent to which students are placed in environments that remove them from the general education environment contrary to what is intended by the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The benchmarks for comparison were the national average rate for each specific placement.

The second phase of this study related to documents involved reviewing a random sample of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) from the secondary schools. The purpose was to compare actual practices with the interview data that provided information regarding the participants' understanding of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Approximately 30% of each school's students' IEPs were randomly selected for review to determine implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement. The selection was made from a listing in which all identifiable information was removed and the list only included those students whose disability category is learning disability. The researcher selected every third file from the list of files from each school until the minimum number had been reached. The Department of Education, Division of Special Education exercised their

right to release information without consent as allowed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Therefore, permission to review the files without parental consent was granted based on FERPA. The head of the Division of Special Education indicated that this study met the conditions under which prior consent was not required to disclose information. Section 99.31 of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) stated: prior consent is not required to disclose information if the “disclosure is to organizations conducting studies, for, or on behalf of, educational agencies or institutions . . . to improve instruction” (Wright and Wright, 1999, p.295). In addition, FERPA also stated that “the agency or institution may disclose information only if “the study is conducted in such a manner that does not permit personal identification of parents and students by individuals other than representatives of the organization” (Wright & Wright, 1999, p.295). The department felt that they would benefit from the results and that the study would contribute data needed for their upcoming self-assessment of special education programs.

Once the consent for review had been granted by the respective department office, the researcher reviewed the files for compliance using a checklist. The checklist documented the following information from the most current IEP: (a) placement as per the definition of OSEP, (b) written evidence to support the nonparticipation of the student in the general education classroom and the student’s inability to succeed in the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services if placement is other than the general education classroom, (c) written evidence that placement was based on individual needs, and (d) written evidence that placement in the general education classroom would adversely affect the education of other students.

Data Analysis Methods

The analysis of qualitative data involved cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990). Since the primary procedure for this study involved identifying themes or categories across the responses of the participants, it was determined that it would primarily be a cross-case analysis for each question in the interview schedule.

The first step of the analysis involved transcribing recordings of the interviews. Interview notes that were not recorded were added to the transcription. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher assigned codes to each unit of the transcriptions. A unit may be a sentence or a paragraph. Glesne (1999) stated that "coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose"(p.135). The transcripts were first assigned major codes that were generated from the questions. These major codes were then broken down into subcodes. Each major code was assigned a set of letters. Each subcode was also assigned a set of letters that was related to the major code. For example, the first question was concerned with the definition of least restrictive environment. The first category was the Definition of LRE. If the major code was DEFINITION and the set of major code letters was DEF, then it would be written as DEF. If the response to this question was inclusion, then the subcode was inclusion and was written as DEF/INC if the major code was DEF for definition and INC for inclusion, which then labeled the statement as DEF/INCL. The codes were developed by determining the theme of the units be it a sentence or a paragraph for each response to each question by the individual participants. After the

initial general set of codes were determined for each question, additional major and subcodes were added as a result of reviewing the transcriptions and additional field notes. The researcher was open to modifications to the coding scheme as necessary to categorize all responses.

For the second procedure of this study, the researcher obtained the placement rate for secondary schools for the period from 1995-96 to the 1999-2000 school year and compared these rates with the placement rate of the continental United States to include the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In addition, the cumulative placement rate was computed for students with learning disabilities within each school. This is determined by dividing the number of students within the age group in a selected educational placement by Guam's total school population for that age group and multiplying by 1000. The cumulative placement rate for each school for each educational placement was then compared with the other schools and with the national statistics.

The analysis for the third procedure of this study involved rating each IEP that was reviewed to determine the implementation of the least restrictive environment. The rating sheet addressed two major questions. Question one had four subquestions and question 2 had one major question. These questions were discussed under data collection. A comparison of practice was then compared with participants' understanding of the least restrictive environment requirement discovered as a result of the interview.

To determine the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement for each selected student's IEP, the Daniel R.R. two-prong test was applied to each IEP. The Daniel R.R. test arose from a case in the fifth circuit and is known as the inclusion standard. This test has been widely used by other circuit courts to determine the

implementation of the LRE provision of the IDEA (Thomas and Rapport, 1998). The Daniel R.R. test involves two major questions: (1) Can education in the general education environment, with the use of supplementary aids and services, be achieved satisfactorily? and (2) if it cannot, has the school placed the child with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate? If the responses are yes to both questions, then the IEP has met the Daniel R.R. standard. To demonstrate the consideration of the first question, the researcher reviewed the IEP for documentation of the following:

1. Demonstration of steps to accommodate the child in the general education classroom;
2. Demonstration that that the decision to place the student in a placement other than the general education classroom was made because there would be no benefit in the general education classroom; and
3. Demonstration that the decision to place the student in a placement other than the general education classroom was made because the child's presence in the general education classroom would adversely affect the education of others; and
4. Why the child cannot participate in the general education environment and that a continuum of placement was considered.

Summary

This study utilized the qualitative method of conducting research in collecting and analyzing data. Participants for this study included personnel involved with the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) in secondary schools. This

included parents, administrators, general and special education teachers, and consulting resource teachers. Data collection included individual interviews with school personnel, focus group interviews with parents, and review of written documents. Lastly, data analysis involved the determination of major themes from the interview protocol questions, IEP reviews for LRE decisions, and comparison of Guam placement rates with national placement rates.

Chapter IV provides the results from the data collection procedures. This includes responses to the fifteen interview protocol questions categorized into major themes. In addition, the results of the IEP and placement rate reviews are discussed and analyzed.

Chapter IV Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on Guam. The study addressed four research questions:

1. How do individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, perceive the definition of the term least restrictive environment?
2. What factors influence the determination of the least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
3. How is the least restrictive environment placement determined for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam? and
4. How do the practices on the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research, or intent of the least restrictive environment provision of the IDEA?

This chapter reports the results of data collected from three different sources to address each of the research questions. First, through a standardized open interview guide, direct information was obtained from individualized education program (IEP) team members that included (a) principals, (b) assistant principals, (c) consulting resource teachers (CRT), (d) resource room teachers, (e) general education teachers, and

(f) parents. Second, to supplement the interview data, a random sample of IEPs from each of the middle and high schools was reviewed to compare the participants' beliefs and understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment with practices and behaviors. Lastly, the researcher reviewed the placement rates of secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam in comparison with the national rates in three of the educational placement options from the 1995-96 to the 1999-2000 school year.

Presentation of the results is organized around the four research questions. First, the researcher provides a description of the participants, participants' responses to interview question #1, the question about participants' understanding of the least restrictive environment term. Second, research question #2 is addressed by reporting the participants' responses to the remaining interview questions. Third, research question #3 is addressed by summarizing the contents of IEP documents that were reviewed as part of the study. Lastly, research question #4 is responded to by comparing special education placement rates on Guam with the national placement rates. A summary of the results is given at the end of the chapter.

Research Question 1: How do individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, perceive the definition of least restrictive environment?

Description of Participants – School Personnel

A total of 122 individuals from the 11 middle and high schools on Guam were selected to participate in the study. Only one principal did not participate in the study

due to scheduling conflicts. Two assistant principals selected were not interviewed as part of the study. One principal indicated that there was assistant principal at the school that would be appropriate to interview for this study. Another assistant principal could not participate due to illness. All consulting resource teachers (CRTs) were interviewed with the exception of one. Out of fifty-four general education teachers selected to be interviewed, forty-four participated in the study. Eight general education teachers were not available to be interviewed. Due to conflicts with scheduling, even after three attempts to reschedule, these eight general educators were not available to be interviewed. In addition, two declined to be interviewed for the study. Lastly, thirty-three resource room teachers were interviewed out of a list of 35. Despite three attempts to reschedule, two were not available to be interviewed by the end of the school year. The researcher examined the relationship of the number of individuals selected for the interviews with the total number of individuals for the particular position. Principals, consulting resource teachers, and special education teachers were well represented in this study. The number of principals and consulting resource teachers interviewed made up 91% of the total number of individuals serving in these positions while the number of resource teachers interviewed made up 47% of the total population of special education teachers. The representation of assistant principals and general education teachers were adequate to obtain rich and useful information. Table 5 describes the relationship between the population of each position and the sample selected for the study. In addition to the comparison of sample to population, the researcher reviewed the demographics of the participants to gain a better understanding of the types of individuals interviewed. The majority of the participants were females, from the middle schools, possessed

bachelor's degrees, and had a maximum of five years teaching experience. Refer to Table 6 for specific breakdowns.

Table 5 Comparison of Population to Sample

Position Title	Number	Percent of Population
Principal	10	91%
Assistant Principal	9	21%
Consulting Resource Teachers	10	91%
Resource Room Teachers	33	47%
General Education Teachers w/students w/learning disabilities	44	8%
TOTAL	106	

Table 6 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	46	43.4
Female	60	56.6
Educational level		
B.A./B.Ed./BS	60	56.6
M.A./M.Ed.	38	35.8
Master's +	5	4.7
Doctorate	3	2.8
School level		
Middle	66	62.3
High	40	37.7
Job Title		
Principal	10	9.4
Assistant Principal	9	8.5
CRT	10	9.4
Resource Room Teacher	33	30.2
General Education Teacher	44	42.5
Years in Education		
0-5 Years	50	47.2
6-10 Years	16	15.1
More than 10 years	40	37.7

Description of Participants – Parent Groups

There were a total of eight parent focus group interviews. Three schools were unable to obtain any parent participants. Of the thirty-six parents that participated in the focus group sessions, 27 parents (75% of the sample group) came from the middle schools and nine (25%) were parents of high school students. The parent focus groups were the most challenging part of the data collection. Parent group interviews were difficult to coordinate because of the need to depend on school personnel for contacting the parents. This was further complicated by the need to schedule the interview session at a time and place convenient for all the parents in a particular school. An average of three parents participated in each focus group session. Minimum number of parents was one and maximum number was 14.

Findings

Interview Question #1: What is your understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment?

This research question focused on the individualized educational program (IEP) team members' understanding of the definition of the term least restrictive environment (LRE). This was addressed in question number one from the list of semi-structured interview questions.

In the comment and discussion section of the IDEA federal regulations related to general LRE placement, it states that:

Placement in the LRE requires an individual decision, based on each child's IEP, and based on the strong presumption of the IDEA that children with disabilities be educated in regular classes with

appropriate aids and supports. . .(Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.550, p. 12637).

As stated in the discussion above, Congress emphasized three things: (a) placement in the LRE requires an individual decision, (b) placement is based on the child's IEP, and (c) children with disabilities should be educated in regular classes with appropriate aids and supports. In addition to the above, Congress also added a requirement that prevented the removal of a child with a disability from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.550, p. 12458). In IDEA '97, Congress maintained the requirement of the availability of a continuum of placements. However, the policy makers also realized that meeting individual needs may not always take place in general education classes.

The regulations do not require that a child has to fail in the less restrictive options on the continuum before that child can be placed in a setting that is appropriate to his/her needs. Section 300.550 (b)(2) of the regulations, however, does require that the placement team consider whether the child can be educated in less restrictive settings with the use of appropriate supplementary aids and services and make a more restrictive placement only when they conclude that education

in the less restrictive setting with appropriate supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303. §300.550, discussion, p. 12638).

The researcher analyzed the participants' responses in this study in terms of their alignment with the intent of Congress as described above in the comments and discussion of the IDEA federal regulations.

Definition - School Personnel

The responses to the first of the interview questions, dealing with the participants' understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment. (Refer to Appendix E) posed to each of the participants provided a working description of least restrictive environment. Three (2.8%) of the 106 school participants stated that they had no knowledge of the definition of least restrictive environment. Of the three, one individual stated that she had a "blank" as far as the definition was concerned. The second individual admitted, without hesitation, that she did not know what it meant, while the third responded to the question by describing the maximum class size for general and special education classrooms.

All the other participants stated that their understanding was based on experience over the years rather than through formal staff development training. Twenty-five percent of the participants prefaced their response with personal statements such as "my understanding of LRE" and "my definition." One individual stated her definition was

based on memory, while another individual reported that she was guessing, and a third individual stated that the definition was based on law. In a follow-up question to participants' understanding of the definition of LRE, the researcher asked if the term LRE was mentioned at IEP meetings. More than 50% of the participants reported that the term was not mentioned at IEP meetings when determining placement for a child with a disability.

For the initial analysis of participants' perception of their understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment, the responses for this question were first placed into groups by position. The major code for this question was DEF for definition. Within each group, the theme for each individual's definition was extracted and listed. These themes for the different individual responses were then combined and resulted in a total of 103 themes or subcodes. For the second round of coding, the duplicate responses were deleted and this resulted in 53 subcodes. These subcodes underwent another coding that resulted into nine subcodes. The nine sub codes were then grouped into four major categories. The four categories were: (a) accessibility to the general education curriculum, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities; (b) meeting individual needs of the students; (c) general education classroom placement with consideration for meeting student's individual needs as well as the needs of the nondisabled peers; and (d) the rights of the child with a disability to the best education as that provided for nondisabled peers. A listing of the categories and sample responses, which fell under each one, is given in Table 7.

Table 7 Categories of Responses to Definition of Least Restrictive Environment

Category	Sample Responses
Individual Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Accommodating needs ◆ Placed in a classroom where they are capable of doing the work ◆ Accommodate student based on disability ◆ Maximize full potential
General Education Classroom Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mainstreamed ◆ Normal environment ◆ Participate the same as general education students ◆ Access to regular education programs
Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Opportunity to succeed ◆ Opportunity to learn ◆ Opportunity to participate
General education classroom setting and consideration for individual needs and needs of nondisabled peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ General education class with supplementary aids and services which best meets need of child ◆ General education setting with modifications ◆ Environment that is adapted or modified so that the child will be included with peers

One-third of the participants (approximately 32% of the total responses) focused on placement in the general education classroom. Participants used such terms as “mainstreaming,” “normal environment,” “normal classroom setting,” or “regular classroom.” More than a third (36.9% of the participants) defined least restrictive environment in terms of prioritizing the individual needs of the students with disabilities when determining placement. One of the participants defined it as “area where child can be successful, meet individual needs, based on individual needs.” A principal defined it

as “the environment in which the student is able to function and meeting the needs basically the special needs of the child.” Another 16% emphasized the rights of students to an education. The definition of least restrictive environment for the remaining 11% of the participants addressed least restrictive environment (LRE) in terms of placement in an environment with the student’s nondisabled peers while at the same time meeting the individual needs of the child without disruption to the learning of others. The definition of this group of participants included such language as “general education placement with supplementary aids and services,” “general education placement with modifications,” and “general education curriculum.” Table 8 provides a sample of the quotes for each group under the specific categories.

In comparing the responses of the school participants with Congress’s intent of LRE, the responses were divided into the various components as intended by such a requirement. No one definition met each of the components that comprised the definition as mandated. Though one-third of the participants alluded to placement in regular education classes, the focus was more on location rather than on participation with age-appropriate non-disabled peers with the provision of supplementary aids and services. Individuals that defined the term LRE in terms of meeting individual needs did not make the connection to the IEP process and participation in classroom settings with nondisabled peers. If one were to consolidate the responses, then the definition would have a higher correlation with Congress’s definition.

In summary, the definitions for school personnel may be classified into four general themes: (a) needs, (b) access to general education classes, (c) access to general education classes and meeting individual needs, and (d) rights to an education. The definitions of the participants were generated more from experience than from exposure to training. As individual definitions, none of the responses related to the definition of LRE aligned with the intent of Congress. The majority of the others included at least one of the components addressed by Congress's definition.

Table 8 Matrix of Sample of Direct Quotes from Responses to Question on Definition of LRE by Positions By Category of Theme

Position/Theme	Access to general education curriculum, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities	Individual needs of students	General education classroom with consideration for meeting individual student needs	Rights to an education for a child with a disability
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Providing the students access to regular academic programs ◆ Full access to the regular classroom academic programs ◆ As close to any class as any of the other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Look at the whole child ◆ Greatest opportunity for learning ◆ Defined based on individual ◆ Area where child can be successful, meet individual needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Environment in which the student is able to function and meeting the needs basically the special needs of the child; it doesn't have to be the regular classroom; it doesn't have to be the resource room; it just depends upon the individual student; the main thing is we try as much as possible to place the students with the other students and at the same time be meeting their needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A place of where students are given the opportunity to expand and learn as much as what they can produce or what they can come up with.

Position/Theme	Access to general education curriculum, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities	Individual needs of students	General education classroom with consideration for meeting individual student needs	Rights to an education for a child with a disability
Assistant-Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Opportunity for any courses or activity you have in your school as a regular student; ◆ Opportunity to go into the mainstreamed classroom and participate with regular classroom students ◆ That the special education students have to participate in academics and sports activities the same as regular students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Put him in a setting that is most appropriate because of his disability 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Freedom, independence ◆ Best attain education
Consulting Resource Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ For the students to go out into the regular classroom and see if they can meet their demands ◆ Place them with their peers ◆ Normal an environment as possible to be with other kids their age group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ It's always going back to the student's needs ◆ Environment just doesn't cover the physical environment, but meeting the student's needs; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Place them with their peers; it's always going to go back to the student's needs; ◆ Placed with his or her peers; function to the best of their ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Learn best in the best environment and it is not limited by any of his disability ◆ Placement where the child would most benefit from his educational environment ◆ Situation where they can grow

Position/Theme	Access to general education curriculum, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities	Individual needs of students	General education classroom with consideration for meeting individual student needs	Rights to an education for a child with a disability
Resource Room Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Opportunity to be placed in regular classroom; interact with regular students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Environment which best meets needs of child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Placed in the school closest to the general education curriculum where his needs can be met most appropriately. 	
General Education Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mainstream ◆ Normal environment ◆ Opportunity to experience what the average kids experience ◆ Normalized environment as much as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Allows child to learn according to his needs ◆ Accommodating their needs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Best education ◆ It's not closed where freedom is there; ◆ Opportunity to learn

Definition – Parent Focus Groups

At the beginning of each parent focus group session, the researcher posed the first interview question dealing with the definition of least restrictive environment (Refer to Appendix E) to the group of parents. The initial response to the question was silence. After repeating the question, participants in six of the eight groups stated that they had never heard of the term and they did not recall the term ever used at an IEP meeting for their child. For the focus group of parents that responded, they stated that they were unsure about the definition, but they would make an attempt to respond anyway. One parent defined least restrictive environment (LRE) in terms of a “system of care” which she indicated was “family-focused” and “child-centered.” Another parent, from a different group, defined the term to mean, “mixed with regular students” and “go more or less at own pace.” For groups that were somewhat familiar with the term, they defined LRE in terms of meeting the individual needs of the child within a setting that was “mixed with regular students.” One parent admitted that they may have explained the definition of the term at one of the IEP meetings, but did not recall the term actually used during the meeting. Since a majority or 95% of the parents lacked knowledge or even awareness of the definition of least restrictive environment, the researcher provided a working definition in order to proceed with the remaining interview questions. Once a working definition was provided, at least one parent from each focus group spoke up about the placement of the child with a disability. For at least one parent in each group, the process of determining the placement for her child resembled the intent of the statute as given in the definition. More than 50% of the parent participants, that indicated that they were not knowledgeable of the term, continued to vocalize that LRE was new jargon

and expressed surprise when informed that the term LRE was actually 25 years old.

Other statements provided by the parents included comments such as “services needed for underprivileged,” “never heard of term,” “usually the wife is always the one present at the meeting,” and “no knowledge of definition or term.” Five parents indicated that they have “never heard of term.” Another parent defined it as “transition with regular students where they don’t feel different and constantly monitored.” The only school which had only one participant indicated that she “never heard of term” and that her “child is in SPED classes.” Table 9 provides a summary of the parent responses.

Table 9 Summary of Parent Responses to Definition of Least Restrictive Environment

- ◆ Never heard of term (reported by six groups)
- ◆ It’s like systems of care
- ◆ Services needed for underprivileged
- ◆ May have been explained without using the term
- ◆ Not aware of; actually this is the first time
- ◆ No knowledge of definition
- ◆ Go more or less at own pace; not staying in one spot; mixed with regular students; transition with regular students where they don’t feel different; constantly monitored

Summary

In regards to perception of the definition of least restrictive environment, it does not appear as if there is a full understanding by either school personnel and/or parents. There is some consensus that the term means to place students with disabilities in general education classes. However, the definition as reported by participants in both groups did not fully align with the definition of the term as intended by Congress. Therefore, this

researcher concludes that individuals responsible for the placement of secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam do not have a full understanding of the definition of the term least restrictive environment and the lack of understanding may have an impact on the implementation of the requirement.

Research Question #2: What factors influence the determination of the least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?

Interview Questions #2 to #15 focused on major factors that may have an influence on the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of IDEA. These factors were identified and field-tested in a previous study conducted by Hazasi, Johnston, Liggett, and Schattman (1994). The questions were stated in a manner that required the participants to respond to the influence of each of the factors. Responses from the semi-structured interview questions # 2 to #15 (Appendix E) were analyzed to determine which of the pre-identified factors the participants in this research study perceived as having an influence in the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement. The factors from interview questions #2 to #15 are given below:

Interview Questions #:

2. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 amendment that required that students with disabilities participate and progress in the general curriculum,
3. Characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most successfully included in the least restrictive environment,

4. Characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most unsuccessful in the least restrictive environment,
5. Federal policy,
6. School and/or district reforms
7. Educational structure and service delivery systems
8. Distribution of funds
9. Advocacy
10. Due process and litigations
11. Preparation of individuals involved with implementation of LRE. professional organizations, certification, higher education
12. Values and beliefs
13. Outside influences such as school boards, parents, community members, etc.
14. Identification of individual strongly identified with the implementation of LRE at school and central level
15. Other factors, not already identified, as influencing the implementation of LRE.

The responses to the interview questions dealing with factors that may be influential in the implementation of the least restrictive environment were divided into two parts: (a) school personnel responses and (b) parent responses. For both the school personnel responses and the parent responses, the question relating to each factor is given and the responses describing the type of influence on the implementation of LRE. The responses of each factor were grouped into three general categories: (a) no influence, (b) positive or negative influence, and (c) no response or no clear response provided by participant. This

section provides the percentage of responses for some of the categories when appropriate, with the exception of interview question #3 and #4. Specific quotes are provided in the respective tables listing how the factor influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of IDEA.

School Personnel Responses

Interview Question #2: How does the IDEA amendment of 1997 related to access and progress in the general curriculum impact how the school is implementing the least restrictive environment requirement?

In response to the question dealing with the factor related to the requirement of access and progress in the general education classroom, .05% of the school personnel indicated that they were not familiar with the requirement or that they could not respond at all to the question. On the other hand, 20.8% felt that the additional requirement under IDEA had no impact or influence in the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision. Lastly, 74.5% reported that the new requirement of 1997, related to access and progress in the general curriculum, greatly influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision. The majority indicated that the type of influence was a positive one. A listing of how this factor contributed to the implementation is given in Table 10 as stated verbatim by participants.

Table 10 Influence of IDEA requirement of Access and Progress in General Curriculum on the Implementation of LRE

Influence	Type
Opportunity to the child for co-curricular activities	Positive
Teachers struggling to catch up and meet requirements	Negative
Accommodating child to be part of general education curriculum	Positive
Increased mainstreaming	Positive
Made regular teachers take students	Positive
It's made regular ed teachers not just aware, but responsible	Positive
General education teachers becoming more aware of what they need to Do	Positive
Allow access into general curriculum	Positive
Kids are placed that are not necessarily appropriate	Negative
May not be LRE for child with severe disability	Negative
Focuses on interacting or following curriculum as close as possible to regular students	Positive
No training for teachers to implement	Negative
Give more teeth for LRE	Positive
Able to socialize successfully with regular students	Positive
Increase number of students in LRE	Positive
Makes us follow LRE by allowing students to take same courses as regular ed students	Positive
Curriculum taught in least restrictive setting	Positive
May be complying with LRE, but not coming with support and quality	Positive/ Negative

Interview Question #3: What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most successfully included in the LRE? What are the strengths of the system that have enabled that success and how can those strengths be used to promote the implementation of LRE for students who have not been as successfully included?

The responses provided by school personnel for the characteristics of successful students in the least restrictive environment are classified into five major themes: (a) good attendance, (b) academic performance, (c) coping skills, (d) degree of disability,

and (e) social skills. As one individual stated, “the biggest success I see in integrating these students with the larger population is their degree of acclimation. The other is their emotional well-being.” Another responded to the question by stating two critical components: “One of them would be motivation and the other would be attendance. And I think a willingness to socialize with their peers. And ability to get along with peers.” These factors appear to be a consensus with a majority of the respondents. At least one individual described the characteristics as being intrinsic. She stated, “A student is more intrinsic and I think more successful students are motivated intrinsically than extrinsically rather than what the school does for them.”

As for the question on strengths of the school, there was an overwhelming response that focused on the importance of the teachers. More than 50% indicated that the attitudes and training of the teachers greatly impacted the success of the students. As one individual reported, “Teachers give up extra time; make individual feel there is hope.” While another stated, “I think it has to do with the teachers, the mainstreamed teachers being willing to make modifications and willing to work with these students.” One participant attributed the makeup of the school population as the biggest strength: “The kind of kids we have, the friendliness, the openness, the affability of the kids, that’s the biggest strength.”

Interview Question #4: What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most unsuccessful LRE experiences? What are the current barriers that need to be overcome to enhance their success?

The responses to question # 4 related to the characteristics of unsuccessful students in the least restrictive environment seemed to mirror that of the responses provided in question #3. However, the characteristics focused on the “lack of “ the characteristics described in #3. Participants’ responses were grouped into the following categories: (a) poor attendance, (b) discipline problems, (c) low motivation, and (d) severity of the disability. At least two individuals attributed the failure of these students to factors unrelated to the disability. To quote one participant, “It’s not the disability that makes the kids fail, it’s usually a behavior problem.” Another described the students’ characteristics as being no different from unsuccessful nondisabled students. “The ones who don’t succeed are just like the regular kids who don’t succeed to a great extent. There are discipline problems, behavior problems.” While a small minority of less than ten, stated that the severity of the disability contributed to the lack of success. “These kids are kids who have like a more severe physical and mental disability. A lot of their unique need require more individualized attention.”

In response to the second half of the question, the identified barriers to successful placement in the LRE were similar to those identified as strengths. The majority of the participants attributed lack of success to lack of teacher training and support from the teachers once the student is placed in the general education classroom. As one participant stated, “I think it really would be the teachers, the general education teachers, teachers’ lack of training, the know-how, or awareness of that child’s disability.”

Another comment made by another participant that confirmed this sentiment was as follows: “Lack of training for teachers to modify for kids as well as administration and people who are working with the kids.” While another stated, “Some of the reasons for them not being successful would be the regular classroom teachers not being able to provide modifications to their lessons. Teachers not familiar with the special needs of the child.” Another factor identified by the majority of the participants that was also considered a barrier to successful LRE placement was the lack of support from parents. The following statements related to this are: (a) “It’s lack of parental support, sensitivity from parents;” (b) “It’s little support from home;” and (c) “They don’t really have parental support.”

Interview Question #5: How does federal policy influence the implementation of least restrictive environment at the school level?

For most participants, the factor dealing with the influence of federal policy was rated highly as a critical factor in the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement (LRE). This item resulted in 13% of the participants responding that they had no knowledge that LRE was a federal policy while only 9.4% of the participants indicated that despite the fact that the requirement was a federal policy, it had no influence on its implementation. Approximately 77.4% of the participants reported that the fact that the least restrictive environment requirement was a federal policy greatly influenced the implementation both in a positive and negative manner. Verbatim statements as to how they influenced the implementation of LRE are given in Table 11.

Table 11 Influence of IDEA Federal Policy on the Implementation of LRE

Influence	Type
Have to be more aware of it	Positive
Frightens people something terrible	Negative
Makes people do a better job with threatening aspect	Positive/ Negative
Puts us in line	Positive
If no federal policy, people would pay no mind to it	Positive
Because it's law, more apt to do it	Positive
When you hear federal, you have to comply	Positive
Made teachers more accountable	Positive
Fear of repercussions	Negative
Prime motivator	Positive
Federal weight carries more respect	Positive
The "cat's meow"	Positive
Work on just sticking one in class; not complying with all their needs	Negative
Keeps them in check	Positive
If it's something that's a law, they'll try their best.	Positive
Provides good guideline to use	Positive
Lot of paperwork	Negative
Threats of suit	Negative

Interview Question #6: Are there any school and/or central office reform efforts going on that are influencing the implementation of LRE?

This interview question, which addressed school and/or district-wide reforms, resulted in a majority (more than 75%) of the participants responding that they were not aware of any reforms. The other 25% or less indicated that there were some reforms that were being implemented, but that these reforms did not influence the implementation of LRE one way or the other.

Interview Question #7: Are there things about the way educational delivery systems and/or the structures are organized that influence the implementation of LRE?

Interview Question #7 referred to the structure of the Guam Department of Education (GDOE) and to the educational delivery system within each school. This was a two-prong question. The first part required participants to determine if the GDOE setup of having two layers (i.e. a central office and the schools) had any influence on the implementation of the least restrictive environment. The second part of the question asked participants to respond to how the service delivery system within their specific school influenced the implementation of LRE. The second prong of the question made reference to the existence of resource rooms and/or separate classrooms (if applicable) as a continuum of placement from the general education classrooms.

Of the 106 participants, 7.6% indicated that they did not know, were not sure, or were not familiar enough with the GDOE structure or educational delivery system within the school system to respond to the question. One individual stated, "This is what we get. We just make something out of it. That's all we have so we work a way out." On the other hand, 19% or 21 individuals reported that this factor had no influence, while an overwhelming majority (72%) indicated some type of influence. Of the individuals that stated this factor influenced the implementation of LRE, 3.9% reported that the structure and/or the educational service delivery system was a positive influence while 41% indicated a negative influence. The remaining responses were neutral.

The manner in which the structure and/or educational service delivery system affected the implementation can be divided into the following categories: (a) the location

of the special education classrooms either increased or decreased participation in the general education classroom; (b) the mere existence of segregated classrooms, such as resource rooms or separate classrooms, promoted and encouraged the placement of students in these classrooms; (c) proximity of special education classrooms either hindered or enhanced the communication between general education and special education teachers and between schools and the central office; and (d) two layers delayed the receipt of resources either personnel or material to the school. Teachers felt the steps to obtaining materials needed for implementing IEPs were delayed by the need to process the request through a central office. As one teacher reported, "As far as getting resources, it just takes too long. It's a tedious process." Another teacher reiterated this. She stated, "I'm sure if there were less bureaucracy, things will get done quicker. There's less roads to go through. You're going to get there a lot quicker." While another stated that the division between a central office and the schools promoted isolationism. The participant stated, "I don't know what downtown wants from us. We have never seen them. We have never heard from them. We don't have any communication with them. What we do here is just us and the principal." There appeared to be some resentment of policies and procedures handed down by the central office without input from school staff. As several participants reported, "The system is too big. Edicts are issued down without any reflection. Some really strange stuff has been coming out without any regard for reality." While another stated that "Too many people are in charge. It is a fragmented delivery system."

From the responses, it is apparent that there is some perception that the structure of the Guam Department of Education and the educational delivery system within each

school do have some influence on the implementation of LRE. However, the manner in which they influence the implementation of LRE varied from school to school and that some factors could be categorized as both positive and negative depending on one's perceptions.

Interview Question #8: How does the way money is distributed influence the implementation of LRE?

For the question related to how money is distributed and its influence on the implementation of LRE, two (2.8%) individuals chose not to respond to the question. Of the remaining participants, 80% indicated that they had no idea or knowledge of how money was distributed to the schools. A majority of this group responded with an "I don't know how money is distributed" or "I'm not aware of any funds." The remaining 18% indicated that they were aware of how the local funds were distributed or how the monies that were at least allocated to their school were spent, but had no knowledge of the distribution of federal funds to individual schools.

Though the majority of the participants indicated that they were not aware of how the monies were distributed, some chose to comment on how the distribution of funds influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement. Statements made by the participants in this group could be classified into the following categories: (a) critical statements, (b) statements indicating distribution of funds as influencing the implementation of LRE, and (c) statements indicating funds as having no influence on the implementation of LRE. For those individuals who voiced their criticism of the manner in which funds were either allocated and/or spent by the school

system, these participants made such statements such as “Let’s not go there;” “That’s a sad, sad story;” “I don’t know if I want to comment any further;” or “What money? All schools are affected the same way by the lack of funds locally. Federal funding? Don’t get me started.” For some reason, the interview question, addressing distribution of funds, generated humor from the participants, as they would chuckle after making the statement “what money” before proceeding to answer the question. Individuals whose responses were critical of the management of funds reported that they were not aware that federal funds were available to the schools to supplement the local funds in the implementation of the least restrictive environment. These same teachers reported that they did not receive any resources to ensure the success of the student with a disability in the general education classroom. Their comments included such statements as “Not much money is given to teachers,” “As much as it stands right now, we hardly have any money,” “I don’t really see any money,” or “I can’t say anything about money because of these years that I’ve worked, I’ve never seen what monies are coming in.”

The individuals that indicated that the distribution of funds affected the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) are reported as follows:

- (a) 53% could not indicate whether or not the distribution of funds was an influential factor in the implementation of LRE,
- (b) 38% indicated it is an influential factor, and
- (c) a small minority number or 9.4% reported the distribution of funds as having no influence.

The responses to how the distribution of funds influenced the implementation of LRE in the schools could be grouped in the following categories: (a) the provision or lack of available personnel and material resources to programs serving students with disabilities impacted the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education

classrooms; (b) success of students in the least restrictive environment; and (c) meeting the individual needs of students in the least restrictive environment. Comments made by the participants include the following:

- ◆ “More money would help.”
- ◆ “All schools are affected the same way by the lack of funds locally. Federal funding? Don’t get me started. Affects modifications in the regular class.”
- ◆ “If we really want to impact the educational program of the kid, the financial resources must be there. There are just a number of things that we want to do here at the school, but are not able to because of lack of resources.”
- ◆ “Great influence; need financial support to assist in teaching.”

It is obvious from the responses that the participants perceived this factor to have some influence on the implementation of the least restrictive environment. However, the individuals interviewed had no knowledge of how funds were distributed to the schools or whether any funds were available to support the implementation of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Interview Question #9: What influence has advocacy had related to the policy and practice of LRE?

In response to the influence of advocacy related to the policy and practice of the least restrictive environment, 31 of the participants or 29% reported that they were not aware of any advocates for placement in the LRE. Thirty (28%) individuals reported that there may be some advocates, but their advocacy had no influence on the implementation

of placement in the least restrictive environment. The remaining 61 participants or 61% reported some influence related to the policy and practice of LRE. The responses made by the individuals that indicated some influence on the policy and practice of LRE may be classified into the following themes:

1. Influences school personnel into complying with LRE requirements—holds them accountable.
2. Influences by creating negative feelings between schools and parents.
3. Influences by ensuring the provision of services to ensure success in the least restrictive environment.

Comments made by participants included the following:

- ◆ “If no one says anything, it’s going to be status quo. But when you have someone speaking out, then everyone is on the ball.”
- ◆ “I think once the parents push for that, then they’ll get it.”
- ◆ “It makes it better because we’re able to get things and it’s just too bad that it has to be a lawyer present that we can provide services for our students.”
- ◆ “It is intimidating, but positive. Forces administrators to be accountable during meeting.”
- ◆ “Well, I think it’s like the big stick. We carry that and when they don’t do it, we do that. It’s too bad we have to do it, but it has to be.”

From the responses made by individuals who perceive advocacy as an influence on the implementation of LRE, there are some sentiments that if it weren’t for the

advocates, students with disabilities would not be in the least restrictive environment. As one individual stated, "If parents did not voice their concern or if there wasn't a strong, advocating parent, and if a teacher says a student should not be in his classroom because of this, this and this, if a parent wasn't strong, they'd say okay, okay." To summarize the responses indicating the factor of advocacy influencing the implementation of LRE, a quote from one participant is given: "If no one says anything, it's going to be status quo. But when you have someone speaking out, then everyone is on the ball."

Interview Question #10: What influence has due process and litigations had on policy and practice related to LRE?

Prior to and during the time frame of this research study, the Guam Department of Education (GDOE) was not involved in any litigation. However, they have experienced at least three due process hearings and several requests for hearings related to the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE). These due process requests have been filed during the past year, but the hearings were avoided through settlements. The responses to the factor related to the influence of due process and litigations on the implementation of LRE are divided into three categories: (a) no response or inability to respond for lack of knowledge, (b) no influence, or (c) positive or negative influence.

For this factor related to due process and litigations, 8.5% or 9 participants indicated that they had no knowledge of what a due process was or were aware of any court cases or pending litigations. To quote the participants, their responses were either "Can't answer," "Don't know much about the process," or "Not familiar with it, I don't

know what 'it' is." At least one of the nine participants chose not to respond at all to the question.

On the other hand, 21.7% reported that this factor had no influence on the implementation of LRE. The participants whose responses fell in this category seemed to believe that despite the remedy of due process hearings and threat of litigations hanging over the GDOE, it didn't seem to make much or any difference in the day to day implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement. Their responses included such comments as "Shouldn't make any difference," "Don't think so," "Department avoids litigations; they make good faith efforts," or "Don't think so; parents not aware." The responses seem to imply that the lack of influence was sometimes due to the lack of awareness by parents. This was apparent in the last quote given in the previous sentence. Another participant seemed to agree with this premise by stating, "Don't think so. I get the sense that parents are not very familiar or educated about due process."

For the last category of the responses related to the influence of due process and litigations, 69.8% stated that this factor either had a positive or negative influence on the implementation of LRE. Despite a lower percentage indicating its influence as compared to the factors of policy and training, the interview question of due process and litigations generated some emotions from the participants. Approximately 14.2% of the participants considered the availability of due process procedures and litigations for school personnel to be pressure, threatening, or scary. They indicated that the threat of due process or getting sued created a climate of fear within the school environment. The remaining participants welcomed due process as it made the system more proactive and aware of the

LRE requirement. These two processes provided school personnel with a sense of accountability. A few quotes from the participants are given below implying both a positive and/or negative influence.

- ◆ “Threats make administrators more willing to look at issues.”
- ◆ “Holds us to accountability factor. Keep faculty and administrators in check.”
- ◆ “I think it would. Concentrate on issues that really affect a child.” “If more parents use these processes, implementation would be given more attention.”
- ◆ “Until someone sues. everyone thinks everything is okay. Pacify squeaky wheel.”
- ◆ “Think so. Don’t want resource students with threat of lawsuit. Have lawsuit hanging over our heads. Do it because we’re afraid.”
- ◆ “Anything having to do with punishment has a lot of influence in you doing the right thing. Gives a lot more concern for us to actually be involved.”
- ◆ “Yes, no question about it. Greatly influences IEP teams.”

It is apparent from the responses quoted above that the factor related to due process and litigations influences the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of IDEA. However, the influence appears to be one of intimidation and threat rather than the focus on complying for the sole purpose of meeting individual student needs as intended by the requirement.

Interview Question #11: What influences have teacher/administration preparation programs, professional organizations, certification, and/or higher education had on the implementation of LRE?

Of the 106 participants, 7.6% did not provide a response to the question about the preparation of individuals involved with the implementation of LRE, professional organizations, certification, and/ or higher education. Out of the remaining individuals that responded, 6.6% indicated that this factor had no influence on the implementation of LRE. Of the 13 factors, this factor was the most highly rated one. Approximately, 86.8% (92 out of 106 participants) of the school personnel interviewed responded that the preparation of individuals responsible for the implementation of LRE was the most influential factor. At least 38 of the total participants reported that school personnel, primarily general educators, were not prepared adequately to work with students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. The individuals that reported that their preservice program did not adequately prepare them to work with students with disabilities did not indicate whether their preservice training was received on Guam or off-island. As for the other factors grouped under this section, a majority of the participants were not aware of any influences from professional organizations or current certification standards. However, at least 36% reported that the University of Guam's (UOG) preservice program for secondary teachers did not require any coursework in special education. The same participants, that indicated that UOG failed to require special education courses as part of the secondary education program, felt the lack of required course work or training in working with students with disabilities greatly influenced the placement of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

The following are the responses quoted from the participants that indicated training was an influential factor in the implementation of LRE:

- ◆ “Education for regular education teachers needs to be improved substantially.”
- ◆ “Should be part of requirement.”
- ◆ “Believe there should have been training before we graduate.”
- ◆ “Teachers not prepared. Regular teachers scared to allow children with disabilities into their classrooms.”
- ◆ “General teachers not prepared to work with disabled.”
- ◆ “No prep from UOG.” “Should have some basic courses. Would be much easier working with mainstreamed kids.”
- ◆ “Teachers coming out of UOG not prepared to work with students with disabilities.”

Interview Question #12: How do values and beliefs influence the implementation of LRE?

Next to factors related to preparation of individuals responsible for implementing LRE at the school level, the factor of values and beliefs was rated as the second highest factor influencing the implementation of LRE. Of the 106 participants, 13.2% did not respond one way or another to the question, 6.6% responded that this factor had no influence, and 80.2% reported that this factor influenced the implementation of LRE either in a positive or negative manner.

For the participants that did not respond one way or the other to how people's values and beliefs influenced the implementation of LRE, their statements included the following: (a) "Not sure" or (b) "I don't know." As for those that reported no influence by this specific factor, comments included such statements as (a) "Don't think it really influenced the implementation of LRE," (b) "As far as personal values, I don't see why that would be an influence," or (c) "That's the biggest thing that doesn't influence LRE."

The most responses to this question, related to the influence of values and beliefs on the implementation of LRE, were from participants who believed that there was some influence on the requirement. To illustrate the sort of responses offered by the participants, several quotes are given below verbatim from the transcripts:

- ◆ "I'm sure it has a lot to do with it. Exposed to LRE and special needs students, you have a greater appreciation for implementing such programs, more accommodating."
- ◆ "Has a real influence on how they accept our kids into their classes. Own personal values affect how they deal with our kids."
- ◆ "Yes. if teachers don't understand needs of students, they're quick to recommend removal from LRE especially if teachers don't know how to work with students. Those with a lot of experiences really influences how LRE is considered."
- ◆ "Your standard is your bible. Values take a big account in teaching. many of us who are rigid, go by values at home because it's a reflection of the whole front."
- ◆ "Beliefs do influence LRE. Because of beliefs, never give students a

chance to be out there in the general education class.”

- ◆ “Decisions are based on values and beliefs.”
- ◆ “A lot of teachers and parents apprehensive about placing students in least restrictive environment. Stubborners will prevent students from reaching potential.”

In summary, the influence values and beliefs has on the implementation of LRE may be both positive and negative. One of its influences is the impact it has on the decision that is made in determining the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. The influence may be positive if the values and beliefs about students with disabilities are positive. However, if individuals responsible for the decision-making and implementation have negative attitudes about working with students with disabilities, then it will have a negative influence on LRE. Though a decision may be made to place a student in the least restrictive environment, which may or may not be the general education classroom, the success or failure of that student in whatever placement is highly influenced by the values and beliefs of the service providers such as the teachers.

Interview Question #13: How do teachers, administrators, school boards, community members, and/or parents influence the implementation of LRE?

In this question related to outside influences on the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement, about 6.6% or seven individuals could not respond to the question or responded with an “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure.” The remaining 99

participants or 93% responded that this factor either had no influence or had some influence. Only 27.4% responded that there were some outside influences on the implementation of LRE while a larger number of 66% responded with the factor having no influence.

Of the participants that reported there were outside influences, two organizations were identified as having a great influence in the implementation of LRE. The two organizations that were named as being influential are Child Protective Services (CPS) and Guam Legal Services. Both agencies are known for their advocacy for children's rights. The other outside influence was primarily the parents. As one interviewee stated, "Parents question different treatment. Sometimes influences IEP meetings[sic]." Another reported that "the more that the parents are involved, there's enforcement." Another believed that "outside sources are very helpful as far as helping the child." Statements made by individuals that reported no influence included the following:

- ◆ "No, they don't influence a lot. All I can see in the school board assisting me is hopefully getting me funding."
- ◆ "At least, I don't feel the direct influence."
- ◆ "The only outside influence is just the individual parent themselves not so much the board or parental group."

Individuals that made the statement about the influence of this factor and others that reported no influence seemed to believe that it is a result of the lack of awareness or knowledge about the least restrictive environment requirement of IDEA in general. As one stated, "It should influence if they are aware of it. I don't think they are." While another reported that "Those who could influence are not informed or aware." A third

individual stated, "I think they can, but right now I don't think the parent organization really doesn't have any influence on LRE."

Interview Question #14 Who are the individuals influencing the implementation of LRE at the school and central office level?

The first 11 factors focused on process, legal issues, financial, and training. This question focused on personnel that can be identified as strongly influencing the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of IDEA. For the school level, more than 50% of the participants identified the school administrator and the consulting resource teacher as the top two individuals influencing the implementation of LRE at the school level. Other individuals identified were the special education teachers, general education teachers, counselors, and parents. Slightly more than 13% of the participants could not identify any position in the school that strongly influenced the implementation of LRE. Table 12 provides a breakdown of the responses.

When the focus switched to the district level, 59% of the participants could not identify a position that strongly influenced the implementation of LRE. For those that had identified central office personnel, 11% named a division head, 10.4% named a program coordinator, and 6.6% identified the compliance monitors as the individual influencing the implementation of the LRE requirement.

Table 12 Individuals Identified as Responsible for LRE Implementation

School Level	Number	Percentage
Administrator	38	36
Consulting Resource		
Teacher	29	27
Resource Room Teacher	12	11
General Education		
Teacher	1	.094
Parent	1	.094
Counselor	3	2.8
Teachers	6	5.7
All	2	1.9
Don't know	14	13.2
	106	
District Level		
Division Administrator	12	11
Program Coordinator	11	10.4
Director	2	1.9
Compliance Monitor	7	6.6
Division	9	8.5
Transportation	1	.09
Related Services	1	.09
Don't know	63	59
	106	

Interview Question #15: Are there other things or events we haven't mentioned that you see as having been influential in shaping LRE policy and practice in secondary schools?

A last attempt was made to obtain responses regarding additional factors influencing the implementation of least restrictive environment. This question focused on other factors that the participants felt were influencing the implementation of LRE, but had not been mentioned in any of the previous questions. Of the 106 participants, 39 or 36.8% provided other factors that influenced the implementation of LRE. The factors

were grouped into the following categories (numbers in parentheses represent number of participants whose responses fell into the category):

1. Leadership (5)

- ◆ Longevity of leadership
- ◆ Governor
- ◆ Supportive administrator
- ◆ Continuity of administrator

2. Environment (9)

- ◆ Classroom size
- ◆ Size of school
- ◆ Building structures
- ◆ Population of school
- ◆ Accessibility
- ◆ Location of special education classrooms
- ◆ Ratio of students with disabilities in general education classes to nondisabled peers

3. Collaboration (5)

- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Follow-up
- ◆ Relationship between general educators and CRT
- ◆ Consensus decision-making

4. Accountability (2)

- ◆ Compliance

5. Students (5)
 - ◆ Social skills of students
 - ◆ Participation of students
 - ◆ Student achievement
 - ◆ Student disability
6. Parent involvement (3)
7. Politics (1)
8. Economy (1)
9. Culture (1)
10. Misinformation (1)
11. Visibility and outreach by central office (1)
12. Support (3)

In summary, the factors greatly influencing the implementation of LRE as perceived by school personnel were: (a) IDEA requirement of 1997 related to access and progress in the general curriculum, (b) federal policy, (c) DOE structure and educational delivery system, (d) advocacy, (e) due process and litigations, (f) preparation of individuals involved with implementation of LRE, and (g) values and beliefs. Though other factors were identified, the numbers were not significant.

Parent Responses

For research question #1 related to how parents perceived the definition of the term least restrictive environment (LRE), the majority of the parent groups were not

aware or knowledgeable of the term. Therefore, it is worth prefacing the presentation with a caution. The parent responses to interview questions #2-15 may not reflect a knowledgeable and informed understanding of the factors that may be influencing the implementation of LRE. This statement is based on interview question #1. For some of the questions relating to factors influencing the implementation of LRE, it was necessary to provide additional prompts in order to obtain a response.

Interview Question #2: How does the IDEA amendment of 1997 related to access and progress in the general curriculum impact how the school is implementing the LRE requirement?

In the question related to the influence of the IDEA requirement dealing with access and progress in the general curriculum, the parents responded to the effects of including children with disabilities in the general education classes. However, except for one group, they did not respond to how the requirement of access to the general curriculum actually influenced the students' participation in the general education classroom. The first focus group vocalized that this requirement produced difficulty and chaos for the school. As one parent stated, "I don't think teachers are adequately trained to cope with IEP modifications to suite a child's unique special needs." On the positive side, she also reported that "It's helping the teacher expand her way of teaching that would help other students maybe students who are not special education students, but who are slow learners." One of the parents stated: "If they're supposed to be learning what everyone else is learning, they need to be in same classroom with the regular

students.” While another verbalized, “Should learn general curriculum in regular class.” As for the majority, the participants equated general curriculum more with placement rather than with content.

Question #3: What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most successfully included in the LRE? What are the strengths of the system that have enabled that success and how can those strengths be used to promote the implementation of LRE for students who have not been as successful.

As to the question related to characteristics of students successfully included in the least restrictive environment, parents described such students as “highly motivated,” “proud,” and “enjoys being with friends.” Two other parents felt their children’s placement in the least restrictive environment, specifically the general education classroom, produced a “happier” child and a child that “likes to come to school.” However, at least one parent felt his child was not in the least restrictive environment.

For the second part of the question, only three groups responded to the strengths of the system that contributed to the success of the students. The parents identified the following as influencing the success of students in the least restrictive environment:

1. Communication;
2. Combination of resource room and general education classroom for instruction; and
3. Good teachers.

Interview Question #4: What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most unsuccessful LRE experiences? What are the current barriers that need to be overcome to enhance their success?

For this question related to characteristics that produced unsuccessful LRE experiences, the parent groups identified the following as characteristics of students who were not successful in the LRE:

1. Poor academic performance; "Found work hard even after being guided given repeated instructions; gives up; feels teacher making it hard;"
2. Lack of appropriate transition between elementary and secondary placements; and
3. Frustrated.

Not all groups identified the above characteristics as contributing to the failure of the students. The one response most frequently identified was the student's poor academic performance.

The second part of the question generated the following responses related to barriers that contributed to the lack of success.

1. "Attitude of teacher; attitude of principal;"
2. "Not keeping contact with parents; lack of information from school about absences;" and
3. "Lack of communication from elementary to secondary placements; poor transition between elementary and secondary. "

For this part of the question, a majority of the groups concurred that attitudes, communication, and the inability of teachers to meet the individual needs of the students were a great barrier to the successful placement of the students.

Interview Question #5: How does federal policy influence the implementation of LRE at the school level?

For the question related to the requirement of LRE as a federal policy, it was necessary to inform the participants in all of the focus groups that it was more than just a local mandate. At least 50% of the groups were not aware it was a federal special education policy. However, despite being given that additional information, six of the eight groups reported that the fact that LRE was a federal policy did not affect its implementation. They indicated that there was a lack of influence because the policy was not emphasized or because school personnel and/or other individuals involved with its implementation lacked the understanding of the policy. In addition, individualized education program (IEP) teams based their placement decisions on what was best for the child. For the two groups that reported that the federal policy was an influential factor, their reasoning was because it was mandated and that they superceded local statute.

Interview Question #6: Are there any school and/or district-wide reform efforts going on that are influencing the implementation of LRE?

Similar to the federal policy factor, six of the eight groups reported no influence or were not able to respond to the question related to school and/or district-wide reforms. For the two groups that reported otherwise, they each identified a program that promoted

the inclusion of students with disabilities and the development of skills for academically low performing students. The two groups seemed to believe that these supplemental programs facilitated the implementation of the least restrictive environment by building the skills of the students with disabilities in order for them to participate in the general education classroom. One such program was an after school program known as Gear Up, a program to encourage and prepare students for post-secondary education.

Interview Question #7: Are there things about the way educational delivery systems and/or structures are organized that influence the implementation of LRE?

With this question related to the educational delivery system and/or structure of the Guam Department of Education (GDOE), it was necessary to provide additional prompts in order for the participants to provide any type of response. The majority of the parents in the group were not fully aware of the structure of DOE and/or the educational delivery system within their child's specific school. Once the additional information was provided on this specific factor, some parents were then able to respond to the question. However, the additional information elicited no response for the other groups.

For this question related to the influence of the educational delivery system and/or structure of GDOE, four of the eight groups reported that the district structure and educational delivery system influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement. The following reasons were given ways in which the DOE structure and/or the educational delivery system influenced the LRE: (a) makes it flexible, (b) availability of continuum of placement, (c) participation with nondisabled

peers in the general education classroom, and (d) positive interaction with peers. As one parent stated, "I don't think the setup is bad at all. They're basically being given the opportunity to go into regular classes. It does promote them to basically wean themselves out of the resource and be more independent."

Interview Question #8: How does the way money is distributed influence the implementation of LRE?

In responding to the question related to how the distribution of money influences the implementation of least restrictive environment (LRE), five of the eight groups provided some type of response. However, in analyzing the responses, it seems as if the parents were reacting to how the lack of funds or the provision of insufficient funds affected the education of their child in general and not necessarily the implementation of LRE. The parents were not aware of how local and/or federal funds were distributed to the schools. For one parent, he seemed to feel that they, as parents, had no input as to how the money is distributed. To quote him, "What money? I thought the government took the money and did whatever it wanted to do with the money." While another stated, "The money should go to where the intention of the funds." A third participant seemed to feel that the needs of students in special education were not a priority as given by the following statement: "Local is based on whose needs is needed first." It was not clear that they were specifically referencing its influence to the implementation of LRE. Only two parents made a direct reference to the influence of the distribution of funds on the implementation of LRE. The statements made were: (a) "Yes, kids are not being placed

in the LRE because of lack of materials and books,” and (b) “lack of money prevented student from being in the LRE.”

Interview Question #9: What influence has advocacy had related to the policy and practice of LRE?

In regards to the question related to the influence of advocacy on the implementation of LRE, one group indicated they did not know anything about it and could not respond, two groups' comments did not address the question, one group indicated it had no influence, and the remaining four hinted some type of influence. Similar to the question related to the educational delivery system, it was necessary to provide additional prompting in order to elicit responses from some of the groups. As one parent stated, “Yes, helpful. CRT knew enough.” Another parent indicated that the involvement of Guam Legal Services facilitated the parents and children advocating for themselves.

Interview Question #10: What influence has the due process procedures and litigations had on policy and practice related to LRE?

The responses to the question related to the influence of due process and litigation generated by the parent focus groups were similar to those produced by school personnel. It was obvious that the parents had very little knowledge or understanding of the due process procedures as an option in resolving disagreements with the school system. Therefore, it was necessary to explain the process and the use of the litigation as an additional option after exhausting administrative remedies. This lack of awareness or

knowledge of due process was surprising to the researcher as these processes are printed as part of the procedural safeguards notice that was given to parents when their child was initially evaluated and annually upon receiving notification of each IEP meeting.

In responding to this question related to due process and litigations, three of the groups indicated it had no influence on the policy and practice of LRE due to lack of awareness and knowledge of the processes. As one parent stated, "I don't think parents are educated to know to take that action." Another vocalized, "A lot of parents not aware of that part of rights meaning that they have that option and I mean I'm not really fully aware of doing all the way that far [sic]." A third parent made the following comment: "It doesn't affect. I never knew about due process." A fourth parent responded to the question in a manner that did not relate to it at all.

For the groups that reported that due process and litigations influenced the placement of their children in the least restrictive environment, they seemed to feel it was done out of fear and intimidation rather than to meet their child's needs. As one parent stated, "Scares them to where they don't want to go further; where they don't want to fight; they tend to get intimidated by that." While two parents verbalized that it was a form of "checks and balances." "Make sure they follow it. Keeps everyone in line," as stated by one parent. The school "pays more attention and protects the child," stated another parent." "It's good to have. It's like you say, we have rights." These were the comments made by parents that seemed to feel these processes had some influence on the implementation of LRE.

Interview Question #11: What influences have teacher/administration preparation programs, professional organizations, certification, and/or higher education had on the implementation of LRE?

The parent groups responded to the question related to the influences of teacher/administration preparation programs, professional organizations, certification, and/or higher education on the implementation of LRE in a limited fashion. Due to their lack of awareness and knowledge, none of the groups were able to comment on any matter related to professional organizations, certification, and/or higher education. While they commented on the influence of teacher/administration programs, their responses were based on their personal experiences with the school personnel responsible for implementing special education programs at the school. The parents had little, if any, knowledge about the specific teacher/administration preparation programs.

With the exception of one group, the parent groups reported that the preparation of individuals involved with the implementation of least restrictive environment influenced its implementation. Their responses were categorized as follows: (a) lack of training in working with students with disabilities may lead to failure of their child in the general education classroom, presumed to be the least restrictive environment; (b) compliance with requirements of Individualized education programs (IEPs); (c) lack of knowledge affects attitudes towards students with disabilities; and (d) lack of knowledge prevents teachers and other service providers from following through with modifications. Their verbatim statements are given below:

- ◆ “Absolutely. Regular teachers aren’t trained. I don’t think any of them take special education classes or anything.”

- ◆ “New teachers don’t know what to do alone. Regular education teachers are not trained. They don’t know how to modify.”
- ◆ “When teachers know what they’re doing, able to follow through with modification.”
- ◆ “Lack of training may influence LRE.”

As supported by their responses, there was a consensus at least with the groups that responded, that teachers, particularly general education teachers, are not trained to work with students with disabilities.

Interview Question #12: How do values and beliefs influence the implementation of LRE?

Three of the eight focus groups did not have a response to the question concerned with values and beliefs and their influence on the implementation of LRE. The groups that responded indicated that values and beliefs influenced how decisions were made regarding placement for their child. As one parent stated, “I know there’s a teacher that have this in their mind that I’m getting paid whether you learn or not that’s not my business as long as I get paid. That’s the attitude they got. Take them out. You have an individual that said he doesn’t care about the kids. You’ve got to get rid of them [sic].” While two other parents reported that people’s values and beliefs affect the decisions made regarding the placement of students with disabilities.

Interview Question #13: How do teachers, administrators, school boards, community members, and/or parents influence the implementation of LRE?

Of all the questions, this was probably one of the most difficult or least understood factor regarding the implementation of LRE. Three groups provided no response and three other groups indicated they were not aware of any outside influences. Only one group reported the influence of an outside organization as influencing the implementation of LRE specifically for students with emotional disabilities and not necessarily for all children with disabilities. The programs identified as influencing the implementation of LRE were the Upward Bound Program and Project Filak, a wraparound project for students with emotional disabilities.

Interview Question #14: Who are the individuals strongly identified with the implementation of LRE at the school and central office level?

Cumulatively, the parents identified the administrators, the consulting resource teachers, and teachers in general, as the individuals most strongly identified in influencing the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). No individual was identified from the central office as the parents indicated they were not aware of the names and/or positions of specific individuals assigned to the central office.

Interview Question #15: Are there other things or events we haven't mentioned that you see as having been influential in shaping LRE policy and practice in secondary schools?

The parent focus groups identified two additional factors that influenced the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision. The factors were: (a) facilities and (b) location of classrooms. Two groups identified facilities as inadequate to meet the needs of the students while another group reported the location of classrooms as a barrier to the implementation of LRE.

In summary, the perceived definition of least restrictive environment (LRE) reported by both parents and the school personnel fell on a continuum from access to the general education classroom to lack of awareness or knowledge of the term. In comparing the factors identified as influencing the implementation of LRE, the factors that were common to both groups included the following: (a) Department of Education (DOE) structure/organization, (b) preparation of individuals responsible for the implementation of LRE, (c) due process and litigations, and (d) values and beliefs.

Research Question #3: How is the least restrictive environment determined for secondary students on Guam?

This section of the study involved collecting data from individualized education programs (IEPs) to examine the process utilized by the IEP team in determining the least restrictive environment (LRE) placement for each secondary student with a learning disability. In the review of the IEPs, the researcher examined the following documents available in the central office special education files related to LRE: (a) *Case Manager Notes For An IEP Review Meeting* (Appendix G), (b) *IEP Placement—Secondary* (Appendix H), and (c) *Modification Checklist* (Appendix I). In reviewing the requirements, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 Federal Regulations, least restrictive environment requirement is as follows:

Each public agency shall ensure:

- (1) That to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
- (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.550, pp. 12457-58).

In addition, the public agency must also ensure:

- (a) . . . that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.
- (b) The continuum required in paragraph (a) of this section must:
 - (1) Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under §300.26 (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions); and
 - (2) Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.551, pp. 12457-58).

and

- . . . c) Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled;
- d) In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs; and
- e) A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum” (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention

Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.552, pp. 12457-58).

and.

. . . (4) An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in the activities described in paragraph (a)(3) of this section; (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Final; Final Regulations, March 12, 1999/34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, §300.347).

The activities related to the Individuals with disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as excerpted above include: (a) involvement and progress in the general curriculum, (b) participation in regular classes and nonacademic activities, and (c) participation in extracurricular activities. With the use of the IEP checklist in Appendix F, each file was reviewed to determine whether it complied with the requirements given above. The Guam's Special Education *Case Manager Notes for an IEP Review Meeting* form (Appendix G) listed placement as Item #12 under "issues to be discussed." The instructions given was to "be sure to discuss LRE(least restrictive environemnt) options and reasons for decisions." On the Guam's Special Education *IEP Placement – Secondary* form (Appendix H), the IEP team was required to provide a statement addressing the following areas related to the least restrictive environment requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): (a) "Briefly summarize how the

child's disability prevents him/her from participating in the general education curriculum," and (b) explanation of nonparticipation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities." On the third form, *Modifications Checklist* (Appendix I), the IEP team was required to check off those items which were necessary to "meet the unique needs of the students." This section reports on the results of the reviews of the IEPs through a review of these documents.

Findings

The researcher reviewed a total of 276 IEPs for secondary students identified as having a learning disability. Of the 276 IEPs reviewed, 55.4% were from the middle schools and 44.6% were from the high schools. The placements of the students reviewed produced the following placement rates: (a) 24% were placed outside the general education classroom for less than 21% of the time; this placement is classified as general education placement; (b) 32% were placed outside of the general education classroom from 21% to 60% of the time; this placement is classified as resource room placement; and (c) 44% were placed outside of the general education class for more than 60% of the time; this placement is classified as separate class placement. The review also revealed the following:

1. As students transitioned from 5th grade to 6th grade, there was an increase in the amount of time spent outside the general education classroom.
2. All the IEPs provided a statement summarizing how the disability prevented the child from participating in the general curriculum. However, the statement was

standard for each IEP in a particular school. Examples of the statements are given below:

- ◆ “Unable to perform at the rate or level of his peers in a general education classroom due to learning disability”;
 - ◆ “Performing below grade level in all subject areas and needs one to one and small group instruction”;
 - ◆ “Currently behind peers in most areas; would be too frustrating”;
 - ◆ “Is below grade level which makes it hard to keep up with regular peers”;
 - ◆ “Would not be capable of functioning at the rate of his peers using the same grade curriculum”;
 - ◆ “Due to learning disability, she would not be able to function at rate of peers”;
 - ◆ “Child’s performance in math is not at the current level of her peers and prevents her from fully participating in general curriculum”;
 - ◆ “Learning disability prevents him from full participation and one to one instruction and smaller class settings”;
3. The current IEP form does not require an explanation of nonparticipation in the general education classes.
4. Each IEP included a copy of the *Modifications Checklist*. However, IEPs within the same school typically had the same items checked off. The most common items checked off in order to meet the needs of the child were as follows:
- ✓ Clear step-by-step instructions
 - ✓ Adjusted time for completion of tests
 - ✓ Extra time for work completion, as needed

- ✓ Adjust length of assignment
- ✓ Give directions in small units

In reviewing the present levels of the child's performance and his/her disability, there were mismatches between the items checked off and types of modifications needed in order for the child to be placed in the least restrictive environment as a result of the disability. For example, a student with a reading disability. Some of the items checked off were to adjust the length of the assignment and adjust the time for completion of assignments. In reality, giving the child more time would not improve his or her chances of reading the assignment. Table 13 provides a listing of the modifications most often checked by the IEP team members from the reviewed IEPs. The number represents the number of IEPs that identified the item on the *Modifications Checklist* form (Appendix I) as needed in order for the student to benefit from instruction.

Table 13 Checked Modifications

Modification	Number
Adjust time for completion of tests	23
Clear, step-by-step instructions	21
Adjust length of assignment	20
Adjust time for completion of assignments	19
Extra time for work completion as needed	17
Pre-teach vocabulary	15
Clear models/samples of expected work	14
Lower reading level of assignments	13
Reinforcement of strengths and successes	13
Clear and logical consequences for behavior	12
Emphasize critical information/key concepts	12
Alternative assessments (verbal, demonstration, etc)	11
Do not penalize for spelling errors	11
Frequent checks of work	11
Provide consistent structure	11
Get parent cooperation in reinforcing student at home for school successes	11
Location of student desk near teacher or near good student role models	11
Assignment notebook	10
Minimize visual and/or auditory distractions	10
Reduce reading level of exams	10
Repeated review and drill	10
Individual and small group instruction	9
Learn student's interests and strengths and use to motivate	9
Peer tutoring/assistance	9
Use of student journal for communication, self evaluation, motivation	9
Brief student on key points	8
Clear models/samples of expected work	8
Maintain assignment notebook	8
Modify homework	8
Open book exams	8
Read directions/worksheets to student	8
Utilize cooperative learning groups	8
Clear explanation of making choices, cause and effect	7
Define limits (behavioral/physical)	7
Give directions in small units	7
Provide visual cues	7
Use multiple choice tests	7
Use of visual, auditory and tactile presentation modes	7
Utilize attention getting strategies (visual and voice signals, eye contact, touch, group alerts, etc.)	7
Give clear directions in small units	6
Give instruction in listening skills	6
Utilize manipulatives	6
Controlled and structured activities as rewards	5
Key rules posted in prominent place in classroom	5
Modified texts	5
Modify assignments requiring copying in a timed situation	5
Teacher-to-parent-to-teacher daily notes regarding assignments and/or reinforcers	5
Break assignment into a series of smaller assignments	4
Demonstrate expected behaviors (positive practice)	4
Leave class for assistance	4

Table 13 Con't Checked Modifications

Provide word bank for fill-in-the-blank tests	4
Use positive practice strategies	4
Use student's interest areas in making assignments	4
Change format of assignment	3
Cooling off period	3
Note taking assistance	3
Oral or taped tests	3
Regular and specific feedback on what is correct	3
Use model, lead and test (direct instruction) teaching strategy	3
Checklists to organize desk and work materials	2
Use written back-up for oral directions	2
Students do guided examples on chalkboard before starting individual assignments	2
Reduce paper & pencil tasks	1
Use of charting, graphing to evaluate self	1

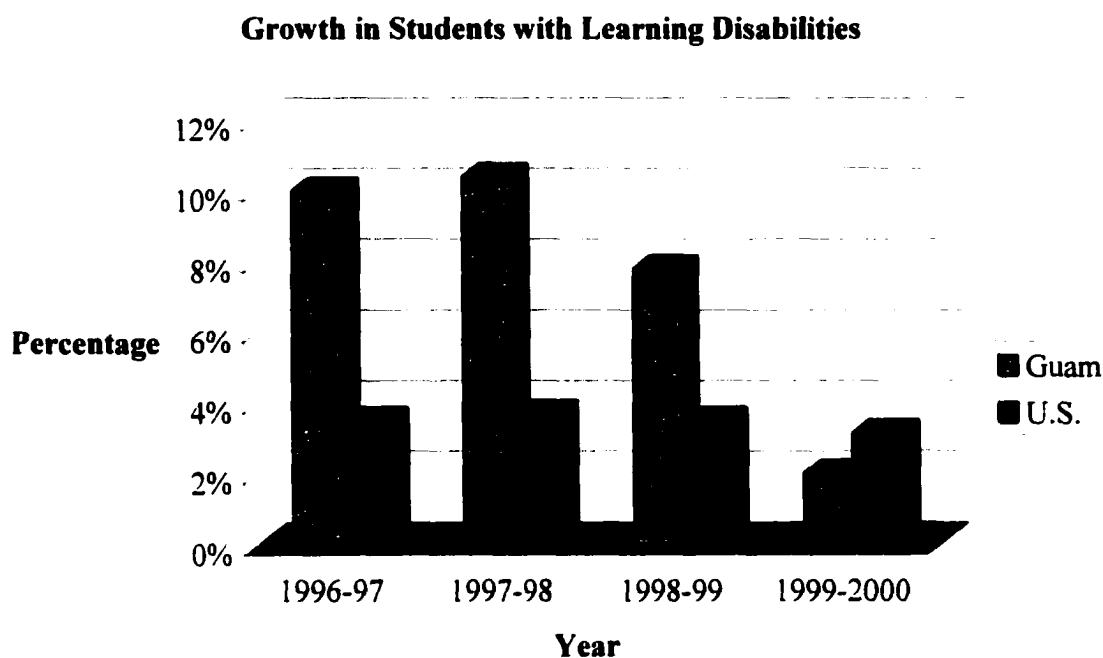
Note: This reflects the modifications selected from 33 IEPs.

The last part of the review included the *Case Manager Notes for an IEP Review Meeting* form (Appendix G). As stated above and as part of the procedural handbook, the Guam Department of Education (GDOE) requires that options for placement in the least restrictive environment be discussed. Less than 10% of the IEPs had any statement next to this item on the checklist that explained how the placement decision was made. There was no written evidence to support the IEP decision when the placement was outside the general education classroom other than the statement given in the IEP placement form briefly describing how the disability prevents the child from participating in the general education curriculum. All the IEPs lacked physical evidence to document that the continuum of placement was considered before placement in a more restrictive setting outside the general education setting.

Research Question #4: How do the practices in the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research, or intent of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

In addition to the data collected through the interviews and review of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the researcher examined the placement rates for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools from the 1995-96 through the 1999-2000 school years. For the first step in this part of data collection, the researcher examined the population growth for the students with learning disabilities during these five years. This was done to provide additional context that may explain the growth or decrease in specific settings. The rates for Guam in comparison to the continental United States are listed in Figure 1. Second, using data from the Guam Department of Education and the Annual Reports to Congress, the placement rates for the three major placement options, general education classroom, resource room, and separate classroom, were computed for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam. In addition, the cumulative placement rates (CPR) were also computed for the secondary schools for the 1995-96 through 1999-2000 school years.

Figure 1 Rate of Growth in Number of Students with Learning Disabilities



Findings

From 1995-96 to the 1999-2000 school years, there was an increase every year in the number of students with learning disabilities on the secondary level with the exception of the 1998-99 to 1999-2000 school year. There was a 1% decrease in the number of students with learning disabilities in comparison to the U.S. average of an increase of 3% each year. In reviewing the placement rates of the number of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom (<21% outside the general education classroom) from 1995-2000 school years, the percentage of students in this placement ranged from 22% to 25% while the total percentage for the 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico, ranged from 41.4% to 44%. For placement in the resource room (21% - 60% outside the general education classroom), the results ranged from 29% to 32% in

comparison to the total U.S. rate of 38.8% to 39.6%. Lastly, the final category of placement examined in this study, the separate classroom, had the greatest percentage of students with learning disabilities on Guam. From 1995-96 through the 1999-2000 school years, the rate of students with learning disabilities in this placement on Guam, ranged from 45% to 49% in comparison to the range of 16.4% to 17.9% for the U.S. 50 States, D.C., and Puerto Rico. For the 1999-2000 school year, the educational data was not available for the U.S. 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. See Figure 2 for breakdown.

The cumulative placement rate provided information to the researcher on the number of students who are educated in a given placement per 1000 school-age children. One interprets this “to indicate the number of students in a typical school of 1000 students who would be identified as having a learning disability and placed in a given setting” (Danielson and Bellamy, 1989). In calculating the cumulative placement rate (CPR) for secondary schools on Guam, the researcher individually calculated the rate for middle schools and high schools respectfully. The CPR for both levels for the general education classroom setting ranged from 11 to 17 students per 1000 students. However, the CPR for the resource room setting ranged from 6 to 43 students per 1000 students. Lastly, the CPR for the separate class setting ranged from 19 to 32 per 1000 students during the same five years.

For the middle schools, the CPR for the general education classroom setting remained constant during the years reviewed. However, the CPR for the separate class increased each year with the exception of the 1999-2000 school year. There was a decrease from the year before. The CPR for the resource room increased from the 1995-96 to the 1996-97 school year, but dropped by almost 20 students per 1000 students from

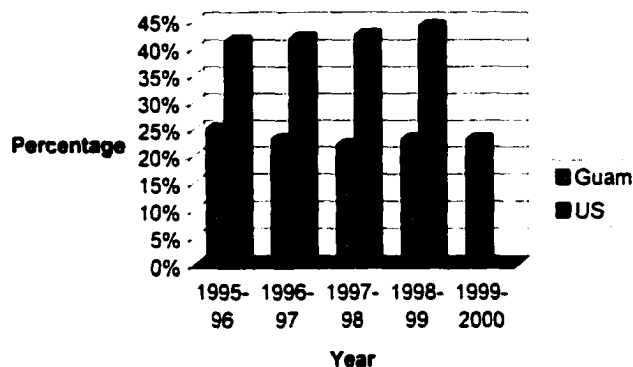
the 1996-97 to the 1997-98 school year. For the next three years, the CPR increased each year.

As for the high school, the greatest change occurred the first year from 1995-96 to 1996-97 for the resource classroom setting. The CPR was 6 and 14 respectively per 1000 students. The following four years for this particular setting showed ups and downs from one year to the next. As for the general education classroom setting, a decrease occurred from the 1995-96 to 1996-97 school year, but increased steadily for the next four years. This trend was similar for the separate classroom setting. During the 1995-96 school year, the CPR was 19 per 1000 students and increased by 58% during the 1999-2000 school year. Figure 3 provides the CPR information for each year for the middle and high schools on Guam.

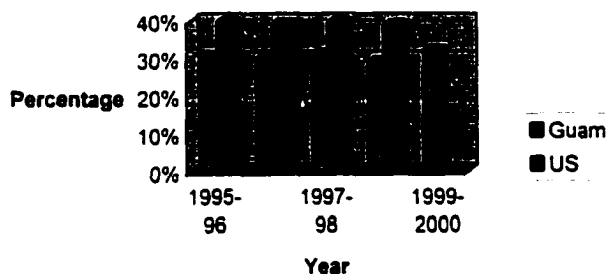
As for the IEPs that were reviewed during the 2000-2001 school year as part of the data collection, the placement rates were as follows: (a) general education classroom setting – 24%, (b) resource room classroom setting – 33%, and (c) separate class setting – 44%. These findings from the 2000-2001 school year showed a decrease in general education classroom and separate classroom setting, but an increase for the resource room setting.

Figure 2 Comparison of Placement in the General Education Classroom Environment

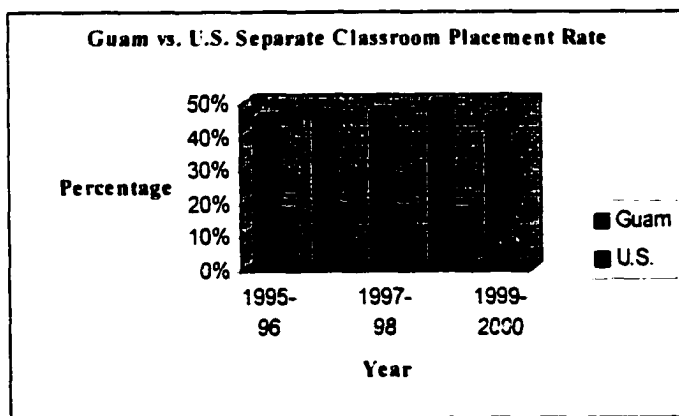
Guam vs. U.S. General Education Classroom Rates



Guam vs. U.S. Resource Room Placement Rate



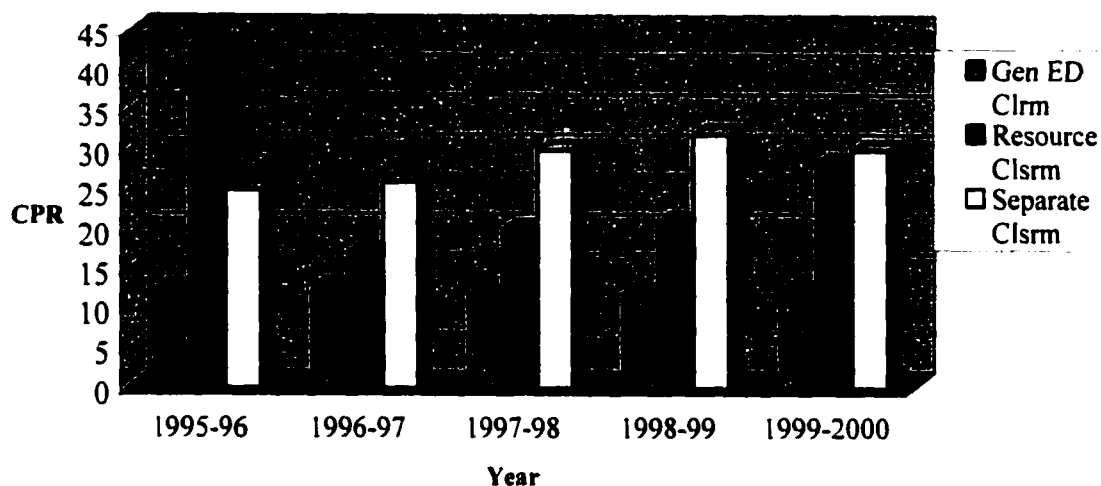
Guam vs. U.S. Separate Classroom Placement Rate



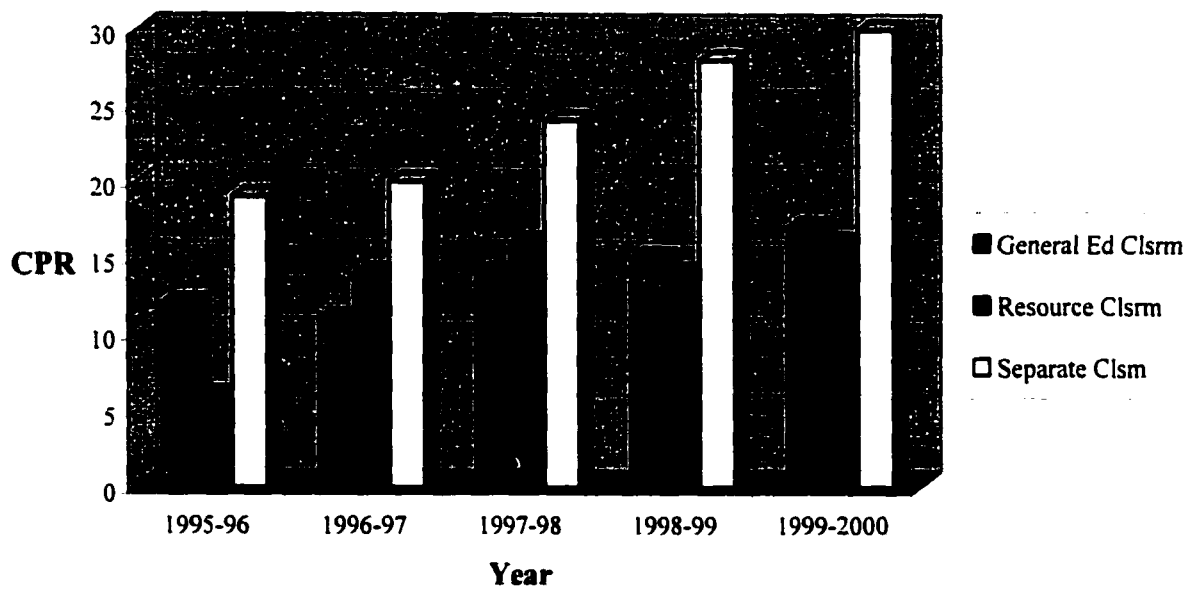
Note: Placement rate for 1999-2000 not available for U.S.

Figure 3 Average Cumulative Placement Rate for Guam's Middle and High Schools

1995-96 to 1999-2000 Average Middle School Cumulative Place Rate



1995-96 to 1999-2000 High School Average Cumulative Placement Rate



Summary

This chapter reported the results of the interviews with school personnel and parents. In addition, an analysis of the review of written documents, namely the individualized education programs (IEPs) and annual data reports, was made by the researcher. A summary is given below.

First of all, the definition of least restrictive environment, as perceived by school personnel, was coded into four major categories: (a) placement in a setting which meets the individual needs of the students, (b) placement that allows access to settings available to nondisabled students, (c) general education classroom setting with consideration to meeting individual needs of students with disabilities as well as nondisabled peers, and (d) placement that ensures rights of students with disabilities are protected. The results of the parent focus group revealed very little knowledge and awareness of the definition of the least restrictive environment requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Secondly, the factors, identified by school personnel as influencing the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision, are listed below:

1. Preparation of individuals responsible for the implementation of the requirement,
2. Due process and litigations,
3. Values and beliefs,
4. Federal policy,
5. IDEA requirement related to access and progress in the general curriculum,

6. DOE structure and educational delivery systems, and
7. Advocacy.

The parent focus groups, however, did not agree with school personnel that federal policy influenced the implementation of the provision. As for the individuals that were highly identified with the implementation of the requirement, the administrators and the consulting resource teachers (CRTs) garnered the most votes over other positions within the school setting.

Lastly, the review of IEP documents and annual data reports revealed that as the number of students with learning disabilities increased, the number of students in settings other than the general education setting increased. This trend was evident as a result of the review of placement rates as reported to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for the 1995-96 to 2000-2001 school years. In addition, the review of IEPs also indicated that there was no evidence to support the more restrictive settings for a majority of the IEPs reviewed.

In Chapter V, the researcher provides a summary of the purpose of the study and its findings and alignment with the literature, research, and statute. In addition, the researcher also describes the implications based on the results obtained through conducting the study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter V Conclusions

Summary of Purpose

This research study examined the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam. The study addressed four research questions:

1. How do individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam, perceive the definition of least restrictive environment?
2. What factors influence the determination of the least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
3. How is the least restrictive environment determined for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?
4. How do the practices in the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research, or intent of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

Three data collection procedures were utilized to address the four questions:

(a) interviews, (b) review of IEP documents, and (c) review of documents related to placement rates of secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam with their

counterparts in the 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico for the 1995-96 through 1999-2000 school years. A discussion of the analysis is provided in this chapter. The chapter is divided into three major sections: (a) summary of findings of study and alignment with the literature, research, and statute; (b) implications for policy and leadership; and (c) recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Summary of Findings of Study and Alignment with the Literature, Research, and Statute

Research Question #1: What is the perception of the definition of least restrictive environment individuals, responsible for determining placement for secondary students with learning disabilities?

In this study, the responses to the question related to the school personnel's perceived definition of the least restrictive environment were grouped into four major categories: (a) accessibility to the general education classroom, (b) meeting individual needs of students; (c) general education placement with consideration for meeting the individual needs of the child with a disability as well as the needs of the nondisabled peers; and (d) the rights of the child to the best education as that provided for nondisabled students. The responses obtained from the school personnel indicated that they do not have a clear understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment. Very few of the definitions given by the participants were congruent with the definition of the least restrictive environment as defined in the IDEA final regulations. In addition, at least five participants had no clue as to what it meant or that it was even part of the special education process. They were quite surprised to find out that such a term related to special education had been in existence for over 25 years. As for the parents, it was

evident from their responses or lack of response that they had no idea of the definition. Their lack of response, even with the provision of probing follow-up questions, demonstrated that they were neither aware nor familiar with the term least restrictive environment and its implications for their child's special education service delivery program.

In attempting to understand the responses in this study, related to the participants' perception of the definition of least restrictive environment (LRE), the researcher compared the responses to those obtained in other studies conducted by Hasazi, Johnson, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) and Borden (1998). The importance of the comparison of this study to other studies that investigated this subject was to determine whether the procedures or responses obtained by the researcher in this study were unique or unusual for the sample of school personnel in Guam. The responses provided by the Guam participants in this study, related to their perception of the definition of the least restrictive environment, was dissimilar to results obtained by Hasazi et al. (1994) and Borden (1998). First of all, the study conducted by Hasazi et al. (1994) did not include interviews with parents of children with disabilities other than those who may have been a staff of the advocacy office, parent training office, or support organizations. Secondly, in the Hasazi et al. study, the criterion for selection was based on whether the individual was knowledgeable in the implementation of LRE. Therefore, only those who were "known for their statewide knowledge of LRE policy implementation" were selected (Hasazi, 1994, p.492). Similarly, the participants in Borden's study only included individuals from the district office and did not involve any parents. Therefore, it is a

given that the responses in this study would vary somewhat as the selection criteria in the Guam study did not include knowledge of the definition of least restrictive environment.

In the Hasazi et al. (1994) study, the responses to the question related to the definition of least restrictive environment were more congruent with the definition of LRE as given in the IDEA statute and implementing regulations. In this study, only two of the categories of perceived definition by school personnel matched with the study conducted by Hasazi et al. The two definitions were: (a) consideration of individual student needs when making decisions about least restrictive environment (LRE), and (b) LRE as the delivery of appropriate special education services in neighborhood schools. In comparison with Borden's study, only two participants in the Borden study aligned with the majority of the responses obtained by Guam's school personnel. This related to consideration of individual needs when determining placement in the least restrictive environment. Similar to the Hasazi et al. and Borden studies, the responses by the Guam school personnel made a direct reference, not necessarily preference, for placement in the general education classroom. Though this was a clear implication by over half of the participants, their practices did not correlate with their perceived definition as was evident through the review of the Individual Education Programs (IEPs).

It is evident from the present study that school personnel, responsible for the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in Guam, do not have a clear understanding of the definition of LRE. Though more than half of the individuals interviewed had six or more years of experience in the education system, their knowledge base about LRE was

not necessarily congruent with what one might expect to discover from the experience. Since over half of the respondents indicated that LRE training had not been provided, one is led to conclude that their working definition was internalized over the years through experience rather than from formal training.

Research Question #2: What factors influence the determination of least restrictive environment for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?

The responses from the participants in this study, related to factors influencing the determination of least restrictive environment, varied somewhat from the studies conducted by Hasazi et al. (1994) and Borden (1998). The factors identified strongly by school personnel in Guam as influencing the implementation of LRE were: (a) IDEA requirement of 1997 related to access and progress in the general curriculum, (b) federal policy, (c) DOE structure and educational delivery system, (d) advocacy, (e) due process and litigations, (f) preparation of individuals involved with the implementation of least restrictive environment (LRE), and (g) values and beliefs. The school officials also identified other critical factors such as (a) leadership, (b) physical environment, (d) communication, and (e) collaboration, as having had an influence in the implementation of LRE. Parents in the study agreed with four of the factors identified by school personnel as having an influence on the implementation of LRE. The factors are: (a) DOE structure and educational delivery system, (b) due process and litigations, (c) preparation of individuals involved with the implementation of LRE, and (d) values and beliefs. Unlike the perception of school personnel, parents felt that the

organizational structure and educational delivery system was a positive influence in the implementation of LRE while school personnel indicated it was a negative influence.

In comparison with the two other studies, the factors that were similar in this study to the Hasazi et al. (1994). study were: (a) knowledge and values, (b) organization, (c) advocacy, and (d) implementors. For both Hasazi et al. and Borden (1998) studies, financial/cost was considered a major factor. However, in this study, the participants could not determine funding as a major factor since they had no knowledge of how funds were distributed or the amount of funds that were available for implementing programs in the schools whether it was local or federal funds.

Hasazi et al. (1994) identified implementers as highly influential in the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of IDEA. Unlike the Guam study, the Hasazi et al. study found that district individuals were strongly identified as highly influential in the implementation of LRE. However, the school personnel and parents on Guam fail to identify any district or central office individual as highly influential in the implementation of LRE. At the school level, the participants in the Guam study identified the principal, consulting resource teacher, and teachers as individuals who were highly influential in the implementation of LRE. The participants also indicated that the leadership within the school is critical to the implementation of LRE. However, the leadership was not necessarily associated with the leadership position per se in the school. More than 25% of the participants in this study identified an individual other than the school administrator as the individual most strongly identified with the implementation of LRE in the schools. There was a slight difference of 9% from those participants who identified the school administrator as the individual

highly influential in the implementation of LRE in the schools. The second individual in the schools most strongly identified as highly influential in the implementation of LRE was the consulting resource teacher, a teacher-status position responsible for facilitating the special education process within the schools.

As for the factor related to due process and litigations, Guam had not had any litigation as compared to the states involved in the Hasazi et al. (1994) and Borden (1998) studies. However, due process and litigations were identified as highly influential in implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA for Guam school personnel and parents. The participants in the Hasazi et al. and Borden studies, however, did not consider due process and litigations as an influential factor even though the participants involved may have come from states in which the rights to utilizing these procedures have been exercised by the parents. Guam, however, has not experienced any litigations, but have experienced several cases of due process hearings. From the responses, it seems as if the threat of litigations was sufficient to influence the implementation of LRE and not necessarily in a positive manner. At time, placement decisions were based on parent preferences rather than on child's needs. The mere presence of a legal advocate with the parent influenced the determination of the placement of LRE.

Participants in this study identified the source of the least restrictive environment provision as highly influential in its implementation. The fact that the source of the LRE requirement is found in a federal statute/regulations was perceived by participants in this study as carrying a lot of weight. This was not found to be the case in the Hasazi et al. (1994) and Borden (1998) studies. Their studies indicated state policies as highly

influential in the implementation of LRE. Unlike Guam, the states in these studies appeared to have stronger local and state policies that mirrored the specific requirements of IDEA.

Lastly, in Guam, past monitoring reports revealed that there has been a lack of compliance with the least restrictive environment requirement. The school personnel and parents were not aware of the reports of previous monitoring by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that cited Guam for non-compliance of LRE. They also indicated that they had not received any training in this requirement as a result of this non-compliance citation. There was a general consensus among the participants in this study that preservice training was a significant factor in the implementation of the least restrictive environment requirement of IDEA. This was not found to be the case in the Borden (1998) study, but was indicated in the Hasazi et al. (1994) study.

In summary, the results of this study validated the factors identified in other studies as highly influential in the implementation of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Major issues were related to: (a) knowledge and values, (b) training of individuals responsible for implementation, and (c) identified individuals responsible for the implementation of LRE.

Research Question #3: How is the least restrictive environment determined for secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam?

From the person-to-person and focus group interviews, it was quite evident that school personnel and parents focus on the unique needs of the students when determining

placement. This was evident by comments such as “meeting individual needs,” “helping them succeed,” and “providing them with the opportunity to learn as all other students.” However, their lack of understanding of the least restrictive environment may have prevented them from carrying out the intent of least restrictive environment (LRE) as mandated by federal and local legislation. This section discusses the implications of the review of the *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs - see Appendix H).

The review of the *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs) seem to indicate that determination of the least restrictive environment (LRE) was based primarily on the student’s ability to perform at the rate and level of their nondisabled peers. The IEPs reflected that if the students were not at grade level for reading, math or both, the placement for classes that required these skills would generally be in the resource room. There was no evidence to support that the continuum of placement was considered or if it was considered, the top of the continuum was presumed to be the resource room rather than the general education classroom. In addition, each IEP had a *Modifications Checklist* form (see Appendix I) as part of the IEP packet. However, the modifications marked on the checklist were, for the majority of IEPs, not directly related to the student’s unique needs as a result of his/her disability. This practice of not matching modifications to student’s unique needs that are necessary to participate and progress in the general curriculum seemed to align with school personnel’s and parents’ understanding of the definition of least restrictive environment. The primary focus was on meeting the individual needs of the student. The IEP teams, composed of school personnel and parents, based placement strictly on the individual needs of the child without regard to placement in the environment with the student’s nondisabled peers to

the maximum extent appropriate with supplementary aids and services as stated by the LRE requirement. The lack of the provision of appropriate modifications did not ensure the successful participation and progress of the students in the general curriculum. The second half of the LRE requirement involved the removal of the students with a disability from the general education classroom. Removal to more restrictive placements was allowed provided that placement in the general education classroom proved to be unsatisfactory even with the provision of supplementary aids and services. However, the review of the Guam secondary students' IEPs revealed that removal from the general education classroom was made despite the fact that, for some students, their needs only required modifications in the general curriculum. The IDEA regulations state that removal from the general curriculum cannot be made if the student only needed modifications.

Parents are essential participants in the determination of the least restrictive environment placement for secondary students with learning disabilities. However, parents often depended on the school personnel for guidance and recommendation regarding placement. A majority of the parents felt that the school personnel were the experts in this area and would "go along" with whatever they recommended unless they were accompanied by a legal advocate. Therefore, along with school personnel, parents were functioning at IEP meetings with their misunderstanding of the definition of LRE and as a result make decisions based on this misunderstanding.

Guam's school personnel demonstrated a strong belief in the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom as revealed by their responses to the interview questions related to the definition of least restrictive

environment. However, their practices of determining placement did not always correlate with their beliefs. The placement rates on Guam from 1995-1996 to the 1999-2000 school years revealed a preference for more restrictive settings other than the general education classroom. However, it should be noted that the placement determination was based primarily on meeting the individual needs of the students without consideration for participation and involvement in the general curriculum with their nondisabled peers. Based on the study by Danielson and Bellamy (1989) and the results of the review of IEPs, Guam would be identified as a “high user” of more restrictive settings.

Research Question #4: How do the perceptions and practices in the secondary level on Guam align with the literature, research or intent of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

The perceived definition of least restrictive environment (LRE) as reported by the participants in this study did not align with the literature, research, or intent of the LRE provision of IDEA. The participants' placed their emphasis on including students with disabilities in the general education classroom without addressing the provision of supplementary aids and services to ensure satisfactory results in a setting with nondisabled peers. However, if the students were not able to perform as their peers, then a placement other than the general education classroom was considered as the most appropriate placement without the consideration for additional supports for both the

students and the teachers. The perceived definition and factors influencing implementation of LRE were validated by the placement rates and review of the IEPs.

The studies conducted by McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges (1998) and by McLeskey, Henry, and Axelrod (1999) provided information on national placement rates of students with disabilities. In comparing the national rates with the rates on Guam, it was evident that the rates on Guam are negatively correlated with the national rates. Though Guam's population of students with learning disabilities has steadily increased over the years, placement rate increases occurred in separate classrooms rather than in general education classrooms as indicated by the national trend. The rate of students in general education classrooms remained at a stable rate over the 1995-96 to 1999-2000 schools years. Guam's secondary students with learning disabilities were placed in more restrictive settings as compared to students in the 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. This indicates that the majority of secondary students with learning disabilities are outside the general education classroom more than 60% of the time.

Implications

The results of this study made several implications. The implications involve the following areas: (a) vision of educating students with disabilities, (b) training to increase knowledge and skills of the implementers of the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (c) leadership roles and responsibilities of the implementers of LRE, and (d) culture of educating students with disabilities.

In *Reforming education and changing schools: Case studies in policy sociology*, Bowe and Ball with Gold (1992) wrote that the generation of policy is often "remote and detached from implementation." In addition, they added "policy then 'gets done' to people by a chain of implementers whose roles are clearly defined by legislation" (p.7). This was certainly the case for Guam. The federal legislation that mandated the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement was enacted over 25 years ago. However, its implementation has yet to meet the intent of the law based on evidence provided by compliance reports from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). For Guam, the IDEA and its implementing regulations have had a great impact in the access to an educational system for students with disabilities. However, IDEA requires much more than access. IDEA requires a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, which is the subject of this study.

According to McNulty, Connolly, Wilson, and Brewer (1996), implementing a policy such as LRE requires much more than a mandate. McNulty et al. (1996) states that the LRE mandate can promote that students with disabilities be placed in the general education classroom. However, in order to fully implement the intent of LRE, school personnel and parents must change their basic philosophy, attitudes, and beliefs in educating these students with disabilities. Participants in this study reported that values and beliefs are critical to the implementation of LRE. These results and the statements made by McNulty et al. imply that the true intent of LRE can never be achieved unless individuals in leadership positions or those individuals perceived to be the leaders have the vision that students with disabilities should be placed in the least restrictive

environment with the general education classroom at the top of the continuum of placement. Therefore, it is critical for individuals strongly identified as responsible for the implementation of LRE to have the vision for placement of all students with disabilities in settings with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate as intended by the LRE mandate.

The implementation of the least restrictive environment has been a local and federal mandate for decades. Smith (2000) in a study to examine federal role in early childhood special education policy recommends that “the goal of policy, whether federal or local policies, are more likely to be met if individuals at the local level commit to local action.” Therefore, the implication is that what is needed is much more than training. There must be that vision and commitment to be locally responsible for implementing the LRE policy. It must occur at each level of the system. Policies cannot be forced upon individuals. There must be an opportunity for individuals responsible for the implementation of the LRE policy to have the positive experiences necessary for changing attitudes that will eventually impact behavior. Smith (2000) implies several immediate remedies that are supported by the data: (a) leadership direction, (b) parent education, (c) organizational structure within the school, and (d) role of culture in the implementation process.

It was clear from the results of the study that individuals responsible for implementing LRE do not have a clear understanding of what it means and the factors that are critical for determining such placement. Therefore, the most logical implication is to increase their knowledge base and skills through formal and structured training.

Weatherly (1979) recommends the following in order to ensure implementation of policies:

1. Initially, responsible individuals should have support for the federal policy.
2. Time for planning and preparation should have been provided before putting the policy into effect.
3. Additional resources to restructure, and the provision of more active leadership should be made.
4. The policy should be clear and detailed.
5. There should be plans for monitoring of local effort. (Bowe & Ball with Gold, 1992)

Currently, recommendations #1, #2, and #4 are factors that may not be controlled by the leadership on Guam and certainly not by those at the school level. However, leadership on Guam may reflect on whether the resources in #3 have been provided and that the leadership has taken an active role. Weatherly (1979) writes that there are administrative remedies that would ensure successful implementation. Her suggested remedies are:

1. Improved data and accountability system;
2. Improved training and improved technical assistance to local system; and
3. Increased support of mediation and advocacy programs.

The literature implies that lack of knowledge base and skills require training and technical assistance. This training must go beyond the “stand and deliver” format. There must be follow-ups to the trainings and on-site mentoring or technical assistance support. For some of the participants, a “stand and deliver” type of training has been provided. So why was it not effective? The true test of any training is the impact it has after the

participants have left the training site and entered the implementation site. There is a need to monitor and measure the impact of such training initiatives. In addition, as recommended by Weatherly (1979), those in leadership positions must take an active role in the process.

For interview question #1 related to the participants' perception of the definition of least restrictive environment (LRE), the majority of the participants perceived placement and service delivery as primarily dealing with placement factors. This was evident with such terms as "normal environment," "access to regular education programs," and "environment that is adapted or modified so that the child will be included with peers." There was no reference to learning outcomes, instructional strategies, or core curriculum outcomes. The definition of the LRE requires that students with disabilities regardless of the severity of their disability be placed with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate with supplementary aids and services that will produce satisfactory results. The responses to interview question #1 did not address the need to identify the LRE placement that will produce satisfactory results as evident in the sample direct quotes given in Table 8. This implies that there is a need to refocus their perceptions that go beyond a physical placement. The leadership of the school must empower school personnel and parents by creating an environment that focuses on student achievement rather than solely on the compliance with mandates. This was evident with the responses to the interview question that addressed the influence of due process and litigations. One participant stated, "Holds us to accountability factor." Though they indicated that the LRE requirement added a feeling of accountability, it was accountability for compliance rather than accountability for ensuring student

achievement. Though this focus on student achievement rather than just on placement may be school based, there is a need for the department to set the stage and direction for a commitment to improve service delivery and determine placements that place emphasis on learning outcomes beyond compliance and not merely for students with disabilities, but for ALL students. Leadership personnel should lead by example and modeling rather than the mere dissemination of policy.

The parent responses to interview question #1 related to the perception of the definition of LRE indicated that they did not understand the term as given in Table 9. Though there has been an increase in complaints and requests for due process hearings by parents, the issues have not focused on the placement or outcomes. The focus has primarily been on the provision of services such as one-to-one aides, assistive technology, or related services such as occupational or physical therapy. With the lack of knowledge of LRE as indicated by the responses to interview question #1, parents will not likely ensure that their child with a disability is placed in the least restrictive environment that promotes satisfactory results as mandated by IDEA. There is a need to provide education for parents by parents. This implies that there is a need to establish parent support groups to empower other parents to become directly involved in the placement decisions of their children. Unlike the parents in the continental U.S. that have become empowered to participate fully in the placement decisions and have challenged placement decisions, some parents tend to give schools the total responsibility for determining the most appropriate placement for their child. Their level of involvement is sometimes limited. The results indicated limited understanding and education of the LRE and other IDEA issues. This implies the need for more education and the establishment

of support systems for parents while building their knowledge and skill level to maximize their participation in the decision making process.

The results of interview question #15 in this study, related to the individuals strongly identified with the implementation of LRE, implies a need to redesign the roles and responsibilities of individuals highly identified with the implementation of LRE both at the central and at the school level. This may require some changes to the structure of the organization. Most participants in this study were not aware of any individual at the central level that they can strongly identify with the implementation of LRE. For the participants that identified individuals, the program coordinator, division administrator, and compliance monitor were indicated as responsible for the implementation of LRE. If this is the case, the roles and responsibilities of these individuals within the organization must be reexamined if they are considered the leaders in ensuring the appropriate implementation of LRE as intended by IDEA. The Guam Department of Education (GDOE) must ensure that these individuals are knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of the LRE requirement. Secondly, these individuals must be empowered and have the authority to provide the support to the individual schools in order to facilitate the implementation of LRE. Once again, this requires the leadership with the organization to examine their own vision of what they envision for students with disabilities that go beyond mere compliance. They must build the leadership capacity of these individuals to take the lead and support them in their efforts to ensure the implementation of LRE. Lastly, these individuals must build their leadership skills that are not authoritative in nature, but supportive and facilitative.

The other issue implied by responses to interview question #15 on individuals responsible for the implementation of LRE involves the leadership at the school level. Leadership is sometimes defined as inherent with the position. In the case of the school environment, the leadership would be presumed to be the school administrator. However, the results of interview question #15 did not necessarily indicate school administrators as the implementers for the LRE mandate. A little over 25% of the participants identified the consulting resource teacher (CRT) as the individual strongly associated with the implementation of LRE. This implies an organizational problem that must be resolved before any future changes can be fully realized regarding the issue of LRE. There is a need to reexamine the role and responsibilities of the CRT. CRTs are teacher-status individuals whose direct involvement with students varies from school to school. It ranges from no involvement to some involvement to high involvement with the educational program of the child with a disability. If this group of individuals is highly considered as responsible for the implementation of LRE, there is a need to redesign their roles and responsibilities so that they are in a better position to provide the leadership and guidance to school personnel to ensure the implementation of LRE. The position of CRT must be redesigned so that it provides them with the valid authority that often accompanies supervisory responsibilities to ensure the implementation of policies. Their current teacher-status position does not give them the authority to monitor and/or supervise the implementation of LRE as they are on the same organizational level as the other staff members with the exception of support staff. Therefore, it is critical to upgrade the status of CRTs and provide them with the on-going opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills related to the LRE mandate.

One other factor was implied through the results of the study. This factor is directly related to the culture of education on Guam particularly education of students with disabilities. For more than two decades, children with severe disabilities were referred and placed in a separate day school. While children with mild disabilities were placed in their home schools, placement was often limited to segregated settings such as the resource room and/or a separate classroom. One must explore whether the previous existence of a separate day school and the cultural belief of educating students with disabilities in separate classes acts as a barrier to implementing the least restrictive environment today. The responses by both the school personnel and the parents seem to reflect on past practices, which no longer is considered appropriate today.

The implications provided by the results of this study require some major organizational structural and policy changes. If the Guam Department of Education is committed to the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment that promotes learning outcomes, then they need to focus on the following areas: (a) organization structure, (b) vision for the education of ALL students, (c) on-going training for all education personnel at all levels, and (d) parent training and the establishment of a parent support system. Unless the system identifies the issues involved as systematic issues, the current practices and beliefs will continue to prevail over the intent of LRE of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Recommendations for Further Research

In Chapter I, the researcher stated that this study had several limitations. The first one is related to the geographic location of the study. Secondly, the study focused

primarily on secondary students with learning disabilities on Guam. Lastly, data reviewed provided information on placements as determined by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. Though the data from the review of written documents revealed the use of more restrictive settings other than the general education classroom, there was no evidence to support that these placements were not resulting in satisfactory outcomes. It is recommended that future research measure the outcomes achieved by students with disabilities in their educational settings regardless of their restrictiveness.

Another priority for future research is an examination of the type of staff development that has been provided for individuals responsible for the implementation of least restrictive environment (LRE). Evaluation methods should include measuring the impact of the training given a reasonable time after the provision of the training. The evaluation should not be limited to the content and the application, but should also include the delivery of training and its impact on the programs and services for individuals with disabilities.

As stated in the literature, policy generation is often “detached from policy implementation.” Therefore, prior to mandating additional policies to enforce LRE, an evaluation of each school’s commitment and vision to the education of all students should be made to determine that the supports are there. Without the buy in from the stakeholders, it is highly unlikely that policies would be implemented as intended by policy makers.

As a final note, Glesne (1999) suggests that we can never understand it all, but that research helps us to “know where next to look, what new questions to ask, and what sense it might have” (Glesne, 1999, p. 199) for ourselves and others. She continues to

state, “Each step, no matter how small, contributes to understanding (Glesne, 1999, p.1999).” In closing, this study has increased our understanding of the implementation of the least restrictive environment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. However, it is only the beginning of how the LRE provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is implemented on Guam for secondary students with learning disabilities. This is not the end. This will point us to the way for yet another search. (Glesne, 1999, p.1999).

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Appendix A
List of Participating Secondary Schools

Names of Middle Schools

Agueda Johnston Middle School
F.B.L.G. Middle School
Inarajan Middle School
Jose Rios Middle School
L.P. Untalan Middle School
Oceanview Middle School
Vicente Benavente Middle School

Names of High Schools

George Washington High School
John F. Kennedy High School
Simon Sanchez High School
Southern High School

Appendix B
Letter Requesting Support from the Agency

October 1, 2000

Ms. Rosie R. Tainatongo
Director of Education
Department of Education
P.O. Box DE
Agana, Guam 96910

Dear Director Tainatongo:

My name is Nieves Flores and I am soliciting your assistance in conducting a research study in fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree with the University of San Diego.

The purpose of the study is to examine the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in secondary schools on Guam. The study will involve interviewing school staff such as principals, assistant principals, consulting resource teachers, general and special educators, and parents to determine their understanding and implementation of LRE.

The results of the study will provide information regarding the understanding and implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of IDEA for determining training needs and policy changes. A copy of the results will be provided to your office upon completion of the study.

As a long-time former employee and an advocate for students with disabilities, your approval of this study will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Nieves Flores

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research Study

University of San Diego CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked by Nieves Flores, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Diego, to participate in a research study on the implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is an agreement of the protection of your rights in this research study.

1. The purpose of the study is to examine the secondary school staff's and parent's understanding and implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendment of 1997.
2. As participants, you will be asked to respond to interview questions related to your understanding and implementation of the least restrictive environment provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Unless you refuse, your interview will be recorded electronically and all electronic recordings will be destroyed after the information has been transcribed and verified for accuracy by you as the respondent. The interview may last from 30 to 60 minutes. If you are a parent, your responses will be gathered through a focus group session that could last from 60 to 90 minutes. Participation in this study will not involve any potential risk and/or discomfort.
3. As participants, your input will contribute to improving the delivery service models for secondary students with disabilities on Guam.
4. The data gathered will relate primarily to secondary schools and services delivered to students with disabilities. You will be provided with a copy of your responses before it goes into its final format to review and edit the information if appropriate.
5. All information will be kept confidential. To ensure anonymity, both the schools and the participants will be given a code and those findings will be reported in a non-identifying manner. Participants in schools will not be identified by name.
6. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without risk or penalty. In the event you choose not to participate, it will in no way jeopardize your job or status within the Department of Education.
7. There is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that which is expressed on this consent form.

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanation and give consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____
 Location: _____
 Signature or Principal Researcher: _____ Date: _____
 Signature of Witness: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Least Restrictive Environment Interview Protocol Questions

- ◆ What is your understanding of the definition of LRE?
- ◆ How does federal policy influence the implementation of LRE at the school level?
- ◆ Is there any school or districtwide reform efforts going on that are influencing the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ Are there things about the way educational delivery systems and/or structures are organized that influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How does the way money is distributed influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ What influence has advocacy had related to the policy and practice of LRE?
- ◆ What influence has litigation had on policy and practice related to LRE?
- ◆ What influence has due process had on policy and practice related to LRE?
- ◆ What influence has teacher/administrator preparation programs, professional organizations, certification, or higher education had on the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How do values and beliefs influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How do teachers, administrators, school boards, community members, and/or parents influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ Are there other things or events we haven't mentioned that you see as having been influential in shaping LRE policy and practice in the state?
- ◆ Who are the individuals strongly identified with the implementation of LRE at the school level? District level? What has been their contribution?

Source: Hasazi, Susan Brody, Johnston, A.P., Liggett, Annett M., and Schattman, Richard A. (1994). A Qualitative Policy Study of the Least Restrictive Environment Provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Exceptional Children, Vol. 60, No. 6, pp.491-507.

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***LRE** refers to least restrictive environment.

Appendix E

Least Restrictive Environment Interview Protocol Questions Revised

- ◆ What is your understanding of the definition of LRE?
- ◆ How do the IDEA 1997 requirements related to access and progress in the general curriculum impact how the school is implementing the LRE requirements?
- ◆ What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most successfully included in the LRE? What are the strengths of the system that have enabled that success and how can those strengths be used to promote the implementation of LRE for students who have not been as successfully included?
- ◆ What are the characteristics of students with disabilities that have been the most unsuccessful LRE experiences? What are the current barriers that need to be overcome to enhance their success?
- ◆ How does federal policy influence the implementation of LRE at the school level?
- ◆ Is there any school or central office reform efforts going on that are influencing the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ Are there things about the way educational delivery systems and/or structures are organized that influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How does the way money is distributed influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ What influence has advocacy had related to the policy and practice of LRE?
- ◆ What influence has the due process procedures had on policy and practice related to LRE?
- ◆ What influences have teacher/administrator preparation programs, professional organizations, certification, or higher education had on the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How do values and beliefs influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ How do teachers, administrators, school boards, community members, and/or parents influence the implementation of LRE?
- ◆ Are there other things or events we haven't mentioned that you see as having been influential in shaping LRE policy and practice in secondary schools?
- ◆ Who are the individuals strongly identified with the implementation of LRE at the school level? Central office level? What has been their contribution?

Source: Hasazi, Susan Brody, Johnston, A.P., Liggett, Annett M., and Schattman, Richard A. (1994). A Qualitative Policy Study of the Least Restrictive Environment Provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 60, No. 6, pp.491-507.

Adapted with permission.

Appendix F

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Checklist

File #: _____ School: _____

Test Item	YES	No
1. Did the IEP committee take steps to accommodate the child in the regular education classroom?		
2. Did the IEP committee consider and/or attempt the provision of supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom?		
3. Did the IEP committee provide written justification that the general education would not be appropriate?		
4. Did the IEP committee determine that the student is unable to receive educational benefit that is not limited to academic achievement?		
5. Did the IEP committee consider a continuum of placement that is based on the individual needs of the student?		
6. Did the IEP committee provide documentation that placement in the regular education classroom would adversely effect the education of the other students in the classroom?		

If a check is marked under the "YES" column, the documentation must be written and included in the IEP.

Guam Department of Education
Division of Special Education

Case Manager Notes for IEP Review Meeting - 15

Name		DOB	Grade	School
Committee members present:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/s requested reschedule of meeting for this date.				
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/s not present. Attempts to contact parent/s were made on these dates:				
Issues Discussed		Decisions/Actions/Concerns		
1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent Rights reviewed with parent/guardian	<i>Parent Signature:</i>		
2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Introduction of all members			
3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Present Levels of Performance (PLOP) – Brief statements supported by test data & work samples.			
4.	<input type="checkbox"/> IEP Team members provide input and discuss student’s progress. Any concerns may also be addressed during this time.	Further documentation may be written on blank Case Manager Notes on page 2.		
5.	<input type="checkbox"/> Review of previous goals and objectives – If objectives have not been met, discuss possible changes in expectations and/or strategies.			
6.	<input type="checkbox"/> Unique Needs – Discuss goals student should be able to accomplish in 12 month period. Have relevant and realistic expectations for the year.			
7.	<input type="checkbox"/> Age 14 + or 8th grader – Student Interests filled out.			
8.	<input type="checkbox"/> Goals & Objectives – Develop based on information from PLOP and student’s unique needs.			
9.	<input type="checkbox"/> Modifications - Curriculum, grading, seating, expectations, number of problems, etc.			
10.	<input type="checkbox"/> Placement – be sure to discuss LRE options			
11.	<input type="checkbox"/> Related services. Discuss carefully and refer to Q&A for help in making these decisions.			
12.	<input type="checkbox"/> ESY (Extended School Year) Services – Must have documented evidence of significant regression towards attainment of goals and objectives.			
13.	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation needed? If new request, fill out Transportation Form. If not, make sure form is ready for the following school year.			
14.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 Aide Considerations – must complete Student Schedule and 1:1 Determination form.			
15.	<input type="checkbox"/> If any related services not being delivered, complete Form 29. Don’t forget to document this on the Data Entry Sheet			
16.	<input type="checkbox"/> Summary Statement of how the disability affects student’s involvement and progress in the general curriculum.			
17.	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional supports for school/personnel.			

Appendix H

**Guam Department of Education
Division of Special Education
Secondary IEP Placement - 22**

Name	Sex	DOB	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial <input type="checkbox"/> Review/Transition <input type="checkbox"/> Reevaluation	
School	Grade	Primary Language		
Parents/Guardians	Home Phone	Work Phone	Ethnic Identity	
Home address				
Mailing Address				
Extent of Participation in Regular Education: Subjects & Minutes per day. 1 period = minutes at secondary level.				
Total minutes per day =				
Special Education Program: Subjects & Minutes per day 1 period = minutes at secondary level.				
Total minutes per day =				
Related Services: Be very specific about minutes, times per week/month, direct or consultative service, area or subject.				
<input type="checkbox"/> 10	Speech Language Services			
<input type="checkbox"/> 12	Hearing Services			
<input type="checkbox"/> 13	Vision Services			
<input type="checkbox"/> 15	Physical Therapy			
<input type="checkbox"/> 16	Occupational Therapy			
<input type="checkbox"/> 17	Leisure Ed: Adaptive PE			
<input type="checkbox"/> 18	Transportation			
<input type="checkbox"/> 20	Extended School Year (ESY)	<input type="checkbox"/> No. No need to complete Form 23	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please complete ESY Form 23	
<input type="checkbox"/> 21	Community Based Education (CBE)			
<input type="checkbox"/> 22	ED Counseling			
<input type="checkbox"/> 23	Tutoring (Must include subject areas, person's position, etc.)			
<input type="checkbox"/> 24	Consultation & Monitoring			
<input type="checkbox"/> 26	1:1 Instructional Aide			
<input type="checkbox"/> 29	Counseling (School Guidance Counselor)			
<input type="checkbox"/> 34	Placed in DY.A			
<input type="checkbox"/> 36	ED Consultation			
<input type="checkbox"/> 38	Placed in PACE			
<input type="checkbox"/>				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modifications Checklist Attached		<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior Management Plan Attached	
1. Briefly summarize how this child's disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general curriculum:				

Appendix H

Secondary IEP Placement - 22

Student:	DOB:	School:
2. Statement of supports for school/program personnel that will be provided for this child in order to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities:		
3. Explanation of extent to which child will not participate with nondisabled peers in nonacademic and extracurricular activities:		
4. Assistive Technology Considerations:		
<input type="checkbox"/> No Assistive Technology (AT) needed; current interventions and strategies are appropriate		
<input type="checkbox"/> Current assistive technology is appropriate.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Different and/or additional AT and/or strategies needed. List what is recommended. <i>(Please complete AT Checklist & Eval Plan)</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistive Technology evaluation needed. <i>(Please complete AT Checklist & AT Evaluation Plan)</i>		
5. District-wide Assessment		
<input type="checkbox"/> This student will participate in the district's standardized testing with NO MODIFICATIONS.		
<input type="checkbox"/> This student WILL NOT participate in the district's standardized testing. He/She is working on an alternative set of skills that are being measured at least quarterly via data collection as detailed in the current IEP.		
<input type="checkbox"/> This student will participate in the district's standardized testing with the following MODIFICATIONS: <i>Describe modifications in terms of subject area (Math, Reading, etc.) and consider setting, presentation, and response.</i>		
6. This student's parents/guardian will be notified of the student's progress toward IEP goals and objectives on at least a quarterly basis (same as for non-disabled peers). The evaluation criteria, method of collection, and evaluation schedule is described in detail in the student's Goals and Objectives section of the IEP. If there are additions to the above schedule, specify here:		
7. If student is 17 or will be 17 during period covered by this IEP: The parent/s and the student, upon reaching age 17, have been informed the rights will transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority (18), unless legal guardian or Conservator has been appointed.		
<input type="checkbox"/> I have been clearly informed of the transfer of rights to me:		
_____		<i>Student's Signature</i>
<i>(Parent is given Form 32 - Transfer of Parent Rights)</i>		
8. By age 14 - Transition Services: Brief Statement of general areas needed:		
Service Areas	Services Needed	Agency Link/Responsibility
Instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Related Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Community Experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Adult Living/Employment Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Daily Living Skills/Functional Vocational Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Date of Last Evaluation	Next Reevaluation	IEP Implementation to
Signature/Position		Signature/Position
Parent/Guardian Signature:		Principal Signature:

