



1981

An Analysis of the Dissemination of the Legal Rights of Exceptional Children to Parents in Selected School Districts in Cook County, Illinois

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISSEMINATION OF THE LEGAL RIGHTS
OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN TO PARENTS IN SELECTED
SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

by

Deborah Ann Larson

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May

1981

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is sincerely grateful to Dr. Melvin P. Heller, the Director of the dissertation committee, for his encouragement, counsel, positive critique, and support. Appreciation for constructive suggestions is also extended to Dr. Jasper Valenti and Dr. Max Bailey, who served on the dissertation committee.

Special recognition is extended to Dr. Robert Monks who contributed to the formulation of the topic and provided comments and suggestions throughout the development of the dissertation.

A special thanks is expressed to family and friends who have offered prayers and support throughout my studies at Loyola University of Chicago. Appreciation and sincere gratitude is extended to my sister, Vicki, for her patience and help in typing the dissertation.

VITA

The author, Deborah Ann Larson, is the daughter of Earl Russell Larson and Ruth (Hajen) Larson. She was born August 29, 1953, in Oak Park, Illinois.

Her elementary education was obtained at Zion Lutheran School, Hinsdale, and secondary education at Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Illinois, where she graduated in 1971.

In September, 1971, she entered Concordia Lutheran Junior College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and in May, 1975, she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in elementary education from Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois.

In February, 1976, she entered Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, and was awarded the Master of Arts in Education in August, 1977. While attending Lewis University, she was elected to Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities and became a charter member of the Phi Delta Kappa, Will County Chapter. She began her doctoral studies at Loyola University of Chicago, Department of Administration and Supervision, in January, 1978.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Justification

The goal of American Education is to value each child as equally an individual and entitled to equal opportunity of development of his own capacities, be they large or small in range...Each has needs of his own as significant to him as those of others are to them. The very fact of natural and psychological inequality is all the more reason for establishment by law of equality of opportunity, since otherwise the former becomes a means of oppression of the less gifted.

Tom Dewey¹

The constitutional rights of children and their parents were established through passage of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and through court litigation. All children must be accepted as the educational responsibility of the public school district in which their parents reside and have the right to a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment. The Congress of the United States also insists that parents be included in the determination of their child's needs and services and developed the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as a vehicle to insure that parents be made full partners in the decision-making process concerning their child.²

¹H. Rutherford Turnbull and Ann Turnbull, Free Appropriate Public Education: Law and Implementation (Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1978), p. 3.

²The Department of Special Education, University of Illinois and The Illinois Regional Resource Center, Parent Rights and Responsibilities (Dekalb: Illinois Regional Resource Center, 1980), p. 1.

The schools were further charged with the responsibility of informing parents of their various rights and the means by which they can secure these rights for themselves and their handicapped child. While dissemination of educational rights might be construed as a simple task of merely mailing these regulations to all district residents, far more important is the opportunity to provide parents with knowledge, skills, and competencies to become effective members of the team which develops the child's Individual Education Program.³

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the dissemination techniques utilized by select elementary school districts in Cook County, Illinois, to inform parents of the legal rights of their exceptional children. Public Law 94-142 as well as Illinois' Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education have mandated that school districts inform parents of handicapped children of their legal rights in the following areas: 1) Individualized Education Program; 2) Case Study Evaluation and Placement Procedures; 3) School Records, and 4) Impartial Due Process Hearing Rights.

This study examines the strategies that school districts utilize to inform parents of exceptional children of their

³ ibid, p. 2.

legal rights and assesses the parents' level of awareness of their legal rights. The comparison of these data provides the evidence to determine strategies which can be utilized by the school district in order to insure compliance.

The significance of this study is the emergence of recommendations for school districts to utilize in order to effectively disseminate the legal rights of exceptional children to their parents or guardians for compliance with Article 9.01 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education, which states:

Each local district shall develop and implement procedures for creating public awareness of special education programs and for advising the public of the rights of exceptional children.⁴

Procedure

In order to assess the effectiveness of school district procedures for informing parents of their legal rights, a comparative analysis was made involving the following factors: 1) comparison of dissemination techniques used by school districts with the guidelines for effective dissemination as established by the National School Public Relations Association; 2) comparison of the Directors' of Special Education perception of their dissemination with the parents' perception of the school district's dissemination techniques, and

⁴Illinois, Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education (Illinois State Board of Education, 1979), p. 26.

3) assessment of what the parent knows with respect to the educational rights being disseminated.

An interview was scheduled with each participating district's personnel responsible for the dissemination of this information. Each interview was structured around a series of questions (see Appendix A) which are largely developed from the suggested guidelines of the National School Public Relations Association. In addition, each administrator was asked his perceptions of his experiences in the dissemination process. Documentation to substantiate the means by which districts are informing parents of special education students in their district of their legal rights was collected and recorded.

Each district was analyzed with respect to the presence or absence of the following critical components established by the National School Public Relations Association: 1) policy statement; 2) public relations professional; 3) formal planning; 4) formal evaluation; 5) two-way communication, and 6) media. Furthermore, each district was analyzed with respect to the dissemination techniques utilized and the awareness of parents of their legal rights, which constitutes the uniqueness of this study as it goes beyond the traditional evaluation of established guidelines for effective techniques, and includes in the evaluation a comparison of what parents know vs. what is disseminated.

Four of six elementary school districts in a selected special education cooperative area agreed to participate in

this study, which constitutes a population of approximately 650 handicapped students. Each local school district is responsible for providing a comprehensive program of special education for those exceptional children who are between the ages of three and twenty-one and who are resident in the district. Due to the low incidence of certain handicapping conditions, several school districts jointly provide special education services under the auspices of a special education cooperative. This unique relationship requires cooperation and coordination among the school districts and the cooperative in which all participate in the dissemination of educational rights. Hence, this sample is limited to a special education cooperative area.

A stratified random sample constituted the population for obtaining information regarding the awareness of parents of their legal rights. The population consisted of those parents with children placed in self-contained special education programs in the following categories: 1) early childhood; 2) mentally retarded; 3) learning disabled; 4) behavior disordered/emotionally disturbed, and 5) multiply impaired. The special education programs were located within the district, a cooperative program, a regional program, a private day placement, or a private residential program.

A five question simple "yes/no" survey was distributed to 100% of the parents in each category. The purpose of this survey was to determine the basic level of knowledge of parents of exceptional children in regard to their rights as

guaranteed by the following: 1) United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment; 2) Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act; 3) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; 4) The School Code of Illinois, Article XIV, and 5) the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education.

Upon return of the survey, 25% of those parents in each category who indicated "yes" to all five questions were randomly sampled and individually interviewed (see Appendix C). Hence, this survey functioned as a screening device for determining the population to be interviewed.

As mentioned previously, the data were used to assess the effectiveness of school district procedures for informing parents of their legal rights. Effectiveness was measured in two ways: 1) by comparing school district dissemination techniques with the guidelines for effective dissemination as established by the National School Public Relations Association, and 2) by assessing what the parent knows with respect to the educational rights required by law to be disseminated by school districts. The perceptions of the Director of Special Education and the parents are incorporated in the analysis with specific suggestions and recommendations for better communication being noted.

Data were cross-tabulated in order to examine specific variables such as: 1) handicapping condition; 2) location of special education programs, and 3) various dissemination procedures across districts, providing an opportunity to

analyze the level of knowledge in conjunction with the possible impact of these specific variables.

Upon examination of the data, recommendations were made in regard to specific dissemination techniques which may be utilized by school districts in order not only to insure compliance with Section 9.01 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education, but also to develop strategies to increase parents' understanding of their rights through the dissemination process, hence, increasing effectiveness.

Major Purpose and Presentation of Information

The major purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of dissemination techniques utilized by school districts to inform parents of their exceptional child's educational rights. Due to the fact that a study such as this has not been previously undertaken, Chapter II presents:

- 1) the litigation which preceded and established the need for passage of Public Law 94-142;
- 2) the responsibility of the State and local boards of education for complying with this law;
- 3) a description of the four major components which need to be disseminated to parents in order to fulfill the requirements of the law, and
- 4) a discussion of the six critical components necessary for a good public relations program as established by the National School Public Relations Association.

The focus of Chapter III is to delineate the dissemination techniques utilized by the four participating elementary school districts and examine how these techniques compare with the guidelines established by the National School Public Relations Association.

Chapter IV presents how parents are informed of their educational rights and their level of awareness of these rights in the areas of: 1) Individualized Education Programs; 2) School Records; 3) Impartial Due Process Hearings, and 4) Case Study Evaluation and Placement.

Chapter V presents the summary and conclusions of this study. Effectiveness of the dissemination techniques is analyzed and measured in two ways: 1) comparison of the dissemination techniques utilized by the school district with the guidelines established by the National School Public Relations Association, and 2) comparison of what parents' know in relation to what is being disseminated.

The perceptions of the Directors of Special Education and the parents regarding their feelings as to how to effectively disseminate information are analyzed in Chapters III and IV with specific recommendations for better communication incorporated in Chapter V. Recommendations for further study are also included in Chapter V.

Definitions

For purposes of this study, the following handicapping conditions comprise the population and include only those

parents whose child is involved in special education over 50% of his/her school days.

Early Childhood Noncategorical: A child between the ages of three and six years old who demonstrates a significant delay intellectually, motorically, socially, or in the area of speech and language.

Mentally Retarded: The child's intellectual development, mental capacity, adaptive behavior, and academic achievement are markedly delayed. Such mental impairment may be mild, moderate, severe, or profound.⁵

Learning Disabled: The child exhibits a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Such term includes conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.⁶

⁵ Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Specialized Educational Services and The Illinois Regional Resource Center, The Illinois Primer on Individualized Education Programs (DeKalb: Illinois Regional Resource Center, 1979), p. C-3.

⁶ *ibid*, p. C-2

Behavior Disordered/Emotionally Disturbed: The child exhibits an affective disorder and/or adaptive behavior which significantly interferes with his or her learning and/or social functioning.⁷

Multi-Impaired: The child exhibits two or more impairments, severe in nature or total impact, which significantly affect his or her ability to benefit from the educational program.⁸

Limitations

With the use of a survey and interview as methods of collecting data, the possibility exists that respondents may interpret the same questions in different ways. Also inherent in this procedure is the fact that the recording and interpretation of the data involves subjective interpretation by the interviewer.

Another limitation of this study is the influence of outside sources, i.e., other parents, local and national support groups, and their influence on the parents' level of knowledge. This factor will be somewhat controlled, however, through the questions utilized during the parent interview.

⁷ ibid, p. C-3.

⁸ ibid, p. C-3.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A manual search was conducted in order to discover whether or not a study has been previously undertaken which examines the effectiveness of the dissemination techniques utilized by school districts to inform parents of the educational rights of their handicapped child and included the following resources: 1) Educational Index; 2) Resources in Education (ERIC); 3) Current Index to Journals in Education; 4) Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, and 5) Dissertation Abstracts International, University Microfilm International. Upon investigation of these sources, it was determined that this study has not been previously done, however, each year since the passage of Public Law 94-142 more and more research is being conducted on the impact of this law.

Due to the lack of direct research on this topic, Chapter II presents related background information, specifically: 1) the litigation which preceded and established the need for passage of Public Law 94-142; 2) the role and responsibility of the State and local boards of education for adhering to the requirements established by the law; 3) a description of the four major components which need to be disseminated to parents in order that they may become involved in the unique, special education of their child, and 4) a discussion of the six critical components necessary for a good pub-

lic relations program as established by the National School Public Relations Association.

Litigation

"A major legal development in this decade has been the extension of the principle of egalitarianism to handicapped persons."¹ This principle simply means that all persons, however unequal in their ability, should be treated equally by being granted equal opportunities.

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, the Supreme Court established the principle that all children be guaranteed equal educational opportunity:

Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.²

Central to this case was the fact that blacks were denied admission to schools attended by whites under laws requiring or

¹Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 17.

²*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

permitting segregation according to race. The United States Supreme Court found that segregation solely on the basis of race in the public schools violated equal protection and denies black or minority children an equal educational opportunity. Therefore, any state-required or sanctioned segregation solely because of a person's unalterable characteristic is unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Brown was the grounds for successful challenges of governmental discrimination against certain persons because of their unalterable, personal characteristics. "Inequalities have existed in the opportunity to be educated and handicapped children have been among the victims of educational discrimination."⁴ In the right-to-education cases, the class is all students whether handicapped or not. When the state treats handicapped students differently by denying them an opportunity to attend school, the courts found that the handicapped had been denied equal protection of the school laws on the basis of their unalterable trait -- their handicap.⁵ That basic constitutional assumption, that handicapped children are also entitled to the equal protection of the laws, was used to challenge successfully the exclusion of

³Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 14.

⁴ibid, p. 33.

⁵ibid, p. 34.

the handicapped in two landmark Federal cases.⁶

In 1971, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (P.A.R.C.) brought suit in Federal court against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania charging that the exclusion of mentally retarded children from public school programs is unconstitutional.⁷ The Pennsylvania School Code provided two avenues of exclusion: 1) if it was determined that the child is unable to profit from further public school attendance, and 2) if the child had a mental age of less than five years. P.A.R.C. argued that all children are capable of benefitting from systematic education and that education must be viewed as a continuous process and not solely limited to academic experiences.⁸ This case established the rights of those retarded children and the court found:

...that all mentally retarded persons are capable of benefitting from a program of education and training; that the greatest number of retarded persons, given such education and training, are capable of achieving self-sufficiency, and the remaining few, with such education and training, are capable of achieving some degree of self-care; that the earlier such education and training begins, the more thoroughly and the more

⁶Reed Martin, Educating Handicapped Children: The Legal Mandate (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1979), p. 13.

⁷Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 334 F. Supp. 1257 (E. D. PA. 1971) and 343 F. Supp. 279 (E. D. PA. 1972).

⁸Richard M. Gargiulo, "Litigation and Legislation for Exceptional Children: An Historical Perspective," Illinois Council for Exceptional Children Quarterly 29 (Winter 1980): 4-6.

efficiently a mentally retarded person can benefit at any point in his life and development from a program of education and training.⁹

In *Mills v. Board of Education* in August of 1972, the practices attacked were broader than those in the *P.A.R.C.* case and involved all types of handicapped students and not only the exclusion from services in the beginning, but also the use of suspension and expulsion to eliminate children whom the school did not want to serve.

The genesis of this case is found 1) in the failure of the District of Columbia to provide publicly supported education and training to plaintiffs and other "exceptional" children, members of their class, and 2) the excluding, suspending, expelling, reassigning and transferring of "exceptional" children from regular public school classes without affording them due process of law...Due process of law requires a hearing prior to exclusion.¹⁰

In both *P.A.R.C.* and *Mills* the courts relied on legal and educational authorities to support their finding that education was essential to enable a child to function in society and that all children can benefit from education. The equal protection and due process guarantees of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments were applied to furnish this important right to handicapped children.¹¹

⁹*P.A.R.C. v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

¹⁰*Martin*, p. 15.

¹¹*Turnbull and Turnbull*, p. 36.

Legislation: Public Law 94-142 and Section 504 of the
Rehabilitation Act of 1973

In 1975, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted, and in 1977, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was implemented. These two Federal laws both attempt to prevent functional exclusion by requiring that the handicapped child be given an education appropriate to his conditions and needs.¹²

Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey, the principal author of Public Law 94-142, stated:

The Constitution provides that all people shall be treated equally, but we know that, while all youngsters have an equal right to education, those who live with handicaps have not been accorded this right. This measure fulfills the promise of the Constitution that there shall be equality of education for all people, and that handicapped children no longer will be left out...the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975...is, in my judgment, the most important Federal legislation affecting American public education since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It establishes a process by which the goal of educating all handicapped can and will be accomplished. And, it establishes the principle that handicapped children and their parents are not unreasonable when they expect to be given the benefit of their constitutional right to equal protection of the laws.¹³

The enactment of Public Law 94-142 provides services to more than an estimated eight million children aged three to twenty-one with the expressed purpose of assuring that all handicapped children have available to them a free,

¹² *ibid*, p. 56.

¹³ Reed Martin, The Impact of Current Legal Action on Educating Handicapped Children (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1980), p. 13.

appropriate public education which provides special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, and that the rights of handicapped children and their parents are protected.¹⁴

In addition, on December 9, 1971, Congressman Vanik of Ohio introduced H. R. 12154 to amend Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in any program receiving Federal funds. The Vanik amendment added a prohibition against discrimination based on handicap.¹⁵

On January 20, 1972, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey introduced a similar measure in the Senate:

I introduce...a bill...to insure equal opportunities for the handicapped by prohibiting needless discrimination in programs receiving federal financial assistance...The time has come when we can no longer tolerate the invisibility of the handicapped in America...Children who are excluded from school...These people have the right to live, to work to the best of their ability, to know the dignity to which every human being is entitled.¹⁶

The Vanik-Humphrey proposals were added to a bill which became the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and were placed in the final section of that Act, Section 504, 29 U.S.C. 794, and provided simply:

¹⁴Gargiulo, p. 21.

¹⁵Martin, The Impact of Current Legal Action of Educating Handicapped Children, p. 79.

¹⁶ibid, p. 79.

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States, as defined in Section 7(6) shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.¹⁷

Therefore, failure of public programs to comply with the mandate of Section 504 would result in the termination of Federal financial assistance to the entire state education program.¹⁸

Public Law 94-142 and Section 504 assures that handicapped children receive a free, appropriate education and are not discriminated against or by any public agencies furnishing special education services. Together the two laws cover all handicapped children without regard to where they live or which state or local agency serves them. "The two acts seal all the cracks in services and carry out a policy of zero reject and nondiscrimination."¹⁹

State Responsibility

Historically and legally education has been a right reserved to the individual states by the Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. The State has complete con-

¹⁷The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794 (1976)

¹⁸David P. Kula "The Right to Special Education in Illinois--Something Old and Something New," Chicago Kent Law Review 55 (1979):653.

¹⁹Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 25.

trol of education subject only to the limitations imposed by the United States Constitution.²⁰

In order to qualify for Federal assistance and comply with Public Law 94-142, the State must present a detailed document outlining the policies and procedures for guaranteeing a free, appropriate public education to all handicapped children.²¹ The State must identify, locate, and evaluate handicapped children and provide a plan for establishing services and facilities within the State.²²

Local School District Responsibility

The State Board of Education has delegated the requirement of establishing and maintaining special education services and facilities to local school boards through the Illinois School Code, Article XIV. The Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education further mandate that the local school district is responsible for: 1) providing and maintaining appropriate and effective education programs at no cost to the parents for all exceptional children between the ages of three and twenty-one who are resident therein; 2) insuring that special education students participate to the greatest extent possible in non-handicapped programs, thereby achieving interaction with

²⁰Gargiulo, p. 2.

²¹ibid, p. 23.

²²Kula, p. 652.

their non-handicapped peers; 3) actively seeking and identifying all exceptional children in the district, ages three to twenty-one, and evaluating the child's need for special education and related services; 4) providing a continuum of program options to meet the unique needs of the handicapped child; 5) maintaining interaction with parents to provide for internal program evaluations and planning for their child; 6) notifying the parents in writing when the local school district proposes to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or placement of their child, and 7) informing parents resident in the district of special education programs and advising the public of the rights of exceptional children.²³

Case Study Evaluation

When a child is identified through the screening process or through informal observation as a child who experiences problems which interfere with the child's educational progress, or once there is reason to believe that a child may require special education services, the child must be referred for a case study evaluation. The referral may be made by school district personnel, parents, or community agencies.²⁴ The local school district is directly respon-

²³ Illinois, Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education (1979), Article II, pp. 7-9.

²⁴ ibid, Article IX, Section 9.03.

sible for overseeing the referral, deciding whether any action should be taken, and initiating the procedures. Whether or not the school district determines that a formal case study evaluation is required, the district must notify the person who made the referral, its decision, and in all cases must notify the parents of the determination. If the district determines that a case study or re-evaluation of the child, or that initial placement of an exceptional child in a special education program or related services program is necessary, the district must obtain the parent's consent to place the child in the program.²⁵

Once the formal case study evaluation is completed, a multidisciplinary conference should be convened to formulate program service options, determine the unique needs of the child, and develop the Individualized Education Program. Such conference must include the parents, representatives of the local district, the special education director, school personnel involved in the child's evaluation, and those persons who will become responsible for providing a special education program or service to the child. The purpose of the conference is to establish an understanding of the child's learning characteristics and to determine the child's eligibility for special education programs and/or related service, the extent to which the child's needs may be met by the stan-

²⁵Kula, p. 671.

dard program, and the nature and degree of special education required.²⁶

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Every child served in a special education placement is required to have an Individualized Education Program, a written statement jointly developed by an appropriate school official, the teacher, the parent or guardian, and the pupil, if appropriate,²⁷ which includes: 1) a statement of his/her present level of educational performance; 2) annual goals and short term objectives to meet these goals; 3) a statement of specific special education and related services to be provided; 4) a statement of the extent to which a child may participate in regular education programs; 5) the projected dates for these services, and 6) a plan to evaluate the child's progress.

Public Law 94-142, the requirement of a free, appropriate public education boils down to the requirement that a handicapped child's education be individual, and this requirement is achieved in terms of standards and conformity with Individualized Education Programs.²⁸

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 672.

²⁷ Gargiulo, p. 21.

²⁸ Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 117

Placement

Placement decisions are made at the multidisciplinary conference where discussion occurs regarding the case study evaluation, the unique needs of the child as specified in the IEP, and the program options available. When placing a child in a special education program, Article IX, Section 9.17 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education recommends the following:

- 1) The child shall be placed in the education program which is appropriate to the student's needs and least restrictive of the interaction with non-handicapped children.
- 2) The special education placement must be based on the child's IEP and located as close as possible to the child's home.
- 3) Unless a handicapped child's IEP requires some other arrangement, the child must be educated in the school which he or she would attend if not handicapped.
- 4) Consideration must be given to any potentially harmful effect on the child, on the quality of services which he or she needs, or that which impedes the education of the other students in the environment.²⁹

If it has been determined at the multidisciplinary conference that the local school district's special education program is unable to meet the child's needs because of the child's unusual handicap, the district must locate an appropriate state-operated or private program which can accommodate the child's handicap.³⁰

²⁹ Illinois, Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education, Article IX, Section 9.17.

³⁰ Kula, p. 678.

Maynard C. Reynolds provides a decision-making tool for determining the appropriate placement of the child, indicating that the child should move away from the regular classroom only as far as necessary, and should move back down towards the regular classroom from more restrictive placements as soon as it is educationally feasible to do so. Program placement alternatives may range from a totally non-restrictive setting, such as the regular classroom, to a very restrictive setting, such as a non-public residential school for the very severely handicapped. Between the two extremes are alternatives which include: 1) regular class placement with supportive services; 2) regular class placement with some time spent in a resource room setting; 3) part-time special class placement; 4) full time special class placement; 5) special schools; 6) homebound instruction, and 6) hospitals. Moving towards the regular classroom from more restrictive placements is essentially the meaning of education in the least restrictive environment.³¹

School Records

School records are those which are directly related to a student and maintained by an educational agency.³² Parents

³¹Illinois Regional Resource Center, Law and the Handicapped Child: A Primer for Illinois Parents (Dekalb: The Illinois Regional Resource Center, 1980), p. 5.

³²Martin, Educating Handicapped Children: The Legal Mandate, p. 122.

must have access to educational records and have the right to: 1) inspect and review records; 2) make copies of records; 3) receive a list of all types and locations of records being collected, maintained, or used by the school; 4) ask for an explanation of any item in the records; 5) ask for an amendment of any record on the grounds it is inaccurate, misleading, or violates privacy rights, and 6) request a hearing on the issue if the agency refuses to make the amendment as governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, codified as 45 C.F.R. 99.22.³³ If the school official's decision is still not to amend the record, he must notify the parents of the right to place in the records a statement specifying their reasons for disagreeing with the school's decision.³⁴

Furthermore, parents have the right to restrict access to their child's records by withholding consent to disclose the records, the right to be informed before information is destroyed, and the right to be told to whom information is disclosed.³⁵

Impartial Due Process Hearing

"Procedural due process - the right to protest - is a necessary ingredient of every phase of the handicapped child's

³³ *ibid*, p. 99.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 127.

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 101.

Education."³⁶ The right to due process is a constitutional requisite under the requirements of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. In regards to the education of the handicapped, due process means that no handicapped child can be deprived of an education without exercising his right to protest.

Illinois statutes³⁷ and the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education permit parents, guardians, the local school district, or the child to request an impartial due process hearing to resolve disagreements concerning: 1) identification; 2) case study evaluation; 3) initial placement, continuation thereof, change in placement, or termination of special education placement; 4) failure of the local district to provide a placement consistent with the case study evaluation; 5) failure to provide the least restrictive special education placement appropriate to the child's needs; 6) insufficient amount of related services; 7) suspensions totalling ten or more school days in a given year; 8) recommendation for graduation of an exceptional child; 9) failure of the district to comply with any of the Rules and Regulations, and 10) failure of the school district to provide a free, appro-

³⁶Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 171.

³⁷Illinois Revised Statutes, Chapter 122, Section 14-8.02.

priate public education.³⁸ It is the responsibility of the local district to notify the parents or guardians in writing of both the right to a hearing and the procedures to follow, as well as to inform them of any free or low cost legal services available.³⁹

In brief, due process is a technique for accountability, a means of assuring that the educational system will do what it is designed and required to do. Due Process enables educators and consumers to correct illegal practices as well as provide child-centered education.⁴⁰

Communication and Dissemination

It was through the efforts of consumers that the first litigation was brought (P.A.R.C., Mills) which resulted in the right to free, appropriate, public education for all handicapped children.⁴¹ Previously, parents of handicapped children were not able to advocate the rights of their children because they were erroneously led to believe that their children were not capable of leading meaningful lives. However, over the past decade, parents of handicapped children have begun to recognize that their children are being

³⁸Illinois, Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education, Article X, Section 10.01.

³⁹Kula, p. 673.

⁴⁰Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 181.

⁴¹ibid, p. 77.

denied services which are guaranteed under the United States Constitution.⁴²

Through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the groundwork has been laid for partnerships between parents and education professionals based on cooperation and collaboration. Two of the implications of this partnership are shared decision-making and increased communication. When parents participate in conferences, it is important for them to state their concerns and priorities in regard to their child's development and education.⁴³ Parents must be given an opportunity to communicate openly and honestly with professionals and have access to educational records. This opportunity will bring parents more into the forefront as informed decision-makers and increase the potential for communication between educators and consumers, thus offering the possibility of decreasing the misunderstandings that exist or might develop.⁴⁴

Since the school district has been charged with informing parents of their rights and allowing them to participate in educational decisions affecting their handicapped child, it logically follows that the school district establish good public relations and dissemination techniques.

⁴²Martin, The Impact of Current Legal Action on Educating Handicapped Children, p. 9.

⁴³Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 132.

⁴⁴ibid, p. 184.

Public relations in this study is defined as:

...a social philosophy of management expressed in policies and practices which, through sensitive interpretation of events based upon two-way communication with its publics, strives to secure mutual understanding and goodwill.⁴⁵

Arthur B. Moehlman considers the public school a democratic institution providing an essential social service. This service is provided through the willing cooperation of the people and the efforts of specialized personnel. The success of the school depends on the support given by the people, a factor determined by the efficiency with which the school fulfills social needs.⁴⁶

To further support the need for public relations and dissemination of information, Scott Cutlip and Allen Center offer these objectives:

- 1) to build the public support necessary to obtain adequate funds;
- 2) to gain public acceptance and cooperation in making educational changes;
- 3) to fully report school news and thus head off misinformation and rumor, and
- 4) to build amicable working relationships with news executives and reporters.⁴⁷

In light of the responsibilities placed on the local

⁴⁵H. Frazier Moore and Bertrand R. Canfield, Public Relations: Principles, Cases, and Problems, 7th ed. (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin Inc., 1977), p. 6.

⁴⁶Arthur B. Moehlman and James A. van Zwoll, School Public Relations (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1957), p. 3.

⁴⁷Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978), p. 540.

school district with the passage of Public Law 94-142, an additional objective is added: to establish a positive working relationship with parents in order to fulfill the spirit and intent of the law without creating adversarial relationships. Some commentators say that the due process hearing, in particular, provides consumers with an opportunity to challenge educator's domain and their authority. This process may make educators practice "defensive" education.⁴⁸ Gus Steinhilber, legal counsel for the National School Boards Association, adds:

Starting with the IEP, the law gave parents the right to appeal all the way up the State Board of Education. Instead of mediation and conciliation, the appeals process (and the fact that parents tend to hire an attorney for due process hearings), creates a litigious situation.⁴⁹

The National School Public Relations Association recommends six critical components which should be included in a good public relations program: 1) a written policy statement; 2) a public relations professional; 3) formal planning; 4) formal evaluation; 5) two-way communication, and 6) use of appropriate media.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Turnbull and Turnbull, p. 183.

⁴⁹Eileen White, "Handicap Education is a Legal Mine Field," The American School Board Journal (February 1981):20.

⁵⁰Don Bagin, How to Start and Improve a Public Relations Program (Evanston, Illinois: National School Boards Association, 75), p. 11.

The written policy is an operating concept of the administration; a state of mind that guides administrators.⁵¹ It should be described in a concise statement that reflects the philosophy of the organization.⁵²

The execution of this policy is the responsibility of every member of the organization who, in the performance of his duties, has contact with the public.⁵³ The person who has the designated responsibility of public relations, however, is the person who facilitates and insures the correct flow of information to the public, gathers representative opinions from the publics, and makes sure that the policies and operations of the school are in concert with the needs and views of the community.⁵⁴

Formal planning of the dissemination of information is the responsibility of the public relations professional. The community relations function will be as large and useful or, as inconsequential and ineffective as the planning that goes into it. "Even today there is disturbing evidence that many school boards and administrators do not recognize the need for a planned program to build support."⁵⁵

⁵¹Cutlip and Center, p. 6.

⁵²Moore and Canfield, p. 9.

⁵³ibid, p. 10.

⁵⁴Cutlip and Center, p. 7.

⁵⁵ibid, p. 531.

It is absolutely imperative that school systems not be defensive. They must report with candor to their communities and attempt to establish procedures whereby they can intelligently carry on meaningful dialogues. Avenues should be established for the purpose of soliciting responses from the community in order that realistic viewpoints are reached concerning issues.⁵⁶

Establishing avenues for soliciting feedback from parents can be accomplished through a variety of formal and informal techniques, such as, periodic surveys, inventory checklists, parent/teacher conferences, and conversations between principals and parents. This feedback provides the schools with an opportunity to evaluate how well they communicate and whether or not they are providing the services which are desired by the community.

Two-way communication provides an opportunity to develop constructive relationships with parents. Through careful listening and sensitive interpretation of the signals it receives, the schools can explain, reveal, promote, and defend its policies and actions in order to secure understanding and acceptance. Two-way communication also provides an opportunity to detect any breakdowns in communication and evaluate and possibly alter the nature, approach, or emphasis of any facet of the educational system.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Thomas Alva Edison Foundation, The Elements to Better School-Community Relations (Melbourne, Florida: Institute for the Development of Educational Activities, Inc., 1972), p. 19.

⁵⁷Moore and Canfield, p. 10.

Communication with the community can be provided through a variety of media. News disseminated through the school newspaper and community newspapers, over radio and television, through personal contact, and in public meetings "...forms the hard core of the informational program."⁵⁸

Communication can also be provided through conferences, encouragement of parent observation in the classroom, special programs for parents, and home visits by teachers. Parent Teacher Association meetings are also a valuable tool in school-parent communication.⁵⁹

Good public relations operates on the premise that the public has a right to know. "If an organization does not explain its actions, people supply their own explanations, or through heresay, gossip, and rumor, acquire false conceptions."⁶⁰

The relations between education and the people are many, direct, and diverse. Opportunities abound for friction, misunderstandings, and communications breakdowns. The need for understanding and support of education is urgent in a time when demands for freedom and equal rights have penetrated the schools...⁶¹

The passage of Public Law 94-142 guaranteed a free, appropriate, public education for all students and established a process whereby parents are involved in their child's

⁵⁸Cutlip and Center, p. 542.

⁵⁹ibid, p. 538.

⁶⁰Moore and Canfield, p. 11.

⁶¹Cutlip and Center, p. 526.



individual education. Responsibility for informing parents of their educational rights rests on the school district. It is, therefore, imperative that school district officials examine their techniques for effective communication and dissemination of educational rights.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DISSEMINATION TECHNIQUES

Chapter III presents the data which were gathered through individual interviews with the Director of Special Education of each of the four participating elementary school districts. The focus of this chapter is to delineate the dissemination techniques utilized by the district and examine how these techniques compare with the guidelines established by the National School Public Relations Association.

As stated in the Review of the Literature, the National School Public Relations Association has identified six critical components which should be present in a good public relations program: 1) presence of a written policy statement; 2) a public relations professional; 3) formal planning; 4) formal evaluation; 5) two-way communication, and 6) use of a variety of media for dissemination of information.

After a brief description of each of the participating districts, a table summarizing the presence or absence of each of the six critical components for Districts A, B, C, and D follows. Each district is then compared to the six critical components with special emphasis on unique strengths and weaknesses of a given district. Analytical comments will be interspersed throughout each subsection and presented in such a way that interpretative comments will be evident.

The second portion of this chapter will focus on the perceptions of the Director of Special Education in relation to: 1) his positive and negative experiences in fulfilling the requirement of disseminating the rights of exceptional children; 2) the impact of this requirement in his role as a Director of Special Education; 3) the impact of this requirement on his relationship with parents, and 4) the effect of this requirement on programming for special education students.

Major conclusions and observations will be used in Chapter IV which focuses on: 1) the parents' level of awareness of their child's educational rights; 2) how their school district informs them of these rights; 3) their perceptions of the dissemination techniques utilized by the school district; 4) the impact of these rights on their relationship with the Director of Special Education, and 5) the changes parents have observed in programming as a result of Public Law 94-142.

Overview of Participating Districts

District A was originally established as a small German settlement. With the influx of apartment buildings and high rises, it is now becoming an integrated community. Of the 900 students currently enrolled, forty eight are in self-contained special education programs. Nineteen parents of the forty eight special education students voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

District B was primarily an upper class community; however, through planned integration over the last ten years, it is now a community representing a cross section of all socioeconomic levels. Of the 2500 students enrolled in the district, 159 are in self-contained special education programs, of which eighty four parents participated in this study.

District C is primarily a blue collar community with a large Spanish population located in one section and a few upper middle class families located in another section. 5300 students are enrolled in the public schools. Of the 264 students receiving special education services in a self-contained classroom, ninety nine parents agreed to participate in this study.

District D is a bedroom community of 1600 public school students. Ethnic groups are located in this stable community of blue collar workers, although recently, the tradition of successive generations remaining in the same household is being seen less and less, giving way to a more transient population. Of the seventy four students in self-contained special education programs, forty five agreed to participate in this study.

Policy Statements

The written policy is an operating concept of the administration and a state of mind that guides administrators. It should be a concise statement which reflects the philosophy of the organization and expresses the purpose and

TABLE I

DISTRICT SUMMARY OF CRITICAL COMPONENTS

<u>Public Relations Components</u>	<u>District A</u>	<u>District B</u>	<u>District C</u>	<u>District D</u>
Presence of Policy Statement	no	yes	no	no
Presence of Public Relations Professional	no	no	no	no
Formal Planning	no	no	no	yes
Formal Evaluation	no	no	yes	no
Two-way Communication	no	yes	yes	no
Variety of Media	yes	yes	yes	yes

objectives of the public relations program.

District B is the only district which has a written policy statement regarding public relations. This statement clearly establishes the intent and purpose of the communication between the school and the public:

The board of education shall encourage study, discussion and participation by the community in the promotion of the best possible program of education. The board recognizes the right of the public to information concerning its actions, policies, and educational and business operations...

The policy handbook in addition to expressing the purpose of the public relations program delegates responsibility for various aspects of the public relations program. The Superintendent and his staff are responsible for developing and implementing a continuing flow of information designed to acquaint citizens of the community with the problems, plans, achievements, and needs of the school. The Superintendent, specifically, is responsible for: 1) a program of news releases; 2) the publication of educational reports, and 3) the preparation and dissemination of parental and student guides and handbooks. The Principal is responsible for the cooperation of the staff with the parent organizations in the district. Although the policy manual does specify that the Superintendent is responsible for parent handbooks, this handbook does not specify the rights of parents of exceptional children. In fact, the Director of Special Education in District B indicates that he gets very little help from the Superintendent in disseminating these rights due to the

Superintendent's belief that special education is getting too much attention. The National School Public Relations Association's guidelines suggest that in addition to a policy statement regarding communication, the Board of Education should establish written objectives expressing the type of information to be communicated and delegate responsibility to specific school officials for the dissemination of this information. District B has established policy for broad communication, however, the Board of Education has not established specific objectives regarding the dissemination of educational rights, nor has it designated individuals who should be involved in this process. The Director of Special Education indicated that he has primary responsibility for the dissemination of information but does not receive support from other personnel in this process. It could be that he has not formalized his concerns to the Board of Education requesting clear direction and delegation of responsibility to disseminate information. If such a request were made, the Board of Education may direct other school officials to become involved in this process and establish procedures whereby school officials would become acquainted with the educational rights of handicapped children and thus be able to accurately inform parents of their rights.

Since the Board of Education and the Superintendent believe that special education is already receiving too much attention, they may consider the dissemination of information

a low priority. The Director of Special Education would be wise to point out to the Board that dissemination is a legal requirement and noncompliance could result in the elimination of all Federal funds. Therefore, dissemination should be given a higher priority with formalized procedures established to inform the public of their rights.

Districts A, C, and D did not have a written policy regarding communication to their publics, and like District B, does not have a policy regarding the dissemination of educational rights. Since no policy statement exists, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what is being done to inform the public and what priority communication is given in these districts. Possibly the connection and importance of establishing policy on communication has never been addressed. As communication relates to the dissemination of the educational rights of exceptional children, perhaps the Directors of Special Education should assume a leadership role and inform the Board of Education of the need to establish policy and delegate responsibility. The Directors may not be forcing this policy issue because they have line and staff concerns and thus believe it would be a usurpation of authority to request policy on dissemination of educational rights. Another possibility is that the Directors consider dissemination a low priority and/or do not want the parents to become knowledgeable. Given the consequences of discontinuation of all Federal funds if compliance with Public Law 94-142 is not met by the district, the Directors should

examine their reasoning and give dissemination of educational rights a higher priority. If a policy were established, it would place responsibility on the administration to disseminate these rights effectively and give importance to this facet of education.

Public Relations Professional

At the current time there is no professional who is solely responsible for public relations in any of the districts. Two years ago Districts B and D did have a public relations professional but this position was the first to be eliminated during financial cutbacks. In all districts the Director of Special Education has the primary responsibility for the dissemination of educational rights.

The Director of Special Education in District A reports that he works closely with the Superintendent in communicating with parents of special children. The Superintendent appears to be very public relations oriented and has even devoted considerable time and support to a group of parents who established a group home for autistic children within the district. The Superintendent is also available to attend personal conferences with parents of special children if difficulties or concerns arise with regard to programs. This availability is in sharp contrast to the Superintendent of District B who prefers to not get involved with the difficulties that arise in special education.

Districts A, B, and C indicate that Principals are also involved in the dissemination of educational rights, however, all three Directors question the Principal's ability to disseminate information accurately. In fact, the Director of Special Education in District B feels that the Principals are only qualified to distribute written materials. The Director of Special Education in District D indicates that the Principal is not involved at all in the dissemination process. Quite frequently if a question arises regarding special education, the Principal immediately telephones the Director's office, where secretaries are often competent in answering questions.

In a time when local control and neighborhood schools are issues in education, it is abhorrent that the Principal, who is the leader of the education program in the school and surrounding neighborhood, is possibly not qualified or is not interested in giving information regarding the educational rights of handicapped students. The Principal is the visible link to the parents and should be equipped to answer their questions. Public Law 94-142 in establishing the right to a free, appropriate, public education, has also established financial support for inservice training for administrators, teachers, and parents. Inservice training would be one avenue for assuring the Principal's knowledge of parental rights. Another avenue is for colleges and universities to emphasize the spirit and intent of Public Law 94-142 as well as the requirements established therein

to administration students. It would behoove the Director of Special Education to establish his own training program for administrators in his district in order to ease the stress which accompanies attempting to respond to a number of school building concerns on a given day.

A professional public relations person in the district would be responsible for facilitating and insuring the correct flow of information to the public. Due to the influx of requirements and the number of educational rights established by passage of Public Law 94-142, it would be more effective to hire a public relations professional who could train administrators, teachers, and parents as well as fulfill the dissemination requirements established by the law. In lieu of this person and due to financial cutbacks, the responsibility has been delegated to the Director of Special Education in addition to his other duties. Time alone would become a factor in effective dissemination.

Formal Planning

According to the National School Public Relations Association, formal planning of the dissemination of information is the responsibility of the public relations professional. The community relations function will be useful or as ineffective as the planning that goes into it. A planned program is a means to build support for the educational services provided in the district.

District D has established a Curriculum Council for the purpose of developing goals and objectives for programming in all areas of education. This committee is comprised of representatives from administration, teaching staff, and support service personnel. They are responsible for developing inservice training programs and presentations for community groups at open houses and Parent Teacher Organization meetings. District D also has budgeted \$5,000.00 in order to develop eight video tapes on special education for use at Parent Teacher Organization meetings and other civic community groups. These video tapes are currently being developed.

Although District D is the only district that has established a committee for formal planning, the parents in this district are the least knowledgeable of their educational rights. The parents' lack of information may be because the committee focuses on the types of programs available in the District and not on the educational rights of exceptional children. Another possibility is that the inservice training programs and presentations do not reflect the needs of the community. Gathering information to evaluate the needs of the community could be accomplished through formal evaluation or through having parent representatives serve on the committee. Although a structure exists in District D for formal planning, perhaps the District needs to examine why parents are essentially unaware of their rights and establish appropriate procedures for disseminating this information.

Districts A, B, and C have no formal planning for dissemination of educational rights; however, the parents in these districts were more aware of their rights than the parents in District D. This awareness may be because informal planning is occurring which results in more effective dissemination procedures. It is not discernable from the data whether or not the informal planning is a conscious or unconscious effort.

Districts A, B, and C did indicate that formal planning was not occurring due to a lack of financial and human resources. The Director of Special Education in District C did indicate that he would be willing to explore options for different ways to communicate with parents if these did not require a greater expenditure of funds. Currently, Districts A, B, and C utilize funds for postage and xeroxing costs. Other than these and personnel expenditures, no funds are specifically earmarked for dissemination of special education information.

In order to have a formalized plan for dissemination of educational rights, it appears that the Board needs to earmark funds and provide adequate resources to insure a concerted effort for communicating with parents and build support. By not earmarking funds for this purpose, the Board is, in effect, saying that communication of educational rights is not a priority. Yet, again, the consequences of not fulfilling the requirements of the law could result in the

discontinuation of federal or state funds provided through the financial reimbursement structure of Public Law 94-142.

Formal Evaluation

Formal evaluation is a planned procedure for soliciting feedback from parents and can be accomplished through a variety of formal and informal techniques, such as periodic surveys, inventory checklists, parent/teacher conferences, and conversations between school officials and parents. This feedback provides the schools with an opportunity to evaluate how well they communicate and whether or not they are providing the services which are desired by the community.

District D has created a paradox in that it has an established committee for long range planning and yet, has not designed formal procedures for evaluating the needs of school personnel or the community. As indicated in the Review of the Literature, it is imperative that the school systems establish procedures whereby they can carry on meaningful dialogues and solicit responses from the community in order that realistic viewpoints are reached concerning issues. If no assessment has been made concerning what parents need to know and what they do know, it is very possible that the school system may be exerting time, energy, and money in areas that are unnecessary or invalid. For example, District D did have an inservice on Testing and Guidance for parents in the community but only six parents attended. It is possible that the inservice topic was

not important to the majority of parents or that the dissemination procedures for informing parents of this inservice was not timely or did not reach the majority of parents. Perhaps the inservice was scheduled at a time or place that was not convenient for parents to attend. The data did not indicate clearly what the reason for poor attendance was, but the possibilities outlined above point to the importance of establishing formal evaluation procedures with parental involvement so that the District may provide relevant information to the parents and not expend valuable time and energy on an unproductive program.

Informal assessments, however, are used in District D and consist of informal discussions among the Superintendent, Board of Education, Principals, and Director of Special Education. Although the Board of Education is comprised of elected members of the community, it often functions as a very formal group, not allowing for too much interaction with community members regarding their personal and individual needs. The data suggest that the Director of Special Education in District D relies on Board meetings to disseminate information and evaluate this process. Reliance on this method could create problems in the dissemination of information since the same community members are usually present at these meetings. The fact that the Board only meets once each month raises an additional concern regarding the timeliness of the dissemination. The information may not be

disseminated each month or frequently enough to address the specific concerns of the members of the community. Dissemination of information at Board meetings would also require close contact between the Director of Special Education and the School Board, which may cause problems with hierarchical line-staff authority. This close contact may be threatening to the Superintendent and his position. Although this situation may not be the case in this district, open access to the Board of Education by someone other than the Superintendent has created difficulties in other districts. These concerns raise questions regarding the use of Board meetings as an optimal situation to provide information to parents since this medium may not take into account the personal and individual needs of the parents of exceptional children. Therefore, evaluation on even an informal level should involve parents of exceptional children in order that the school system may consider their needs and viewpoints in planning for special training sessions and determining what information needs to be disseminated and what type of media should be used in the dissemination process.

District A does not have a formal procedure for evaluation. However, informal procedures exist whereby administrators meet and informally discuss ways to disseminate information. Due to the small size of the school district, school officials are afforded an opportunity to respond to individual parental concerns. In one instance, a few parents felt

threatened, angry, and upset when a letter came to their home by certified mail indicating their child was referred for a case study evaluation and possible placement in special education. The parents upon receiving this information were also concerned that they should hire legal counsel because the information was written in formal, technical language. As a result and through informal evaluation, the Director of Special Education now meets individually with each parent when his child is referred to special education and informs him of his rights and the procedures to be followed.

Although this informal assessment works well in some instances, there is no guarantee that a parent will feel comfortable in coming forward and relating his concerns either in person, in a letter, or over the phone. Furthermore, by relying on parents to initiate the evaluation process, there is no guarantee that the parents who do make contact with school officials are a representative sample of the parents in the community. This reliance may also hinder the district in their initiation of evaluation procedures which is important for effective dissemination according to the National School Public Relations Association.

District B has not established formal or informal procedures for evaluation and relies on parents to ask the Director of Special Education questions if parents are unclear or need further information. Although it is impor-

tant for parents to feel comfortable enough to contact the Director of Special Education if they have questions, initiating contact usually requires that the parents have at least a basic understanding of their rights in order to know what to ask. If questions are brought up, it would seem that the chances are good that the parent is dissatisfied or a crisis is occurring, a situation which creates a stressful situation for the Director of Special Education and would make the role of the Director essentially unpleasant.

District C primarily uses informal evaluation at Annual Reviews in order to determine the needs of parents. Annual Reviews are a formalized atmosphere and may not be an optimum setting for informal interchange. To use an informal evaluation in a formalized setting may lead to confusion as to the purpose and importance of the informal evaluation. However, formal evaluation was used in 1980 and parents were given a questionnaire to fill out at the Annual Review regarding how often they would like Individualized Education Programs reviewed. As a result District C conducts Individual Education Program reviews every nine weeks. This process provided an opportunity for parents to express their desires and for the school system to respond to their needs.

Public Law 94-142 requires that school districts submit a plan for providing special education services in their schools. The Director of Special Education is responsible

for submitting this document which functions as an assessment of special educational services provided as well as a request for special education reimbursement. Districts A, B, and C sent out a survey last year in order to get information from parents regarding the needs of special education programs in their respective districts. This survey had a definite impact on programming for special students as Districts A and B opened a behavior disordered classroom and District C reduced the class size in their educable mentally handicapped class. All districts hired additional support services personnel. In the Review of the Literature, it was indicated that communication with the public provides adequate resources and support for developing programs that are viewed as needs in the community. The survey in all three districts provides a good example of what can be accomplished through formal evaluation and two-way communication.

Two-way Communication

Two-way communication implies a cooperative relationship. It provides an opportunity for school systems to develop constructive relationships, to explain, reveal, promote, and defend their policies and actions in order to secure understanding and acceptance, to detect breakdowns in communication, and to evaluate and possibly alter any facet of the educational system.

All four school districts inform parents of the type of special education programs available, the process for referral,

the educational rights of exceptional children, and the screening process. The media utilized in this process will be discussed in the next subsection. This subsection discusses the opportunity afforded parents to respond to the information they receive.

Despite the one survey in Districts A and B, Districts A, B, and D rely on verbal telephone calls in order to receive feedback and answer questions. Although all three districts did identify specific individuals and groups which require continuous communication, they usually require these individuals to initiate contact. Districts A and D do utilize Parent Teacher Organization meetings as an avenue for presentation of information and feedback; however, both Directors of Special Education indicate that there are more staff in attendance than parents, and that it is always the same parents which attend. It would seem that Parent Teacher Organization meetings are one good avenue for communication, however, both districts should explore other options for creating open communication in order to reach the majority of parents.

Districts B and D also use the Board of Education meetings to receive feedback and communicate with the public. The Director of Special Education in District D reports monthly on how many students are in special education and the percent mainstreamed. Since Board meetings are open to the public, he feels strongly that this mode of communication is sufficient. However, utilizing this method may not

be an appropriate way to receive feedback from the public. Merely reporting statistical information does not guarantee that the implications of these facts and figures are addressed or related to the dissemination of educational rights. The parents, if given no opportunity to question or respond, may misinterpret the information or the information may not be perceived by the parents as being relevant.

In contrast, District B utilizes the Board of Education meetings as an avenue for creating two-way communication. According to the Director of Special Education, Board meetings in District B are well attended by the public and the press. Also, with the installation of cable television in the area, the Board of Education is making preparations to televise meetings.

During the spring of 1981, District B was exploring the possibility of establishing early childhood programs within the district as opposed to serving these students in a cooperative program located outside the district. In order to study the feasibility of this program change, the Board established a task force comprised of parents, teachers, the Director of Special Education, the Coordinator of early childhood programs at the cooperative level, and an outside consultant. Goals and objectives were established by the Board and the task force cooperatively. This task force provides an opportunity for those persons directly affected by the program change to be involved in the planning. As a result of the establishment of this task force, District B

will operate early childhood programs in regular education buildings located in the district. Parental input has also resulted in a continuation of program quality since related services such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy are to be provided in the same manner within the district programs as they were provided by the cooperative program. This task force provided an excellent opportunity for parents to express their feelings and viewpoints.

Although both Districts B and D use board meetings for communication, they are quite different in their techniques. Cable television and task forces provide for more effective dissemination of information and possible feedback than does statistical reporting.

District C has not identified specific individuals or groups which require continuous information. However, they do provide a variety of avenues for eliciting feedback from members of the community and district personnel.

The Director of Special Education estimates that he receives approximately fifty phone calls per month from parents. He has a special tablet by his telephone in order to record and document conversations, and he also confirms through a follow-up letter discussions which may present potential difficulties with parents in the future. He indicates that the new rules and regulations governing special education require this documentation in order to protect his position and the school district. There seems

to be a pay-off for this documentation in due process hearings; however, the documentation has the potential to become compulsive and border on the absurd. When a school district and a parent cannot resolve their disagreements, a due process hearing may be requested, and the State rules and regulations indicate that the burden of proof for a school district decision rests with the school district. For this reason, accurate records of phone calls and personal discussions need to be kept. Although appropriate documentation is important, if this procedure is overused, the documentation could become time consuming and possibly unnecessary and may lead to a mutual lack of trust between the Director and the parents if the parents were aware that their conversations were being recorded.

Each year at new staff orientation, District C provides an inservice on "How to Communicate with Parents." The Director further encourages communication by requesting his staff to contact parents weekly regarding the progress of their child in the classroom. Parents in this study report that the more they are in contact with the school, the more open and comfortable they are in communicating with the school. Therefore, weekly contact should develop an open and comfortable atmosphere for communication in a relatively short period of time. Open communication helps teachers keep abreast of parental concerns and respond to them before they fester and develop into a confrontation.

Currently, District C is developing a six week course entitled "Working with Your Child" which will be offered to parents. Often parents of special children need help and support in dealing with the unique problems of having a handicapped child. School districts traditionally are unable to give support in the home due to the human and financial resources required. A special course such as this may meet the needs of both the parents and the school district.

District C also involves parents by providing pot luck dinners for parents of exceptional children. These dinners are held in order to give parents an opportunity to communicate with each other so they feel more comfortable about having an exceptional child.

Finally, District C allows special education parents an opportunity to mingle with regular education parents through appointing both groups to home rooms and involving home room parents in the same Parent Teacher Organization. Because of the fact that special education was previously not emphasized in the public schools, and because federal legislation was designed for this unique group of special education students, the result has been a separation of regular and special education staff, parents, and students. School systems are still struggling in their effort to bring these groups together, a struggle substantiated by the difficulties in the past five years of mainstreaming and bringing special education students back into the regular school building. Procedures have been established to create

an awareness of the handicapped to teachers and regular education students, but regular education parents were not given an opportunity to be inserviced in this facet of education. Through cooperative junctures such as combined Parent Teacher Organization meetings, an avenue is in place for parents to communicate with each other across all types of students receiving education in the schools.

Media

Table II on the following page provides a summary of the media utilized by the four participating districts in disseminating the rights of exceptional children to parents in the community.

All districts give parents a booklet entitled, The Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide, which is published by the State Board of Education. The information contained in this booklet was used as the basis in this dissertation for the questions asked of parents to determine their level of knowledge. (The data from the questionnaire are presented in the subsequent chapter.)

Differences were noted among districts in the frequency of dissemination. Districts A, B, and D offer the booklet at Annual Reviews and give parents a copy when the child is placed in special education. District C gives parents the booklet at Annual Reviews and placement, assuming that the booklet has been misplaced during the past year

TABLE II

DISTRICT SUMMARY OF MEDIA USEAGE
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Media	District A	District B	District C	District D
<u>Written</u>				
<u>The Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide</u>				
	X	X	X	X
District Parent Handbook	X	-	X	-
Newsletter	X	-	-	X
Newspaper	-	X	X	-
Special Flyers	-	-	X	-
Child Find Information	X	X	X	X
<u>Personal Contact</u>				
Multidisciplinary Staff Conferences	X	X	X	-
Parent Teacher Organization	X	-	X	X
Pot Luck Dinners	-	-	X	-
Board Meetings	-	X	-	X
<u>Special Training</u>				
Inservice by Cooperative Agreement	X	X	X	X
District Inservices	-	-	X	-
Audio-Visual Presentations	-	-	-	X

and in order to insure compliance with the federal regulations. If a parent is unable to attend the Annual Review, District C sends the booklet home with the student. Districts A, B, and D do not make these provisions. With the increase in the amount of working mothers and single parents, as well as the constraints placed upon the school district to hold meetings during the school day, the probability of parents being unable to attend Annual Reviews increases each year. Therefore, sending the booklet home with the student is a good option to insure that parents receive the information.

Child Find procedures vary among the four districts. District A sends out one flyer to all residents of the district and District B holds a month long campaign regarding the importance of early identification and where to get their preschool child screened. Public Law 94-142 has required school districts to establish Child Find procedures and this is one area of special education that seems to be well publicized.

The local newspaper is not used by Districts A, B, and D, for the purpose of informing parents of their educational rights. Although District B's special education programs are often in the newspaper, there is no concerted effort to use this medium for disseminating educational rights. District C utilizes the newspaper four times a year for this purpose.

The local newspaper is an effective medium for reach-

ing many households at no cost. It is an avenue that merits attention by the Directors of Special Education in Districts A, B, and D as a way to insure compliance with Article 9.01 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education.

Written literature is relied upon as the medium for communicating with parents. Although this means is probably the easiest and most efficient, two-way communication is not inherent in this process. Personal contact at Parent Teacher Organization meetings and parent conferences do provide an opportunity for schools and parents to communicate. However, in the districts studied, the purpose of these meetings is not for informing parents of their rights, but rather to discuss programming for students.

Inservice training sessions are an excellent medium for establishing two-way communication and dispensing information. The special education cooperative, which serves all districts within a select area, provides a training session entitled, "Parents Rights and Responsibilities," once each year. It is an all day session held on Saturdays. In October of 1980 only thirty parents from these four districts were present. Although this number may seem low, parents may have attended in previous years and felt it unnecessary to attend this year. The training session involves the audience in mock multidisciplinary conferences, and gives parents an opportunity to participate in the development of a mock Individual Education Program. The

Director of Special Education for District A was in attendance at this last training session and stated that it was unproductive because it provided parents with ways to "catch" the school district, insinuating that the parents need to watch the school district closely as they may not be keeping the best interests of the child in mind. According to this Director, the session may have been more productive if it were to focus on improving the communication and cooperation between the school system and the parents. Why this focus was missing was not revealed by the Director who complained of the problem.

The purpose of using a variety of media is to give the public an opportunity to receive information through a variety of means. If a district were to focus entirely on verbal or on written material, it would undoubtedly lose its effectiveness. All four districts do demonstrate good usage of media through written, verbal, and personal contact.

Positive and Negative Experiences in

Disseminating Information

When asked what positive experiences the Directors have had fulfilling the requirements of disseminating educational rights of exceptional children to parents, Districts A and C replied, "None." The Director of District B indicated his only positive experiences are when the parents are truly grateful and trusting, which is not very often. The Director of Special Education of District D does not feel

there is a problem with the dissemination since he believes the majority are aware of their right to a free, appropriate, public education. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the parents who reside in District D are not well informed of their rights. The Director of District D needs to evaluate the parents' level of knowledge since a discrepancy exists between what he indicates the parents know and the results of the parents' level of knowledge in this study. If the Director thinks the parents are aware of their rights, he may not think it is necessary to make a concerted effort to disseminate information. If the parents were informed, the Director of District D may also have a lack of positive experiences in disseminating information and fulfilling the requirements of Public Law 94-142.

When asked what negative experiences the Director has had, the list is much longer. Frustration is felt by Directors because they are legally required to disseminate this information, yet when parents receive it they become threatened, angry, and upset due to the legal jargon, technical language, and confusion resulting from the information.

The Director in District A has concerns that the emphasis being placed on educational rights suggests that the district is not looking out for the best interests of the child, thus putting the dissemination in the wrong perspective. The emphasis should be on developing a cooperative relationship between the home and the school and sharing responsibility for the education of the student.

The Director of Special Education in District B believes that with the majority of parents if you give an ounce, they want a pound, and that few parents have any regard for the financial expense of all the services they request.

The Director of Special Education in District C feels a lack of reinforcement from parents and states that no parent ever says, "Gee, thanks a lot."

All of these individual concerns point to the conclusion that disseminating these rights is not a very rewarding experience. An unpleasant atmosphere is thus associated with the duties and responsibilities of the Director's position. Again, there was no evidence of on-going plans or strategies by the Directors to overcome the problems which they identified.

Impact on Role as Director of Special Education

The Directors of Districts A, B, and C indicated that this legal requirement has created more paperwork. As a result, more time during the day is spent at a desk and less time spent with teachers and parents. In addition, the Director of District C indicates that his job has become more crisis-oriented, thus planning and development need to occur outside the work day.

The Director of District B indicates that he does not find very many rewarding experiences in his job and that it is becoming more and more difficult to earn a living this

way. Given this attitude and the previous comments, it appears that the educational rights afforded parents of exceptional children may be necessary for providing a free, appropriate, public education, but may also be creating a very stressful, unrewarding job for Directors of Special Education. Directors seem to be becoming compulsive regarding documentation and accountability, their job is crisis-oriented, and there is a general negative attitude regarding dissemination of educational rights. The Director of District D is the only one who indicated that the requirements made no impact in his role as a Director. However, his parents are the least informed, which may be one of the answers to maintaining happiness and reducing stress on the job.

Relationship to Parents

Again, the Director of District D does not feel any impact on his relationship with parents. However, the Directors of Districts A, B, and C see a negative impact. Their role has become more legalistic and thus their relationship with parents has become more formal. They feel as if they are viewed as a negative figure and that the number of irate encounters has increased. The Director of District B has an increasing number of due process hearings and court cases each year. If the hearing goes to appeal, the process takes eighteen months and involves twenty two pounds of documentation and four pounds of testimony. He

feels that the greater the discrepancy with what the law demands and what the district can afford, the more hearings that will result.

The Director of District C further adds to this dilemma by indicating his role has become paralegalistic resulting in a change in his professional jargon to more legalistic terms. At this time he would never want a parent to leave his office without his saying something about "due process."

These attitudes on the part of Directors would lead one to conclude that the relationship with parents have been affected by the legal requirements placed on the district. The relationship could be described as tenuous and wary, with Directors constantly concerned that they are accurately giving information and documentation every time a conversation ensues. The relationship could also be described as adversarial especially in situations where due process hearings extend over a long period of time and eventually end up in court.

Impact on Programming

With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, there have been many changes in programming for special students. All districts have seen a growth in the number of programs provided within the regular school buildings and the number of support services required to meet the child's individual needs.

The Directors of Special Education in Districts A, B, and C have also experienced a "backlash" from the regular education sector. If financial cutbacks need to be made, they cannot be from a mandated program, and thus, decreases in expenditures occur in the regular education programs. A controversy still exists between regular and special education teachers, with regular education teachers referring students to special education and special education teachers mainstreaming students into regular education, creating a revolving door.

The Board of Education in District B is also expressing resentment toward special education. According to the Director of Special Education, the Board indicates that it costs too much money, takes too much time, and creates controversy. One administrator in this district was heard commenting, "The Spartans and Greeks were strong societies and they burned the handicapped."

It appears that pressure is being felt by directors, administrators, teachers, and the board of education regarding the impact of the dissemination.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' AWARENESS OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

Chapter IV presents the data which were gathered through a five question survey and individual interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the perceptions of the parents with regard to the dissemination techniques utilized by the school districts, and the awareness of parents of their legal rights.

Each parent in the four participating school districts who has a child in a self-contained special education program, was asked to complete a survey which consisted of questions involving their basic knowledge of his child's educational rights (see Appendix B). Of the parents responding correctly to all questions, 25% were randomly selected to participate in individual interviews (see Appendix C).

The first portion of this chapter will analyze: 1) how parents are informed of their educational rights; 2) their perception of the dissemination techniques utilized by the school district; 3) the impact of these rights on their role as a parent of a handicapped child; 4) the impact of these rights on their relationship with the school district, and 5) the changes parents have observed

in programming within the last five years as a result of Public Law 94-142.

The second portion of this chapter will present the data regarding parents awareness of their educational rights in four major categories: 1) Individualized Education Program; 2) School Records; 3) Due Process Hearing, and 4) Case Study Evaluation and Placement. Special emphasis will be placed on major discrepancies in each of the four categories cited above. Analytical comments will be interspersed throughout each subsection and presented in such a way that interpretative comments will be evident.

The third portion of this chapter, Additional Comments, presents information and analysis related to: 1) the initial survey responses, and 2) the results of the individual interviews with regard to specific handicapping condition and location of program.

How Parents Recieve Information

Table III on the following page illustrates how parents are notified of their educational rights. This table corresponds to Table II in the preceding chapter which reports how districts inform parents of their rights, with an additional component of information received from outside sources.

The majority of parents in District A (80%) do receive the booklet, The Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide. The second largest source of information

TABLE III

SUMMARY OF PARENT NOTIFICATION

Media	Percent of Information Received			
	District A	District B	District C	District D
NOT NOTIFIED	-	29%	7%	11%
<u>Written</u>				
<u>The Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide</u>	80%	64%	47%	67%
District Parent Handbook	20%	-	-	-
Newsletter	20%	-	7%	-
Newspaper	-	7%	-	-
Special Flyers	-	-	47%	11%
<u>Personal Contact</u>				
Multidisciplinary Staff Conferences	20%	57%	80%	56%
Parent Teacher Organization	-	-	-	-
Board Meetings	-	-	-	-
<u>Special Training</u>				
Inservice by Cooperative Agreement	-	21%	7%	11%
District Inservices	-	-	-	-
Audio-Visual Presentations	-	-	-	-
<u>Outside Sources</u>				
Friends	40%	14%	20%	11%
Special Interest Groups	40%	43%	-	22%
Outside Professionals	-	29%	7%	-
On Own	20%	-	-	11%

is from outside sources, through conversations with friends (40%), and through special interest groups (40%) such as the Coordinating Council for Handicapped Children.

While Districts B, C, and D utilize multidisciplinary staff conferences for informing parents, only 20% of the parents in District A indicate that this medium is used. Although 80% of the parents receive the booklet on educational rights, the Director of Special Education in District A indicates that he only gives the booklet at the time of enrollment in special education. If the dissemination of this booklet occurs only once and the majority of parents indicate that they do not receive information at the multidisciplinary staff conference, it is somewhat surprising that the parents of District A were more informed than the parents in the other districts about their educational rights. The explanation may be that informal discussions with parents occur throughout the year regarding special education programming and rights. The fact that the district is small and the Superintendent is public relations oriented may also increase the amount of two-way communication and contribute to the parents' level of awareness.

All the parents in District A feel they are given an opportunity to question and respond to the information they receive by calling if they have a question. 60% of the parents contact the Principal or the teacher regarding specific concerns. If these persons are indeed contacted, then an earlier concern of the Director of Special Education

regarding the ability of the Principal to give accurate information must be considered. However, the parents indicate that they are comfortable contacting the school if a question arises which is a sign of open and two-way communication.

The parents of District B seem to receive their information from a variety of sources. 64% indicate that they receive information from the Parent's Guide booklet and/or from parent conferences. 29% of the parents indicate that they are not notified by the school district at all and rely on their own outside resources for information. This diversity may indicate a need for District B to analyze how to gain a greater audience and to develop consistent procedures to reach all the parents. The Director of Special Education commented that special education in District B is often a topic in the local newspapers. Although the newspaper may be an example of a consistent procedure for disseminating information, only 7% of the parents stated that these articles provide information regarding the educational rights of handicapped children. Given the pervasive attitude of the Board of Education and the Superintendent in this district that special education receives too much attention and that informing parents of their educational rights creates hassles, it is not surprising that a clear and consistent procedure has not been established in District B.

21% of the parents in District B felt that there was no opportunity to question or respond to information received

by the district. The remaining parents utilize parent conferences and the telephone to ask questions. 64% contacted the teacher and 50% contacted the Director of Special Education if they had questions, indicating that the Director is readily available. Only 14% of the parents contacted the Principal with concerns. It may be that the Principal prefers to remain uninvolved in disseminating information regarding educational rights, does not encourage parents to contact him directly, is not available for contact, or feels inadequate to respond to these questions. Another possibility is that the parents have discovered that they do not receive satisfactory or accurate information and thus rely on the teacher or Director or outside sources for their answers.

73% of the parents in District C receive their information solely from the school district. District C has established a variety of avenues for parents to be involved with other parents through Parent Teacher Organization meetings, pot luck dinners, and district inservice training programs. It is important for parents of a handicapped youngster to feel support and receive help, and District C is providing opportunities for parent interaction to occur.

80% of the parents in District C stated that they received information regarding their rights at multidisciplinary staff conferences. The Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education

has specified that rights be explained to parents at these meetings and District C is in compliance. The booklet on educational rights published by the State Board of Education as well as pamphlets and special flyers designed by District C are reaching 47% of the parents. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Director of Special Education in District C makes a conscious effort to disseminate this material every year at parent conferences and through the mail. It is possible that since he indicates that he does distribute the booklet, Educational Rights of Handicapped Children, at the parent conferences, that the parents are classifying the booklet and parent conferences under the category of "parent conferences." If so, 80% is a respectable amount of parents that are reached.

93% felt they were given the opportunity to question or respond to the information primarily by calling the school and speaking with the teacher (60%) or the Principal (47%). 40% indicated that they would contact the Director of Special Education if they did not receive a satisfactory answer from the school. A chain of communication appears to have been established in this district. However, if the Director is still receiving fifty telephone calls each month, it is possible that the teacher and Principal are not giving satisfactory responses to the questions raised by the parents and the parents require additional information. This statement assumes that a portion of the calls to the

Director represent the people who have contacted the Principal or the teacher.

67% of the parents in District D do not receive information from outside sources and therefore a substantial portion of parents rely on information received by the school district. The booklet on educational rights and multidisciplinary staff conferences comprise the way parents receive information, 67% and 56%, respectively. The majority of parents indicate they receive information once each year. Only 11% indicate they are not notified, so the information does appear to be getting to the parents.

56% of the parents indicate that they make a personal appointment to question or respond to the information received and 67% of the parents contact the Director if they have questions. An open door policy and individual attention by the Director seems to be indicated. The Director of Special Education in District D indicated that he does not feel the pressure that the other Directors are experiencing and perhaps this feeling is because he attempts to deal with concerns in person rather than over the telephone. Although this activity is time consuming, the payoff may be less aggravation in dealing with parents and decreased stress levels for this Director. Perhaps there is a message here for the other Directors. However, in spite of these efforts at personal contact, less than 40% of the parents interviewed in District D were aware of their educational

rights in the four major categories studied. Therefore, the data suggest that possibly these personal contacts focus on other issues and not on the educational rights of exceptional children.

Although all four districts utilized a variety of media to inform parents of their rights, the parents do not indicate that they receive information through Board meetings, Parent Teacher Organization meetings, or special training. It is possible that personal contact outside of parent conferences is just that, contact. However it is imperative the parents are given an opportunity to become acquainted with the Director so that if a question were to arise, they would feel comfortable with telephoning the Director and be able to put a face with the voice.

Parents Perception of Dissemination Techniques

80% of the parents in District A were satisfied with the information they received regarding their rights from the district and 20% felt they needed more information. When asked how they would like the information relayed to them, 40% of the parents indicated that inservice training programs and the mail were good sources of communication. One parent expressed concern over the initial lack of information that she received when her child was under three years old in 1976. She indicated that she scanned newspapers and called friends but was unable to find information on how to receive help for her child. Finally through her

contact with a hospital, she was informed that special programs existed in the public schools. This incident, however, was four years ago and since that time it is feasible that the school district is doing a better job of informing parents of young children the special help they can receive in the public schools. The fact that 80% of the parents are satisfied substantiates that the school district has improved its dissemination procedures since 1976.

43% of the parents in District B indicated that they would like more information regarding their educational rights. Quite a number of recommendations were made by parents when asked for suggestions to disseminate information effectively, and included: 1) Inservice Training; 2) Special Education Parent Meetings; 3) Question/Answer Sessions; 4) Parent/Teacher Conferences, and 5) through teachers. Due to the fact that 43% of the parents would like more information and that over 40% receive information from outside sources, the data suggest that the Director of Special Education in this District communicates selectively with parents. Although this situation may not be intentional, an effort should be made to inform all parents. This effort could be successful if a consistent procedure were established.

All the parents in District C were satisfied with the information they receive from the school district; however, they did provide suggestions for ways to disseminate infor-

mation, which included: 1) Special Education Parent Meetings; 2) Inservice Training, and 3) through the teacher. Two parents indicated that the information received is written in technical language and is thus unclear. They suggested that the material be written in layman's terms so that it is not threatening or confusing to parents. Although only two parents made this comment, the implications can be applicable to the whole matter of communication.

67% of the parents in District D indicated that they were pleased with the information received. The remaining percent (33%) expressed a desire to receive further information. When asked about better ways to communicate, they recommended the following: 1) through the mail; 2) through teachers, and 3) through flyers periodically on one subject at a time so that it is not overwhelming.

The recommendations cited above will be discussed in further detail in Chapter V. It is encouraging that parents are willing to cooperate and offer suggestions in order that schools may efficiently give information to them.

The Impact of These Rights on a Parent of an Exceptional Child

When discussing the impact of these rights on their role as a parent of a handicapped child, parents in Districts A, B, and C indicated that they were more secure and more involved in the education of their child. These attitudes are further reflected in their comments that the opportunity

for a free, appropriate, public education has preserved their emotional and financial stability. As a result of this involvement, a few parents indicated that they had a greater responsibility in their child's education. The additional security felt by the parents may be the result of the legal procedures available to them through due process hearings, as well as the opportunity to disagree boldly with the school district about their child's education.

In general, the rights have had a positive impact on parents, which is in sharp contrast to the impact these rights have had on the Directors. With the exception of District D, the other Directors indicated that more paperwork, greater job responsibility, and more crisis-oriented administration has been a result of the passage of Public Law 94-142. Possibly, if the Directors were aware of how secure and involved the parents felt, they might feel better about their role as an implementor of special education.

It is interesting that the Director of Special Education in District D has felt no impact in his role as a result of these educational rights, and 56% of the parents in this district have also felt no impact. These feelings are difficult to understand due to the fact that he has been in the school district for the last twelve years. The pre-Public Law 94-142 years and the post-Public 94-142 years must have influenced positional tasks and demands regarding special education. Either the Director was providing the

services required by Public Law 94-142 prior to its passage or he has not responded to the intent of the law. The stability of the community may also be a contributing factor to the Director's assumption that the parents are aware.

Parents Relationship with the School District

Approximately 50% of the parents in all four districts felt that their educational rights have had no effect on their relationship with the school district. However, they did not indicate whether or not their relationship was positive or negative. The remaining parents in District A and 40% of the parents in District C indicated that their relationship with the school was more open and comfortable. 35% of the parents in District B felt that their relationship was either adversarial or too formal, causing them to be intimidated during meetings.

Since the majority of parents of District B feel secure and involved and have a positive attitude about their role, it is possible that those who are dissatisfied with their relationship are picking up negative signals from the Director and are thus finding this relationship tenuous. If this is indeed the situation, then attitudes need to be changed from the perspective of the Director in order to create a more positive and open atmosphere for communication.

The Directors of Districts A and C also indicated that their relationship with parents is too formal and legalistic.

In comparison with the parents' perceptions, this feeling is not shared. The parents in these two districts indicate that they are comfortable in discussing their concerns with the Director, and possibly, if the Directors were aware of this indication, their attitudes may become more open and positive. The need to share the views of the parents with the Directors is evident.

Changes in Special Education Programming

Approximately 60% of the parents in Districts A, C, and D have not noticed any changes in special education programs within the last six years. 20% of the parents in Districts A, B, and C have noticed that more services are provided, and ironically, 20% of the parents in District B have noticed less services being provided. However, the parents who have observed fewer services are also concerned with the financial cutbacks that are occurring in special education this past year and projected cuts in the future. 20% of the parents in District D also indicate that less services are being provided and also have concerns about the financial cutbacks.

The situation of less support services and financial cutbacks may become a source of discontentment to parents since it has been just in the last five years that they have been put in a position to demand an appropriate education for their child and still find that the bureaucracy cannot or will not provide it. This situation may also lead

to an increase in due process hearings and begin to widen the communication gap between Directors and parents.

Individualized Education Program

Every child served in a special education placement is required to have an Individualized Education Program, a written statement jointly developed by a representative of the school district, the teacher, parent, pupil if appropriate, and other persons at the discretion of the school or parent, which includes: 1) a statement of his/her present level of educational performance; 2) annual goals and short term objectives; 3) a statement of support services to be provided; 4) a statement of the extent to which the child may participate in regular education programs; 5) when the Individualized Education Program will be implemented, and 6) a plan to evaluate the child's progress.

The parents in District A are well informed of their rights in relation to the Individualized Education Program with 80% or more responding correctly to the questions in this section. The fact that they did so well may explain why 80% indicate that they are involved in the education of their child. They obviously participate in establishing the goals and objectives which they expect their child to accomplish during the next year.

Approximately 70% of the parents in District B were aware of the major issues involved in the Individualized Education Program process, namely, that the purpose is to

establish annual goals for their child and that the district representative, teacher, and parent should be present when developing the educational plan. However, less than 40% were aware that procedures should be established for determining whether or not the goals and objectives were met and to what extent their child will participate in regular education. This fact would lead one to suspect that possibly the parents are not given an opportunity to question their child's progress or request that their child be involved in some regular education courses.

Less than 45% of the parents in District B were aware that the Individualized Education Program could be reviewed at any time and revised if necessary, limiting their input if their child progresses and could benefit from a different type of service or program.

Over 80% of the parents in District C were aware that the Individual Education Program should include a statement of their child's present level of performance, annual goals for the next school term, and who needed to be involved in the Individualized Education Program process, however, less than 45% were aware that the Individualized Education Program should include the extent of participation in regular education programs, the evaluation procedures to determine if the goals and objectives have been met, when the Individualized Education Program would be implemented, and only 13% realized that the educational plan could be revised at any time. These results are fairly consistent with the

results in District B. Both of these districts are larger than District A, which may account for the lack of specific knowledge these parents have. It may simply be that the Directors do not have as much time to spend with each parent in order to discuss all the intricacies involved in the Individualized Education Program process. If time is indeed a problem, then the Directors need to delegate responsibility for the dissemination of educational rights to other school personnel.

The parents in District D were not well informed with less than 35% responding correctly to any question. This result is in sharp contrast to the responses of parents in the other three Districts. Even though the Director of District D has an open door policy and parents feel comfortable in communicating with the Director, the majority of parents in District D have not seen any changes in programming nor do they feel involved in their child's education. This lack of involvement suggests that the parents do not participate actively in the development of their child's Individualized Educational Program.

School Records

School records are those which are directly related to a student, maintained by an educational agency, and governed by the Student School Records Act and the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education.

The parents in all four districts are aware that they have the right to inspect the records, obtain copies, and designate in writing who may receive copies of their child's records. The vast majority (80%) were not aware that they could challenge the content of the records and what procedure would have to be followed in order to have inaccurate information removed. With only half of the parents aware that the content of the records may be explained to them by a qualified professional, it is not surprising that they would not know they could challenge the content. If a parent does view the records but does not have them explained, they would probably find the professional jargon incomprehensible. Therefore, if the records were not explained, they would not be an active participant in the multidisciplinary staff conference as their knowledge base would be much less than the professionals in the meeting. The spirit and intent of Public Law 94-142 is to involve parents and let them have input as to what is an appropriate education for their child. Given a limited understanding of what their child knows or is capable of, it logically follows that the educational program will primarily be what the professionals feel it should be. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the professionals could manipulate the meeting so that certain information is withheld thus resulting in fewer services being provided in order to save money. Clearly, improved efforts of dissemination of information would minimize potential problems and allow more parent participation.

The School Student Records Act applies to all students and therefore is the responsibility of others in the school system to inform parents of their rights. Districts A and C do explain in their District Parent Handbook the following: 1) the types of records maintained by the district; 2) the location of the records; 3) the retention and destruction schedules, and 4) who may have access to the records with or without parental consent. Despite this notification, none of the parents in all four districts knew this information nor had any idea that they were ever informed. Perhaps the Parent's Handbook is too long or the print is too small or it gets filed away with barely a glance.

Overall, parents were not aware of their rights as they relate to their child's records, indicating that either Directors are not assuming responsibility for informing them of these rights or have not made an effort to make student record procedures clear to the parents. Whatever the reasons this situation cannot be allowed to continue if compliance with Public Law 94-142 is to be achieved.

Impartial Due Process

Impartial Due Process Hearings are a technique to insure that the educational system will do what it is designed and required to do. It is a process which gives parents and students an opportunity to protest if they feel that they are being denied any of their educational rights.

40% of the parents in District A, 50% of the parents

in Districts B and C and 30% of the parents in District D are aware that they may request an impartial due process hearing if they object to the proposed placement, a continuing placement, a major change in placement, or an inappropriate special education placement for their child. Over 80% of the parents in all four districts are not aware that they may request a due process hearing to resolve disagreements concerning: 1) identification; 2) case study evaluation; 3) termination of special education services; 4) failure to provide the least restrictive special education placement appropriate to their child's needs; 5) insufficient amount of related services; 7) suspensions totalling ten or more school days in a given year, or 8) recommendation for graduation of an exceptional child. Although these parents do realize that the due process structure exists, they are not aware of when or how they can use it.

In 1980 George Diamond studied the impact of the procedural safeguards mandated by Public Law 94-142 on the administrative units of special education for suburban Cook County, Illinois.¹ He discovered that 78% of the cases heard involved a dispute over placement, and the decisions of the hearing officers overwhelmingly favored the schools' recommendations. It is therefore not surprising that parents in Districts A, B, C, and D are aware of their right

¹George Diamond, "An Analysis of Due Process Cases in Selected Illinois Administrative Units of Special Education" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1980), abstract.

to disagree with placement and take it to due process, since the vast majority of cases in Cook County revolve around placement issues. It seems possible that if parents are informed by school officials or others that schools are favored in placement decisions, parents would be reluctant to initiate due process hearings. Parents may resign themselves to a particular placement option at the district level because they know that no other placement exists within the district and that the school is doing the best it can to provide services locally.

In his study George Diamond also reported that the mode for expenses to the school district was Two Thousand Dollars per case and preparation was forty hours per case.² In view of these findings, Directors may be reluctant to discuss due process rights openly in order to avoid an impartial due process hearing.

Adversarial relationships may develop in the few instances where compromise is not reached and the parents discuss their concerns with friends or other professionals and find that impartial due process is an avenue that can be pursued. Anger and resentment on the part of the parents is likely to develop if they feel that the school district should have informed them of their right to pursue impartial mediation.

² *ibid*, p. 3.

Case Study Evaluation and Placement

Over 70% of all the parents are aware that they have the right to allow or deny permission for their child to be evaluated or placed in special education. 75% of the parents in Districts A and C are aware that they may obtain an independent evaluation if they feel that the evaluation from the school was inadequate or unfair. Less than 40% of the parents in Districts B and D are aware of their right to an independent evaluation and are thus consigned to the evaluations conducted by their school district.

It is encouraging that the majority of parents are aware that they have control and participation in the decision to place their child in special education. Their feelings of security may lie in the fact that they do have decision-making power in regard to their child's Individualized Education Program and their involvement in the placement decision.

Additional Comments

This section presents information and brief analyses related to: 1) the initial survey responses, and 2) the results of the individual interviews with regard to specific handicapping condition and location of program.

Survey

As previously mentioned, the five question survey was used as a screening device in order to establish the population to participate in the individual interviews. The

five questions were very general and would require parents to have at least a basic level of knowledge of their child's educational rights. According to the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education, these basic rights should be disseminated at least once a year. If the rights were disseminated, it would be expected that the vast majority of the parents would be aware of the following: 1) that their child is entitled to a free, appropriate, public education; 2) that their child is supposed to have an Individualized Education Program designed for his/her educational needs; 3) that if the parents disagree with the Individualized Education Program proposed for their child, or are dissatisfied with his/her present placement, or if they have been denied any of their rights, they may request an Impartial Due Process Hearing; 4) that they may examine all information contained in their child's records, and 5) that their child is to be educated with nonhandicapped children to the maximum extent appropriate.

Table IV summarizes the percent of parents who correctly responded to all five questions. The Table is separated according to the following five categories of special education placement: 1) early childhood; 2) mentally retarded; 3) behavior disordered; 4) learning disabled, and 5) multiply impaired, as well as by district.

The parents of children in early childhood programs scored consistently low. These low scores may be due to the fact that their child has been in special education only

TABLE IV

PARENT SUMMARY OF CORRECT SURVEY RESPONSES

<u>Categories</u>	District A	District B	District C	District D
Early Childhood	67%	67%	60%	-
Mentally Retarded	0%	70%	68%	60%
Behavior Disordered	100%	50%	79%	71%
Learning Disabled	80%	63%	71%	89%
Multiply Impaired	100%	100%	33%	-

one to three years, and the parents have not been exposed to special educational rights over a long period of time. One parent who was interviewed did mention that her first meeting with the school district was very frightening and intimidating. She stated that the information may have been relayed at the meeting, but she was too confused to pay close attention. Perhaps this intimidation is a more logical explanation of the low scores since students may enter special education programs at any age and this initial confrontation would not be unique to this category. Another possible explanation is that the early childhood program is located in a cooperative program and not in the district's own school building. The parents may not be comfortable with contacting school officials or the Director of Special Education may not make an effort to contact these parents since the program is located outside the school district.

In District B 100% of the parents of multiply impaired children knew their basic rights. All of these children whose parents responded are in private day or residential schools and may be receiving the information from the private as opposed to the public school sector. One parent who was interviewed mentioned that she received no information from the district but found the private school very helpful and informative. It is interesting to note that the parents with children in public school programs within the local district scored lower than the parents in District B whose children were in private school programs. The data

suggest that the private schools are doing a better job of informing parents of their basic rights than District B is doing with their public school parents. This greater level of awareness may be because parents in the private school have children with more severe handicapping conditions, or the parents have become more involved in parent groups established in the private sector.

67% of the parents of multiply impaired children in District C did not answer all five survey questions correctly. These students are also located in a cooperative program and thus their parents may not be receiving as much individual attention as parents in the regular school building. Another possibility is that when the child is not in a public school setting in the community, parents may not be as free to contact school personnel with questions or concerns they might have.

When examining each question in isolation, the majority of parents were unaware of one of the five rights. No pattern or consistency was evident regarding which educational right they did not know.

Specific Handicapping Condition
and Location of Program

Due to the fact that the parents were not as aware as anticipated and that the Institutional Review Board of Loyola University had concerns that the participation in this study be strictly voluntary so that parents would not

feel that their lack of participation would in any way influence their child's education or create undue difficulties with the school district, the number of parents individually interviewed was limited in certain categories of special education. Therefore, the preceding sections in this chapter present the information received from all the parents in each district. However, the individual interviews divided into the five categories of special education do warrant additional comments and observations (See Appendix D for the population which comprised this study).

The greatest discrepancy in District A was the fact that the parent interviewed who had a child in the early childhood program was not aware of any of her rights related to school records and due process hearings, except that she could examine her child's records and that she could request a due process hearing if support services were not sufficient to meet the unique needs of her child. She was aware of the rights inherent in the Individualized Education Program and Case Study Evaluation and Placement, which seems to indicate that she is more familiar with the rights that she is likely to encounter when a child is initially placed. This situation lends credence to the fact that the Director of District A reports that he gives specific information regarding educational rights when a problem arises or is anticipated, other than providing information in a systematized fashion.

Less than 50% of the parents of children in behavior disordered programs and multiply impaired programs in Dis-

trict B were aware of their rights in developing the Individualized Education Program. The parents of multiply impaired students are in private settings and one parent indicated that district personnel do not attend Individualized Education Program meetings at the private school which may explain why the parents are unclear as to the process involved and who should be present.

Why the parents of behavior disordered students in District B were not aware of their rights in developing the Individualized Education Program is not clear, however, they are more aware than other parents of their due process rights. In the study conducted by George Diamond it was found that over half of the due process cases analyzed involved children classified as behavior disordered³ which may explain why this group is more informed. The one right that parents in District B were not aware of was that they could request a due process hearing if their child was suspended more than ten days in a given school year. Since it is especially difficult to maintain behavior disordered students in the classroom, these students are more likely to be suspended for behavior that is harmful to themselves or others. Due to the possible frequency of suspensions in behavior disordered classrooms, it would not be surprising if school officials did not actively publicize this right. One parent of a behavior disordered child indicated that she re-

³ ibid, p. 2.

ceived her information from an outside psychologist after recurrent problems occurred regarding her child's appropriate special education placement.

The parents of children in early childhood programs in District C knew very little about their rights in relation to school records and due process hearings. As discussed previously, that lack of knowledge may be due to the classroom being out of district in a cooperative program as well as their lack of experience in the special education process.

The parents of mentally retarded children in District D knew nothing about the Individualized Education Program process and their respective rights. The parents interviewed were from both a cooperative program and a district program, so location does not appear to be a factor in this district.

Two of the parents of learning disabled children in District D indicated that they were involved with special interest groups and discovered their educational rights through these sources as well as their own research. Consequently, these two parents knew their rights for requesting due process hearings while their counterparts did not.

In summary, the location of a program seems to have an impact on the parents' level of awareness of their educational rights. The farther away the program is from the public school building, the less information the parents have from the school district. The parents of early childhood and multiply impaired students were least in-

formed of their rights which may be due to the fact that their program is located outside the public schools, rather than a relation to the particular special education category. No other consistent patterns or trends were noted across all four districts with regard to category of handicapping condition.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the school districts' dissemination techniques utilized to inform parents of their educational rights. Effectiveness was measured in two ways and are summarized in the first portion of this chapter: 1) by comparing school district dissemination techniques with the guidelines established by the National School Public Relations Association, and 2) by assessing what the parent knows with respect to the educational rights required by law to be disseminated by school districts.

The second portion of this chapter will focus on recommendations for school districts to effectively disseminate the education rights of exceptional children.

School District Dissemination Techniques vs. National School Public Relations Association's Guidelines

Several conclusions can be noted based upon the data which were collected for this study.

- 1) Districts did not place a great deal of emphasis upon disseminating the educational rights of exceptional children.
- 2) Directors of Special Education, who have the primary responsibility for dissemination, receive very little support from other school officials in this process.

- 3) Little evidence of formal planning and formal evaluation with regard to dissemination of educational rights was found in the majority of districts.
- 4) Good two-way communication regarding parental rights was evident in two of the four districts.
- 5) Directors of Special Education utilized a variety of media for informing parents of their educational rights, including written literature, personal contact, and special training sessions.
- 6) The majority of Special Education Directors indicate that their relationship with parents is becoming too formal and legalistic.

Although the Directors of Special Education are attempting to inform parents of their legal rights, it appears that they are not receiving support for this endeavor from their Board of Education and other school officials. Support is not evident due to the following factors: 1) there is no written policy statement in three of the four districts that reflects the philosophy of the Board of Education to communicate with their publics; 2) there is essentially no financial support in order to disseminate the educational rights of exceptional children, and 3) the Principals and other administrators appear to be unaware of the parents' educational rights and, therefore, cannot help the Director in disseminating this information. Evidence to further substantiate a lack of emphasis upon dissemination can be found in the form of inadequate staffing for public rela-

tions. Even part-time help would substantially improve the dissemination and remove the primary responsibility from the Directors whom do not have the time to direct their attention and energy to such a task.

The data suggests that the majority of districts do not formally plan how they are going to disseminate the educational rights of handicapped children. Based upon the fact that not all parents have received the booklet, Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide, it is evident that the procedures utilized by the majority of districts is inconsistent. Isolated incidents of dissemination were evident, but most Directors seem to disseminate rights after a problem arises. If this fact is indeed the case, it is not surprising that the Directors find that the majority of their workday is spent responding to crises.

Most of the Directors do send out surveys to parents in order to gather information regarding special education program development. This evaluation does not include how well the districts disseminate educational rights. Informal evaluation procedures are utilized whereby parents frequently telephone and relay their concerns. Parents seem to be comfortable with this mode of communication. However, evaluation of dissemination procedures involves the opinions of school officials without direct input from the parents.

Formal planning and evaluation would be the easiest to implement. Both of these require a commitment from the Board of Education and Superintendent to establish goals,

objectives, and procedures to keep parents informed. This commitment would insure that staffing and budgetary requirements would be available for effective dissemination.

Two of the districts do have formalized avenues for two-way communication and feedback. Opportunities for eliciting feedback are given to parents through parent-teacher conferences, Parent Teacher Organization meetings, Board meetings, and the creation of task forces for special projects. The telephone and personal meetings are also a common avenue for parents to use if they would like information. The majority of parents indicates that the Directors are accessible if a major issue arises, and the Directors report that they are willing to meet personally with parents or relay information through a follow-up letter.

Although the Directors use a variety of media in order to inform parents, there is no evidence that these procedures are implemented consistently. The data suggest that some parents are well informed and others are not informed at all. If the Directors indicate that they respond to crisis situations, it is possible that the parents who are more visible to the Director receive the most information. It could be that there is not enough time for Directors to explain the educational rights to all the parents.

The Directors report that they find their role frustrating and crisis-oriented. More paperwork, a lack of time for adequate planning and development, and an increase in the number of irate encounters have resulted in creating

a position which is unrewarding and stressful.

From this report it seems obvious that Directors are under immense pressure and could benefit from a formalized support system whereby the Board of Education, Superintendent, Principals, and teachers take a more active role in disseminating educational rights.

What Parents Know vs. What is Disseminated

Overall, parents are essentially unaware of the educational rights of their children. Great strides have been made in the involvement of parents in their child's education due to the fact that parents know more about the Individualized Education Program than other areas. Several conclusions can be noted based upon the data collected:

- 1) Parents are essentially unaware of their educational rights in special education.
- 2) Parents who understand the Individualized Education Program process are more involved in their child's education and are more comfortable about discussing their concerns with district personnel than parents who did not understand the process.
- 3) The size of the district did not significantly affect the parents' level of knowledge about their educational rights.
- 4) The farther the special education program was located from the district, the less that parents knew about their rights.

- 5) Parents of children in early childhood programs are the least aware of their educational rights.
- 6) The vast majority of parents are not aware of the reasons for which they may request a due process hearing or how to initiate this process.
- 7) The majority of parents are aware of their right to allow or deny permission for their child to be evaluated or placed in a special education program.
- 8) Parents who are aware of their educational rights feel secure in knowing that they have mediation and legal avenues to pursue if they feel their child's education is inappropriate.
- 9) The majority of parents indicated that these rights have not had an impact on their relationship with the school. The remaining parents either felt more open with the Director or felt their relationship is adversarial.
- 10) The parents who are the least informed believed the school district was doing an average or above average job in complying with Article 9.01 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education regarding the dissemination of educational rights.

Due to the fact that school districts in this study do not possess the six critical components established by the National School Public Relations Association and that parents are essentially unaware of their educational rights, it is therefore concluded that selected school districts in Cook County, Illinois, are not effective in disseminating

the educational rights of exceptional children. The next section outlines specific recommendations for effective dissemination which emerge from this study.

Recommendations

1) Support for the Dissemination of Educational Rights

The Board of Education, Superintendent, other school employees, and parents need to take an active role in the dissemination of the educational rights of exceptional children. The Board of Education should adopt a clear, concise policy for informing the public of their problems, plans, achievements, needs, and educational rights as guaranteed by the United States Constitution. A well informed public will build support for the educational system, and through informing parents of their rights, education can become a shared responsibility.

2) Training Programs for School Personnel

All school employees need to be involved with the community and accurately impart information. Special training programs should be developed for administrators and teachers regarding the spirit and intent of Public Law 94-142 and the legal requirements established in order to insure all students a free, appropriate, public education. By acquainting all school personnel with the rights guaranteed under the law, the responsibility to inform parents will be distributed among all school personnel and ease the burden placed upon the Director of Special Education to

inform parents singlehandedly. Parents are usually most familiar with their child's teacher and Principal and these two staff members should be able to answer questions and concerns that parents have. Through training of personnel, the school district would facilitate the correct flow of information to the public.

3) Provision of Adequate Resources for Planning and Evaluation

The Board of Education should earmark funds and provide adequate staff in order to provide a concerted and consistent effort for communicating with parents. Participation in planning strategies for dissemination should include school personnel and parents so as not to waste time, energy, and funds in unproductive techniques.

Formal evaluation procedures should be developed to solicit responses from the public and establish procedures for two-way communication. School districts should assess what parents need and want to know so expenditures are productive and cost efficient. Simple surveys and checklists as well as special meetings would enhance communication between the school and the public. It is important that consistent dissemination procedures are utilized so that all parents receive information.

4) Procedures for Two-way Communication

School districts should not rely on the telephone as a means for establishing two-way communication. Although it is a convenient form of communication, parents are often

required to initiate contact. Responsibility for creating open communication rests upon the school districts. Parent-teacher conferences, special education parent meetings, involving special education parents in the activities of the local school building, and encouraging communication between special education teachers, parents, and students with regular education teachers, parents, and students are good ways to involve all persons with the education of the handicapped. Understanding and support need to be given from all in the educational community in order to build constructive relationships and secure acceptance of the handicapped in the community.

5) Use of a Variety of Media in the Dissemination Process

Printed literature should continue to be provided by the school district so that parents may keep information for future reference. The Educational Rights of Handicapped Children: A Parent's Guide is an excellent source of accurate information and is printed by the State Board of Education, decreasing dissemination costs. Special flyers should be sent home once each month and include one aspect of the law, written in language that is understandable to the parents.

Multidisciplinary staff conferences and annual reviews provide an excellent opportunity for school officials to relay information regarding the rights of exceptional children. Five to ten minutes should be set aside for informal discussion of the rights, and the participants should in-

clude one school representative and the parents so that the discussion is not intimidating or too formal.

6) Training Programs for Parents

Many parents expressed an interest for participating in special training sessions. To encourage participation and open communication, school districts should provide the training sessions at the local district level. Although the cooperative does provide training for parents, parents may feel uncomfortable attending what they presume to be an elaborate presentation. Small gatherings at the district level would be less formal and would allow an opportunity for addressing individual parental concerns.

Effective communication and dissemination would make parents feel more secure and involved in their child's education. The payoff for the school district would be shared responsibility and decision-making, support for the educational programs, and possibly a more open and comfortable relationship with parents.

Recommendations for Further Study

In view of the results of this study, the following objectives for further research are recommended:

1) To Substantiate Findings in This Study

There appears to be limited research on how effective dissemination techniques are in informing the public of their educational rights. This study should be repeated to substantiate the findings and determine whether or not these

results are specific to this geographical area or exist state or nationwide. The study should also be expanded to determine what impact handicapping conditions and location of program have on the parents' level of knowledge.

2) To Determine the Role of School Officials in the Dissemination Process

The Directors of Special Education in the four participating school districts seem to receive little support from other school officials in the dissemination process. It is recommended that research be conducted to determine the role and knowledge of the following personnel in the dissemination process: 1) the Board of Education; 2) the Superintendent; 3) the Principals; 4) the teachers, and 5) other related service personnel. This information would be significant in order to establish the importance of all personnel being involved in the dissemination process.

3) To Determine the Awareness of All Parents of Their Educational Rights

At the current time special education is perceived as a separate entity from regular education. Appropriate education should be provided to all students and for this reason further study is recommended to determine the awareness of all parents of available special education programs. Also indicated is a need to determine the relationship that exists between regular and special education in the area of cooperation among personnel and communication among parents. Relationships should be cooperative and productive, contri-

buting to the education of all children.

4) To Determine the Relationship Between the Parents' Level of Awareness and the Parents' Relationship with the Director of Special Education

Research in this study indicates that parents' awareness of their rights produce two contradictory results:

1) parents indicate that their relationship with the Director of Special Education is comfortable and open, or 2) parents indicate that their relationship with the Director of Special Education is adversarial. Although it is unclear as to whether or not these feelings are a direct result of the dissemination of educational rights, it warrants further research. It is possible that the timing of dissemination plays an even more important role than actual knowledge in the feelings that result.

The above recommendations for further research will provide professionals with the data necessary to support planned programs of communication and dissemination, a necessary ingredient for public participation in education.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL DISTRICT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Policy Statement

1. Does your district have a written policy statement with respect to its public relations program?
2. Does your district have a separate written policy with respect to the dissemination of educational rights in the area of special education?
3. Does the policy statement express the purpose and objectives of the special education public relations program?

Provision for Public Relations Professional in the Organization

1. Does the district have a person who is in charge of the public relations program?
2. Is this person responsible for the dissemination of information regarding the rights of handicapped students? If not, who is?
3. Does this public relations person work cooperatively with the Director/Coordinator of Special Education?
4. Are other professionals in the district responsible for dissemination of rights? Who?

Provision for Adequate Resources for the Public Relations Program

1. Is there sufficient staff to accomplish the objectives of the public relations program, specifically the objectives related to special education?
2. Does professional staffing meet the minimum standards as set by the National School Public Relations Association?
 - a. one or more for up to 24,999 pupils

- b. two or more for 25,000 - 49,999 pupils
 - c. three or more for 50,000 - 99,999 pupils
 - d. five or more for 100,000 and over
3. Does your district budget funds which can be identified as earmarked for dissemination of information regarding educational rights of the handicapped? Specifically, how much money is allocated for technical services such as publications, advertising, audio-visual, radio, television, etc.?

Provision for External Communication

1. Have you identified specific individuals and groups within the district which require continuous communication? Who?
2. What kind of special education information is supplied to the community?
3. How often?
4. Which media are utilized in this communication process?
5. How is feedback received, analyzed, and utilized?

Provision for Evaluation of the

Public Relations Program

1. Is provision made for evaluation of the program?
2. Who is included in the evaluation process?
3. Is the process an on-going one?

Provision for Long Range Planning

1. Is there long range planning with respect to dissemination of information?
2. Is provision made for developing new and different avenues of communication and relationships?

Related Data

1. Enrollment of students in special education, specifically the following self-contained programs:

- a. early childhood noncategorical
 - b. mentally retarded
 - c. learning disabilities
 - d. behavior disordered/emotionally disturbed
 - e. severe language/behavior disordered
 - f. multi-impaired
2. Dates information disseminated by the school district since July 1, 1978, for compliance with Article 9.01 of the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education.

Perceptions

1. The law has outlined educational rights of handicapped children and placed responsibility on the school district to inform parents of these rights. In fulfilling this requirement what positive experiences have you had? Negative?
2. How has this requirement made an impact on your role as an administrator of special education?
3. How have these requirements affected your relationship with parents?
4. What impact has there been on programming for special students?

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parents:

In an effort to increase the communication between the Special Education Department and yourself, I am requesting that you participate in a study to explore the effectiveness of the school district's dissemination of your rights as parents of a special child.

Participation is strictly voluntary and if you choose not to participate, in no way will your child's education be affected.

Please complete the survey below and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. I would like to interview some of you in order to examine in further detail how you can best be served. If you do not wish to be interviewed, please indicate this below.

Your timely response and cooperation is sincerely appreciated,

Deborah A. Larson

PLEASE PLACE AN "X" ON THE APPROPRIATE LINE. "YES" IF YOU ARE AWARE THAT YOU HAVE THAT EDUCATIONAL RIGHT: AND "NO" IF YOU ARE NOT AWARE.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. I am aware that my handicapped child is entitled to a free appropriate public education from 3 - 21 years of age. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. I am aware that my child is supposed to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) designed for his/her educational needs. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. I am aware that if I disagree with the IEP proposed for my child, or am dissatisfied with his/her present placement, I may request an Impartial Due Process Hearing. | _____ | _____ |

4. I am aware that I may examine all information contained in my child's school records including all reports and other information sent to my child's school by hospitals, clinics, private doctors, and other professionals.

5. I am aware that my handicapped child is to be educated with nonhandicapped to the maximum extent appropriate.

I DO _____ DO NOT _____ WISH TO BE INTERVIEWED.

PARENT SIGNATURE: _____ PHONE: _____

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dissemination

1. How are you notified by the school district of the educational rights of your handicapped child?
2. How often?
3. Do you receive information regarding your rights from sources other than the school district? How often?
4. Is the information you receive from outside sources consistent with the information received from the school district?

Evaluation

1. Are you given an opportunity to question or respond to the information received by a school district? In what manner?
2. If you have a question regarding your child's education whom do you contact?
3. Overall, are you satisfied with the information you receive? Why or why not?

Checklist

The following questions will be used in conjunction with the attached Interview Checklist. The checklist will serve as a recording device.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

1. What is an IEP?
2. What information needs to be included on an IEP?
3. Who needs to be present at an IEP meeting?
4. How often can an IEP be revised?
5. When should an IEP be implemented?

School Records

1. Who may examine the information contained in your child's school records?
2. What may you do if you do not agree with the information contained therein?
3. Who is responsible for keeping these records?
4. Will these records be destroyed? When?
5. Who may review these records without your written permission?

Impartial Due Process

1. For what reasons may you request an impartial due process hearing?
2. What is the proper procedure for requesting a hearing?

Case Study Evaluation/Placement

1. If the school district recommends evaluation or placement of your child, what options are available to you?

Perceptions

1. The law has outlined educational rights of handicapped children and placed responsibility on the school district to inform parents of their rights. As it relates to your child and the information you have received, how do you feel the school district is doing in fulfilling this requirement?
2. How have these rights made an impact on you as a parent of a handicapped child?
3. How have these rights affected your relationship with the school district?
4. With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, what changes, both positive and negative, have you seen in the last five years with respect to programming for your special child?

Interview Checklist

The parent is aware that:

1. an IEP is to be developed annually and implemented for each handicapped child
2. the IEP must include a statement of present levels of educational performance
3. the IEP must include annual goals
4. the IEP must include short term instructional objectives
5. the IEP must include specific education and related services to be provided, including the initiation date and anticipated duration of services
6. the IEP must include appropriate objective criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining at least annually whether the short-term instructional objectives have been achieved
7. the IEP must include the extent to which the child will participate in the regular education program
8. participants in the IEP meetings should include a representative of the public agency other than the child's teacher who is qualified to provide or supervise special education
9. participants in the IEP meetings should include the child's teacher
10. participants in the IEP meetings should include one or both parents
11. participants in the IEP meetings should include the child where appropriate
12. participants in the IEP meetings should include other individuals at the discretion of the parent or agency
13. the school must notify the parents early enough to insure that they can attend, and the meeting must be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and place
14. the IEP may be revised at any time
15. the IEP must be reviewed at least annually to see if their child needs different services and if he/she is achieving the goals and objectives established
16. the IEP should be implemented as soon as possible, but no later than the following semester

17. they have the right to examine all information contained in their child's school records
18. they have the right to receive an explanation of the contents by a qualified professional
19. they have the right to challenge the contents of the record (excluding grades), asking for correction or deletion of inaccurate, misleading, or inappropriate data, or insert into the records a written explanation of their own about the contents
20. they have the right to confidentiality of the contents of the records
21. they have the right to obtain copies of their child's records
22. they have the right to designate in writing persons who may have access to their child's records
23. they have the right to have their request to examine the records granted within fifteen days
24. they have the right to be notified annually of the types of records maintained by the district
25. they have the right to be notified annually of the names of persons who are responsible for these records
26. they have the right to be notified annually of the location of the records
27. they have the right to be notified annually of the retention and destruction schedules
28. they have the right to be notified annually of persons having access to the records without their consent

No information contained in their child's records can be released without their written permission except:

29. to the parent, a designated representative, or a person having their specific, dated, written consent
30. to employees or officials of the school or school district or of the State Board of Education who have current demonstrable educational or administrative interest in the student
31. to the official records custodian of another school, within or outside of Illinois, in which the student has

enrolled or intends to enroll, upon the request of the student or school records custodian

32. for research purposes or statistical reporting or planning, with the consent of the State Superintendent of Education and provided no parent or student can be identified from the information released
33. pursuant to a court order, parent must be given prompt, written notice of the terms of the order, the information to be released, and the opportunity to inspect, copy, and challenge this information
34. in an emergency where knowledge of such information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or others

A parent may request a due process hearing for any of the following reasons:

35. their objection to a proposed case study evaluation
36. failure of their school district to provide a case study evaluation
37. failure of their school district to consider evaluations by qualified professionals outside the district
38. their objection to a proposed special education placement
39. their objection to a continuing placement
40. their objection to a major change in the program or placement of their child
41. termination of their child's program or supportive service
42. failure of the school district to provide a special education program consistent with the findings of the case study evaluation, and the recommendations of the staff conference
43. failure of the school district to place their child in a program with children who are not handicapped, if it is appropriate to their child's needs
44. special education program or services is in an amount insufficient to meet their child's needs
45. reasonable belief that their child has been suspended or expelled for behavior which is due to a handicap

46. recommendation of graduation of their child

The parent is aware that:

47. they have the right to allow or deny permission for their child to be individually evaluated
48. they have the right to have their child fully evaluated within sixty days of referral
49. they have the right to have an independent evaluation if they feel that the school's evaluation was inadequate or unfair
50. they have the right to allow or deny permission for their child to be placed in a special education program

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

TOTAL POPULATION

	District A	District B	District C	District D
Total Response	19	84	99	45
Total Population	48	159	264	74
<u>Total Interviews</u>				
Early Childhood	1	1	1	0
Mentally Retarded	0	4	4	4
Behavior Disordered	1	4	4	1
Learning Disabled	2	2	5	4
Multiply Impaired	1	3	1	0

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Deborah Ann Larson has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 21, 1951
Date

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