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Parent Perception Of The Parent And Placement Team Process

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Parent Perception of the Parent and Placement Team Process

By

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Special educators face a growing number of legal implications as they strive to meet students' needs as identified on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Once identified as requiring special education services, students have an (IEP) to track their progress on goals and objectives. All IEP meetings require the family's attendance and feedback as part of the process. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) noted that parent feedback is required in the IEP document. This study collected information about parents' perceptions of the IEP process.

Individual interviews were completed with 13 engaged parents to document their experiences working through the IEP process. The themes identified were the need for regular communication, the need for simplification of the documents and parents' experience of overwhelm. Parents' feedback was minimal throughout the special education process. The researcher documented parents' feedback about how their input could be used to improve their child's educational outcomes.

This study found communication from school staff to parents is crucial to improving their engagement in the IEP process. Another finding was that the special education process should be simplified as it is overwhelming for parents. The special education process is very lengthy and legalistic and the researcher found the process makes it hard for parents to stay engaged. Parents felt the special education team valued their feedback but wished the process could be changed to

support more family engagement. Parents recommended developing a handbook to provide clear guidelines that could strengthen parent support and support the transition process.

Keywords: Parent perceptions, special education, IEP, PPT

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted to document how parents experienced their interactions with school staff who provide special education services to their children. Special education is defined as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Wright, 2011, p. 1). Students ages three up to twenty one years old can receive special education services if they qualify for specialized instruction through the public school. A student would qualify for special education under a primary disability category of: learning disabled, other health impaired, speech and language impairment, autism, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance or multiple disabilities. Students who are identified for special education services have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that measures academic growth.

Current processes in special education include how instruction is provided and what goals and objectives students work on. Services must be given in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). When assessing what support is required for a student to be successful, general education classroom offerings with accommodations and modifications would be evaluated. If data show a student could not be successful in a general education setting, a special education teacher and general education teacher both providing content in a co-taught would be provided. If a student still was not making adequate progress, a restrictive setting would be required through a pull-out support and self-contained classroom or within a specialized program. Services are not only provided for academics and related services such as: speech and language, counseling, occupational therapy and physical therapy can be received. Special education services are provided in the local public school during school hours.

Parents play an important role in special education. School staff needs to work effectively with parents to create a partnership throughout the special education process. An

important part of staff-parent collaboration is documenting the required contributions parents make during special education meetings (IDEA, 2004).

These types of meetings are generally called “IEP” meetings, and are required by federal guidelines at least yearly to assess student progress (Wright, 2011). In some states, these meetings are designated as “PPT” or Parent and Placement Team, which is a local term, where the special education team meets to develop and discuss the specialized education document. This study focuses on PPTs, but much of the literature and many educators use this term interchangeably with IEPs. Both terms will be used throughout this document.

Parents of students who qualify for special services struggle to navigate the special education process and understand the IEP and the processes that lead to its development. Some research suggests that, while parents who engage in the special education process try to be active participants, many do not understand the roles and responsibilities of parents in the collaborative process (Bonifanti-Romanelli, 2017).

The special education process including creating an IEP is required in American public schools. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), also referred to as Public Law 94-142, was updated in 2004 and now emphasizes parent involvement for all students placed in special education. Weishaar (2010) explained that a guiding principle of IEP meetings is parent involvement. However, some parents whose children qualify for services struggle to navigate the special education process. The steps required for parents to advocate for a child in special education can be complex (Strong, 2017). To determine if a student requires specialized instruction a parent or the school needs to make an initial referral. The whole school team and parents meet to discuss the information and then decide if evaluations are warranted. Evaluations are completed in the areas of psychological, academic achievement and other deficit

areas if necessary. These include speech and language, developmental history, occupational therapy, physical therapy, functional behavioral assessment, auditory processing and use of assistive technology to identify a weakness that requires specialized instruction.

It is essential that parents are engaged in the special education process. Myer (2014) stated that, when parents are not involved in the special education process, tension and negative feelings may occur. Collaboration between parents and the school team is necessary for a successful outcome of progress on goals and objectives in special education. Sontag (2015) stated parents need to be able to navigate special education to have trust in the school team and be actively involved in the special education process. Reiman, Beck, Coppola and Engles (2010) noted that, when parents had representation such as an education advocate involved, they were respected more by the school and the process was followed more diligently from a legal perspective. Parents need to be able to navigate the system independently and believe they are respected by educators. Parents are necessary team members in the special education process and it is important to study how they perceive the process.

Complexity of IEP Processes

The special education process is complex. While the purpose of the policies is to provide specialized services to students who qualify for them, services outside of the public school are expensive and the decisions surrounding designing a combination of support can create conflict. A special education student in the public school system costs on average 3,000 dollars more than a general education pupil (School and State Finance Project, 2020).

Hedeen (2011) explained the special education system is viewed by parents as a complicated, lengthy, litigious process, and the system promotes conflict instead of collaboration with parents (as cited in Wellner, 2012). It is hard to have parents be active team members when

their ideas differ from the school's goals for a student. Wright (2019) noted that special education laws change regularly and school administrators must ensure the legal response outlined in an IEP document is correct. Hedeem (2011) explained following legal protocol is a big part of helping improve collaboration between parents and schools understanding of the process. Reiman et al. (2010) completed a study to understand what parents thought of the special education system and found that parents considered the process to be "confusing" and felt "totally lost". Federal law requires appropriate participation for parents, but does not outline specific participation requirements. Piastro (2000) outlined that IDEA 2004 required parents to be IEP participants but never explained their participation in a meeting. Therefore, it is up to the school and the district to determine the interpretation of parent involvement in an IEP meeting.

When academic growth is not being seen by parents, they need to use their procedural safeguard document. The procedural safeguard document is a thirty-eight page paper which outlines parental rights in the special education process (Connecticut Department of Education, Support Services, 2011). If a parent does not agree with a school team's decision, the parent is welcomed to file for due process. When due process occurs the school district and parents try to address the concerns through mediation before going to a hearing. Whenever mediation occurs parents are recommended to bring representation such as a lawyer or advocate. Mediation is when a school district, parent and mediator try to settle the dispute outside of court. When a mediation is not successful a hearing takes place. During a hearing, the school team and parent witnesses testify in court and the decision is made by the judge.

Parent Collaboration

Parent involvement throughout the special education process is more likely to lead to effective collaboration. Researchers have identified family circumstances that may influence

how they engage with educators on behalf of their student. Bonifanti-Romanelli (2017) found four major influences that affected the degree of parent involvement: cultural, social, economic and political pressure. Parent involvement occurs when parents feel welcomed by the school team. However, a disconnect occurs when parents do not understand how a school is meeting their student's needs based on the legal requirements for the IEP.

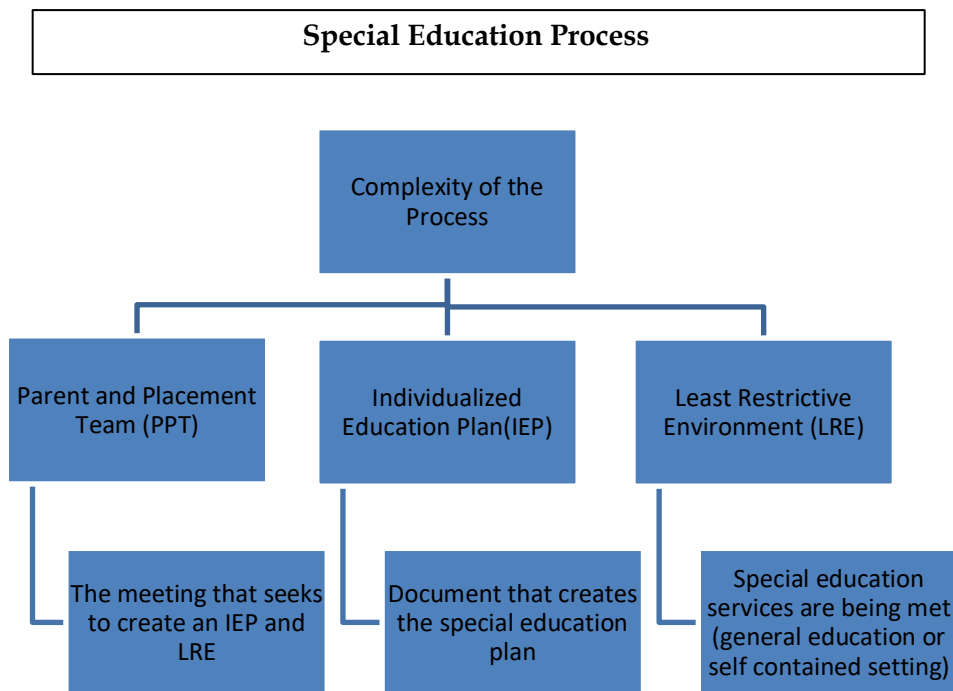
Some parents find IEP meetings difficult due to the length of the meeting and legal language used. Wellner (2012) stated IEPs should have a parent voice in the process but the school team makes recommendations on what they observe and the data collected. Fish (2008) explained special education should prepare students for the real world, but unfortunately some parents may not understand how to read their student's IEP. "Contemporary institutional and legal structure of schools tends to disconnect teachers and families" (Bonafanti-Romanelli, 2017, p. 43). Reiman et. al (2010) noted heightened parental dissatisfaction with the special education process due to the lack of understanding the system. The special education process may include technical terms, require lengthy meetings, provide legal documentation and lead to delivering programming in a different model. Some parents struggle with the special education process since it is complex.

Below is a graphic representation of the various components of special education. A Parent and Placement Team (PPT) meeting is when a special education team has a meeting with parents to discuss goals, objectives and services given to an identified special education student. The document that outlines the support required is the IEP. In an IEP document the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is considered. The LRE is the setting deemed most appropriate in which an individual special education student is to be educated. Services for special education should be reviewed through the lens of an inclusive environment such as: general education with

less supports to a more supportive environment such as: self-contained environment with only disabled peers taught by a special education teacher exclusively.

Figure 1.

Complexity of Special Education with Understanding the Process



Parent and Placement Team (PPT) Process

To hold a Parent and Placement Team (PPT) meeting, parents are legally required participants and their feedback is necessary for school staff to make decisions. The PPT meeting occurs annually to create an IEP. It can be amended throughout the year based on teacher or parent feedback. Public school teachers are required to collect data on student progress for those engaged in specialized instruction. PPT meetings are required and should be used to assess student progress and gain parent feedback. There is a required section in the documentation for parental feedback. The IEP document uses present levels of performance as a foundation to develop goals and objectives for the student. Gartin (2005) outlined the importance of writing

measurable goals with the general education teacher's input. Typically, a PPT meeting consists of school representatives and parents working as a team to review the learner's growth and discuss next steps. The team members include an administrator, special education teacher, general education teacher, a specialist, and parents according to federal guidelines (Hirsch, 2004).

The school team wants parents to feel involved in PPT process, which in turn helps them stay active in their child's education. Hirsch (2004) explained that IDEA requires parents to have a reasonable understanding of the IEP. Reiman (2010) stated parents need to see themselves as valued team members. A national concern from public school teachers about the PPT process is the lack of parent participation. Altemueller (2001) explained collaboration is the cornerstone of the process and noted that parents are often unclear of the steps for effective collaboration in PPT meetings. Bonifanti-Romanelli (2017) expressed that views of parents about the PPT process vary based on how effectively the special educator explains the process. Before and during a PPT meeting, parents are provided their rights in the process and these are explained to them by the school team. The volume and complexity of the documentation alone may contribute to parents not understanding several aspects of the process, including their rights. Holdren and O'Connor (2017) noted parents feel isolated because they do not know what to expect or how to respond. Holdren and O'Connor (2017) showed that increase in participation rises as a result of parent inclusion strategies such as a parent statement or asking for parent feedback in the meeting. Parents' participation in PPT meetings helps all team members determine appropriate student placement for services.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the document where all supports for a special education student are outlined. Parents are required to attend the meeting and should provide feedback to the school team on the IEP. Parents receive a draft of the IEP document before a meeting. Parents may not know what is in the finalized IEP until it is completed by school staff. Collaboration with parents and school team is necessary to have a complete IEP document. Gartin (2005) defined an IEP as a plan for how a student can access learning through a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students who have disabilities revised through IDEA (2004). Comer (2009) stated that students who require an IEP have access to the curriculum through specialized instruction. Most students with less significant disabilities and an IEP are able to access the curriculum in the general education environment for the majority of the day. Inclusion is when a general education classroom provides support with special education through the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) model. Bonafanti-Romanelli (2017) suggested that incorporating special education students in a general education classroom frequently leads to a smoother transition to general education with less specialized support needed for the future. The IEP for a student must outline their educational strengths and weaknesses which can lead to parents understanding their child's learning needs in a PPT.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Wright (2020) stated the first time the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was used in Part B of *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* was in 1975. Monsen (2014) explained the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) includes a curriculum accommodation and/or modification to help the student make academic progress as outlined in the IEP. To identify the appropriate LRE, student achievement, behavior and growth data are required from the

mainstream environment which is collected by the classroom and special education teacher to assess progress. The data collected represent the support needed with specialized instruction in the IEP. Collaboration between the special education teacher and general education teachers is required to ensure the IEP is being followed.

The Marzano (2001) differentiated teaching model acts as a conceptual framework as these strategies help all students access the LRE. Parents need to be informed about how services for special education students can be provided in the general education setting. Parents may advocate for their student's needs to be met outside the "typical classroom" but is not always the best way to deliver support. In the LRE, Nicholson (2015) explained students are provided with role models, enrichment of curriculum and at times, receive more support. The LRE may be in the mainstream setting. Monsen (2014) provided the understanding that inclusion requires not only a student being physically present, but also being capable of accessing the curriculum and rules/values required in the classroom. Education is provided in a learning continuum from self-contained to co-taught to mainstreamed as the educational team has a legal obligation to meet students' needs in the LRE. This continuum may be hard for some parents to recognize and fully understand. Wellner (2012) recognized decisions about providing special education is the most contentious part of education because parents and school teams sometimes have disputes about how an identified student's needs can be met in the LRE. Working together as team members encourages parents to participate collaboratively with the school staff to provide appropriate services.

Education Advocates

Education advocates are individuals who help to support parents to understand the IEP. Boduch (2019) expressed the need for advocates and lawyers to become involved in the IEP process to help with parental collaboration. Educational advocates want students to make academic growth. Frequently the school IEP team does assess a student's progress using grade level or other data and observations. Sonntag (2015) found that, when parents explore using advocates, it is for one of three reasons: distrust of the school IEP team, lack of understanding about special education law, or their discomfort in IEP meetings based on heightened emotions. At times advocates can share with parents those services that need to be provided by the school. Boduch (2019) also explained that parents may feel ill-equipped and uninformed about the process, which may be why they use educational advocates. However, educational advocates and lawyers may not know what a school can offer since they do not work in the school.

Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) is required through IDEA for all students to be allowed access to the general education curriculum with specialized instruction. FAPE has not occurred when there is no collaboration with the school team. Participation of stakeholders from outside of the multidisciplinary team makes the process more contentious since agreement on the IEP occurs less often (Nicholson, 2015). Educational advocates may be hired by the parents and strive to address their needs. The school team has an obligation to follow the IEP. Involving extra team members in the special education process can create unwarranted tension. The IEP process is meant to be inclusive, allowing each team member and parent is to have an important voice. The IEP process outlines a plan establishing how specialized instruction will be provided to students. An advocate is only involved in the process to support and explain the special education process and IEP document to parents.

Problem Statement

In this study, when the terms parent or parents are used, the researcher is referring to the person responsible for the student, which may be parent or legal guardian. Holdren and O'Connor (2017) found that parents want to be active team members in the special education process but are often intimidated by the other professionals at the meeting. Parents are legally obligated to participate in the IEP process, but there is a lack of research on parental involvement in the IEP meetings. Parents may be unclear of the special education process and special education staff may find it difficult to involve parents. Parents involve advocates when they do not see adequate progress being made on the goals set forth on the IEP (Boduch, 2019). This study examines what parents currently perceive about the IEP process and what they need to become more collaborative team members since they are required to participate but, for the reasons reviewed above, may not be fully participating.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how parents in a New England high school who are motivated to be actively involved participants in the IEP process perceive the effectiveness of the process. Motivated parents in the IEP process are defined for this study as attending special education meetings, participating in the meeting, independently reviewing an IEP document and understanding the steps in a meeting. The researcher documented parents' perceptions of their involvement in the IEP process and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the process. The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of those parents about the effectiveness of the IEP process. Purposive sampling was used in this study. Findings shed light on parents' perceptions of barriers to their involvement. Legally, parents' feedback is necessary in the special education process. Examining how parents understand and see the process is a desired

outcome of this study, and findings may be useful to help parents be more involved participants throughout the IEP process.

Research Question

The essential research question for this study is: What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of the IEP process by motivated parents of special education students?

Conceptual Framework

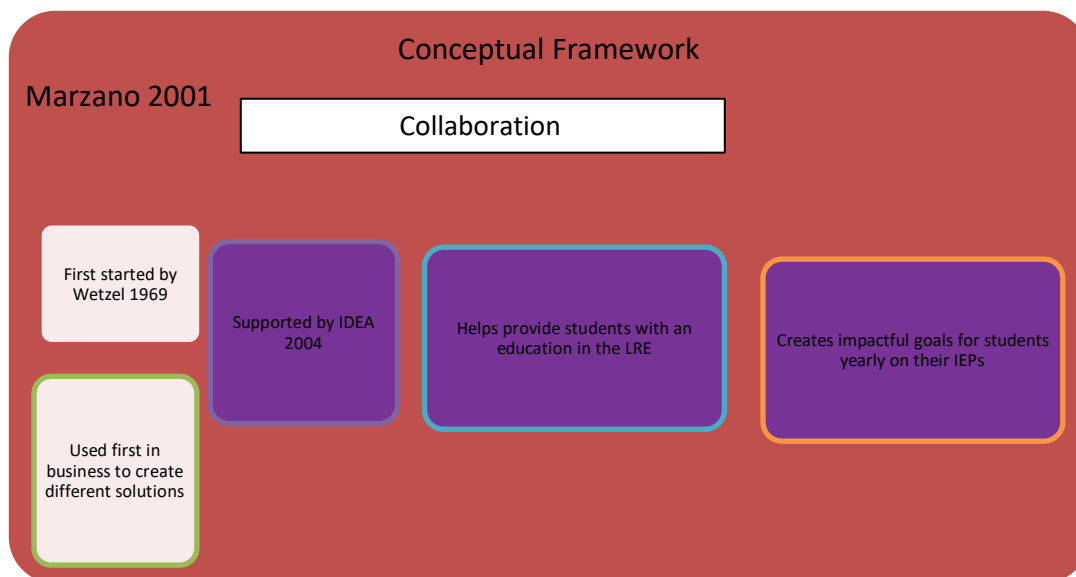
This study is guided by a conceptual framework that includes Marzano's collaboration model. A collaboration model was first introduced by Wetzel in 1969 in businesses to generate more creative problem solving. Schools explored this model to learn if it could increase working more effectively and more creatively with others. Collaboration models reviewed by Marzano (2001) have been shown to be effective in the general education classroom with inclusion strategies for special education students. Marzano's (2001) collaboration model requires individuals to work towards both their goals and the group's vision. When skilled in collaboration, team members will work towards achieving individual goals and use interpersonal skills to meet the team's needs. Collaboration is important within the internal school team as well as the IEP process that includes identified students and parents. Strong (2017) explained that stronger parent relationships occurred if continued effort and education were provided to parents in the areas of law, procedure, and ways to help their child grow. Impactful goals and objectives written on the IEP should lead to positive outcomes for students and inform future progress. Collaboration between the school staff and parents is necessary to meet federal law and for students to achieve their IEP goals.

Below is a graphic illustrating how the collaboration model is currently used in schools. This graphic representation highlights how collaboration supports special education students'

learning. When collaboration is effective all school team members are working to help special education students achieve mastery on their goals and objectives as described on their IEPs.

Figure 2.

Collaboration Model for Schools



Marzano (2001) explained that learning achievement is increased based on three important involvement factors which are “student-centered instruction, teaching of critical thinking and hands-on activities” (p. 9). Marzano (2001) used strategies previously created for simplifying classroom management for all students. These methods help integrate collaborative learning in an inclusive setting. The cooperative learning methods used by Marzano (2001) have introduced more specialized instruction in the regular classroom. Inclusive learning methods proposed by Marzano (2001) do not require pull-out support, or meeting the student outside the mainstream classroom, for most special education students. Some types of learning strategies proposed by Marzano (2001) in the general education setting are reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning and student goal setting. Palincsar and Brown (1984) first introduced the reciprocal

method. Marzano (2001) reintroduced this instruction strategy, involving four principles to use in all content areas: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and identifying.

Cooperative grouping research dates back to 1867 and was reintroduced by Johnson, D.W. (1981) and Marzano (2001). Cooperative groups follow three principles according to Marzano (2001). Groups are not leveled, that is, composed of students with the same reading ability, groups are small in size and groups are consistent with the structure and routines. It is necessary for parents to understand how those not performing on grade level can be helped by cooperative grouping strategies. Marzano (2001) identified the benefits of cooperative groups including the concept that students can work more independently without competing against each other. As for student goal setting, Marzano (2001) defined three principles: “goals need to be narrow to a student focus, not be too specific and students should personalize the teacher's goal” (p. 13). In special education, school staff needs to recognize students’ abilities to set goals for their IEPs and collaborate with all school team members.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The study’s participants include parents who are actively engaged in the IEP process. There is an assumption that parents who remain involved in the PPT process agree with the decisions made at the IEP meeting using a PPT process. This researcher also assumes the participants understand the basics of the PPT process and the purpose of an IEP meeting.

Research participants for this study were drawn from parents of special education students at Strawberry Hill High School, a pseudonym for the research site. There are many languages spoken by the parents at Strawberry Hill High School and a translator would be required for those non-native English speakers to participate in the study. Since translators are not available, only fluent English speakers were included in the study. There are many schools in

this district and procedures for special education meetings can vary even within the same town. Another limitation is that the research findings will relate only to the Strawberry Hill High School and may only be loosely relevant to other schools at the high school level.

The scope of this study included parents of special education students at Strawberry Hill High School as research participants. Data were gathered from semi-structured individual interviews to examine their current perceptions of the process. This study was narrowly focused to examine the perceptions by parents of the special education process.

Significance of the Study

The special education process involves parents being important advocates for their child. Frequently, parents are unclear on the process and do not understand how to be engaged. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined how parents in a New England high school who are motivated to be actively involved participants in the IEP process perceive the effectiveness of the process. This study is important to document the current understanding of special education processes through the parent's perceptions. Parents are necessary stakeholders. Parents are required by law to participate and their feedback is crucial for student improvement. This research may be helpful to special education administrators who need to understand the barriers to parent involvement and perhaps learn why specific parents are more active participants than others.

Definition of Terms

Advocates - People hired to support parents or guardians understand the PPT process. Boduch (2019) expressed the need for advocates and lawyers to become involved in the process and help with parental collaboration.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) - The Department of Education (2019) explained that NCLB was amended in 2007, and, over time, its outcomes were deemed unachievable. A different law was proposed by Obama administration called *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*.

Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) - Gartin (2005) explained all special education students are entitled to this level of education in a public school setting through the IDEA law (2004).

Guardian - The person responsible for a student under the age of 18. This study uses the term parents to include all individuals that are in charge of making educational decisions for the student.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - In special education, parent and student involvement is required through Public Law 94-142 (2004).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - Comer (2009) A document that provides students with specialized instruction based on a learning disability need. A certified teacher must draft the plan and school staff must obtain parent feedback to finalize the document.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - Monsen (2014) provided the understanding that this policy requires not only a student being physically present in an environment but also capable to access the curriculum and rules/values required in the classroom.

Planning and Placement Team (PPT) - A group of professionals who “reviews referrals to special education, determines if the child needs to be evaluated, decides what evaluations will be given to the child, and determines whether the child is eligible for special education services” (Connecticut Department of Education, 2008, p. 3).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - This Act “required that scientifically based research serve as the standard to determine which approaches could be used for school improvement” (Fleischman, Scott & Sargrad, 2016, p. 9).

Special Education - “A child evaluated and qualified as having a cognitive disability, a hearing impairment, deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, blindness, a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and is in need of learning support and related services” (Comer, 2009, p. 6).

Scientifically-Based Research Intervention - NCLB standard that “serves as the standard to determine which approaches could be used for school improvement” (Fleischman, Scott & Sargrad, 2016, p. 6).

Title I - “Federal categorical program providing funds to schools and districts with high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet academic standards” (USDOE, 2004, p. 1).

Conclusion

This chapter explained the role of parents in the special education process, and some of the challenges parents face when engaging in the special education process. Special education is a complex process that requires collaboration with school team and parents. The Department of Education (2018) identified that special education services had an impact on 6.7 million identified youth in America during the 2016-2017 school year, and that number increases by 100,000 each year. Laws guiding decisions about how to support students with learning deficits have evolved over time and have a direct impact on students and their families striving to address students’ learning needs. With many changes in education over the last fifteen years, it is necessary for parents to understand how special education students can be served in the mainstream environment. Educating parents about the different approaches to address learning deficits requires collaboration between staff and parents.

Parents are important stakeholders in the PPT process. To understand what is occurring in the special education process, more data are needed from and for parents throughout the IEP meeting. Strawberry Hill High School staff has worked to build relationships with parents to support the PPT process. It is vital to examine if parents feel informed as participants in that process, and if the effort from Strawberry Hill High School to keep parents engaged has been effective. The data collected reflected parents' perceptions about their understanding of the special education process. This study examined what Strawberry Hill High School parents perceive as working in the special education process and identified what are the potential roadblocks or barriers to their understanding.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the Parent and Placement Team (PPT) process, many parents struggle to navigate and understand the special education process. The laws and policies mandated through Individuals of Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004) are constantly changing which makes it difficult for parents to understand current practices. The law was amended to increase parental participation in the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which has brought further conflict and disagreement in the special education process (Nowell & Salem, 2007). The purpose of this study is to describe parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the IEP process. The essential research question for this study is: What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of the IEP process by motivated parents of special education students? The IEP process must be as accessible as possible to enable all parents to engage in and advocate for special education.

Specialized instruction is provided to special education students in various ways. IEP documents explain how students will receive instruction through inclusion and pull out and/or co-taught classes, which are the most common settings for providing differentiated instruction. However, educators may concentrate on the product or document more than the process of developing it (Tarver, 2006). As a result of IDEA (2004), parents are required to be participants in developing the IEP and their input is needed in the document. "Regular education teachers, parents and the child have very little input into the product" (Tarver, 2006, p. 263). Sontag (2015) stated that parents and students may have preconceived ideas of how services will be enacted and do not feel their input is implemented. Families are often unsure how their learners can most benefit from specialized instruction, what the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is, and how the school staff can help their students achieve yearly growth.

The literature review begins by presenting the conceptual framework based on Marzano's (2001) differentiation and collaboration model. Differentiation assesses progress through formative assessments and teachers provide tiered instruction. Collaboration is required to conduct appropriate instruction and assess progress. The theoretical framework is based on ensuring socially just practices in public schools. The history of special education including legal changes in special education is reviewed. Legal implications that have emerged based on the local, state, and federal laws starting with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) and *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) will be reviewed. ESSA and NCLB impacted education nationally by establishing rigorous standards known as the Common Core State Standards. When standards are not met, the Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) tiered process is used. If students do not demonstrate adequate progress then a referral for special education is developed. Once a referral for special education is made by the school team or parents, a meeting is held to discuss potential evaluations to determine whether specialized instruction is required. Students understanding how they and their parents can prepare for post-high school transition is part of the IEP process.

Special Education History

Through the Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) schools are required to provide an education for significantly impaired students until age 21 and transition components in educational services for all special education students starting at age 14. This decision mandated equal opportunities in education for all students and ruled it unlawful to exclude students with disabilities from public schools in the District of Columbia (Wright & Wright, 2010). This case also required parental involvement and support from general education teachers. The NCLB Act developed from an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act (ESEA) of 1965. The NCLB Act was created as a result of concern that some local education systems were not stringent enough and that the federal government needed to take more of an active role in creating standards. Wright (2007) noted that Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens and *Mills vs. Board of Education* 1972 guaranteed a right to education for all, no matter what the student's disability or need. Congress then enacted Public Law 94-142 in 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The law promised that all students with disabilities would receive an education, and it established a process by which state and local public schools were responsible for providing support (Wright, 2019). Another set of changes in public education was the establishment of learning standards by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), created in 2009 and implemented starting in the 2012 school year, to standardize education benchmarks. This was a federal initiative like NCLB. "The changes to American education initiated with *A Nation at Risk* have advanced standards-based reforms and singular views of educational achievement as test scores" (Matlock, 2016, p. 12). Many legal cases and acts affect current special education processes. Recently, the *Endrew vs. Douglas County* 2017 Supreme Court ruling showed that making minimal progress on goals and objectives was not enough to qualify a student for special education (Wright, 2019). The *Endrew* case further explained that making a few annual changes on an IEP is not considered specialized education.

Conceptual Framework

Marzano's (2001) meta-analysis on collaboration and differentiation impacted classrooms as it introduced the use of different teaching methods for the general education setting. Marzano was the first to define differentiated instruction in the classroom as implementing different teaching methods using the same content. Marzano (2001) discussed strategies previously

created to simplify classroom management to benefit all students. Inclusive learning methods proposed by Marzano (2001) do not require pull-out support for most learners. Werts (2014) found through further research that using Marzano's (2001) differentiation model led to fewer students requiring intervention support if differentiation was provided in the inclusion classroom. Stevens (2010) broke down Marzano's (2001) differentiation methods into modeling, pre-teaching, small group instruction, and student-led instruction, all of which tailor learning to the students' needs. Stevens (2010) noted that some experienced general education teachers feel inadequate to the task of supporting special education students in the classroom. Stevens (2010) explained that the federal mandates, NCLB and IDEA (2004), had the common goal of ensuring that all children receive an appropriate education. In turn, IEPs have incorporated Marzano's (2001) methods of differentiated instruction to help teachers provide more effective instruction in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Marzano recognized that differentiation and collaboration went together. When differentiation and collaboration are used in the classroom together all students have the opportunity to be successful. Collaboration occurs when staff work together to achieve the same goals in the classroom which includes planning together, grading together and holding daily discussions about students. Marzano (2011) stated that improved teaching is the primary way to raise student achievement. "When teachers are given the time and tools to collaborate they become lifelong learners, their instructional practice improves and they are ultimately able to increase student achievement" (Marzano, 2011, p. 66). Teachers and instructors agree that collaboration in and out of the classroom leads to better student outcomes (Marzano, 2011). The members of teams created for collaboration must work effectively together.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on collective case studies. This study examines social justice within the special education system through a parent's lens. *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) was a landmark legal case where the United States Supreme Court looked at scientific research and its how affected social obstacles in education at the public school system (Normore, 2008). Social justice refers to equity in opportunities (Normore, 2008) for this study, in education. This study analyzed parents' understandings of the PPT process using a case study format. It addresses how legal implications affect the current processes and how parent input helps inform the IEP document. Legally, school team members must abide by the IEP document, but the same ramifications do not apply to parents. The ESSA, which was derived from the NCLB Act, requires parents to actively engage in the special education process. Current guidelines as outlined by the Common Core and SRBI informs the data collection processes about the LRE and determines appropriate levels of support. Using formative assessments and transition information from parents and students, educators can gain knowledge on students' LRE and plan further learning opportunities.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) was created to change educational standards in public schools. The NCLB Act created an identification process for special education with a "goal of recommending policies for improving the education performance of students with disabilities" (USDOE, 2002, p. 1). The Department of Education (2002) explained that students in intervention programs grades kindergarten to third grade were required to participate in research-based instruction programs recommended by the Local Education Agency (LEA). The Department of Education (2002) stated that school districts had to report these scores at the state

and federal level as a whole and for specific underlined subgroups. It required improvement in scores year to year and that a lack of those scores would result in repercussions. NCLB aimed to increase school accountability. Edley (2002) explained that this goal was accomplished by states monitoring test scores, funding, and graduation rates. Gartin (2005) explained that in 2004, IDEA was amended to better align with the requirements of NCLB. IDEA (2004) required general education teachers to be team members at IEP meetings, and NCLB gave funding to states that complied with guidelines.

If states followed the NCLB guidelines, their school districts received funding from both the state and federal government through Title I. “Title I is one such federal categorical program providing funds to schools and districts with high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet academic standards” (USDOE, 2004, p. 1). Title I funding is provided to schools that have higher needs based on their community and students. Title I funding is directly related to state and LEA grants. Title I articulated an approach based on scientific research to identify students who require more support in the classroom. The Department of Education (2004) recognized that students receiving intervention through SRBI must show progress otherwise students will be referred for the special education process. The Department of Education (2004) also stated that districts that did not comply would lose grant funding.

The NCLB Act aimed to serve under-privileged and disadvantaged students together, which made the overarching goal of meeting benchmarks impossible. Shaul (2006) explained that using growth models allows states to track student gains over time and would provide more support to districts that meet the end of the year goal. In order for schools to receive adequate funding, major improvements in test scores were needed, or drastic measures such as new leadership, new staff or state takeover of schools were required. The NCLB Act was revised and

states did try to repeal it because they did not think it required enough growth for all students. The guidelines did not demonstrate consistent progress in public schools. Klein (2015) explained that students showed growth when they attended school and displayed growth in intervention. The supports ranged from access to free tutoring to even switching schools, which students rarely took advantage of through NCLB. However, NCLB did strengthen public education resulting in increased graduation rates and standardized test scores at the high school level. Nevertheless, NCLB was not able to fulfill all its legal obligations, because its goals were too high. Gartin (2005) noted that the concerns with NCLB voiced by parents were never addressed; these included budgets not being fulfilled, an overuse of standardized testing, racially profiling students, and an absence of parent education. Layton (2012) stated that in 2001, high school graduation rates were 72% while in 2009 they were 75%. While NCLB is a federal mandate, state and local agencies were required to take control of the programs and show consistent student growth. Intervention support needed to lead to student progress to have parental buy-in. Schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress metrics were supposed to lose funding, but instead, many received more support to help their lowest-performing students.

After amendments to NCLB in 2010, a standard set of academic expectations and benchmarks for grade levels was established in Common Core Standards. “The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary” (Common Core, 2018, p. 1). The Common Core Standards required state and federal implementation. “In 2009 legislation required states to sign on to de facto national standards, the CCSS, in order to compete for billions in federal aid” (Matlock, 2016, p. 12). Matlock (2016) noted that teachers who had taught for longer periods felt that their input was gathered in order to create the standards but was not used. Newer and more adaptable teachers adjusted to the new

expectations (Matlock, 2016). IEPs require standard-based goals and transition planning. Gewertz (2015) stated that matching the Common Core Standards to the IEP goals and objectives increases the standards for special education growth. Common Core Standards bring instruction in the classroom into line with IEP growth.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The IEP document has state and federal requirements stemming from IDEA, introduced in 2004, developing from those introduced under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001), which has become *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015). Fleishman (2016) reported frustration among parents, since growth throughout the states has not proved consistent. ESSA took effect in the 2017-2018 school year as a result of educators and families calling for creation of a better act focusing on the clear goal of fully preparing all students for success in college and careers. Tung (2017) explained that the goal of ESSA is to improve the academic performance of the bottom 5% of students based on the state test scores of high school students. The focus of ESSA is on graduating of students with real life skills. The NCLB Act and ESSA use intervention data from evidence-based research programs to show progress in students' achievement. Fleishman (2016) explained states are not mandated to complete specific improvement metrics like those under NCLB; instead the school sets its own improvement goals based on individual state and district guidelines to create more flexibility. Fleischman (2016) stated the purpose of ESSA is to create more open-ended goal-setting, enabling progress towards an end result of growth that is attainable for states. The ESSA requires schools to demonstrate improvements using intervention programs but does not prescribe required programs.

Edley (2002) explained that ESSA outlined parental involvement in the evaluation process making sure that all the testing was reviewed by parents before inclusion in the IEP. It

also required parental involvement because states complained that NCLB was not meeting the needs of students. “The Department should work to ensure parental and public involvement over time, including providing guidance to states on how to establish effective systems and ensure parental and public involvement from diverse communities” (Edley, 2002, p. 10). Hedeem (2011) found parents were not invested in the execution of NCLB or in its implementation because they were unclear as to what needs were being measured and how they could collaborate. “More balanced parent/ school relationships show the value in parent training in advocacy and collaboration skills” (Hedeem, 2011, p. 5). The NCLB Act was instituted and showed promise in raising parental involvement in the learning process, which is also part of ESSA. NCLB did experience some success in increasing high school graduation rates. However, the goals originally set out by NCLB to involve more parents were not met. Agoratus (2016) explained how ESSA pushed districts and states to create more parent advisory committees so parents could be involved in the special education process. ESSA included mandates for parent involvement. However the lack of funding cut many parental involvement opportunities for special education parents. Myer (2014) found that professional development for staff and teachers increases awareness of the importance of parental inclusion in the IEP process, which is necessary in special education. The complexity of the special education process has made the IEPs difficult for parents to understand, and schools lacked the programs to support parents. One of the purposes of NCLB and ESSA was to increase parental involvement; however, this effort fell short because the budget to engage them was never fully allocated. Cohen (2009) also explained that what a student is entitled to as directed in the law and what the school actually provides are often different. Henderson (2015) explained that ESSA required school districts to create some type of parent advisory board to receive outside feedback. This

board provided an opportunity for some more experienced special education parents to coach others who struggle with their child being identified as a special education student, and with the meetings, paperwork, and other processes.

ESSA was similar to the NCLB Act since a budgetary support is required to carry out the requirements. Budget cuts to public schools directly impact the amount of state funding that schools receive through ESSA. “A state superior court judge ruled Connecticut's funding formula leaves poor, black, and Latino students trapped in underfunded schools that are disproportionately staffed with unqualified teachers” (Daarel, 2017, p. 1). Fleischman (2016) explained that due to ESSA, states must put seven percent of state’s NCLB funding toward supporting school improvement. Fleischman (2016) noted that up to an additional three percent in funding can be used for direct student support such as tutoring and credit recovery. Current Title I funding is down 10% from what was previously received, impacting intervention supports. Fleischman (2016) explained that the ESSA provides more opportunities for individual buildings their own intervention supports within the district. The Act uses a tiered-intervention model similar to NCLB to support all students. Specific groups, such as English-language learners, special education, and poor and minority students were targeted in ESSA for the assessment of growth. A change in funding intervention programs leads a school district to restructure how they approach supporting students for Title 1 and SRBI since ESSA allows schools to choose their own research-based programming.

Funding Problems

Klein (2015) stated that the budget to help Title I and special education for schools and parent education was cut every year during NCLB. While the NCLB act had many noble intentions and goals, many were not met as a result of funding cuts at the federal level (Klein,

2015). “Thirty-eight percent of schools were failing to make adequate yearly progress in 2010 up from 29 percent in 2006” (Klein, 2015, p. 3). Title I funding was critical for programming for higher-needs schools and districts, as it “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, p. 1). Financially, this policy requires the federal government to fund programs. Henderson (2015) highlighted that ESSA funds are contingent on outreach to all parents.

The original law (NCLB) authorized up to \$32 billion in spending in 2002 dollars, but Congress never spent anywhere close to that, appropriating just \$23 billion in 2015.

ESSA authorizes the spending of \$24.9 billion in 2016, again subject to the spending bill now being finalized by Congress. (Korte, 2015, p. 2)

ESSA was required to use some of its Title 1 funding for parent engagement: “at least 1% for a district receiving more than 5,000 dollars” (p. 3). However, the costs for implementing ESSA continued to be a concern, especially in Connecticut. “Connecticut Governor Daniel Malloy wants to cut \$20 million out of that state's \$4.1 billion education budget due to a revenue shortfall” (Daarel, 2017, p. 1). Daarel (2017) thus highlighted the need for Malloy to optimize the use of public school funding. Cohen (2009) noted that, due to the lack of parent resources during NCLB and the legal implications of the Parent and Placement Teams (PPTs), frequently, outcomes recommended by the school team are not mutually agreed upon with parents’ input.

Formative Assessments

Formative assessment is a process that includes students and teachers in setting goals for learning leading to academic progress. Formative assessments include tiered instruction to help

teachers assess what content is understood by students. Quick assessments are helpful to explain to parents their students' current progress and how they are gaining knowledge under current instruction. These pre- and post-data help parents understand what an appropriate LRE based on classroom performance should look like. Special education students who struggle with assessments benefit from chunked content assessing in segments whether they understand the information. Formative assessment results then instruct the teacher as to whether the pacing is appropriate or whether more instruction is needed in order to ensure that a student grasps a concept. Collaboration with special education staff helps students who need support access the curriculum in the general education environment. Assessment is necessary in order to show improvements in test scores and graduation rates. Stevens (2012) stated that differentiated instruction referred to "data collection that allowed all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that are tailored to students' needs" (p. 14). Marzano (2001) also assessed how critical thinking could provide differentiation in the classroom. "Optimal learning occurs when a student is challenged to cognitively process material that is neither too difficult nor too easy" (as cited in Rule, 2003, p. 2). Formative assessments provide differentiated instruction to all students in the general education environment. Edley (2002) stated that the initial intent of the NCLB Act was that improvements on assessments were intended to produce more state and federal funding to a school district. Fisher and Frey (2007) incorporated formative assessments to check for understanding in a learner. Stevens (2012) noted that general education teachers are more comfortable with formative assessments, but less so with differentiated instruction. Black and William (1998) used formative assessments to analyze students' current progress (as cited in Klute, 2017). Assessment data also helped teachers modify the instruction for whole group or individual

students, to ensure that instruction was more accessible. Rule (2003) explained how instruction can be effectively differentiated in the classroom and individualized for students. Fisher and Frey (2007) emphasized that it is important to assess students' understanding on a daily basis.

Formative assessment entails assessing what a student does and does not know informally and formally, in order to modify teaching and thereby maximize student attainment. Fisher and Frey (2007) explained that evaluating a student's understanding of the content can be done orally or in a written fashion. Fisher and Frey (2007) explained that daily formative assessments are needed for a successful summative assessment, which includes the use of questioning techniques to gauge understanding of material and engagement in student discourse to assess higher-level thinking. Steven (2012) noted that increased federal obligations for teachers require educating all students with diverse needs. The needs of all students can be met by determining whether the student requires more time to grasp the concepts. Their comprehension can be assessed quickly through post-tests and exit slips.

Using formative assessment helps close the gap for learning and helps teachers understand how students are making progress throughout the lesson. Ninomiya (2016) stated that formative assessment can be criticized unfairly based on poor understanding of assessment. When progress monitoring occurs throughout the learning process, the needs of more students can be met in the general education environment. The main features of progress monitoring "show conclusively that formative assessment does improve learning and that gains in student achievement are amongst the largest ever reported" (Ninomiva, 2016, p. 81). Formative evaluations enable a greater sharing of discourse among students and peer/self-assessment. This process helps learners and teachers assess where students need to go and how to get there properly. When parents understand the process, they recognize the importance of promoting

learner involvement. Ninomiva (2016) stated that formative assessment requires extra progress monitoring and more student responsibility. These learning techniques relate to the instructional approaches and learning goals outlined on students' IEPs.

Transition Planning

At the high school level, the transition page is a significant part of a student's IEP. Parents are often unprepared to appropriately advocate for their student's needs without more significant support from the school system. The William Bridges transition model (1980, 2004), paved the way for consideration of postsecondary options. Bridges (2004) explained that it is not change, but actually transitions, that people tend to resist. This model uses transition as the mode of change. It uses a three-step process: new beginnings, neutral zone, and endings. Bridges (2004) created a guide for moving through life's transitions, which includes the process of navigating post-high school graduation. Hedeem (2011) recognized that involving parents in the process and engaging them in the transition is important. In high school, classes are determined for the student based on graduation requirements and credits. As the transition process occurs, parents grow concerned because, as Hedeem (2011) explained, more communication and consultation is required than is currently provided. Student voices in the IEP document and participation at the high school level are thus necessary.

One important part of the PPT process that requires student participation is the Summary of Performance (SOP) page and the transition document. An SOP page is completed before a student graduates to document their needs for the future. Cohen (2009) explained that this process focuses on academic, vocational and independent living. Advocacy is a necessary skill for students to learn that helps them be successful for the future. Transition goals help students define future interests more clearly. Cohen (2009) stated that it is necessary for a "transition

service plan to be in place no later than the first individualized education program (IEP) in effect when the child turns 16” (p. 1). In high school, students could focus more on their personal interests if they have an outline of a future plan. “Self-determined students assert themselves when appropriate, take pride in their accomplishments and abilities, and are able to act as self-advocates” (Hart, 2013, p. 1). Hart (2013) continued by explaining that when students self-advocate they gradually assume a more proactive role in their IEP. This can be based on the knowledge that they have gained of their own strengths, needs and interests. By learning their strengths, they can communicate their own choices and better evaluate decisions. Hart (2013) noted this engagement is necessary in order to carry out their success as students in the future. Students also can practice interviews, the Accuplacer test, and resumé writing at high school when they engage in the goal-setting process, setting them up for early success.

The more impactful the goals and objectives, the more positive the outcomes are for the future. Goal setting is something that all students should do every year. Hart (2013) explained that special needs’ students must focus on self-advocacy and self-determination. Strong (2017) outlined that better adult interactions were formed as a result of continued effort and education provided by parents in the areas of law, procedure and ways to help their students learn. By understanding the process and providing more communication regarding the engagement in special education, parents will be more motivated to engage in developing an IEP.

IEPs revolve around the student's input at the high school level. From ages 14-21, student involvement in the IEP process is required. “Transition is where people gradually accept the details of the new situation and the changes that come with it” (Bridges, 2004, p. 4). Transition involves setting post-secondary goals for employment and daily living if needed. Change, Bridges (2004) explained, occurs quickly whereas transition is something that can be

worked through since it is gradual over time. Students are required to complete a transition process from high school to post-high school as part of the PPT process. The transition tools include surveys, student input and writing employment/post-secondary goals, all initiated by students themselves. For more impaired students, this transition also involves vocational training and daily living skills to help with the process of getting a job independently. High school students are often not active in this process because frequently special education teachers write the goals for them. Reynolds (2005) found that a student who is involved in writing their IEP goals shows higher motivation to master their goals. At the high school level, the transition goals are an important aspect of an IEP document.

It is important for parents to grasp how necessary student involvement is throughout the IEP process. Hedeem (2011) stated that it is important to have parents engage at the highest level in the collaboration continuum. Fisher's (2007) study cited data that show that many parents find it difficult to get involved with the transition process. Hedeem (2011) showed that this disconnect with involvement in the process was based on the observed cracks in the special education system and the encouragement of collaboration not being fully supported by the school. Sonntag (2015) explained that parents want to understand more about the transition process to help support their student in the PPT. It is important for students and parents to understand the purpose of transition planning so that they remain active in the process.

Parent Involvement

The NCLB Act (2002) promised more parental education and state involvement than previously mandated by the Department of Education (2002). Comer (2009) explained that the role of parents in the special education process has become increasingly important over time. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142 was passed by

Congress and reauthorized in 1990, 1997, and 2004. In each reauthorization, Comer (2009) indicated that parental involvement in the special education process was mandated by law. Jones and Peterson (2017) found that parents are an essential part of their child's education, especially for students with special learning needs. Parents motivated to be involved in the special education process are engaged in PPTs.

Parents are often unclear as to the process and lack knowledge on how to advocate for their special education child. Myers (2014) outlined that PPT provisions based on the parent perspective are important and are ethically right. In a PPT, the procedural guidelines state that everyone works together as a team. From the parent's perspective, Myers (2014) stated, this collaboration is not occurring. Hirsch (2004) noted a "significant positive correlation between parent satisfaction and whether they were asked to give input in preparing their child's IEP" (p. 20). Myers (2014) stated that parents generally had high regard for participation and decision-making at a PPT. Myers (2014) further explained that there is a lack of parent voices at IEP meetings. Altemueller (2001) suggested parent participation is based on the basic principle of democracy in the United States government. Parents should be involved in the decision-making process but they require support to navigate the system. If the IEP process included more collaboration between school and parents, everyone would be required as active team members to work together. Myers (2014) stated that "Parents stating that they felt voiceless, had little input, and did not feel a sense of 'belonging' at IEP meeting" (p. 2). The ESSA and, previously, NCLB, required schools to involve parents through family engagement strategies. Myer (2014) found, however, that some parents were still lost in the process of special education.

Understanding What Parents Currently Recognize About the Special Education Process

Parental understanding of an IEP meeting is an important element in the special education process. “The importance of parental involvement for regular education students is strong evidence that involvement of parents is even more critical for students with difficulties” (Hirsch, 2004, p. 2). Hedeem (2011) explained that feedback from the school is not immediate and specific enough to support the student’s involvement in the process. Hirsch (2004) also noted that understanding the IEP process is the most important step for outside stakeholders. “Parents who assume an active role can advocate so that their child receives the best and most appropriate services available” (Hirsch, 2004, p. 12). Henderson (2015) outlined that ESSA requires more consistent communication and family engagement to fulfill district Title I obligations. “Comfort of parents in the IEP process will result in positive social change by increasing parent activity” (Myer, 2014, p. 3). Completing this process in a workshop model, students and parents were assessed to identify the benefits to the process. Using structured interviews, Werts (2002) found that an “IEP event and simulation of meetings were the most effective in preparing them for an IEP conference for nineteen out of twenty-one who responded” (p. 5). Hirsch (2004) reported that having direct instruction for students on the special education process is helpful in leading them to become more active participants in their IEP meetings and increased parental training could assist parents in understanding special education eligibility and services. Parents would be “more active participants so that they may be better advocates for their child and make informed decisions” (Hirsch, 2004, p. 14). If parents understood the process of special education, Hirsch (2004) noted parent involvement would be greater; due to unfamiliarity with the process and language, however, parents found it difficult to participate. The IEP process is very lengthy, involving legal language throughout the meeting.

Hirsch (2004) stated that helping parents break down the special education process would result in parents being advocates for their student and in the early identification of the need for special education. When parents are engaged in the learning process, they can be more active team members.

Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) and Models Help Parents Understand the Process

Intervention provides support to all students who are struggling learners and do not currently receive support through special education. Fullan (2001) explained that it is important to transform the culture in a school to create change. Myers (2004) explained that if parents are a major contributor to the culture, then their involvement will be well respected in the school environment. Before the special education process is explored, an intervention program should be reviewed. Intervention remediation is provided through SRBI, which is a shorter process compared to special education. Werts (2014) demonstrated through his research that the intervention model uses an outlined tiered model stemming from decades of dissatisfaction with identification of special education students. In SRBI, students are assessed at different Tiers (I, II, III). Tier I is the global school-wide intervention that all classes explore to benefit students. Tier II is more of a smaller group model in the classroom; and finally, Tier III is the most intense intervention providing small group push-in or pull-out support. Each tier is completed in six to eight weeks. If proper progress is not being made with the SRBI, greater intervention support is provided. Tier III support intensifies student support and involves the provision of specialized instruction. Martin (2006) explained that progress monitoring and growth assessment is an important piece of SRBI, as is collaboration with teachers and parents. School team meetings must be a productive time for reviewing students' intervention progress

and determining whether adequate growth has been shown and whether a referral for the special education process is needed (Martin, 2006). Werts (2014) explained that non-responders to interventions move to a more intense tiered support level. An initial start for the special education process requires comprehensive evaluations to be completed on a timeline of 60 school days. Comprehensive special education evaluations require a full review of educational, psychological, and developmental history. Other areas can also be evaluated during a referral evaluation if necessary, these include occupational therapy, physical therapy, auditory processing and assistive technology if weaknesses are noted. Parents should be made aware that their child requires more support before an initial PPT meeting is held.

Parents do not always understand why a student is being referred for special education due to a lack of communication between school and home. Studies show the benefits of starting intervention at early grades to realize more growth over time. Simms and Coyne (2008) also stated that “The primary findings underscore the absolute and relative benefits conferred through explicit code-based reading intervention beginning in kindergarten” (p. 12). When a school staff discusses pulling students from core classes at the high school level, they must consider the fact that students end up missing core content. At the elementary level, there are standardized benchmarks to measure levels of reading and math. The only state testing required in this New England school where the study occurred is the SAT or Scholastic Assessment Test. Strawberry Hill High School, the school for this study, has started using standardized reading and math levels in ninth grade to track intervention support.

When all support has been exhausted, the process of special education is discussed. Tier III support is provided in a very similar manner to a pull-out special education model. Identification for special education services is a long process. Werts (2014) explained that

intervention is approached in a variety of ways with open ended guidelines, lacking a comprehensive framework. Wert (2014) stated that many parents have a hard time understanding the process of intervention and that teachers needed more education to help parents understand the process. Altemueller (2001) stated that “these rules and guidelines have proven to be highly complex and may not have led to the intended collaborative IEP process” (p. 16). Altemueller (2001) demonstrated that more parent participation creates a collaborative process. It is important to recognize what parents understand about the current special education process to help see how schools can help them be engaged in the PPT process. Holdren’s (2017) research showed that parental involvement has a positive impact on students with disabilities by students using generalization of skills and more effective strategies for solving problems.

Student Investment in Goals Create Positive Outcomes

The older a student is, the more necessary student investment in special education is. Tillmann (2001) explained the importance of transition assessments and student participation in the PPT process. Reynolds (2005) stated that “Meaningful student involvement can strength the students and the educators’ commitment to the educational process” (p. 17). All students are invited to their PPT meetings, and school teams request that students become involved in the process. Tillmann (2001) stated that student involvement helps identified special education students be more employable in the future through the provision of direct instruction support. Students at the high school level should be involved in their goal creation transition support plan and in understanding how their special education services help them realize growth. Ingersoll (2006) explained that children whose parents were trained to carry out the intervention and advocate for help continued to make gains outside of the classroom. Goal-setting is needed to create a plan for the future. The goal-setting process entails dissecting an IEP with the student

and ensuring that they understand their current performance and their strengths and weaknesses which are outlined with the present levels of performance. “Student-focused planning appears to hold great promise on important outcomes for students” (Cobb and Alwell, 2009, p. 77). If a student understands their needs, they will feel comfortable sitting and participating in a PPT meeting. “Participants discussed inequities and inequalities such as a perceived lack of power and voice during these meetings” (Strong, 2017, p. 1). Strong (2017) noted that parents cited high levels of frustration due to poor communication with the school and a lack of comprehension of what was being asked throughout the special education process. Parents show frustration with the PPT process and may struggle to be active participants in PPT meetings.

Teaching Self-Advocacy at a Young Age

The earlier the process of self-advocacy and goal-setting skills is taught the more practice students have supporting their learning needs. “Promoting students' self-determination at earlier ages in order to increase more meaningful IEP participation is useful and important work for all professionals and parents to consider” (Hart, 2013, p. 1). Self-advocacy is a critical component of overall self-determination and is defined as “making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence” (Hart and Brehm, 2013, p. 1). Gewertz (2015) found that appropriate course work teaching self-determination helped students be more successful in programs after high school. All students have weaknesses that can be helped by applying their strengths. Martin (2006) explained that if transition is embraced and being active members at PPTs is taught at a young age, then by high school, students will feel comfortable with later expectations of them. Students who are active participants in the transition process can advocate for their needs. Coyne (2008) stated that the earlier self-advocacy skills are taught, the stronger they are in the future.

It is important that student advocacy skills be carried through to the mainstream setting. Hart and Brehm (2009) created a ten-step process that teachers can easily implement at the elementary level in an inclusive environment. The ten-step process involves first gathering parental consent and then proceeding to set goals. Hart and Brehm (2009) used IEP accommodations to help the students understand what support they require and monitored the progress of students towards these goals. It is important that parents set goals with their child regarding what they want to do in the future. Hart (2009) stated that research shows self-determination to be a major component in improved post-secondary outcomes for disabled students. Advocating in the classroom helps students gain skills for the future. Cobb and Alwell's (2009) research showed that instruction on transition skills for students outside of a PPT improved students' outcomes.

How Outsiders Feel About the Process

Legally, public schools are required to ensure collaboration with parents. Holdren (2017) noted that a school staff must make an effort to schedule meetings such that they are convenient for the parent, giving notice five days in advance and providing an interpreter if needed. Holdren (2017) recognized from simulation PPT meetings, however, that even when all legal components are followed correctly, parents frequently feel like outsiders. Myers (2014) stated the process for parents could be improved by employing a

democratic approach so parents feel they are equal contributors; school staff being open to parental input regarding placements, discipline and instruction; being friendly; listening to and valuing parental input; being open, flexible, and willing to adjust to students' needs; and involving and educating parents about the IEP process. (p. 117)

Myers (2014) found that parents frequently state that they simply do not understand what is going on throughout the IEP process. Parents may not understand how much time and effort goes into a PPT meeting or writing an IEP on the part of the school staff. “Educational leaders can support this shift through providing professional development and trainings to parents and site administrators on the legal guidelines” (Thompson, 2014, p. 12). Having students and parents work together with the school in a collaborative effort to address students’ needs will help increase open communication.

How Advocates and Lawyers Help Parents Navigate the Process

If students were taught self-advocacy in school, students could then advocate for themselves independently. Burke and Goldman (2016) recognized that many parents use educational advocates or legal representation during PPTs because the parents need support with the process. Parents need assistance to understand what they want for their child. An advocate is a mediator between the parent and school to help support the PPT. Burke and Goldman (2016) explained that special education advocates vary with respect to training and expertise, and the “special education advocacy field has remained largely unregulated” (Burke & Goldman, 2016, p. 11). Parents hire a third-party representative when they distrust how the school is executing the special education plan. “Many parents find it intimidating to become involved in an adversarial process with schools, particularly because schools have greater access to legal counsel” (Cohen, 2009, p. 208). Advocates are used to increase parent participation in PPTs by providing another professional with special education knowledge as a resource. Burke and Goldman (2016) recognized that using an advocate is less expensive than using a lawyer but that it requires more parental education as advocates either have no formal training or simply attend courses to learn about the IEP process. Holdren (2017) stated “that the wealth of

recommendations available in the parent involvement literature may contribute to implementation challenges” (p. 20). When refusing recommendations at a PPT occurs, parents are encouraged to exercise their due process rights, which may lead to mediation.

Mediation helps resolve conflicts resulting from IEP disagreements. Cohen (2009) described mediations as a process of parties seeking voluntary resolution of one or more disputes. Shane (2007) explained that research shows that when a mediation is completed correctly, it improves the parent-school relationship. Unfortunately, the mediation process takes a huge emotional toll on parents and requires wait time from both the school and parents. Shane (2007) suggested that instead of parents involving an outside party, school staffs should explore strategies for promoting positive parent school communication and collaboration. Simplifying the process, increasing collaboration and ensuring that communication with parents is ongoing will help schools build trust with parents.

The purpose of an IEP meeting is to annually review students’ special education growth. Holdren and O’Connor (2007) explained that an IEP refers to both the legal process dictated by IDEA and the document that is formed during the PPT. The IEP serves functions related to management, accountability, compliance, and the monitoring of a student’s special education services. Additionally, the PPT process is intended to serve as a vehicle for communication and collaboration between home and school. The special education process involves many steps and is paramount to a student’s success. The school staff needs to explain to parents how they can take a more active role, understand the process, and have a greater impact.

Conclusion

The special education process and PPT meetings are supposed to involve setting goals for students who require more individualized support. Altemueller (2001) explained that there is a

lack of collaboration in the IEP process between schools and parents. Fleischman (2016) underscored that funding for intervention support through ESSA has been cut 10% since the original proposal of the bill. Fleischman (2016) explained that many public schools have less money yearly to spend on education due to state budget cuts. The purpose of this study is to understand what would make parents more comfortable with the special education process. The IEP process must be evaluated through a parent's perspective.

Since many parents experience difficulty understanding the PPT process they hire an advocate or lawyer when they do not feel that their child's IEP needs are being met. When an outside party is involved, parents are better able to advocate for the student's needs. Myers (2014) noted that families tend to have negative experiences at PPT meetings because the process focuses on the weaknesses of their child. If the process is adapted based on parent feedback, parents might be more comfortable with it. Hart and Brehm (2013) noted that teaching self-advocacy skills to students in earlier grades helps push student advocacy in an inclusive classroom and leads to students who can articulate and effectively communicate their needs at a PPT. Collaboration in the PPT process with parents and parent programs on the IEP process can support understanding of special education. Smith Martin (2017) explained that using the intervention model to identify students' needs and inform differentiation in the classroom can support the student's growth without the need for special education. The ultimate goal of most parents is that their child be integrated in general education as much as possible while making progress in their IEP.

Parents and students are the most important members in this process. Myers (2014) found that parents frequently do not speak up at meetings because they feel outnumbered. Myers (2014) noted that the opportunity for parents to be truly involved in the PPT process is rarely

offered. Burke and Goldman (2016) stated that outside parties are unsure of what is needed to help students grow as learners. Myers (2014) found that the lack of engagement and collaboration between schools and guardians is the greatest weakness of the PPT process. Strong (2018) explained that one problem that parents had with the process is their perceived lack of a voice in a PPT. Strong (2018) further described how participants' largest concerns were a lack of communication and a lack of follow-through from public schools. In the research reviewed, parents noted they want to be equal team members in the PPT process.

Parents want to know what to expect before a PPT. Strong (2018) stated that it is crucial that more information be given to the parent by the school before a PPT meeting. Myers (2014) stated that parents must feel like valued team members, because they do not understand what to expect throughout the steps of the PPT process. Hart and Brehm (2013) stated that students over 15 attending their IEP meetings must understand how they can use their self-determination to contribute during these meetings. "Having opportunities to make choices and take responsibility concerning one's needs are experiences that are helpful for living independently as an adult" (Piastra, 2000, p. 16). The IEP documents and processes help students advocate for future needs. It is important that all school team members and stakeholders understand proper procedures for special education. Myers (2014) found that parents already feel as defeated and embarrassed by the fact of their child's special education diagnosis. This is another reason why presenting the student's strengths and ensuring collaboration between school and parents throughout the process is extremely important.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

When a student is identified as one with special needs, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting is held with parents and the school staff team and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is created and updated annually. This study examines the perceptions of parents who are actively engaged in the process. This study focuses on a school under the pseudonym of Strawberry Hill High School and the researcher used one-to-one phone or email interviews to identify current processes and concerns in PPTs, as understood by parents. No in-person interviews could be conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on nationwide circumstances including quarantining at home, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is currently being provided from online services and support.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of parents regarding the effectiveness of the IEP process. This research aims to understand parental involvement in the IEP process by examining the perceptions of parents currently engaged in the process. The study targeted reasons why some parents are more motivated to be active participants. Burke and Goldman (2016) explained that research currently lacks parental feedback regarding the special education process. Given that parents are necessary stakeholders in the IEP process, their feedback is necessary in order to ensure legal compliance in the special education process. Understanding how parents currently perceive the special education process can help educators engage parents throughout the IEP process.

Research Questions and Design

The essential question for this study is as follows: What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of the IEP process of motivated parents of special education students?

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study method. This case study was conducted at a single site with individuals engaged in the special education process. Creswell (2018) identified case studies as a means of exploring an issue that is part of a system. The researcher documented how parents understand the current PPT process. A case study is used to assess how people see a current experience based on their perspective. Creswell (2018) noted that a case study provides in depth research on something that has not previously been explored in great detail. It is important to use a group of special education parents from the same school gathering information specific to the setting. Different schools might use a variation of IEP procedures, which could impact the consistency of results.

Site Information and Population

The study took place at a public high school in an urban school district in New England. The high school used for this study has about 1,800 students with about 240 special education identified students. The district contains about 2,000 special education students in total. The district has had a 4% increase in special education students yearly since 2010. Statewide, the number of identified students is approximately 10%, while the Strawberry Hill High School district has a rate of 13%, in line with the state average (Department of Education, 2019). Strawberry Hill High School has three main feeder middle schools. District-wide, a facilitator is a teacher on special assignment to work on fidelity of IEPs at every school and at all levels. Currently, Strawberry Hill High School has a 97% graduation rate overall and a less than five percent dropout rate for special education students. The parents of the special education population are 50% English speaking. The ethnicities of the special education population are 40% Hispanic, 25% African American, 5%Asian, and 30% White.

This study was conducted during the 2019-2020 school year and involved parents from the Strawberry Hill High School. Twelve parents who had students currently in the special education program included in this study. The children of these parents had a range of disabilities, such as learning disabilities, autism, and other health impairments. The parents involved in this study are current active participants in the IEP process. The participants in the study were English speakers to ensure full comprehension regarding the special education terms and procedures. Some of the parents were involved in Strawberry Hill High School in ways other than special education, such as Parent Teacher Association and Parent Advisory Committee membership. The participants were both working and stay-at-home parents.

Sampling Method

The researcher used purposive sampling, including only parents currently invested in the IEP process and who were native English speakers. The researcher contacted 35 potential research participants through email to check for interest, and 13 parents responded that they would like to be involved in the study. Signed consent forms to participate in this study were gathered from the participants. Parents received an email containing more information on the study once they consented to participate.

The researcher collected data from one-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted via phone or email. The researcher asked questions of participants, and if their responses introduced other questions, those were also explored in the conversation. The researcher created transcripts to then analyze how the process was perceived by the participants and gathered perspectives about its effectiveness from engaged parents.

Some Strawberry Hill High School parents have language barriers and require translators for meetings and IEP documentation. There are 86 languages spoken in district. As translators

may not be regularly available, parents screened for this study were required to be comfortable speaking, reading and writing in English. The data-collection format aimed to answer questions of “how” and “why” regarding the IEP and PPT processes from the perspective of the study population. Merriam (2007) explained that researchers use case studies to search for meaning or understanding. The end product may result in a strong descriptive analysis.

The researcher developed questions to be used in the individual interviews (see Appendix A). The questions aimed to gain information on parents’ understanding of the current PPT process. The interviews focused on determining parents’ perceptions of how the current processes in special education are effective, what must be done differently, and what motivates parents to stay involved in the process. The guidelines, framework, and format of special education and the PPT process are investigated in the semi-structured interview questions.

The individual interviews with parents took place via phone interview or email. The phone interviews were recorded and then transcribed using the Scribie service. Confidentiality was maintained as all names or identifying characteristics were omitted. Coding and analysis for themes and patterns was then conducted on the transcripts. The researcher sought to identify themes from information gathered while also considering the literature and conceptual framework. Each participant received a hard copy of the transcription after their interview to review for accuracy. Participants were thanked for their time and effort for being involved in the study with no compensation provided. The researcher kept each interview session to between 15 and 25 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow focus to be placed on the main research questions while ensuring parents could express their feelings and ask questions.

Data Analysis

The interview data were recorded using a phone or recording device and then transcribed using an electronic service, Scribie.com. The data were then analyzed and coded to identify patterns. The information was coded by marking similar information from the interview transcripts and employing triangulation with the conceptual framework, the literature review and data collected. The themes that emerged from multiple parents were used to generate the findings regarding what is being done well in special education well and what should be changed to facilitate parental engagement and collaboration with the school team. All participants were numbered in order to identify who is stating the information. Patterns from the interviews allow the manner in which current procedures are carried out to be identified. Merriam (2007) explained that a case study allows the researcher to interpret the data reflecting feelings about practices, rather than to test a hypothesis. Parents expressed their current feelings on the process within the more structured environment of the semi-structured interview. The data gathered were used to analyze the policies and procedures of Strawberry Hill High School as seen by parents. Participant parents were informed that all information provided would be kept confidential and that pseudonyms would be used to conceal their identities.

Limitations of the Research Design

This study focused on parents who were currently attending PPTs and active in their questioning during meetings. The researcher excluded parents or guardians who did not present as engaged in the process. Since those not actively involved in the process were not included in this study, the researcher did not determine why they are not involved in the IEP process. Eighty-six languages are spoken in the district. To use a native speaker of a different language would require a translator with as much understanding of the IEP process as both the researcher

and the parent. Since such was unavailable, only fluent English speakers were included in the research. This study included only parents who understood the basics of the process of investment in the IEP process and showed some trust in the public school system. At times, when parents demonstrated concerns with the school's decisions, families involve advocates to mediate the process with the school. When lawyers advocate for legal rights at PPTs, instructional decisions are not made at the meeting. Follow-up meetings with district professionals, referred to as mediation, are required if the school team and parents are not in agreement. Since these parents have trouble understanding the process from the school's perspective, they were not included in the study. Frequently, the school team and parents lack of agreement with the IEP process is a result of how current special education processes are completed. This study represented a sample of the engaged Strawberry Hill High School special education population. The participants had an interest in taking time out of their day when convenient for them to help provide data for this study.

In a district with 21 schools, procedures can vary from site to site. The researcher was only based at the Strawberry Hill High School, which is where the study took place. A limitation is that the study relates only to the Strawberry Hill High School and is not generalizable to other schools in the district.

There is limited transferability of this study's findings since it is based on one location. The results cannot be applied directly to another location or population, because all parents have different perspectives of the process. The participants in the study could have differing opinions of the process and information was gathered only from Strawberry Hill High School. Similar procedures are reinforced throughout the IEP process and special education meetings district-wide strive to maintain fidelity across schools with state and federal procedures. Parents often

lack the procedural knowledge of the special education process and feel lost during IEPs (Fish, 2008). A legal requirement is that parents be participants in and understand the importance of their presence at meetings. Annual IEP meetings always begin with parents being informed of the legal procedures and their rights. A parental rights document is given to parents annually, but for some, the information may be difficult to understand. It is important to analyze how the Strawberry Hill High School staff runs meetings and follows procedures with respect to the district, state, and federal IEP requirements. This study used individual interviews to document parent perceptions in IEP meetings at the high school level at Strawberry Hill High School. This study and questions are not based on a previous study.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the district leader of research. Parents also provided informed consent to participate in the study. Pseudonyms for the school and all parent participants were used to keep identities confidential. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no incentives were given for participation. The researcher continues to be responsible for IEP documents of students who qualify for special education at Strawberry Hill High School, and this role did not interfere with the study. All data, including recordings, transcripts, and coding, were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. All recordings and information were used solely for the purpose of this study. The transcripts were used solely for this study and not for any other purposes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate how parents of special education students in a local high school who are motivated to be actively engaged participants in IEP meetings perceive the effectiveness of the PPT process. This study is a qualitative case study using semi-structured

individual interviews as a data collection method. Purposive sampling was used to find research participants. Semi-structured interviews were held individually with 13 parents. The interviews were conducted either over the phone or through email. This study is important because it examines what parents perceive to be the current special education process and provides data to help assess the effectiveness of the special education system at the study site.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions of parents of special education identified high school students regarding the effectiveness of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. This research was completed at an urban New England High school. Parents are necessary stakeholders in the IEP process, and parental feedback is necessary to ensure legal compliance in the special education process. It is important to analyze the current understandings of the process to incorporate parents effectively. This chapter reviews and analyzes the results that were gathered.

Analysis Method

The research site, Strawberry Hill High School, has about 1800 students. Approximately 13% of the school population is identified as special education students. Identified special education students have disabilities ranging from learning disabilities to other health impairments to autistic. The research site has some very involved parents as well as families who struggle to attend meetings. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) made parent feedback a legal priority. It is important to evaluate the range of levels of investment in special education to analyze how engagement for families could be supported by schools. The participants in the study were actively involved in the IEP process at Strawberry Hill High School. Some parents at the research site understood the process independently, while some involved outside team members such as lawyers or advocates to help support the process.

Thirteen parents engaged in the special education process at Strawberry Hill High School agreed to participate in the study. All parents included in this study were primarily English speakers with a high school degree or higher. Some participants in the study worked in the Strawberry Hill High School district, none work at the research site. All parents involved in the

interviews had attended one or more meetings with Strawberry Hill High School staff. The participants involved in the study had been invested in the special education process for more than one year. All parents involved in this study had students with varying degrees of special education needs and required self-contained classes or a self-contained program or resource classes. Parents involved in the interviews had children ranging from ninth to twelfth grade. Ten of the interviews for this study were conducted over the phone and three via email.

Based on current circumstances with the COVID-19 pandemic, no in-person interviews were completed. Participants signed a form granting consent to participate in the study and for the interviews to be audio taped. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by using the Scribie transcription service and identifiable information from the interviews was removed. Each interview was approximately 15 minutes long, with the shortest being under 10 minutes and the longest lasting 25 minutes. All interviews were coded by hand and triangulated with the research collected, the conceptual framework and the literature review.

Presentation Results

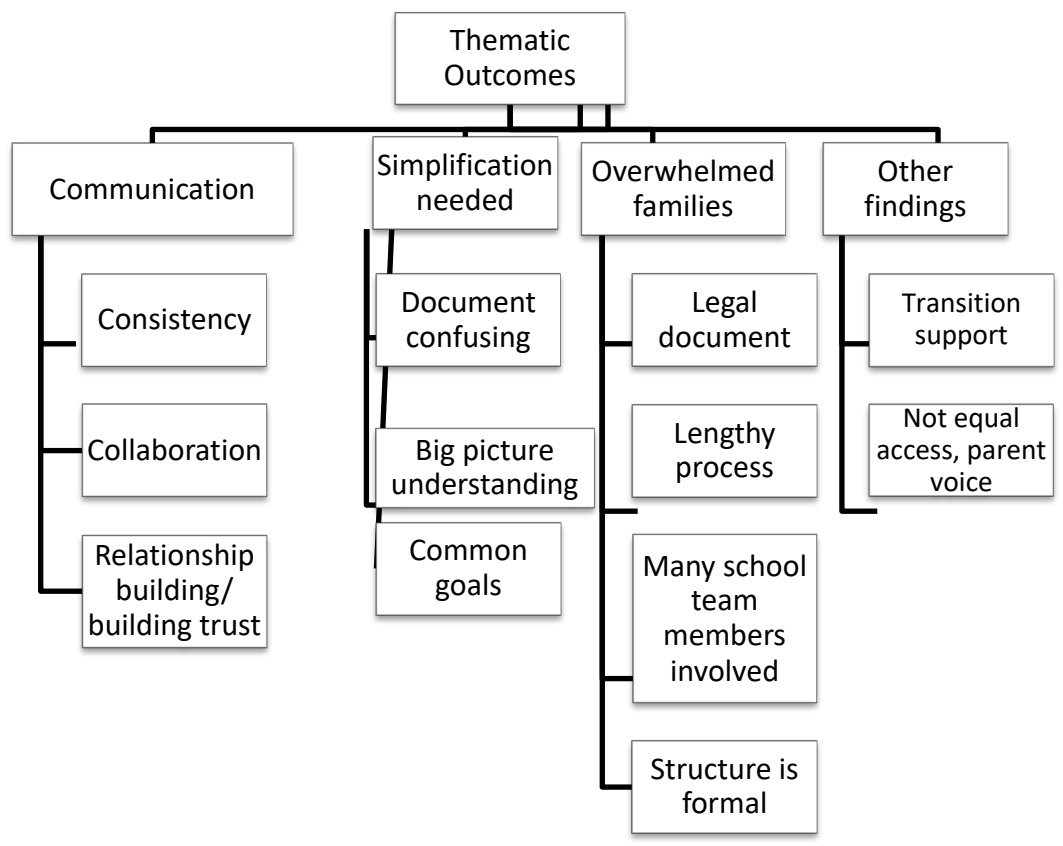
The interviews were semi-structured and some parents were asked follow up questions based on their responses. The transcription of phone and email information was analyzed and coded to uncover emerging themes using a two-step coding analysis process. Participants were asked questions from the research guide (see Appendix A). Common themes emerging from the gathered data, the literature review, and the concept framework were reviewed.

The themes that emerged from this study include: communication, simplifying the IEP, and how overwhelming the process is for families. The interviewees all identified communication with the school team and student's families as the number one priority. To extend the parent relationship, strong communication with the school team must be built.

Communication with the school team prior to walking into the whole school group setting of the IEP meetings is necessary. Participants stated and the conceptual framework noted that families are involved in the IEP process to advocate for their child. Throughout the interviews, participants indicated how the process could support more parental involvement by being simplified. The research shows that the special education process is overwhelming for families. Not only is the documentation highly legal in nature, but parents feel that school team has much more of a presence at an IEP meeting than they do. The conceptual framework using Marzano’s collaboration model echoed the need for collaboration between the school and families.

Figure 3.

Themes from the Interview Data



Communication

All 13 participants noted that communication between the school and families is important. Nine out of 13 stated that communication with the team was positive, but four parents stated that more collaboration with families would help support progress. Participants stated that the Strawberry Hill High School special education process uses a flexible communication approach that provides information at meetings and supports the building of relationships with families. Parents in the study noted that the school team maintains good communication by letting parents know about the meeting in advance and helping to ensure student progress. Given the need for a digital platform due to Covid-19, parents were very happy with the dedication of the team members. Participant 11 stated that one strength of Strawberry Hill High School's special education is "the ability to be very flexible during the crisis and to do PPT meetings over Zoom and over electronics which I thought was amazing." During the interviews, Participant 11 noted that communication and adapting to the current situation was seamless, with parents having ample contact with the school team. Participant 13 stated "What keeps us engaged? Communication. With the team, with the teachers, everyone working with, for the students, communication is key".

Interviewees, such as Participant 5, stated the school team is in "contact with parents to let them know an IEP meeting is occurring". Participant 8 noted that communication with the special education case manager is very important, and starting over every year makes relationship building harder. Participants 7, 8, and 10 noted that having one primary case manager handling the communication was effective, as this helps parents understand whom to reach out to when they do not hear from the school directly. All participants noted that they

remain active in the IEP process in order to help their children succeed. Twenty-three percent of parents stated team communication keeps them engaged in the process as well.

Participants stated that some challenges with communication do occur when parents are not involved in the special education process and the school team makes unilateral decisions. Parents may see team communication about a student as being negative since it focuses more on student struggles, rather than on achievements. Participant 7 noted that since IEP meetings are highly structured, with recognition of growth and then discussion of potential next steps, parents could see progress as unattainable and become upset. However, the school staff not seeing the student as a whole was only noted by 25% of the participants. The researcher asked engaged parents why other parents may not be as invested in the special education process. The engaged parents explained that specific families are not involved in the process due to a language barrier, lack of sufficient education to understand the process, and previous bad experiences. Parents said they do agree that the school team values parent feedback. However, Participant 3 also explained that one meeting per year is not sufficient and more communication between school and home would facilitate the process.

Participants 5, 7 and 10 noted they had to ask for meetings to be set up for clearer communication with the school. All parents in this study did note that the team was flexible and scheduled meetings when asked. Participant 3 noted that communication with the parents must take place frequently to show continued progress and help parents understand when a meeting is needed. Participant 13 noted that “by sometimes putting in the moon and stars never allows for that independence to grow, and for the district to work on, or allow your students to be independent. So I think communication prior to the meeting would be great, it's very time-consuming, [chuckle] but that would be wonderful.” If communication is clear before a meeting,

parents understand what is going to be offered prior to the meeting and see what the appropriate Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is. Participant 7 noted that “bad communication can set a negative tone for the whole team.” Participant 7 also expressed that staff should have training on how to communicate effectively with parents. Communication is the cornerstone of growing a strong bond with families throughout the special education process.

Participants noted that communication between schools must be strengthened.

Participant 6 emphasized they have been involved in the process for a while and that greatest struggle has been the transition between schools due to the lack of communication. It is critical to outline expectations for the parents so that they understand the feedback that they should receive from the school team. Another element of communication that parents identified as a concern was not just the meetings, but knowing what is going on in the classroom. Many parents noted that, at the high school, less communication is provided than at other school levels.

Participant 8 explained they had no idea what was occurring at the high school level in the general education classrooms. It is necessary for all staff to be responsible for the IEP document through collaboration. This will require the school to set aside more time towards collaboration with more team members.

The conceptual framework explains the Marzano model for collaboration. Marzano (2001) described the use of cooperative learning groups in all classrooms. All students benefit from learning in small groups of varied learning levels. This approach requires support not only from the classroom teacher, but also from parents. It is important for teachers and parents to collaborate in order to ensure cooperative learning in the classroom. Marzano (2001) stated that learning takes place not only in the classroom, but in the community through family support. Marzano (2001) stated that students and parents must understand what progress is being

produced in the classroom to realize further growth. If collaboration with the school and families is more consistent, the communication will be well received.

Studies have shown that general education teachers are unclear regarding what is appropriate to say at an IEP meeting. IDEA (2004) states that open communication should occur with parents and the school team throughout the year. Case managers are helpful in supporting students' progress but more consistency throughout the team is needed to help children in the mainstream setting. Myers (2014) noted that a potential barrier in building trust with a family is the team not seeing enough positive qualities in a student. It is important to see the student as a whole and not just see their challenges.

Incorporating the parent voice in the IEP document is necessary to support collaboration. Myers (2014) stated that in order to show a strong parent voice in the IEP document, families must have their feedback given priority. Henderson (2015) outlined that the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) requires more communication with families to involve them in their students' progress. *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) tried to enforce more parent engagement, but budget constraints got in the way. Myers (2014) noted that the lack of collaboration between the school team and parents hindered participation. Shaul's (2006) research noted that NCLB set stringent standards for special education identification and parent involvement. Even though the budget in these areas was not fully allocated, ESSA introduced even more rules for families to stay involved with the school team. Special education services are subject to legal standards, but parents nevertheless may not trust the process. The lack of trust and the hiring of outsiders to advocate for a student as a result has been noted in previous research a source of tension in the parent-school relationship. Strong (2018) stated that school teams are weary of parents hiring other stakeholders who form less genuine relationships and provide scripted communication with

families. All parents involved in this study expressed a strong need to remain active in the special education process to ensure their child's progress.

Simplification of the IEP process

In this study, parents stated that general education staff sometimes find it difficult to read and understand the IEP document. Participant 7 explained that teachers influenced the process and need to be willing to simplify the process using innovative technology to help special education students continue to realize growth. Participants 8, 12 and 13 noted that the special education process could develop through the creation of a handbook, presenting parent professional development and supporting more communication. Some parents stated that having a handbook that defines common special education terminology would help parents understand the process. Participant 11 expressed that it is "Like we're just thrown into the process and everybody at the table knows what they're talking about, and parents don't." Many parents who participated in the study stated they have even attended workshops on their own to understand the process. Participant 10 stated "parent education is what is needed to strengthen this process." Special education uses many unfamiliar and specialized terms and is a lengthy process.

The IEP process is formulaic and has a formal agenda. A participant noted that the special education process has been organized for less than ten years and the agenda helps the process stay focused. Parents noted that the process could be strengthened if it were simplified and if there were more communication and understanding of what is going on in the classroom. Participants 3, 7, and 13 expressed similar concerns regarding the IEP process, and Participant 5 stated that the process "could be broken down and more can be explained to help stakeholders stay more engaged." Participant 13 noted there are facilitators district-wide to help with the process. They also noted that in other states, there are facilitators to fulfill the role of parent

liaisons and help simplify the process for families without the need for an advocate. Participant 13, who explained that they feel comfortable with the special education process and feel that it is important to help other parents said, “I try to explain everything in layman terms to the parent when helping prepare for a meeting.” Even though the formality of the process was expressed as a strength, the study showed that the special education process is too lengthy to engage parents. The paperwork is frequently over 20 pages long and is couched in language that is difficult to understand. In addition, the process from when a referral occurs to the testing stage and then the qualifying meeting is too long for some parents. The study participants were divided as to whether comprehensive testing was helpful or too much for a child to handle. Parents of students transitioning back to the public school system from a private placement noted that the evaluations helped the team understand a child before school starts. For example, Participant 13 said, “if there's a recommendation for a BCBA or an RBT, they don't necessarily know what that stands for. It's difficult for parents to understand everything and this impacts the parent engagement.” Participants 5, 8 and 9 noted that a review guide of how to break down the IEP document would be helpful. Participant 9 said,

Okay, this bullet point on this sheet might refer to page three, item two, and if we want some change to that, let's talk about that here. But someone else can go into page three, item two in the little tiny little box that's there. I just think knowing the audience and delivering a vehicle for the audience to be able to communicate and have a better collaborative conversation between teachers and parents would definitely be beneficial to the parents.

Participant 5 mentioned that low parent engagement is based on a lack of understanding of the process. Eighty-five percent of the interviewees stated that the IEP document is very

difficult to understand because of the length and legal language involved. The results showed that parents struggle with the PPT process due to the legal language, length of the document, the high number of school team members at the meetings, the acronyms used, and the many steps in the special education process.

Marzano's (2001) previous studies concur with this analysis noting that more collaboration with families and the school team leads to more student growth. It is helpful and crucial to support families in understanding the special education process and what is the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Marzano's (2001) research on collaboration highlighted the importance of simplifying and explaining the process to families. Understanding the parent perspective is necessary to help the process grow from current practices.

In the theoretical framework, ESSA, that evolved from NCLB, emphasized that more parent education and money had to be set aside for families. Unfortunately, due to unrelated financial challenges, this has yet to be achieved. Parents must stay involved with outside research and understand how the school can best provide a student's LRE. Nicholson stated that, "Many parents lack the knowledge of how to become an effective advocate" (2015, p. 13). Lawyers and advocates tend to be hired when parents do not have a strong understanding of the process. Participant 3 stated that a lawyer is necessary simply to understand the parents' rights document. As seen in the literature review, as special education is such a legal and formal process, it is difficult for parents to be actively involved if the process is not simplified. Strong (2017) found that parents reported difficulty understanding the process and that their feedback was not valued by the school team. Piastro (2000) outlined that IDEA required parents to be IEP participants but never explained the nature of their participation in a meeting. Parents must understand the process and why it is important for them to become active team members.

Throughout the interviews, parents identified room for growth in many areas. The transcripts showed that the more involved a parent is, the more they had to say in their interviews. Many of the engaged parents hire lawyers to help them understand the process but then don't see how that can transfer to the LRE at Strawberry Hill High School. Previous research shows that hiring outside support for the IEP process can muddle the school team's ideas and result in a less cohesive group. The results of this study concur with this previous research. In the interviews, parents who had a bad experience at a previous school stated that they had a more difficult time trusting the school and the team. Parents' opinions of the special education process were largely based on Strawberry Hill High School, but most parent experiences were also shaped by experience from previous schools. This study found that the structure and formality of the special education process helps it move smoothly. When group norms are created by the team and the process is understood, IEP meetings are less contentious. Many legal regulations were introduced by IDEA (2004) to prevent different guidelines from straying into individual schools and making LRE and mainstream decisions. Laws can be interpreted in many ways, and the involvement of outsiders thus complicates the process. Previous research found that there is less debate at an IEP meeting than previously because the process is very formal and based on legal requirements. Parents are aware of their procedural safeguards and rights but are unsure how to advocate for their child when they leave the public school system. To support parents' understandings of the legal documents, giving them a handbook outlining the terms and simplifying the documents would help. The parent perspective is that a special education handbook, should be created as a helpful tool for both school staffs and parents. Parents are an important cornerstone in the IEP process, and more research must be conducted on how Strawberry Hill High School can incorporate the parents as much as possible

in the special education process. This study found that parental feedback was perceived to be valued throughout the IEP process. Unfortunately, it was noted that parents must make many assumptions throughout the process, as only one parent stated that they understood the entire special education process. Sontag (2015) noted that parents must hire outside help to understand the process, which may result in the school team not trusting the families. To facilitate parents' understanding of the process, more communication with families and parents is needed, not just for the IEP meeting but throughout the special education process. The special education process can be highly contentious on both the school's and the parents' sides, and studies have shown that it is difficult for the two to work together.

Overwhelmed Families

Families stated that sitting at a meeting with many school professionals is intimidating. Participant 8 said

I think for some parents, it's overwhelming. For some parents, it's hard to get over sometimes the stigma of their kid is different or their kid learns in a different way. And it's intimidating for them as well to not just get over that, but then come to sit at a meeting around a table where they actually have to openly talk about that, so that's hard.

Parents in an IEP meeting are talking about their child's learning challenges with many school team professionals. The set-up of the special education process is a lot for them to handle. Parents in the study stated that families that are not involved in the process might lack the education to understand what is necessary for engagement in the process. Participant 7 stated that parents might not be involved due to factors such as "Poverty, lack of understanding, their education level themselves. Intimidation, maybe they feel like they don't understand it so they don't wanna be involved in it, that the school will figure it out." This is why parents lean on

other stakeholders to help them advocate for their families. One parent explained that, at their former middle school, decisions were made by the team before the IEP meeting and that the parents were not able to provide input from a private evaluation. Wellner (2012) stated that parents are intimidated by the special education process because families see IEP meetings as predetermined. Participant 2 stated that “Inclusion of the parent is an important part of the PPT as well as a parent wants to know how and what a child is learning.” Parents noted the importance of looking at who the student is as a whole, rather than just focusing on education struggles. Participant 7 said “It's seeing the child and understanding who he is outside of school.” One parent, Participant 11, noted that at PPT meetings, they were not able to obtain service or support and had to hire an outside individual to help advocate for the family. Participants 8 and 13 noted that at times at meetings they legally understood their rights more clearly than the special education and general education team members at the IEP. It is important to work with all families to help them navigate and understand the special education process. All interviewed parents noted that Strawberry Hill High School works hard to meet its students' needs but that not all teachers involved in the special education department are supportive. One participant stated that the teachers should receive more professional development, as some are more accommodating than others. Participant 10 said that “Her teaching is just a little different than the other teachers, which makes me wonder why she's even a special education teacher.” Teachers, whether in special or general education, may find it hard to read and execute the IEP document, and several participants noted and parents reported losing trust in the team when the IEP was not followed. “I tend to feel that they don't know how important it is. I think that they easily give extended time, but they don't use teaching strategies that are necessary, that are on the IEP.” Participant 8 said, “It's not implemented in every

classroom. I also think it's interpreted differently by different teachers, and it's not taken seriously enough.” Not being in agreement about the LRE is what is contentious about special education. An IEP meeting, Participant 2 said, “does not include all teachers and how does a parent know all teachers will be on the same page and know the needs of his/her child for each class?” Some participants noted that the more people there are attending a meeting, the more overwhelming the meeting and the special education process becomes. It was noted in the interviews as well that not all team members attending an IEP are on the same page. Hedeem (2011) found that school teams may find it hard to collaborate with families. Collaboration with the school team and parents is necessary to have open communication.

Legally, IDEA notes that parental collaboration is missing in the special education process. Myers (2014) stated that the lack of “democratic collaboration with schools and parents inhibits this. Barriers exist that can create a lack of parent participation and engagement during an IEP meeting” (p. 97). Some concerns noted with the IEP process were how overwhelming it is, whether what is said matches what is currently occurring, and the legal element of the document. Previous studies have showed that the “IEP communication toward parents was overwhelming” (Strong, 2018, p. 215). The team members at an IEP meeting include many school professionals. The literature review shows that IDEA (2004) requires parental input to create a comprehensive IEP document. Unfortunately, though, when advocates and lawyers are brought in by families, tension is created for everyone. Boduch (2019) noted that parents do not understand the content and processes because of the federal mandates and do not feel adequately prepared to meaningfully engage with a school team. Building a strong school-family relationship is key to building trust with a family and carrying out the IEP processes with efficacy.

Other findings

Of the thirteen parents, seven employed outside support to advocate for their children's special education services. Ten stated that they do feel that, for the most part, they have appropriate input in the special education process. The remaining three participants said that they somewhat feel that they have appropriate input in the process, but struggle with not always being listened to. The participants who indicated that they felt that their feedback was only somewhat valued stated that this perception depended on the school. For example, if they were advocating for their child, other school team members saw it as bullying. It can be concluded that parents cause tension between the school and families when they employ others to advocate for their children. A better scenario is to have parents working with the school team first reach out to the school to see how the problem can be solved instead of hiring others to be involved in the process. When a parent is unsure how to advocate for their child, Participant 6 stated that they use "trial and error to understand", while Participant 1 said that the "process is extremely overwhelming" and Participant 8 stated that "we rely on the team to come up with suggestions." Parents that were confident about the process stated things differently, as Participant 10 said to "know the process and don't trust the team," and Participant 13 said that they "want to listen to the team but are not sure it [the IEP] is followed correctly." People involved in this study had a greater understanding of the special education process if they had an education background and conducted outside research on special education. It is important to note that the number of years involved in the process and engagement in special education were not found to be a significant factor in this study. This study and previous research state that parents conducting outside research and asking questions of the school team when they have trouble are ones who develop the best school partnership.

Sontag (2015) stated that school teams look at families in a negative light when someone is hired to support a family. Not one parent noted a negative experience during the IEP meetings at the school. Participant 12 stated that, “I’ve only really had good meetings at Strawberry Hill High School. No negative.” However, parents did note concern regarding a lack of follow-through on special education services at all grade levels and schools in district, not just Strawberry Hill High School. The transition to other settings from middle to high school or other schools was seen as impeding the parent feedback to the team.

Every parent but one noted feeling inadequate about what the transition support and guardianship offer to families. Professional development for others besides school team members would explain special education with the necessary topics. It was stated nothing should be taken away from what is currently being done. No parents interviewed were currently comfortable with the post-graduation process. Previous research from the literature review noted that student centered planning is crucial for a positive outcome following high school. “Additionally, participants across several studies noted that adding transition planning to jam-packed annual IEP meetings was sorely inadequate; therefore, our research supports the notion that more time be given to transition planning beyond annual review meetings” (Cobb, 2009, p. 9). Parents in this study were the primary advocates for the students since students were not involved in the study. It is important for further studies to explore whether students understand the transition process by learning it through being involved as an identified special education student. There were no further questions by parents when asked by the interviewer.

Summary

Thirteen engaged parents at Strawberry Hill High School were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the current special education processes. All parents involved in the study were

currently involved in the special education process and had an identified special education student at the high school. The parents participated in semi-structured interviews. Parents identified current IEP strengths as communication and team support. However, they reported that the process does not include enough check-ins with the parents and review of the special education process. Thirty-eight percent of participants reported a lack of trust in the team and stated they have to hire other stakeholders to support the special education process for their child. Parents hypothesized that a lack of engagement from some parents may be because the process is overwhelming, they experience difficulty with access, and the process is lengthy. Participants in the study all felt that the school team valued the parental feedback. Participants who were engaged in the process stated that the IEPs are very intimidating and require outside research in order to be an active team member. All parents thought that it was important to remain involved in the IEP process in order to advocate for their child and ensure that they experience appropriate growth.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine current perceptions of engaged parents about the Individual Education Plan (IEP) processes. The researcher interviewed 13 parents from Strawberry Hill High School. In this study, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcription was coded and then analyzed. Sources for the coding were the literature review, conceptual framework and data collected. All students with special needs have an IEP written in collaboration with the school team and incorporating parent input. Through *Individuals with Disability Education Act* (IDEA), parental feedback is legally required in the special education process. It is essential to the special education process that parents feel treated as equal team members. Local school districts make their own determinations on how to incorporate parental feedback. The setting for this study required and encouraged parental feedback throughout the process in varying forms such as district workshops, in person attendance at meetings and sending all evaluations to parents before reviewed at meetings. This study examined what current practices the special education process uses and made recommendations into how IEPs can be made more inclusive for parents.

The essential question for this study is: What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of the IEP process by motivated parents of special education students? The information presented in the conceptual framework and data collected indicate that engaged parents feel overwhelmed. The special education process is complex and if parents are not trained in the process, it is hard for them to stay involved. The special education process is complicated, and some parents use other professionals to support them during the process (Boduch, 2019). The information gathered in the literature review explored parents needing a more collaborative team process with the school and parents working together. The Hirsch (2004) study showed that the more

input gathered from the parents, the more positive satisfaction was demonstrated by the parents. The research shows that the process is complicated and parents struggle to be involved when they do not understand the next steps. Fish (2008) found that parental rights are an important part of the special education process but parents are unclear on what those rights are. The research collected shows Strawberry Hill High School parents feel like their input is warranted but could be used more. This study suggests many parents understand the special education basics and the Strawberry Hill High School's district has set up standardized procedures for all IEP meetings. The district also employs a transition coordinator to help the school and district support special education needs after high school.

Interpretation of Findings

This research was completed to assess current parent perceptions of the IEP process. The research suggests a positive experience providing parental feedback and their understanding of the PPT process. Participants had favorable feedback about the special education process at Strawberry Hill High School. The parents all noted that communication was effective with the team members but could be improved. To have a working partnership with the school team, parents need to collaborate with the members of the school staff. This requires special education team members to frequently check-in with parents, not just for a meeting. During the interviews, parents recognized that some parents might not be engaged because of time constraints with work and half the parents involved in the study noted that meetings frequently started late which could interfere with work obligations.

Limitations

This study gathered results from parents of eight percent of the current special education population at Strawberry Hill High School. It focused on engaged parents but did not include

those not attending meetings. A small sample size limits the information gathered in this study. Not having a translator with a special education background to facilitate the interviews reduced the population to less than 50%. The current online model of learning for students and virtual meetings limited the interaction between the researcher and participants. Because Strawberry Hill High School is in a large district, it may not be relevant to other schools at the high school level. District-wide standardized procedures are used, but parents throughout the study stated different schools approach IEP meetings differently.

Implications

Previous studies have noted that the special education process is complicated and that interferes with parents staying involved (Myers, 2014; Reiman, 2010). To some extent, every parent interviewed noted the process is complicated due to the legal language, lengthy documents and lack of full understanding about how services are implemented in the school setting. Parents interviewed stated that they felt Strawberry Hill High School could simplify the process but current procedures are effective. Special education is constantly evolving because of changes in the laws. Legal implications for IEPs are based on the local, state and federal laws. *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), formerly the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), has paved the way for what schools are required to provide and how to identify students in need of services. ESSA requires rigorous standards, called Common Core State Standards, to guide evaluation of standards for all content areas at every grade level. Using differentiation tiers for the content allows students to understand the material at all instruction levels required, such as modifying the reading level, using small group instruction, and simplifying the information. IEPs require that students receive as much instruction as possible in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), using many strategies to make sure the curriculum is accessible for all.

Special education has many regulations requiring students to access the curriculum as independently as possible. Some teachers are good at teaching the content but may find it challenging to build relationships with families to keep them engaged in the special education process.

Students need to build independence and at times parents can interfere with this outcome. Parents want to advocate for their child because they have done this their whole life and want the student to be successful. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to have a parent understand that when a child turns 18, all involvement is carried out by the student. This balance between supporting and doing for them needs to improve as it is noted throughout the study that no parent fully understands what happens next.

Recommendations for Actions

All parents in the interviews felt welcomed at the IEP meetings. The researcher noted everyone who participated in the study had some criticism or suggestions for next steps. The special education process is complicated and many parents suggested a handbook to reference the abbreviations. Participant 12 stated,

A handbook was actually put together about different words with definitions, and I think it was two teachers who put it together previously. And that was really helpful, especially for parents. So, if that was to be given to them prior to, these are all abbreviations of things that might come up in your meeting, they give them a better idea.

If helpful aids such as a handbook or visual aids were created perhaps more parents might be more involved. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* suggests parent seminars to help support families' understanding of special education documents and process. This has always been a

goal of Strawberry Hill High School, but due to budget and time constraints it has not been fulfilled at the school level.

It is very important that parents understand their rights, but also their student's rights, before they turn 18. No participants in this study felt comfortable with the guardianship process or what happens when a student graduates high school. Strengthening the parent-school relationship is important to continue to grow the special education process.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Expand the study to include all parents of students in Special Education.
2. Translators with special education background be made available to facilitate the conversation.
3. As suggested by the parents, create additional aids such as the glossary of special education terms.
4. Form a parent group and offer family programs for further special education growth such as transition and effective collaboration.
5. Have the school team build a strong relationship with parents and share open communication with them throughout the year.
6. Have special education teachers support general education teachers to understand the special education process and how to read an IEP.

Conclusions

Through identification of students requiring special education in public schools, the number has risen. Nationally, school staffs continue to work to meet all students' needs in the public schools. To have special education students be more successful in school and show progress parental support is required. Parental support in the IEP process is critical because it

creates the partnership between the school and home. This study analyzed engaged parents' feedback on the IEP process at Strawberry Hill High School. The themes emerging from this research included: communication with families is important, the process should be simplified and everyone in this study thought the special education process is overwhelming for families. The parents all stated that they thought it was important to stay engaged in the process to help support their child's progress. Building clear communication and strong relationships between school and families is necessary. It was clear the participants were concerned that other parents are not engaged in the process since the IEP is so crucial for the parents. Strawberry Hill High School was seen as a collaborative team environment with support through the IEP. The biggest concerns noted in this study were the staff not following through on services outlined at the IEP meeting. Parent suggestions of handbooks, learning workshops, and on-going communication need to be added to support families in the special education process.

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Appendix A

Parent Interview Questions

What are the current strengths in the PPT process?

What are some concerns with the PPT Process?

Do you feel you are able to have the appropriate input throughout the process?

Do you understand the current process?

What keeps you engaged in the process?

Why do you think some parents / guardians are not involved with the process?

Does the school team value parent feedback enough?

How could the current process grow?

What would be helpful in the future?

Know the process after high school or guardianship process?

Questions?

Appendix B

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Parent perceptions of the IEP process

Principal Investigator(s): Deborah Perry, Doctoral Candidate

Introduction:

- Please read this form. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how parents in a New England high school who are motivated to be actively involved participants in the IEP process perceive the effectiveness of the process

Who will be in this study?

Native English speakers that have special education students attending Stamford High School.

What will I be asked to do?

Participants will complete and individual interview that will take 10-15 minutes. This will be completed 1:1 on the phone. If phone is not an option email can be used as a back up given the circumstances.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no risks to this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

Helping to develop a more collaborative special education process at the high school between teachers and parents.

What will it cost me?

No costs associated with this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

All names, school information and Identifiable pieces will be taken out of the interview.

How will my data be kept confidential?

All data will be kept locked with the researcher. Once transcribed and coded all data will be destroyed.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current participation at the high school. Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researchers conducting this study is Deborah Perry.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Chair of the Institutional Review Board

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or
Legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date

Printed name