

**Perceived Efficacy of Individual Education Plans:**

**A Literature Review**

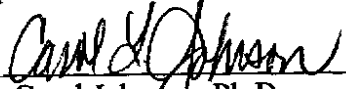
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ABSTRACT

Schools face many challenges today and one priority is finding ways to educate all children. Students with documented disabilities may qualify for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) through the special education program. The IEP presents many challenges to those involved in developing the plan. If some or all of the people involved in the IEP process do not feel the IEP is as effective as it could be, it is important to determine what could be improved. Educators, parents and students may offer key suggestions as to what could be done to improve the practice and make IEP's even more beneficial to the students' success.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to explore the perspectives of those individuals involved with the IEP process. This study focused on the following areas: the opinions of those involved in the IEP process including school staff, parents and students; the shortcomings and strengths of the IEP; complications presented when a referral candidate does not have English as a first language, and suggestions to strengthen the IEP process.

Upon conclusion of the literature review, recommendations were made to assist professionals and parents as to how to strengthen the IEP process and make things easier for all

parties involved. Recommendations were also made for future research, especially in regards to student perspectives.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Schools face many challenges in providing an education for all students. Challenges such as language barriers, budget cuts and violence in schools have become tough realities for educators. Schools are also faced with educating children of all abilities. In 2002, there were over 6 million children in the United States who received some type of accommodation services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Kafer, 2002). Furthermore, according to the National Education Association (National Education Association, 2007, n.p.), “Three out of every four students with disabilities spend part or all of their school day in a general education classroom.”

Because of this, many children have a plan for their education that is tailored to fit their specific learning needs. Individualized education plans (IEP) were developed as a result of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975. These plans help to ensure that children with disabilities ages 3 to 21 are receiving a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This ultimately means that the families of students with disabilities do not have to pay extra fees for their students to receive the extra or modified services they need in order to learn (Kafer, 2002).

Although this sounds like an arrangement in which everybody benefits, especially the students with disabilities, in reality the process is a lot more complicated. Often an IEP involves a myriad of people. The IEP team may include the regular education teacher, a special education teacher, administration (principal, school psychologist, or school counselor), the parents, and if appropriate, the student (Lee-Tarver, 2006). In addition to these key players, professionals such as speech pathologists, physical therapists, and others with specific areas of interest could possibly be involved depending on the child’s needs. All of these people come together as a team

to discuss what the most ideal situation is for the student and decide on what are the most realistic, yet effective services to be given.

The IEP process begins with a referral. The referral may come from a classroom teacher, parent or other individual in contact with the student who recognizes there is an obstacle to the learning process. Regardless of who referred a notice goes home to the parent to inform them that the district has received a referral for special education. Upon receiving a referral, the team will ask for documentation on what the student need is, what is currently being done to assist the student and what the outcomes are of the current accommodations. The team then meets again to determine if this is enough and currently fits the needs for the student, or if other issues are beginning to surface that may require additional testing and further research into the background of the student's needs. If testing is needed, requests are made for parental permission to test. Upon approval for further testing, the team will select which tests are best for this student.

Generally there is paperwork that guides the team in determining what further testing is needed. Some testing tools include, but are not limited to, cognitive/intellectual tests, adaptive rating scales, autism/aspberger's rating scales, emotional/behavioral rating scales, achievement/academic ability tests, speech and language tests, gross and fine motor assessments, vision assessments, hearing assessments and observations. Parental/Guardian consent is required to administer any of these assessments. Paperwork identifying what assessments and who will administer them (if known) is sent home. Parents then determine if they give consent or not for these assessments. If consent is not given then the referral/evaluation process is done. The district cannot move forward without consent. If parental consent is received the district has 60 calendar days to complete the evaluation and hold a meeting. Testing is completed and enough information to determine eligibility is gathered.

When the results are returned, the team meets again at an evaluation meeting to determine the level of need on the assessments. If a student meets a certain level of need, they may be referred to the Special Education Program. An IEP meeting is then scheduled and held. The district has to accommodate the parent/guardian in scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreeable time and place. This involves documentation of the disability, required accommodations, suggested ideas for the plan, signatures by parents, administrators and student services directors, and special education teachers. The IEP is not officially written at this meeting. Information is gathered at the meeting and the parents are given an overview of what it would look like for their child. Once the parent signs consent to start special education services and implement the IEP, services begin by the date projected on the consent form. This then becomes the official Individual Education Plan and thus starts the IEP process.

Individual Education Plans (IEP) provide a written guide for the student, parent, teachers and other support service providers to use throughout the school year. An IEP shows a child's current level and lists the improvements that the IEP team would like to see occur over the stated amount of time. Once everything has been worked out, most often the special education teacher is named as the case manager or the person who will oversee and document that the IEP is being followed. Although an IEP is expected to be a team effort in which there are many members following through with the plan, it has been found that this often falls into the hands of the regular education teacher or is not followed through at all (Lee-Tarver, 2006).

IEP's are being used more and more often in recent years as laws concerning children with disabilities are continually updated. The first list of disabilities approved by Congress for inclusion under special education laws was created in 1975 and had only 13 disabling conditions named. In addition, the age range was narrower in terms of who had to be accommodated. In



1975 the ages of children to be accommodated were school-aged children, ages 5-18 only. Today, children ages 3 to 21 are included and more identified disabling conditions have been added. There are now 13 categories listed under which disabilities and conditions may be covered. Some of these new conditions consist of autism, traumatic brain injuries, and attention deficit disorder, to name a few (Worth, 1999).

Imagine how challenging it then is for the teacher to take on the implementation of not only one child, but possibly more children with special education needs in a classroom with 25 other regular education children. Because of disability and inclusion laws mandating that a student is placed in the least restrictive environment, the possibility for a regular education teacher having one or more students with disabilities in his or her classroom are extremely likely. According to Whitbread et al., the general consensus among teachers today is that they are feeling “overtaxed” (2007, p. 7) when it comes to teaching special education students. Working with the parents, while providing accommodations and paperwork documentation, in addition to their regular workload, it is little wonder that teachers may be feeling overtaxed. If there are multiple parents or partners involved in the process, this can add to the load of working with and notifying not only the custodial guardian/partner/parent, but the non-custodial parent/partner also. This feeling of burnout among teachers may lead to resentment toward the parents they are working with or the entire IEP/special education process in which they are enveloped (Whitbread et al., 2007).

Unfortunately, teachers aren't the only ones in this situation feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. School districts are feeling the pressure from the mandates of special education. Some districts have found that they are providing services they do not believe are suitable, simply because they don't have the funds to battle with the parents in court. A Southern California

school district paid \$254,000 a year for a boy with severe brain damage to go to a special school in Massachusetts and for his parents and sister to fly to Massachusetts to visit him (Worth, 1999). To many, this appears to go above and beyond the term, free and appropriate education.

Aside from the school districts and staff, parents are also feeling the strain of special education and the IEP. Parents going into IEP meetings face many difficulties. These difficulties stem from the fact that parents may feel outnumbered and are placed on-the-defensive in IEP meetings. Special education has a difficult terminology to understand and multiple tests to be given and scores results interpreted that can also add to the confusion. There are some unclear federal mandates that need to be met and, on top of all of this, many parents of children with disabilities have emotional issues about accepting that their child has special needs (O'Donovan, 2007). Sitting in a meeting, outnumbered by educators and administrators and hearing for the first time that your child has disabilities is often very hard for the parents to comprehend. These factors alone may leave parents, students and educators feeling overwhelmed.

With the many stressors on students, parents and teachers surrounding the implementation of the Individual Education Plan, what can be done to eliminate some of the obstacles? What can be offered to get more participants feeling comfortable in dealing with the federal mandates? Finally, are there ways to improve the practice to make it a win-win situation for all involved? Progress has been made in educating children with special needs in the United States; however, it appears to be at the expense of the parents, teachers, and schools districts alike. The reality of special education and the IEP is that the process is a challenge for everyone involved.

*Statement of the Problem*

Implementing the Individual Education Plan (IEP) presents many challenges to those involved in developing the plan. Literature will be explored to determine if participants who develop the plan believe that following the guidelines for the IEP is the most effective way to help students reach maximum educational potential. Therefore the problem becomes, if there are obstacles with the IEP process, what suggestions could be implemented to create more opportunity for the student, smoother transition to the plan and optimal learning environments for all students?

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to review literature related to perceived effectiveness of Individual Education Plans by the team of individuals responsible for developing the plans. Literature will be reviewed in spring of 2008.

### *Rationale*

This review of literature is of value because Individual Education Plans are a part of many students' ability to succeed in school settings. If some or all of the people involved in the IEP process do not feel the IEP is as effective as it could be, it is important to determine what could be improved. Educators, parents and students may offer key suggestions as to what could be done to improve the practice and make IEP's even more beneficial to the students' success.

### *Research objectives*

The objectives of this review of literature are to:

1. gather information regarding the opinions of those involved in the IEP process,
2. determine the shortcomings and strengths of the IEP and,

3. offer suggestions to strengthen the IEP process.

### *Definition of terms*

For clarity of understanding these terms are defined:

*Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* – “special education services are provided to disabled students at public expense, under public supervision, and without charge” (Kafer, 2002, n.p.).

*Individual Education Plan (IEP)* – “a document developed by specialists, parents, teachers, and administrators, establishing annual goals for a child with a disability, and detailing the services that the public agency will provide to, or on behalf of the child” (Kafer, 2002, n.p.).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – originally passed in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142); in basic terms, this law opened the door for those impaired with disabilities to an education.

*Parental involvement* – “parent reported participation at least once during the school year in attending a general school meeting; attending a scheduled meeting with their child’s teacher; attending a school event; or volunteering in the school or serving on a school committee” (Child Trends Data Bank, n.d.).

### *Assumptions and Limitations*

It is assumed that literature cited is research based and participants responded honestly. The literature reviewed in this paper presents a portion of what is available at this time, and with limited resources and time, a sample of available sources was used. Another limitation is that

there may be limited resources regarding student's opinions on the IEP process as they are minors.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter will include information on the perceived efficacy of individual education plans (IEP) in regards to school staff such as administrators, teachers, and support staff. In addition, the chapter will discuss parents' thoughts and opinions on the effectiveness of an IEP from the non-English speaking migrant population. The chapter will conclude with the perceptions of students on the IEP process.

### *School staff*

School educators are very busy. Each member of the school district staff may have many roles. In addition to being a teacher, counselor or school administrator, educators are offered or assigned other duties that may include class sponsorship, coaching, supervising clubs and organizations and running after-school programs. Adding to the already full schedule of staff may be the required participation in special education meetings to determine student eligibility and student needs. Should the student qualify for special education, there are additional participation by educators and administration.

School district leaders need to keep current with new legislation and updated procedures to ensure that they are not in violation of any of the federal mandates surrounding special education. Although the new procedures and forms are there to protect the district, ultimately the massive amount of paperwork and procedures to remember is extremely overwhelming for the teachers, especially special education teachers (California Offers Five Big Ideas on IDEA, 2003).

Research by Worth (1999) indicates that the average amount of time a special education teacher stays in that position is three years. In addition to the high turn-over related issues in the program, the US Department of Education website at that time also identified a shortage of

certified special education teachers. The turn-over rate and shortage may be due to the many stresses of the job, the number of meetings required to add or maintain students in the special education program, and the amount of paperwork required to document student achievement. There are also annual reviews, special training sessions and regular development meetings that add to the workload of these teachers. Special education teachers have reported as high as 50-60% of their time being devoted to paperwork.

In addition to the paperwork, it should be noted that special education teachers are often the case managers for the special education students too. In a study by Arivett et al., (2007) special education teachers reported that they were present at nearly 35 meetings a year on average. In another study by Martin, Marshall and Sale cited in Arivett et al., (2007) those same teachers reported that they had a larger speaking role than administrators, counselors and others serving on the IEP team. This leadership role of prepping for the meeting, gathering necessary documentation, directing the meeting, taking notes and writing the IEP all create additional work for the case manager.

Aside from special education teachers, regular classroom teachers are also feeling the additional work load required by individual education plans for their students. According to the latest provision of IDEA, the excusal provision of 2004 (cited in Etscheidt, 2007), the regular education teacher should participate in the development of the IEP so they can contribute to the decision about how to most appropriately teach the child and have some input into what kind of services or aids they believe the student needs to learn in the classroom. In reality, regular education teachers have been required to attend since Public Law 94-142 was put into place in 1975. This latest provision simply strengthened this requirement for regular education teachers. Furthermore, if the regular education teacher was not present at the IEP meeting, it may interfere

with the Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) mandate because it might suggest that the placement of the child was already predetermined.

Once the IEP has been put into action, the regular education teacher is often responsible for executing at least a portion of the plan (Etscheidt, 2007). Regular classroom teachers may be required to make accommodations for the student with documented disabilities that could include providing assignments in advance, online communications with parents, copies of worksheets or homework on a daily basis, modification of assignments, special classroom seating, allowing students to leave the classroom for a more suitable learning environment, scribes, special testing situations and many more options depending on the individual's needs. Keeping track of these accommodations is a challenge faced by many classroom teachers with one or more students on individualized plans.

### *Parents*

National associations for teachers suggest that one way to help the child in the regular education classroom is for the teachers to involve the parents as much as possible. Yet, this can be a difficult task when many regular education teachers may not have received the training on how to work effectively with parents and families (Whitbread et al., 2007). The importance of teachers involving parents can be found in statistics reported by the Child Trends Data Bank (n.d.). Their findings suggest that when parents are highly involved, the teacher gives more attention to those students. By working together and receiving cues from the parents, the teacher may be able to recognize difficulties the student is having earlier in the child's academic life. These problems, if not caught, could greatly affect the student's learning (*Parent involvement in*



*schools*, n.d.). Ultimately, regular education teachers have a large amount of extra work to be able to help students with special needs meet their potential.

Parental involvement in a child's education is a legal right for parents of all children in the United States, including those with disabilities (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). This is largely due to the fact that students with disabilities have many extra needs and it is important for the school and family to work together to meet these needs. However, parents of students with special needs have many needs as well. These parents report that "their greatest need is for information" (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002, p. 53).

Although many parents want the information needed to best help their child with disabilities, oftentimes they do not know how to obtain it. Due to an uncertainty of the definitions of technical language in special education and an unfamiliarity of the procedures or limitations that the school or teachers have, parents of students with special needs are frequently hesitant to ask questions. These experiences with misinterpretation and an absence of awareness and information can lead to poor relationships between the school personnel and parents (Whitbread, et al., 2007).

In fact, one account from a parent of a student with special needs provides some insight. Sauer (2007) shared some of her experiences as a mother of a child with special needs in the classroom. Some of the vocabulary she used throughout her article was representative of other parents in the special education world including "betrayed" (§ 10), "disregarded" (§ 13), "confused" (§ 12), and "apprehension" (§ 1). Sauer described her husband and her feeling like discussions had already occurred and decisions had already been made when they would walk into a meeting. To them, this lost the feeling of a contributing partnership in the IEP process.

The interesting thing about Sauer is that she herself was once a special education teacher. In fact, at the time of this article, she was a doctoral student looking to receive her doctorate in special education. She knew that so-called discussions about what the school staff wants to happen in the meeting occur, otherwise known as the meeting-before-the-meeting. She and her colleagues used to term those meetings as preparation so that they were all together with their thoughts and ideas. Nevertheless, when it happened to her, Sauer was hurt and let down (Sauer, 2007).

To add additional perspective on how parents feel they are regarded in IEP meetings, another teacher and parent of a child with special needs made the following statement:

I found that suggestions I would make [as a parent] regarding my own child would be totally dismissed by some professionals [attending the IEP meeting], while these same suggestions that I would make as a [teaching] professional concerned about other children [at their IEP meetings] would be cherished by my colleagues as professional pearls of wisdom. (Sauer, 2007, ¶ 21)

If Sauer and other teachers can be left feeling this way after an IEP meeting, imagine how a parent without their knowledge and background may feel.

### *Non-English Speaking Migrants*

Immigrant parents with a child with disabilities are often in a similar situation. This experience can be more challenging because of other factors such as language barriers, differences in customs, and discrepancies in beliefs about education or child development in general. Many immigrant families come to the United States to seek a safe haven or find a better

life. A problem with this, as stated in Al-Hassan and Gardner, is that many immigrant families do not know what the education system entails, special education included (2002).

Also, as with parents from the United States, communication may be a problem because of the technicality of the language used in special education. Those with limited English proficiency might have feelings of intimidation due to the differences in level of education or simply in the high level of communication that is necessary for IEP meetings. Identifying special needs may be a challenge as currently few qualifying tests are in language other than English. Another implication with immigrants and language may be illiteracy of some cultural groups in their native language (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). This could increase the difficulty of communication because daily contact such as notes home about the student's behavior or progress would not be possible without the help of a translator.

Translators may also be needed to work on developing meeting notices, translation of special education guidelines and parental rights and forms to give permission for testing. Special education providers are now challenged to find testing in the native language for students, find ways to translate the test results for the parents or guardians, and write the accommodations so both the student and parents understand the anticipated outcomes.

Parents of students with disabilities appear to be having overall difficulties with the IEP process, namely in communication and general involvement in the meetings. Still, parent involvement is important for several reasons. It has been found that when parents are involved in their child's schooling, the student is reported to have less behavior issues and also achieves higher academically (Child Trends Data Bank, n.d.). Second, for an IEP to be successful, Gress and Carol (cited in Arivett et al., 2007), stated that "all of the members of IEP teams must

contribute and feel a part of the process” (§ 3). If the parents, or any other member of the team, aren't on board, the IEP may not be as effective.

### *Students*

As previously stated, in 2002, the number of children provided an education under IDEA was over six million, which is approximately 12 % of all students (Kafer, 2002). In addition to these students, the 2000 census disclosed that there were 8.6 million immigrant children in the United States (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). These numbers have undoubtedly increased in recent years. With that amount of students in special education and the added amount of immigrant children who require special services, it is no wonder this issue is such an important, yet highly debated topic. With all of the federal mandates, procedures, and paperwork that school districts, teachers, and parents take time to follow and fill out, one has to wonder what the students think about special education and IEP meetings.

According to the latest revision of IDEA in 2004 (cited in Etscheidt, 2007), the student with the disability should attend meetings whenever it is deemed appropriate. This could be beneficial in helping students feel as though they are a valuable and contributing part in deciding the direction of their education. Students may have helpful suggestions as they know themselves best and having a part in their educational decisions may be motivational for students. Nevertheless, being a part of meetings where adults and people in authority are talking about you, not always to you, and also about your negative behavior or learning deficits, may be detrimental to a child.

Although knowing students' thoughts and opinions about the effectiveness of IEP's would be extremely beneficial to improving the special education process, there is not

information on this topic readily available. This may be due to the fact that the large majority of students receiving special education services are minors. However, there are additional aspects of special education that largely impact a student's overall education, other than academics.

### *Behavior Manifestation*

One of these aspects is behavior. When a student has been identified as having a disability that qualifies him or her for special education services, special considerations have to be made when disciplining this student. This process is called manifestation determination. This allows for a group, usually consisting of the student's parents and some members of the IEP team, to decide if the student's behavior was a symptom, or part of, the identified disability. Having a disability does not allow for daily misbehavior problems to be excused. Manifestation determinations are made when the school chooses to take a student with a disability out of his or her educational placement for more than 10 days, such as in a suspension or expulsion. While manifestation determination may be a confusing and difficult process for students, parents and even school districts at times, this is a necessary part of special education to ensure students with disabilities are receiving the education they deserve while not being punished unfairly (Chapman, 2007).

Another aspect that may be difficult but is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 is that of transition services. A Parent Brief from the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition discusses in detail the reasons for and requirements of transition planning in an IEP. Transition services are required as part of an IEP because IDEA recognized that students with disabilities education is structured to fit their needs; however, students may continue to have these needs in a post-secondary setting, whether

that be in continuing education, work and employability options or life skills and living independently of others (2002).

Because IDEA requires that students and parents be involved in the transition planning, the final plan is a result of the student's goals, career interests and academic needs. The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition specifically states, "Students, no matter what or how significant their disability may be, are the most important people involved in transition. The transition planning process should be done *with*, not *for* the student" (pg. 5, 2002). This planning, scheduled annually or more often as needed, generally starts at the age of 14, but may be earlier if suitable. Transition planning involves decisions about which courses will be most appropriate and will help students to reach their goals. Later planning, usually beginning at the age of 16, focuses on post-secondary transitions. Agencies in the community may be called upon as resources for students as they leave the structured educational world. At any stage of the planning, the team must be knowledgeable about the student's needs, accommodations, modifications and goals (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2002).

Because of the different aspects of special education stipulated by federal mandates, such as academic, behavior and transition services, to name a few, students have many circumstances that may impact their education. Therefore, as stated previously, students are often invited to attend IEP meetings if appropriate. IEP meetings are an important time for students to offer suggestions about their education, especially in areas such as academic needs and transition services. Having information about what could improve IEP meetings or the IEP process from the students' perspective may be helpful in determining ways in which IEP's can be more effective and beneficial to the person who needs it the most, the student.

### Chapter Three: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter will summarize information presented in the literature review. In addition, the chapter will include a critical analysis of the literature review. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for the future of individual education plans (IEP) based on the literature about the perceived effectiveness from those involved with the special education process.

#### *Summary*

Although much of the literature reviewed may have indicated a complicated and time-consuming process, special education and individualized education plans are very helpful for those receiving services. Rather, it is the way in which they are handled that may give special education a negative connotation. It has been indicated in the literature that the IEP process may be effective and efficient if the procedural guidelines are followed by all. Also, as indicated in the literature, the IEP planning can be an overwhelming amount of paperwork for staff, complex and time consuming meetings for parents and challenges in communication for the non-English speaking families. This may lead to communication obstacles between those involved, especially school staff and parents, and even the IEP team as a whole (Etscheidt, 2007).

Nevertheless, special education has achieved some goals since the development of federal laws and mandates. As of 1999, the number of students with disabilities going on to further post-secondary education has tripled since 1978. Also, the number of people with disabilities entering the workforce is higher than ever before with 62 % of people with disabilities ages 16 to 24 employed (Worth, 1999). These are noteworthy accomplishments in the field of special education, indicating transition planning is having a positive impact on graduating students.

Research indicating success in the program may easily get overlooked because those involved with special education are overwhelmed and frustrated. The districts feel pressure as they have to follow strict financial guidelines and attend to rigorous documentation of special education programs to meet the legal guidelines. School staff members are sometimes aggravated because they are buried under mounds of paperwork, numerous meetings to attend and individual plans for students that need to be followed. Some parents are discouraged as they feel as though no one is listening to input at meetings and parents are confused because of the lengthy, technical and complicated process of having a child in special education. Most importantly, the students who need the support most may not be getting what they should because those who are trying to help them may be burnt out.

Because many in special education are frustrated, burnt out, or even confused, it is necessary to take a step back and see what can be improved upon based on the literature. The first step is to look at the situation from the perspective of the person on the other side (O'Donovan, 2007). For school staff, that means thinking about what it must be like to have a child with special education needs. The disability diagnosis is somewhat enough of a shock for parents, without having to worry about battling the education system. For parents, a different perspective would be imagining what it's like to be overwhelmed or spread to thin as a classroom teacher.

O'Donovan also suggested putting the legal aspects on the back burner. If a district and the IEP meeting focus on the needs of the child, then the legal concerns will fall into place because the mandates are being met. O'Donovan suggests as long as the needs of the child are met, working with the parents and establishing trust is much easier, again taking care of most of the legal concerns (2007). Furthermore, holding an informational session for parents and



educators provided by those knowledgeable in the area of special education may cut down on the technical talk and put others in a more comfortable communication zone. When parents and educators learn about the process of special education, everyone involved is on the same page and on the same level. This format of training also stressed the importance of collaboration (Whitbread, et al., 2007).

Also, when thinking about ways in which IEP meetings can be improved, it is important to remember immigrant parents of limited-English speaking children with special needs. Translators are essential when working with immigrant parents during IEP meetings. However, it is important to establish trust with the family; therefore, if at all possible, let the family have the choice of who translates for them or even consider asking other parents who speak that particular language to translate, if the family is comfortable with that option. When available, schools and communities could provide classes for immigrant parents to learn English. Providing a list of any other resources including cultural-based counseling or physical therapy and speech therapy, summer camps, employment or housing assistance agencies, and citizenship programs is extremely useful to parents. Building good communication between the parents is essential for a trusting, effective relationship to develop (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002).

Although school staff members are also frustrated with parts of special education, the school should consider taking the lead in minimizing paperwork and meetings. As previously stated, educating students today is harder now more than ever. Not only is special education a necessary challenge, schools are also under pressure to do well on testing, make budget cuts due to lack of funding, and worry about violence in schools. Because legal mandates and federal regulations for special education programs must be followed, schools should support and streamline these programs for the children with disabilities.

Special education programs are here to stay. Providing students quality education with the least number of restrictions continues to be the goal of the program. There needs to be more research on ways to improve IEP meetings and the special education paperwork process so those involved can come together in support of the children. There is a need for more research gathering the students' perspective of the process. Special education services and IEP's are put into place for the students, yet there is little research on their thoughts and opinions. Specific research areas for the future could include students' opinions on involvement in the IEP process, their perceptions regarding the success of the IEP and the transition process to post-secondary life after high school. Surveys could explore whether or not students feel as though they should be involved at the meetings and if they amount they are involved is appropriate for their abilities. In addition, if students are involved in an IEP meeting, studies could further investigate how they feel after the meeting, such as, did the meeting leave them with positive or negative feelings toward themselves and education?

Another area that could be researched regarding students' opinions is that of support they receive. Investigating students' feelings on how much support (too much/not enough) they actually receive versus the intended amount. Do students feel as though their IEP is completely followed? Future studies may also explore if students feel they are in the appropriate educational setting and the impact an IEP and special education services has on them from both an academic and a social standpoint. Is there a stigma from other students that accompanies the label, special ed student? Examining the answers to these possible questions may prove to be helpful for future IEP meetings and providing feedback for the special education process to reach the maximum potential for benefiting students.

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