

2006

# The effects of mini-conferencing prior to IEP meetings on parental involvement in the IEP process

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THE EFFECTS OF MINI-CONFERENCING PRIOR TO IEP MEETINGS ON PARENTAL  
INVOLVEMENT IN THE IEP PROCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

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August 2006

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Lillian (Mama) Jones, and in memory of my late grandfather, Richard Jones, Jr., whom I never had the privilege of meeting. Mama, you have been an extraordinary example of a strong, loving, Christian woman. It was your courage to chase your dreams that forged the way for women like me to fulfill ours.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Lord for allowing me to serve Him through my chosen vocation and blessing me with the ability to undertake such an endeavor. A special thanks to my husband, Curtis Jones, for his unconditional love. Curtis, you are my strength and my inspiration. Thank you to my parents, Walter and Gail Ashby, and my sister, Becky Ashby-Castro, for their unwavering love and support of my pursuits. My sincere gratitude to my doctoral committee chair, Dr. Kristin Gansle, for her friendship, professionalism, constant direction, and countless hours editing. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Earl Check, Dr. Ken Denny, Dr. Paul Mooney, and Dr. Bobby Laird for serving on my doctoral committee. Thank you for your guidance throughout my doctoral career and, especially, the dissertation process. I would also like to thank the teachers, parents, administrators, and members of the community who participated in or contributed to the success of my study. I appreciate the time commitments and/or donation of resources each of these individuals made.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to extend the literature on parent participation in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process by implementing an intervention aimed at fostering parent participation in IEP meetings and comparing its results to those obtained using one school district's standard IEP meeting procedures. This study also sought to determine the effects of SES and disability on parent participation in IEP meetings.

Specifically, a mini-conference between parent(s) and special education teachers prior to the IEP meeting informed parents of their child's competencies and allowed for collaboration on a proposed IEP. A control group of parents was exposed to routine procedures involving no conference. The effectiveness of the mini-conference compared to no mini-conference was determined. Differences on dependent measures according to disability as well as SES were determined. Dependent measures included a researcher's coding form designed to allow the investigator to numerically document the amount of parental input in IEP meetings and questionnaires completed by both parents and professionals at the conclusion of the IEP meeting. The questionnaires were intended to solicit parent, teacher, and administrator perceptions of parental comfort and participation in the IEP process. For parents who received the mini-conference, questionnaires were used to determine whether parents, teachers, and administrators felt the mini-conference was helpful in preparing the parents for the IEP meeting.

Fifteen special educators participated in the study. The return rate of parent consents was 41.9%. No differences were found in either parent or administrator survey responses to items relating to parent comfort or satisfaction with meeting outcome between the experimental and control groups. However, differences were present for the teachers on the same survey measures. Parent education level was correlated with parent participation in the IEP meetings.

Parent participation was no different depending on the percentage of the school day a student received special education services. There was no difference in parent participation by conference group, as measured by number of unsolicited parental contributions. However, parents, teachers, and administrators all responded that the mini-conference was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting, would be beneficial before all IEP meetings, and increased parental participation.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, education in the United States has been the responsibility of the individual states. Until very recently, there was no federal law governing general education, much less special education. Before the 1970's, education of children with disabilities was viewed as a privilege rather than a guaranteed right (Huefner, 2000). Children with milder disabilities, such as learning disabilities and speech impairments, were left in regular schools and provided no special services. These students were often considered stupid or lazy when they could not keep up with their same-aged peers. The children with more severe disabilities, such as mental retardation, blindness, and deafness, were often sentenced to life in an institution or in a special school (Heward, 2003).

It was not until the 1950's, with *Brown v. Board of Education*, that the federal government stepped in and began establishing legal precedence and legislation pertaining to education. The federal government did so because equal educational opportunity for all students became a national issue (Huefner, 2000). Federal courts began to hear cases on behalf of African American students, female students, students with disabilities, and students of lower socioeconomic status who were being deprived of access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), who argued equal opportunity on the grounds of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.

Using this argument, two landmark cases in the early 1970's helped to prompt change for students with disabilities. These cases were known as *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (1972). In the *PARC v. Pennsylvania* case, plaintiffs argued that the state was not providing a

publicly funded education to students with mental retardation, thus denying their civil rights under the Equal Protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The case for the plaintiffs was made by witnesses who argued that children with mental retardation are capable of benefiting from an educational program, that education cannot be defined only as the provision of academic experiences for children, that the state could not exclude students with mental retardation from the provision that all students in Pennsylvania be provided FAPE, and that a greater amount of learning can be expected the earlier children with mental retardation are provided services (Yell, 1998). *PARC v. Pennsylvania* was decided with a consent agreement specifying that all children with mental retardation between six and 21 years of age be provided FAPE in a program as close to that provided to students without disabilities as possible. Similarly, *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* was also brought on behalf of students with disabilities being denied access to public education. However, this case involved students with a variety of disabilities including behavioral problems, epilepsy, hyperactivity, mental retardation, and physical impairments. The case resulted in a mandate that the board of education provide publicly supported education to all students with disabilities (Yell, 1998).

The national outcry for educational services for children with disabilities was heard, and, in 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), better known as P.L. 94-142. For the first time, the federal government offered grants to states for serving students with disabilities. This was significant because the federal government was actively engaged with states in the education of students with disabilities. P.L. 94-142 assured students with eight different disabilities the right to FAPE, in settings that allow for the greatest possible amount of interaction with nondisabled students, described by a written,

individual education program (IEP), and based on a thorough evaluation of the student's needs (Huefner, 2000).

Since 1975, PL 94-142 has been amended on four different occasions, and is currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Huefner, 2000; Yell, 1998). Despite its changes with respect to disability categories and procedures, its emphases on delivery of services through the IEP and on parental participation have not waned. Parent participation in special education was mandated as a result of EAHCA in 1975, and continues to be so mandated. Through the inception of procedural safeguards spelled out in the legislation, parents have been given legal protections to ensure that they can be involved in all aspects of their child's education (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980). In fact, the third, and probably most significant, restructuring of IDEA in 1997 considerably strengthened the legislation with regard to the role of parents. In addition, it ensured students with disabilities access to the general curriculum and made changes in the IEP process that emphasized the importance of meaningful progress toward goals, all with direct parental input.

The IEP is the cornerstone of the program that is provided for students who are found to be eligible for special education services. The term 'individualized education program' is defined as a "written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance [with the requirements of the law]" (IDEA, 2004). Although IDEA does not specify a universal format for each IEP, it does outline very clear requirements for its content. According to IDEA, an IEP must include a statement of the student's present level of performance, annual goals, short-term objectives that facilitate the mastery of goals, statements about the student's degree of participation with nondisabled peers, statements about the student's participation in state and district assessments, special education and related services to be

provided (how often and how long), initiation/duration dates for services, and a statement about how progress will be monitored and reported to the student's parents. School districts must include all of this information to be in compliance with the requirements of the law, but may choose to include additional information (Heward, 2003). If school districts do not include all of the required components, they can be held liable in the courts. For example, in *Lascari v. Board of Education* the court ruled that a student was not receiving FAPE because of inadequacies in his IEP. This was determined because his IEP did not list any current levels of performance and the goals and objectives were vague. Additionally, the IEP contained no allowances for how progress would be measured, nor any rationale for the student's proposed placement (Huefner, 2000).

### **IEP Team Composition and the IEP Meeting**

IDEA mandates the membership of the IEP team. IEP teams must include: the parent(s) or surrogate parents of the child, at least one regular education teacher who teaches the child, at least one special education teacher who teaches the child, a representative of the local education agency, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, and the student if age 14 or older (IDEA, 2004). If all of these required participants are not present, the IEP meeting should not be held. Additionally, if an IEP team member has to excuse him or herself from the meeting, the meeting should be postponed until such time that all members can reconvene. Smith (1990) emphasizes the importance of attendance at IEP meetings by stating that the law is not fulfilled unless teachers, administrators, parents, and all other pertinent members are in attendance at all appropriate IEP meetings. Lastly, the school district is required to make several attempts, through written notice, to include the parent(s) in the meeting and is permitted to do so through alternative methods, such as a telephone conference. In addition to

the required members, the parents or school can invite other persons who have special knowledge of the student, such as related service personnel. Representatives from community agencies may be invited to IEP meetings when planning for transition from school to work or postsecondary education (Heward, 2003).

### **Parental Rights and Participation**

IDEA is very specific about the rights of parents in the special education process. The law mandates procedural safeguards related to 16 different actions providing for prior, written notice; parental consent; access to records; independent educational evaluation (IEE); parental participation at meetings; initiating a due process hearing; mediation; due process hearing; state-level review; litigation; attorney's fees; stay-put decision; stay-put provisions for disciplinary actions; notice for parents seeking reimbursement of the costs of a private school placement; state compliant procedures; and surrogate parents (IDEA, 2004). Arguably, the point at which parents may have the most direct and positive impact on their child's education is at meetings during which their child's IEP is designed, reviewed, or both.

The IEP meeting was designed to be a way that parents and professionals could exchange information and mutually plan for the best interest of the child (Goldstein et al., 1980). When developing a student's IEP, the IEP team should consider the student's strengths and weaknesses, parental input, evaluation results, curriculum based assessments, performance on previous state and district assessments, and program before placement. The IEP team should also determine if the student's behavior interferes with his/her learning or the learning of others, if the student has a limited proficiency in English (LEP), and if the student has communication or assistive technology needs (IDEA, 2004). With regard to all of these considerations, the IEP team should aim to develop an IEP that helps the students to advance towards annual goals,



progress in the general curriculum, be included in extracurricular activities, and be educated with children who are not disabled.

### **Effects of Parental Involvement in Education**

Several comprehensive literature reviews on parent involvement support IDEA's mandate that parental participation is important for student success (Christenson & Conoley, 1992). Becher (1984) listed several benefits of parental involvement for parents, children, and teachers. First, parents who are involved tend to increase their self-confidence and enroll in programs that will enhance their personal development (Gordon, 1979). Parent involvement also has been found to improve the relationship between the parent and the child, and increase the frequency of the parents' involvement in the child's activities (Rempson, 1967; Schaefer, 1972; Young, 1975). The parents' understanding of the child's development and the educational process has also been demonstrated to increase (Lane, Elrey, & Lewis, 1971; Rempson). Parental involvement with schools has also been shown to make parents better teachers of their children and foster more positive forms of reinforcement (Olmsted, 1977). Becher reported that teachers in schools with greater levels of parental participation are more proficient in their professional activities and instruction, allot more of their own time to instructional purposes, are more involved with the curriculum, and tend to experiment more than teachers in schools with lower levels of parental participation. The benefit of parental involvement for children is significantly increased academic achievement and cognitive development (Beller, 1969; Gordon, Olmstead, Rubin, & True, 1978; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Olmsted).

Henderson (1988) found that the literature regarding parental involvement was unanimously positive and fell into one of three categories including improving the parent/child relationship, integrating parents into the school program, and building stronger connections

between schools, families, and the community. The author states that while the majority of the findings from this literature are common sense, they are worthy of restating. These findings are as follows: 1) the family provides the primary educational environment for children, 2) involving parents in their child's education improves the child's achievement, 3) parent involvement is most beneficial when it is comprehensive, well-planned, and has longevity, 4) involving parents when their child is young yields positive effects that continue throughout the child's educational career, 5) significant benefits can also be gained from involving parents at the intermediate and high school levels, 6) parents must be involved with the school as a whole for a global improvement in the school's average level of achievement, 7) children from low income and minority families benefit the most from parental involvement in schools and their parents do not have to be well educated to make a difference, and 8) student's attitudes about themselves and their control over their environment, which are primarily formed at home, are crucial to their achievement. Thus, Henderson writes "parental involvement...is absolutely fundamental to a healthy system of public education" (1988, p. 153). Henderson points out that if schools treat parents as unimportant or as negative educational influences and discourage parental involvement, then they are promoting attitudes that will be a hindrance to school achievement.

Kagan (1984) discovered that the majority of literature on parental involvement dealt with its effects. This research has dealt with six primary emphases: the effect of parental involvement on the student's cognitive development, the student's social and emotional well-being, the school program and climate for learning, the growth and development of parents, the growth and development of teachers, and stimulating public interest in education. Kagan states that the literature shows a clear positive relationship between student gains in cognitive development and parental involvement. However, it is noted that the nature of the involvement

does influence the impact. Programs that involve parents in numerous ways, including home-based tutoring programs, involvement in the PTA, and parent help in the classroom, have been shown to improve reading, math, and language skills (Barth, 1979; Mann, 1975; Walberg, 1984; Woods, 1974). Non-cognitive effects of parental involvement for students have been found to include improved attendance, a reduction in suspension rates, and a better attitude toward homework (Duncan & Fitzgerald, 1969; Thomas, 1980). The literature on the effects of parental involvement on the school program and learning climate have shown that the more parents participated in parent involvement activities, the greater chance the school environment would be improved (Gordon, 1979). This is especially important given that the link between an improved school environment and improved student achievement has been demonstrated (Comer, 1980; McDill, Rigsby, & Meyers, 1969). Parental involvement also has positive benefits for parents. Becher (1984) and Lopate, Flaxman, Bynum, and Gordon (1969) found that such involvement is positively correlated with parental attitudes regarding the importance of education and towards the school as an institution. Furthermore, there are suggestions that skills parents learn through participation in education may lead them to better jobs (Davies, 1978). Davies also notes that the effects for parents might spill over into electoral politics, saying that Head Start offers similar opportunities to poor parents as does the traditional training grounds of the PTA and League of Women Voters. Reports also indicate that in schools with high levels of parental involvement, teachers are generally happier and request fewer transfers (Thomas, 1980). Finally, Kagan (1984) states that although there is not much empirical data regarding the effects of parental involvement on the community, there is potential that the schools can impact the community as a whole (Seeley, 1984). One example that does exist is the Head Start program. It has been

shown that communities where there is active parental participation in the program, the program was more able to impact local institutions (National Survey, 1970).

In her review of the literature, Sattes (1989) states that studies have revealed achievement gains can be made even when parents function merely in a supportive role by encouraging learning. Studies have also shown improvement in achievement when parents are simply informed about their child's progress. Therefore, Sattes (1989) concludes that parental involvement in several forms (teacher, supporter, and reinforcer of school activities) can have an effect on student achievement. Additionally, she argues that because attendance and achievement are interrelated, parental involvement in the school can be a way to combat poor attendance. As parents become more involved in the school, they begin to feel more responsible for getting their children to school.

### **Effects of Parental Involvement in Special Education**

Several researchers have discussed the effects of parental involvement in special education. MacMillan and Turnbull (1983) conceptualize the effects of parental involvement in the IEP process with regard to both the parents and the child according to ways in which such involvement can be beneficial and/or detrimental to both parties. Namely, parents can benefit from involvement when they enjoy the experience, when they gain an increased understanding of the educational program, by learning techniques that enable them to work more effectively with their child, when their self-esteem is increased because of being able to contribute meaningfully, gaining emotional support, and when they feel a sense of belonging. Detrimental effects of parent involvement for parents can include things such as frustration, time away from other children or work, decreased leisure time, physical exhaustion, or emotional dependence on the program staff. For the child, the possible benefits of having parents who are involved include

more rapid developmental gains, better relationships with their parents, an improved instructional and/or social climate at school, and pride of having a parent who is involved with their education. Possible detrimental effects for the child are said to occur when the parent becomes overly involved to the point of overprotection or resents the time and effort that they spend on behalf of the child.

Shevin (1983) also offers possible positive effects of informed parental participation. First, informed participation allows the parent to be in a position to provide continuity to the child's program. Secondly, it gives the parent access to information regarding resources and alternatives for their child. Next, informed participation serves to guarantee that the goals selected by the IEP team are realistic and feasible, in addition to being appropriate. Finally, this type of parental involvement works to ensure that there is one person on the IEP team that is working as the child's advocate. This is especially so because parents are free from any conflicting responsibilities that professionals might face.

Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) state that collaboration between parents and professionals can benefit students with disabilities by providing multiple perspectives and resources to improve educational outcomes. Additionally, they argue that collaboration can benefit the collaborators themselves. This occurs when collaborators make resources, such as motivation and knowledge, available to one another. Thus, collaboration can increase their own resources as a result of the personal support and the sharing of resources that may occur in a collaborative enterprise.

### **The Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Disability Severity on Parental Participation**

Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) define socioeconomic status (SES) as a family's income, level of the members' education, and the social status associated with their occupations. It has

been shown that disability and SES interact with each other to a large degree (Turnbull & Turnbull). Two-thirds of high school students with disabilities live in households with an annual income of less than \$25,000, as compared to 55% of students in general education. Furthermore, only 23% of students in special education live in families where the head of the household has completed some college coursework. In general education that number is 35% (Turnbull & Turnbull). The relationship between SES and disability potentially could be significant with respect to parental participation in their child's education. Winters (1993) states that, "distinct differences can be identified between the participation that occurs in suburban schools, where the population is predominantly white and/or upper or middle class, and that which takes place in inner-city schools located in economically marginal areas, inhabited by African Americans and ethnic minorities" (p. 25). For example, more educated mothers were found to be less satisfied with the results of IEP meetings than other parents of disabled children (Witt, Miller, McIntyre, & Smith, 1984). However, Lynch and Stein (1982) found that regardless of SES, parents reported similar attitudes about their child's special education program and perceptions of their involvement in it. Even though there is known evidence that there is a relationship between SES and parental participation in schools, there is an absence of empirical data specifically related to SES and parental participation in IEP meetings.

In addition, it has been suggested that the nature and severity of a child's disability influences the family's response (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). This is because different exceptionalities bring different challenges for families. However, to date, there is no empirical evidence that the type of disability alone can predict how families will react. Coupled with the disability of the child is the issue of parental intellectual functioning. Turnbull and Turnbull state that children of parents with mental retardation typically have lower IQs than would

normally be expected, with 40% of these children having IQs below 70. This potentially poses unique circumstances for school-parent relationships. The effects of the type or severity of the child's disability and the presence of a maternal/paternal disability on the level of parental participation in the IEP process have yet to be empirically validated.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite the legislation requiring parent participation in the IEP process and the known, as well as suggested, benefits of parental participation on student success, studies have shown that parents are not as involved in the development of the IEP as is intended by both the spirit and letter of the law (Knoff, 1983; Yoshida, Fenton, Maxwell, & Kaufman, 1978).

Knoff (1983) found significant differences between the intended influence of IEP team members and their actual contributions, as based on the perceptions of education professionals. Twenty school psychology trainees, 20 special education teacher trainees, 20 school psychology practitioners, and 20 special education practitioners in New York were surveyed. Medical professionals, parent advocates, parents of the child receiving services, and general education teachers were all rated as "less influential in actuality than they should have been given the intent of P.L. 94-142" (Knoff).

Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell (1978) discovered that planning team members viewed only a few activities of the IEP team planning meeting as appropriate for parent participation. This study utilized a questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate in which of 24 activities they thought parents should participate. Only two of the 24 activities were selected by more than half of the respondents: gathering information (57.4%) and presenting information relevant to the case (65.7%). Items such as reviewing educational progress (41.1%)

and reviewing the appropriateness of the educational program (36.7%) were selected by a minority of the professionals surveyed.

It has also been suggested that the parents' SES has a direct relationship to their level of participation in their child's education and their satisfaction with IEP meetings (Winters, 1993; Witt, Miller, McIntyre, & Smith, 1984). Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) state that a family's response to a child's disability is related to the type and severity of the disability, but that no empirical evidence exists to correlate the child's disability with a specific family reaction. Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) argue that the impact of school culture and socioeconomic status on the IEP process needs to be examined further. Additionally, the authors recommend that studies be undertaken to determine whether the perceptions of IEP meetings vary by the disability category of the child under review. In spite of these recommendations, no additional data exist to support that these variables are related to parental participation in the IEP process.

Given that parental participation in their child's education is positively related to student success and is mandated by IDEA, the legislation that governs the implementation of special education services, and that parents routinely choose not to participate in these meetings, this study seeks to extend the literature by implementing an intervention aimed at fostering the participation of parents in IEP meetings and comparing its results to those obtained using one school district's standard procedures for IEP meetings. In addition, it seeks to determine the effects of SES and disability on parent participation in IEP meetings.

One group of parents was exposed to a mini-conference with the special education teacher prior to the IEP meeting. During this meeting, parents were informed about their child's present levels of functioning and ideas for new goals and objectives were discussed. In an effort to improve participation at the meeting, parents practiced asking questions about topics that



would be discussed at the meeting. A control group of parents was exposed to routine procedures involving no such conference. The effectiveness of the teacher mini-conference compared to no mini-conference was determined. Differences on dependent measures according to disability as well as SES were determined. Dependent measures included a researcher's coding form designed to allow the investigator to gather information in the IEP meetings and questionnaires completed by both parents and professionals at the conclusion of the IEP meeting. Specifically, the researcher's coding form was developed in order to provide a way to numerically document the amount of parental input. A tally mark was made each time parents responded to a question, made an unprompted comment, or asked an unsolicited question. The questionnaires were intended to solicit parent, teacher, and administrator perceptions of the parental comfort and participation in the IEP process. For the parents who received the mini-conference, questionnaires were also used to try to determine whether parents, teachers, and administrators felt that the mini-conference was helpful in preparing the parents for the IEP meeting.

### **Research Questions**

This study was designed to answer the following questions.

- 1) Does a mini-conference with the special education teacher before the IEP meeting, in which the parent or parents discuss their child's present levels of performance, possible goals and objectives for the new IEP, potential educational placements, and are given the opportunity to practice asking questions related to their child's progress and educational program, result in differences in the perceptions of parent participation in the IEP process, as reported by parents, teachers, and administrators, compared to parent behavior in IEP meetings in which no conference has taken place before the meeting?

2) Does an objective measure of parent participation, i.e., number of unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting, differ between groups of parents who have participated in a mini-conference versus those who have not?

3) Does parent participation in the IEP process, as measured by number of unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting, vary as a function of SES, as determined by free or reduced lunch status and parent education level, independent of the effects of the mini-conference?

4) Is the student's disability severity, as indicated by the number of minutes of special education service the student receives per day, related to parental participation in the meeting, as measured by unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting? Are there differences in parental participation between IDEA disability categories?

5) What are participants' perceptions of and satisfaction with the mini-conference?

The following section will review relevant literature pertaining to parental participation in the IEP process, the perceptions of parents and professionals regarding the IEP process, and interventions that have been implemented in order to increase parental participation. Following the literature review, the method section will detail the procedures for the study. Specifically, this section will explain how a mini-conference in advance of the IEP meeting was implemented. The remaining sections will report the results of the investigation, discuss their relevance to special education and, in particular, the IEP process, and discuss implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly known as P.L. 94-142, establishes the right of children with disabilities to a free, appropriate education (FAPE) governed by an individual education plan (IEP) devised by a multidisciplinary IEP team (IDEA, 2004). The IEP is intended to function as an educational roadmap for the child. In other words, the IEP should identify where the child is currently performing, the skills and knowledge that the IEP team intends for the child to gain over the course of the next year, the services to be provided to help the child meet those goals, and statements indicating how the team will know when the specified goals are met (Heward, 2003). In accordance with the mandates of IDEA, it is the IEP meeting that provides an opportunity for parents, professionals, and other participants with specialized knowledge of the child to contribute their knowledge and participate in the planning and placement decisions involved in formulating an IEP. The contributions of all participants to decisions about the child's program and placement have great bearing on the child's progress in school (Gilliam, 1979).

#### **Importance of Parental Involvement**

The importance of parent involvement has been emphasized in every reauthorization of IDEA (Huefner, 2000; Yell, 1998), and several authors have advocated for an increase in the contributions of parents to the development of their child's IEPs. MacMillan and Turnbull (1983) state that parents can benefit from involvement when they enjoy the experience, when they gain an increased understanding of the educational program, by learning techniques that enable them to work more effectively with their child, when their self-esteem is increased because of being able to contribute meaningfully, gaining emotional support, and when they feel

a sense of belonging. For the child, the possible benefits of having parents who are involved include more rapid developmental gains, better relationships with their parents, an improved instructional and/or social climate at school, and pride of having a parent who is involved with their education.

Shevin (1983) also offers possible positive effects of informed parental participation. First, informed participation allows the parent to be in a position to provide continuity to the child's program. Informed parental participation also gives the parent access to information regarding resources/alternatives for their child and serves to guarantee that the goals selected by the IEP team are realistic and feasible. Finally, this type of parental involvement works to ensure that there is at least one person on the IEP team who is working as the child's advocate. This is especially so because parents are free from any conflicting responsibilities that professionals might face regarding allegiance to the child versus allegiance to their employer.

Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) state that collaboration between parents and professionals can benefit students with disabilities by providing multiple perspectives and resources to improve educational outcomes. Collaboration can also benefit the collaborators themselves when they make resources, such as motivation and knowledge, available to one another. Thus, collaboration can increase resources on the part of the collaborators as a result of support and the sharing of resources that may occur in a collaborative effort.

Christenson and Conoley (1992) state that student achievement is correlated with parent involvement. Students have been found to have better grades, test scores, and long term achievement the more their parents were involved with their schooling. Parent involvement has also been found to affect student behavior and attitudes. Specifically, student attendance, attitudes about school, maturation, self-concept, and behavior improve when parents are

involved. Additionally, Christenson and Conoley argue that literature reviews on parental involvement have produced evidence that parents, teachers, and the community reap positive outcomes, such as more successful educational programs and more effective schools, when parents are involved.

Despite the mandated participation of parents on IEP teams and the knowledge of numerous advantages resulting from parental involvement in the IEP meeting, there is evidence that educators have not always developed, or attempted to develop, an equal partnership with parents.

### **Perceptions of Parents**

Perceptions of parents with respect to their involvement in IEP development and decision-making have been investigated and reported in a variety of descriptive studies. These studies attempted to provide a better understanding of the difficulties and realities of parental involvement. Within this literature, five articles reported parent surveys. Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky (1988) investigated parent involvement in the IEP meeting ten years after the passage of P.L. 94-142 to determine if parents had assumed an active role in IEP development and to solicit parent perceptions of the IEP process. To answer their research questions, the authors observed the initial placement IEP meetings of 26 elementary children suspected of having learning disabilities in six schools from the same school district in a large southwestern state. The authors then interviewed the parents immediately following the IEP meeting and asked them about their perceptions of the proceedings. Additionally, the interviewers attempted to elicit parental knowledge of the decisions that were made. The results showed that parents continue to assume passive roles in the initial placement IEP meeting. This was evidenced by the fact that parents asked few questions during the meetings, with the number of parent questions ranging

from zero to 15 and the average number of questions asked being 4.5. In general, parents expressed satisfaction with the IEP meeting and the school's efforts, but responses that parents gave in the interviews indicated that communication could be improved. Specifically, only 12 of the parents indicated in the interview that they did not agree with the school, while 31 parents said they were glad the school wanted to help and were appreciative of that help. However, 23% of the parents could not explain the term 'learning disabilities' when asked. Additionally, when parents were asked how many minutes per day their child would be receiving instruction from a special education teacher, only 68% reported the amount of time agreed upon in the IEP meeting. Sixteen percent reported that they did not know and another 16% reported a time not in agreement with the amount of time established by the IEP committee.

Another study by Lusthaus, Lusthaus, and Gibbs (1981) also attempted to gain a better understanding of parent involvement in the special education process. Specifically, this study was aimed at determining parents' positions on the roles that they play and the roles that they would like to play in the decision process. To gather this information, the authors surveyed 104 parents of children in special education classes at eight different elementary schools in a middle class, suburban school district. Parents were asked to rate their level of involvement in nine of the decisions made by their children's IEP teams. They rated their involvement using the following categories: no involvement, giving and receiving information, or having control over the decisions. Although Lusthaus et al. did not report specific data, they did indicate that parents most often rate themselves as giving and receiving information. Interestingly, 50% of parents said that they wished to continue in an informational role regarding discipline, evaluation, class placement, instructional grouping, special resources, and transportation. However, parents expressed a desire to move from an informational role to having more control over decisions

involving the kinds of records kept on their child, medical services, and transferring their child to another school.

Witt, Miller, McIntyre, and Smith (1984) conducted a study related to parental involvement, focusing on the variables that contribute to parental satisfaction of interdisciplinary staffings, or IEP meetings. In this study, 243 parents of children with emotional disorders, learning disabilities, hearing impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, speech impairments, and visual impairments were surveyed. Data were collected in Colorado, with about one-third of the parents being surveyed at workshops held by the Colorado Department of Education and the remaining two-thirds being surveyed at their child's annual IEP meeting. The questionnaire that parents were asked to complete attempted to ascertain demographic information, the child's disability, the number of staffings that the parents had attended, the education level and occupation level of both parents, and whether they had been involved in any due process hearings. In addition, the questionnaire had 23 items relating to parental satisfaction with staffings. Parents responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The mean level of parental satisfaction was 4.57 on the five-point scale. Notably, the educational level of the mother had an impact on the satisfaction level of parents, with the more highly educated mothers being less satisfied with staffings. In addition, the authors found that six factors accounted for 78% of the variance in parental satisfaction: meeting length (19%), parental blame (blaming the parent(s) for their child's difficulties in school) (18%), multidisciplinary input (16%), parent participation (7%), number of people in attendance (3%), and preparation for the meeting (1%).

Another paper related to parent perceptions, by Lynch and Stein (1982), reported on two studies, an initial study and a follow-up study. In these two descriptive studies, the authors

attempted to examine awareness, attitudes, and participation among parents of special education students. The first study dealt with 106 families of children in special education, all with a low socioeconomic status (SES). The second study dealt with 328 families of children in special education of all SES levels. Data collection was done by interviewers who went into the parents' homes and gathered responses to a 64-item questionnaire. The results indicated that about 70% of the parents surveyed viewed themselves as active participants of their child's IEP team. However, only 47% of those parents reported making suggestions in the IEP meeting. It is interesting to note that regardless of SES, parents reported similar attitudes about their child's special education program and perceptions of their involvement in it. Additionally, only a slight majority of parents felt that the school had identified their child's needs as quickly as possible. In response to these findings, the authors suggested that future research should be conducted to determine why nearly one third of parents view themselves as not involved.

Finally, the last paper specifically focused on soliciting parent perceptions described a study by Polifka (1981). The goal of this study was to determine parent perceptions of school compliance with P.L. 94-142 and ascertain levels of parental satisfaction with the IEP process. The participants of this study were parents of children receiving special education services in northwest Iowa. The setting is described as a rural area, with a predominately upper-middle class SES. The authors collected data by means of a questionnaire that parents completed. One fourth of parents reported that they were not asked to help prepare their child's IEP. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between parental satisfaction and whether they were asked to help prepare their child's IEP, if they felt their child had been placed in the appropriate setting, whether they were informed of the right to appeal, and if they were invited to meetings to review their child's IEP. The authors concluded that parents should be more



involved in educational programming for their children. To accomplish this, the authors argued that parents must have more input in the formulation of the IEP and that providing parents with guidelines pertinent to the scope and construction of general IEP goals prior to the IEP meeting could be a plausible solution to the problem of limited parental participation in IEP development.

### **Perceptions of Professionals**

Along with the articles targeting parental perceptions, perceptions of education professionals regarding parental involvement have also been investigated. Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell (1978), gathered data pertaining to the attitudes of planning team members regarding the activities that parents should participate in during the IEP team planning meeting. In this study, 1,372 planning team members, including administrators, support staff, and instructional staff in Connecticut were mailed a questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate in which of 24 activities they thought parents should participate. Only two of the 24 activities were selected by more than half of the respondents: gathering information (57.4%) and presenting information relevant to the case (65.7%). Items such as reviewing educational progress (41.1%) and reviewing the appropriateness of the educational program (36.7%) were selected by a minority of the professionals surveyed.

Gerber, Banbury, Miller, and Griffin (1986) conducted a study geared toward the perceptions of educational professionals. In this particular study, the authors sought to expose teachers' attitudes about the participation level of parents in IEP meetings and to determine how teachers view IEP proceedings. To do so, a total of 145 special education teachers from Louisiana, Alabama, West Virginia, Texas, Illinois, and Florida were surveyed using a 36-item questionnaire in which they had to respond on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items from the survey included statements such as, "Parents make a significant

contribution to the IEP process,” “Parents should be given the option to waive their right of attendance at IEP meetings,” and “IEPs written prior to the IEP conference are detrimental to parent participation.” Although P.L. 94-142 requires parental participation in the IEP process, only slightly greater than 50% of teachers felt that parental participation in IEP formulation had merit and 71% of teachers responded that parents should be given the option to waive the requirement of parental participation. Furthermore, contrary to the legislative mandate that student IEPs be developed by the IEP team, 68.3% of special education teachers did not view a pre-written IEP as affecting parent participation. It was not clear if this statement referred to pre-written IEPs that were made available to parents for their review prior to the IEP meeting or if teachers were condoning the practice of writing IEPs before the IEP meeting without the benefit of the entire IEP team’s input. Only 51% of teachers viewed the IEP meeting as an opportunity for parent involvement, while 44.3% viewed it as a formality. Lastly, 42.8% of teachers did not perceive themselves as intimidating to parents and 48.6% did not view the IEP process as intimidating. In conclusion, the authors suggested that an investigation comparing teachers’ and parents’ views regarding parental involvement could present enlightening information.

Knoff (1983) investigated the perceptions of professionals about IEP team members’ influence in special education placement decisions and gathered member preferences for an IEP meeting chairperson. Twenty school psychology trainees, 20 special education teacher trainees, 20 school psychology practitioners, and 20 special education practitioners in New York were surveyed. Data analysis revealed significant differences between the intended influence of IEP team members and their actual contributions. Specifically, medical professionals, parent advocates, parents of the child receiving services, and general education teachers were all rated as “less influential in actuality than they should have been given the intent of P.L. 94-142”

(Knoff). As a result of these findings, the authors recommended that future research should investigate the interactions of IEP teams, and that an empirically based system of team processing should be developed so that individual teams can self-monitor the influence of individual members, making teams responsible for their own productivity.

Hughes and Ruhl (1987) attempted to determine the frequency of parent-teacher contacts and the forms that these contacts take. A survey was mailed to special education teachers using the membership roster of the Council for Exceptional Children. Five hundred four special education teachers completed the survey. Eighty-six percent of teachers responded that they contacted parents prior to the IEP meeting. However, 80% use this contact primarily to schedule the meeting and 71% to explain the purpose and procedures of the IEP process. Only 29% of teachers used the pre-meeting contact to explain test results and only 28% reported taking the opportunity to explain parent rights. It is important to note when analyzing the responses that this population of teachers could be construed as more active because of their membership with the major professional organization in their field. This could imply that these responses might be more positive than what you would find with all special education teachers in general.

### **Perceptions of All IEP Team Members**

In addition to the studies that focused solely on the perspectives of teachers or parents, three studies dealt with the perceptions of all IEP team members. Nadler and Shore (1980), interviewed 175 parents, teachers, students, administrators, and support personnel. Although the authors did not quantitatively report their findings, they indicated that many of the IEP team members viewed the requirement of parental participation as placing an undue burden on the IEP process. What is more, parents were seen as poorly equipped to contribute to the development of the IEP and it was believed that their inclusion inhibits the process. Thus, the authors argued

that ways need to be found to make parents better able and more willing to participate in the IEP process. The authors conceded that involving parents may require effort, but contest that, in the long run, the value of parental participation outweighs the burden of measures taken to obtain it.

Gilliam and Coleman (1981) set out to determine the status rankings of all IEP participants and the actual influence of each. The study included 130 participants at 27 IEP meetings from three school districts in southeastern Michigan. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire before and after each IEP meeting. On the first survey, participants responded to questions pertaining to their perceived status of IEP participants. In the follow up survey, participants were asked about the actual contributions of all IEP team members. To obtain this information, participants were asked to rate their contributions to five different IEP functions. These functions included diagnosis, planning, placement, implementation, and due process. Each of these five variables was rated separately on a Likert-type scale. Interestingly, the results showed that the correlation between preconceived importance of members and their actual influence was not significant. Specifically, parents, regular education teachers, social workers, and principals were ranked much higher in importance than in their actual influence over the IEP proceedings.

Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) conducted a three-year study of middle, junior high, and high school IEP meetings in order to investigate the perceptions of IEP team members. One thousand six hundred thirty-eight parents of students with disabilities were included in the study and data were gathered at 393 middle, junior high, and high school IEP meetings over a three-year time period. At the conclusion of each IEP meeting, participants were given a ten item questionnaire. Survey items included statements such as, "I knew the reasons for the meeting," "I knew what I needed to do in the meeting," "I felt comfortable saying what I thought," "I

helped make the decisions,” and “I understood what was said.” Participants were asked to respond to all questionnaire items on a 4-point scale, ranging from *not at all* to *a lot*. Results demonstrated that students and, to a lesser extent, regular education teachers had the worst perceptions of the IEP meeting. The authors recommended that studies be facilitated to determine whether the perceptions of IEP meetings vary by the disability category of the child under review. The authors also recommended that direct observation methods be used to record IEP meeting behaviors and that the findings be compared to survey results. Additionally, the authors hold that the impact of school culture and socioeconomic status on the IEP process needs to be examined.

### **Observations of IEP Meetings**

Direct observations of IEP meetings have also been used to gather data regarding participation in the IEP process. Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980) utilized a coder-observer technique to record the frequency of parent involvement in the IEP meeting and the topics discussed in schools in North Carolina. The coder-observer attended the IEP meetings of 14 children ranging from grades three to six and sampled the topic, speaker, and recipient at two minute intervals. The coder-observer then administered an eight-item survey to all participants at the end of the IEP meeting. The results of the observations produced no one topic common to all IEP meetings, however evaluation and curriculum were the most frequent topics of discussion with citations in 12 and 13 of the 14 conferences, respectively. No significant differences were found between participants regarding satisfactions with the IEP conference. In response to their findings, the authors assert that effective parental involvement in IEP development and implementation needs to be more clearly defined.

The second study that directly observed the dynamics of IEP meetings was also completed in North Carolina. Vacc, Yallescorsa, Parker, Bonner, Lester, Richardson, and Yates (1985) sought to determine how long IEP conferences last, who attends IEP conferences, the content of discussions in IEP conferences, and the degree of interaction between participants in IEP conferences. Parents were mailed a letter informing them about the study and asking them to participate. Parents of 47 students with social, behavioral, and learning problems agreed and were included in the study. An observation coding form was developed in order to consistently record the events of all IEP meetings. It was found that IEP meetings ranged in length from 12 to 49 minutes. The mean number of participants was three. Only six of the 47 meetings were in compliance for appropriate member composition, as determined by IDEA. Approximately one third of parental contributions were passive (i.e. nodding their head as opposed to talking, which would be considered active), while only three percent of special educator comments were passive. Twenty-three percent of the remarks made by parents centered on academic issues and social functioning.

### **Non-data-based Literature**

Much literature has been published in response to the empirical studies and non-data-based arguments that have been made suggesting methods for increasing parental participation. However, it is comprised of the authors' judgments about what reflects best practice, as opposed to empirically supported parent training programs. Although these articles did not include new empirical findings, in some instances, they were based on prior empirical findings. This literature has been categorized according to the barriers to parental involvement, recommendations for professional practice, strategies for conferencing with parents of

exceptional children, empirical literature on parent training, and one parent training model used specifically for parents of students receiving special education services.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement.** Dabkowski (2004) discussed team member attitudes and practices that potentially could affect the active participation of parents in the decision-making process. It is asserted that each individual IEP team has its own culture, a culture that dictates the dynamics of the IEP meeting. The author states that teams demonstrate their culture in the following ways: the procedures by which members share information, who speaks at the meeting, how influential members are in making decisions, the specific recommendations that various members make during the meeting, and the voiced beliefs regarding instructional strategies and their effectiveness. The claim made is that team cultures can determine whether parents are encouraged to participate throughout the meeting or merely asked to participate at the end.

Individual IEP team cultures can produce climates that are not conducive to soliciting parent participation or making the best decisions for the child under review. Lytle and Bordin (2001) review some of the challenges faced by IEP teams. They assert that parents can become frustrated by a perceived inequality of team members, being unfamiliar with school and/or legal procedures, and/or not understanding special education terminology or jargon. This, in turn, can cause professionals to read parental nonparticipation as apathy or a lack of appreciation. While teachers and other professionals see each other every day, and as a result, develop a form of intimacy, parents do not have this luxury, which may result in parents feeling left out when they attend IEP meetings, decreasing the likelihood that they can have meaningful input into the development of their child's IEP.

Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) give possible barriers to parents becoming educational decision makers. The authors state that sometimes parents do not have the motivation, such as energy or hope, to become decision makers. In other instances, parents may have the needed motivation but lack the required knowledge and skills, such as information and problem solving skills. Furthermore, even when parents possess both motivation and knowledge, they face an educational context that prohibits them from becoming equal partners.

Fiedler (2000) argues that a history of mistrust, poor communication, and animosity between professionals and families of children with disabilities can be traced to certain attitudes and expectations held by some professionals. These attitudes have led to “a tradition of separation between home and school” in which educators have relegated parents to insubstantial roles (Christenson & Conoley, 1992). The belief by some professionals that they know what is best for the child, and the parents should gratefully and unquestioningly follow the advice of the expert is the first of the detrimental attitudes given. This belief can be manifested in several different ways, none of which are conducive to the parent-professional relationship. The professional can choose not to indicate that a decision exists or can present no alternatives to their preferred choice. Another tactic that some professionals use is to link one decision with another. The author gives an example of this type of situation stating that parents are often told that their child qualifies for a certain program, but that the program is only available at a specific school. By pairing the decisions, the professional is limiting parental decision-making by not allowing each decision to be made independently.

The second counterproductive attitude listed is that of a judgmental and non-empathetic professional. Professionals with these types of attitudes possess stereotypical attitudes towards certain families whose lifestyles and actions conflict with their own. Another harmful attitude



that professionals can harbor is that parents who are not actively involved in their child's education do not love or care about their child. This belief certainly has no merit, and the author states that expecting parents to be more involved than they have the means and resources to effectively be can be detrimental to the child.

In addition to professionals developing negative attitudes towards parents who are not involved, Fiedler asserts that some professionals actually have negative feelings towards parents that attempt to assert their child's educational rights. Unfortunately, these parents can become viewed as over-demanding and hysterical in the eyes of professionals. Fiedler notes that this reaction to parents who are attempting to serve as parent advocates for their children can stem from professionals feeling intimidated or angered.

Fiedler, in accordance with other literature, points out that some professionals perpetuate the hurtful practice of blaming the child's parents for the disability (Christenson & Conoley, 1992). The author states that the unfortunate consequence of parental blaming is unnecessary guilt and stress on an already difficult situation for families. Another characteristic professionals can take on is the tendency to emphasize the child's weaknesses and disability instead of focusing on his/her strengths when communicating with parents. The final detrimental attitude listed deals with professionals who take a minimalist approach to the education of children with disabilities. Professionals with this attitude ask only "What do I have to do?" versus "What can be done to appropriately serve the child and family?" Thus, professionals exhibiting this type of attitude will always take the path of least resistance and cannot effectively serve as an advocate for the child and family.

Two additional barriers to parental involvement found in the literature are changing demographic conditions and persistent structures (Christenson & Conoley, 1992). Changes in

demographic conditions include factors such as greater numbers of working mothers, rising poverty, an increase in the number of single-parent families, and large numbers of immigrants who do not speak fluent English entering the United States. In the 1990's, 70% of the mothers of school-aged children were in the workforce, as compared to only 30% in 1960. Christenson & Conoley state that almost one in four children now live below the poverty line and 25% of children come from single-parent homes. Comparatively, in 1970, the number of single-parents homes was half of this figure. The term 'persistent structures' refers to schools that cling to traditional methods for interacting with outsiders despite knowledge of a changing society. The authors state that often it is a huge hurdle for schools to realize that their traditional structure may not be meeting current needs.

**Recommendations for Professional Practice.** Dabkowski (2004) also concedes that IEP meetings can be stressful for parents and that professionals must take actions to alleviate parental stress. It is argued that if parents are supported in their initial attempts to be involved in the IEP process, then they will continue to be involved later in their child's educational career. This is especially important given that achievement gains are greater and have more lasting effects when begun at an early age (Christenson & Conoley, 1992).

Thus, school professionals must take measures to help parents become part of the IEP team. It is suggested that through monitoring the meeting environment, being open to different cultural perspectives, and by practicing self-reflection techniques educators can make IEP meetings more parent friendly. Furthermore, it is recommended that professionals spend more time getting to know parents because the more time parents and teachers spend together, the more comfortable they will become with one another. Increased familiarity between teachers and parents should result in a more productive IEP meeting, one in which all parties are able to

contribute fully in making the best decisions for the child. In addition, per the suggestion of Lytle and Bordin (2001), in order to best meet the child's needs, each person on the IEP team must play a specific, clearly defined role.

Margolis, Brennigan, and Keating (1981) offer their perspectives on the factors that contribute to establishing the IEP team intended by P.L. 94-142. One of their main points is that two-way communication is required in the IEP process. Regarding the practice of open, two-way communication, it is possible that some teachers, as exhibited later in several of the descriptive studies, do not feel parent participation is helpful in the IEP process (Gerber, Banbury, Miller, & Griffin, 1986; Nadler & Shore, 1980; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). The authors take issue with this belief, arguing that encouraging the participation of parents with differing views may take more time, but serves the purpose of education far more effectively by allowing people to feel that they have made important contributions to the outcome of the meeting. Margolis et al. go on to say that allowing people to feel that they have made a contribution increases the commitment of all involved individuals to the group decisions. "Encourag[ing] maximally effective two-way communication requires those with designated or perceived power to lay their ideas open to evaluation and demonstrate that they seek the best solutions rather than the implementation of their ideas" (Margolis et al.).

Shevin (1983) targets professionals aiming to actively involve parents in the decision making process by introducing the concept of informed participation. Informed participation exists when parents are involved in the identification of educational priorities, in strategy development for effective goal implementation, and in the ongoing review and modification of those goals. Although informed participation requires the highest level of ongoing commitment on the part of the parents, the authors contest that a school that is committed to this type of

parental involvement can establish meaningful relationships with all parents, even parents with limited resources.

**Conferencing With Parents of Exceptional Children.** Simpson (1982) discusses techniques for conferencing with parents of exceptional children. The author provides ways that educators can prepare for conferences. It is stated that pre-conference planning should involve reviewing the child's previous records, including the IEP, making an outline of items to be discussed, reviewing standardized test scores that may need to be explained to parents, and selecting work samples to illustrate student competencies. Additionally, the teacher should plan for a professional and confidential location in which to hold the conference, prepare the parents to participate, and put together a folder of work samples the parent can take with them after the conference.

As noted above, Simpson asserts that parents need to be given some guidance in how to fully participate in the conference. It is suggested that educators may want to provide parents with a list of procedures to help them prepare for the conference in advance. This list should consist of items such as clearing schedules so that they can arrive on time, arranging for a sitter for other children, staying within the time frame allotted for the conference, discussing conference items with the other parent or child, reviewing any school documents (such as an IEP), refraining from gossip during the conference, bringing a written list of questions and items for discussion, and making a list of information that should be shared. Parents are also advised to arrive ready to work for the best interest of their child, take notes during the conference, and not be afraid to ask questions if an unfamiliar term or phrase is used.

In addition to guidance in preparing for conferences, Simpson enumerates steps that educators should take during conferences to build a rapport with parents and foster their

participation. First, a warm greeting or a positive lead on the part of the educator can go a long way towards building a positive parent-professional relationship. The author instructs teachers to identify the purpose of the meeting and the roles of all meeting participants at the beginning of the conference. The educator should then encourage the parents to participate by asking questions or commenting on the observations of other participants. When transitioning to the major items of discussion for the conference, the educator should always discuss areas of growth or progress before discussing problem areas. Simpson states that in order for positive comments to have the most impact, educators should be able to specifically document the gains of the child. This can be accomplished by showing parents the work samples gathered in preparation for the conference. Only after parents have been informed regarding their child's strengths, should they receive information about their child's weaknesses. Comments that are aimed at apprising parents of areas in which their child needs to improve should be concrete and supported with empirical data. For example, instead of telling a parent that their child is hyperactive, the educator should be able to give specific examples, such as the number of times their child is out of his/her seat without permission in a given time period. In addition to these guidelines for conferencing, educators should remember to provide parents with an opportunity to share concerns about their child or his or her program, not be too hasty in diverting discussion away from topics that parents feel are worthy, and praise parents for actions they have taken that have contributed to student improvement. The conference should be concluded with a brief overview of the items discussed. The review should highlight the points of progress and the interventions that will be employed to help the child progress in other areas. This should include an identification of individual responsibilities, procedures for evaluating success, and the manner and dates for reviewing progress. Just as the conference was begun, it should be concluded on a

positive note. The conclusion of the conference should involve thanking the parents for their participation, inviting the parents to contact educators if a problem or question arises, and, if necessary, scheduling a follow-up conference.

**Empirical Literature on Parent Training.** The empirical literature that focuses on changing parent behavior in education has focused on a variety of approaches to improving participation. Edge, Strenecky, McLoughlin, and Edge (1984) suggest that few models for involving community members in education actually exist. The models that have been developed have been federally funded for the most part, and usually fall into one of three categories. These categories are parent training, parent education, and parent involvement.

Parent training is focused on training parents to perform a certain set of skills. Principles from applied behavior analysis and learning theory are used as the basis for the model. Three methods for training parents are used within this approach. These include a self-instructional package, individual training, and small group instruction. The fact that parent training occurs on an individual or small group level is considered to be both a strength and a weakness of the model because the parents receive individualized attention and form bonds with the group, but few parents can be served in the course of a year. Individual and group trainings are usually very organized and carried out by a trained professional. Training sessions include an introduction, objectives, training procedures, activities, expected parent responses, and evaluation materials. Although this model (as the authors describe it) is used for changing the behavior of the child, the authors state that the model is applicable to the general community and parent involvement. However, Edge et al. (1984) recommended that this model be used with a select group under specified conditions.

The parent education model addresses the areas of parent participation, volunteering, advisory groups, and general education programs. This model is aimed at getting parents and community members involved in the educational process. Parent education often involves schools conducting special activities for the purpose of educating parents about the educational process. Such programs are designed to target a wide range of participants. Individual needs of parents are not addressed. Time and proximity to the school are two significant limitations to the effectiveness of this model. If parents do not live in close proximity to the school, only a small number of parents will participate in the program.

The third model for increasing parent and community involvement in the educational system is the parent involvement model. The parent involvement model is targeted at involving parents in the total education of their children. Under this model, the parent and educator work in conjunction for the benefit of the child. In the instance that a student is having difficulty in some content area at school, the teacher and the parent meet and discuss ways that the parents can reinforce instruction at home. This model is based on the notion that learning is ongoing and that every opportunity for learning needs to be seized. Parents are built into every aspect of the school. The parent involvement model incorporates aspects of both the parent training and parent education models and thus is more flexible and has the potential to involve a greater number of parents. This model does require training teachers and administrators and can result in uncoordinated activities. It is very important that parental involvement be monitored to guarantee productive interactions.

Edge et al. (1984) provide guidelines for developing a parent involvement program. It is stated that there must be clear role expectations. This is because parents may not fully understand the importance of their involvement and that schools appreciate their input. In

addition, parents may not realize that they lack skills for working cooperatively with educators. Thus, schools must clearly communicate to parents that they are expected to be active participants in the decision-making process. Another guideline for developing a parent involvement program is that training programs for teachers and parents will be necessary. This is needed in order to give both parties an opportunity to explore the areas in which their relationship will change. Parental involvement programs must also utilize formal support teams and encourage networking.

Becher (1984) gives characteristics of effective parent training programs. She states that effective programs should utilize a one-to-one teacher-parent ratio. The author argues that this produces better results than a group instructional relationship. Additionally, highly structured, concrete, and prescriptive tasks for parents yield better gains than less structured programs. Long-term consultation of parents has also been found to produce the best results for both parents and children. Lastly, effective parent training programs have specified goals, objectives, and activities and are personalized so that the content is suited to the individual parent.

**The Friends of Special Education Parent Training Model.** Wolf and Stephens (1990) describe a model for parent training that was developed specifically as an attempt to make parents partners in the educational process and IEP meetings instead of merely the recipients of information. This was a five-year program aimed at improving interactions between parents and school personnel and training parents to be “friends” of children with disabilities. The training program was designed to have multiplier effects, meaning parents who completed the training would be prepared to become active in their local schools and serve as a resource to other parents. The principal and superintendent of their local school recommended parents for participation in this training program. Parents were required to attend training sessions one day a



month for six months. Over the five-year period of the program, 200 parents were trained using this model.

Trainings were based on the belief that parents who understand how the school system operates and learn effective communication techniques are more effective in obtaining information and educational services for their children. Also, the training model was developed under the assumption that the likelihood of parents becoming advocates for their child, versus a detractor, would be increased. The topics for the six training sessions included building communication skills, using resources effectively, understanding the role of the parent in the decision-making process, problem solving and taking action, individual and group sensitivity, and preparation for parent contacts. Although the authors are not specific as to the format for materials used in the parent trainings, they did reveal that in order to educate parents regarding their role in the decision-making process, trainings included a video presentation on multidisciplinary staffings, a discussion of a time line for special education services, multicultural resources and services, a discussion of issues related to volunteering in schools, and a tour of the administration and service centers.

In order to collect data on the effectiveness of the program, evaluations for each training session were completed. The areas evaluated included relevance of content, practicality and usefulness of materials, organization, and interest level. In addition, affective areas including the participant's level of satisfaction with the workshop were assessed. Both surveys used a five-point Likert scale, with the programmatic questions seeking responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree and the affective areas structuring responses from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied. Examples of the statements used to determine the effectiveness of the program include, "The content of the workshop was relevant for my needs as a parent," "The

material distributed was practical and useful,” “The presentation was well organized,” and “The presentation was in an interesting manner.” The affective statement used in the evaluation was, “My overall satisfaction with the workshop was: \_\_\_\_.” Scores on the first programmatic statement ranged from 4.41 to 4.8 conducted over the five-year period. The scores on the second statement spanned from 4.29 to 4.78. The results of the third statement fell between 4.29 and 4.71 and scores ranged from 4.31 to 4.71 for programmatic statement number four. Responses to the affective statement ranged between 4.39 and 4.56.

In addition to the evaluations of the training sessions, parents were also given a questionnaire targeted at gaining their perceptions of their ability to help their children. Although the authors do not give specifics regarding how the questionnaire was empirically designed or scored, they do state that parents responded almost unanimously that they held positive feelings about their child’s school experience and their own ability to interact with school personnel. Furthermore, all parents indicated that “they were able to take action that has resulted in improving [their] child’s educational program, “ that they ”spend more time helping [their] child with school work,” “feel [they] understand [their] child’s educational program and teachers better,” and “have become more active in [their] child’s school.” Additionally, responses were extremely positive regarding the statement, “I have been able to help other parents improve their child’s school program.”

Based on their experiences with this five-year program, the authors provide a list of recommendations for conducting parent trainings. First, it is stated that the effort needed to train parents is worthwhile if the goal is truly a home-school partnership. There must be a commitment of staff time and energy to make trainings successful. Programs should be focused on empowering parents and teaching them effective communication skills, so that adversarial

relationships can be avoided. The authors also recommend starting the training program with relatively small numbers in order to refine the program. For this particular program, there was a problem with parent attrition because they could not meet schedule requirements. This may suggest a need to make the program more accessible and keep time commitments to a minimum. It was also evidenced through this program that parents had a need to address their personal concerns regarding the needs of their children before they could address the issues of the training sessions. Through formative and summative evaluation, it was clear that the use of role playing and simulations were very beneficial to the training program because they allowed opportunities for active involvement and provided a venue for using personal parental concerns to illustrate training principles. In addition, it was found that parents exhibited differing levels of sophistication and understanding, and that it was best to tailor training programs accordingly. The authors also recommend keeping written materials to a minimum. Trainings should be designed to be oral and interactive. Lastly, it is important to respond to other training needs voiced by parents and incorporate previously trained parents into the training sessions.

### **Research Attempting to Foster Parent Involvement**

Only one study was found that experimentally investigated the effects of an intervention on parental involvement in the IEP process. Goldstein and Turnbull (1982) researched the effectiveness of sending parents questions prior to the IEP conference in combination with a follow-up phone call and having the school counselor act as a parent advocate in the IEP meeting. Forty-five parents of children with learning disabilities participated in the study, with 15 parents receiving the questions and phone call, 15 getting the parent advocate, and 15 receiving no intervention. Although the authors did not give specific examples of the questions sent to parents, they did say that the questions pertained to the goals parents had for their child,

the student's educational potential, and the development of the IEP. To collect data, a researcher attended all IEP meetings, coding speakers at 30 second intervals according to 13 topics. In addition, parents were given a questionnaire and a phone call after the IEP meeting. The study yielded no significant differences between the control group and parents who had been sent the questions and received the phone call prior to the IEP meeting. Significantly more parent involvement was recorded in the IEP meetings that had a parent advocate in attendance. It is puzzling that all three groups of parents indicated satisfaction with the meeting and the IEP that was developed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although the literature suggests that parent involvement in their child's education leads to improved educational outcomes (MacMillan & Turnbull, 1983; Shevin, 1983; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001), parents tend to remain passive during formal IEP meetings (Goldstein, et al., 1980; Lusthaus, Lusthaus, & Gibbs, 1981; Vacc et al., 1985). Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies implementing interventions in order to facilitate parent involvement. In fact, only one such study has been conducted and it yielded no significant results compared to the control group, as determined by parent responses to questionnaires (Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982). There were, however, methodological limitations to this study and its effects have not been replicated. Namely, parents were the only participants surveyed at the completion of the IEP meetings; therefore, the input of teachers and administrators could not be compared to that of the parents. The present study was designed to investigate the effects of a teacher-parent mini-conference that allows parents an opportunity to gain knowledge, provide input, and receive instruction regarding the unique procedures of an IEP meeting, in order to improve parent participation during IEP meetings. In addition, given the suggestions of several scholars in this literature

(Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001; Winters, 1993; Witt, Miller, McIntyre, & Smith, 1984) that SES and disability may be related to parent participation, these variables were investigated in terms of how they relate to the outcomes of the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### MATERIALS AND METHOD

#### Setting

The study was conducted in an urban school district in central Texas. The school district has a total of 11 schools and serves approximately 7,300 students. Five schools in the district participated in the study. These included two elementary schools, an intermediate school (grades five and six), one middle school (grades seven and eight), and one high school. The schools selected for the study were chosen because they did not routinely use any kind of conferencing with parents prior to IEP meetings and because they were the respective campuses for the volunteering teachers. Teachers and students' families were recruited from the five participating schools.

#### Experimental Design

The study was quasi-experimental and used a 2x2 factorial design. The study was quasi-experimental because random assignment was not possible for SES, but was for the mini-conference or no mini-conference condition. Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the study's design showing how the effects of the conference and SES on parental participation were determined. The items inside the cells of the table represent the dependent variables that were measured in the study.

**Independent Variables.** There were three independent variables. The first independent variable was the mini-conference between the special education teacher and the parent(s). Students/parents were randomly assigned to one of two groups: pre-IEP meeting mini-conference or no mini-conference. Twenty parents of students receiving special education services received a mini-conference prior to the IEP meeting and twenty-one received no

	<b>Conference</b>	<b>Control</b>
High SES	1) Parent Comfort 2) Teacher Perception 3) Administrator Perception	1) Parent Comfort 2) Teacher Perception 3) Administrator Perception
Low SES	1) Parent Comfort 2) Teacher Perception 3) Administrator Perception	1) Parent Comfort 2) Teacher Perception 3) Administrator Perception

**Figure 1**  
**Experimental Design**

conference. Because the use of the mini-conference is not typical and its effects are unknown, withholding the intervention did not deprive control group participants of treatments known to be beneficial, and as a result, presented no ethical concerns.

The second independent variable was the socio-economic status (SES) of the child’s family and was determined by free or reduced lunch status or economic disadvantage, as defined by the state of Texas. The district in which the study took place categorized students as either on free lunch, reduced lunch, economically disadvantaged, or none of the above. The Department of Agriculture established the criteria for free or reduced lunch status for 2005-2006 by multiplying the federal income poverty guidelines for 2005 by 1.30 and 1.85, respectively, and rounding up to the next whole dollar. A family’s eligibility is determined by comparing their annual income to the cutoff, according to the number of people in the household. For calculation purposes, income is defined as all income prior to any deductions such as income tax, Social Security tax, charitable donations, insurance premiums, and bonds. Income includes all monetary compensation for services, net income from nonfarm self-employment, Social Security, dividends or interest on savings, or bonds or income from trusts and estates, net rental income, public assistance or welfare payments, unemployment compensation, government

civilian employment or military retirement, pensions, veterans payments, private pension or annuities, alimony or child support payments, regular contributions from persons not living in the household, net royalties, or other cash income (Federal Register, 2005). To qualify as economically disadvantaged a student must be: a) from a family with an annual income at or below the official federal poverty line, b) eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or other public assistance, c) received a Pell grant or comparable state program of need-based financial assistance, d) eligible for programs assisted under Title II of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), or e) eligible for benefits under the Food Stamp Act of 1977.

Parent education level was also analyzed as a component of SES (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001) based on categories contained in the American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau (United States Department of Commerce, 2005). The original 15 groups used on the parent survey for the study were collapsed into four groups: less than high school education, high school diploma or GED, associates or bachelors degree, and graduate degree.

The last of the independent variables was the child's disability. The level of disability was measured in two ways: 1) the child's qualifying disability or disabilities under IDEA, and 2) the percentage of minutes in the school day that the child was in a special education setting. Given the design of the study, there was no way to determine, *a priori*, what disabilities would be represented in the sample. As a result, these data were collected without their own specific analysis plan. Based on the data that were collected, specifically the fact that most students had more than one disability category identified for which they received services and there was no reliable way to determine which disability required how much of the services the student received, the data presented below by disability category are descriptive in nature. Thus, if a student was classified in a particular category at all, regardless of primary, secondary, or tertiary



eligibility, that student’s data were included in that disability category’s results. Table 1 summarizes the independent variables and the levels for each.

**Table 1**  
Independent Variables and Levels

Independent Variable	Levels
Mini-Conference	2 levels: mini-conference and control.
SES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 2 levels: low or high. Students who were classified as free/reduced lunch status or economically disadvantaged were low SES, students with no such classification were high SES.</li> <li>2) 4 levels: highest degree or level of education completed by the parent: high school, high school diploma/GED, associates or bachelors, and graduate degree.</li> </ol>
Disability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) IDEA Categories.</li> <li>2) Percentage of school day the student receives special education services.</li> </ol>

**Dependent Variables.** There were three dependent variables in the study. The first dependent variable was parent comfort. A parent survey was used to measure parent comfort and satisfaction with the IEP meeting (see Appendix C). Scores from six five-choice Likert items, each attempting to elicit parent comfort with the IEP meeting, were summed. Another question, regarding parental satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting, was also assessed using a five-point Likert scale and was scored separately. Descriptive data were collected regarding parent perception of the mini-conference using two Likert scale items (i.e., “Conferencing with my child’s teacher before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting,” and “I felt more comfortable expressing my opinions and asking question in the mini-conference with my child’s teacher than in the IEP meeting.”) Two additional items appeared on the parent survey for an annual IEP meeting in which the parent received a mini-conference. These items were, “I would be better able to participate in all my child’s IEP

meetings if I was always given a chance to conference with my child's teacher before the meeting," and "How often do you attend your child's IEP meetings?" These items were used as descriptive data as well. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the responses to these additional items.

Teacher perceptions of parent involvement and satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting comprised the second dependent variable and were measured by a teacher survey that was designed to be parallel to the parent survey. This survey also consisted of six Likert items that targeted teacher perceptions of parent comfort. These six items were summed. The seventh item, aimed at teacher satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting, was scored individually. Two additional items, whether teachers felt conferencing with the parent prior to the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting and if teachers felt the mini-conference increased parental participation, were used to collect descriptive data from teachers regarding the use of the mini-conference. Means and standard deviations were gathered from this data.

The third dependent variable was administrator perceptions of parent involvement and satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP process. The same six Likert items that appeared on the teacher survey were present on the administrator survey. Again, the responses to the items were summed. The administrator survey also contained the seventh item pertaining to administrator satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting. This item was scored separately here as well. Descriptive data were collected using the same two additional questions regarding the effectiveness of the mini-conference. The responses to these two items are presented as means and standard deviations. Table 2 summarizes the dependent variables and measures for each.

**Table 2**  
Dependent Variables and Measures

Dependent Variable	Measure
Parent Comfort	<p>Survey; 6 Likert items summed. These items dealt with whether the parent understood the reason for the IEP meeting and school terminology used in the meeting, if parents felt comfortable saying what they thought and talked frequently, and if the parents helped make the decisions/contributed to their child's IEP.</p> <p>Survey; 1 Likert item scored separately. This item targeted parental satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting.</p> <p>Descriptive measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Annual IEP meeting with mini-conference: 2 Likert items analyzed for means and standard deviations. These items were used to determine parental perceptions of the effectiveness of the mini-conference.</li> <li>2) Annual IEP meetings: 2 Likert items analyzed separately for means and standard deviations. These two items were used to determine how often parents attend their child's IEP meetings and if they feel the mini-conference would be useful for all such meetings.</li> </ol>
Teacher Perceptions	<p>Survey; 6 Likert items summed. These items dealt with whether teachers felt the parent understood the reason for the IEP meeting and school terminology used in the meeting, if teachers perceived parents felt comfortable saying what they thought and talked frequently, and if teachers felt parents helped make the decisions/contributed to their child's IEP.</p> <p>Survey; 1 Likert item scored separately. This item targeted teacher satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting.</p> <p>Descriptive measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Annual IEP meeting with mini-conference: 2 Likert items analyzed for means and standard deviations. These two items were used to measure teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the mini-conference in improving parental participation.</li> </ol>
Administrator Perceptions	<p>Survey; 6 Likert items summed. These items dealt with whether administrators felt the parent understood the reason for the IEP meeting and school terminology used in the meeting, if administrators perceived parents felt comfortable saying what they thought and talked frequently, and if administrators felt parents helped make the decisions/contributed to their child's IEP.</p> <p>Survey; 1 Likert item scored separately. This item targeted administrator satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting.</p>

(table 2, cont.)

Descriptive measures:

- 1) Annual IEP meeting with mini-conference: 2 Likert items analyzed for means and standard deviations. These two items were used to quantify administrator perceptions of the effectiveness of the mini-conference on parental participation in the IEP process.
- 

## **Procedure**

**Recruitment of Teachers.** All special education teachers in the target school district were given the opportunity to participate in the study. At a regularly scheduled meeting among all special education teachers in the district, the primary investigator announced the study to all faculty, and those teachers who volunteered to participate were included in the investigation. Teachers were promised one prize for every IEP meeting they conducted that was included in the study.

**Recruitment of Parents.** Every parent of a special education student served by a volunteering teacher, whose annual IEP meeting occurred during the data collection period for the study, was sent a parental consent form (see Appendix D) explaining the study. Parents were promised an entry into a raffle for prizes donated by local businesses and restaurants for participating. Due to the demographic composition of the school district, consent forms were drafted in English and Spanish, and parents were provided the consent form in the language in which school contacts were usually made, in accordance with a home language survey completed by all parents at the beginning of the school year. All parents who returned the form and agreed to participate were included in the study. Parents were randomly assigned to the conference or no conference conditions in the order in which their consent forms were collected. Two parents who only spoke Spanish returned the form and were randomly assigned to the non-conference

group. Parent surveys were not translated to Spanish, but instead data were collected during the IEP meeting using an interpreter.

**Recruitment of Students.** All special education students served by a volunteering teacher were eligible for inclusion in the study if their annual program review occurred during the data collection period. Parents of students receiving special education services were eliminated from the study only if they declined consent.

**Teacher Training.** Teachers were trained as a group at the conclusion of the meeting in which they volunteered to participate. Each teacher was given five participant packets and several permission forms. The forms in the packets included the parent forms for an annual IEP meeting mini-conference and the corresponding teacher script. Each packet was prepared in advance with an ID number and assigned either an 'A' or a 'B'. Teachers were instructed that packets assigned to the 'A' group were to receive the mini-conference (treatment) and those assigned to the 'B' group were to receive no mini-conference (control group). The assignment to treatment or control was done using GraphPad, an online random assignment software, to match one of the two letters with each ID number (GraphPad Software, 2006). Teachers were directed to use the packets in the order that the consents were returned. Regarding the mini-conference, teachers were instructed to follow the scripts exactly as written. Teachers were given a business card with contact information for the primary investigator and asked to contact the investigator with any questions. In order to provide the participating teachers with the instructions in a written format, a follow-up e-mail was sent reviewing the information that was discussed in the training session.

## **Treatment**

For the students/parents assigned to the treatment group, the special education teachers called and established a time that the parents could come to school for a mini-conference in preparation for their child's IEP meeting. Before the mini-conference, the special education teacher completed the parent form for an annual IEP meeting. At the time of the mini-conference, the parents were provided the completed form. In order to cover the contents of the form with the student's parents, the special education teacher read from the teacher script that corresponded to the parent form. During the mini-conference, IEP procedures and contents were discussed. In addition, parents were given the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions regarding their child's educational program. It was clearly explained to all parents that the mini-conference was simply a pre-meeting and that the IEP team would make all final decisions during the IEP meeting.

## **Conference Forms**

All forms used in conducting the mini-conference were adapted following the guidelines for conferencing with parents of exceptional children provided by Simpson (1982). The mini-conference was structured to inform parents of the purpose for both the mini-conference and the IEP meeting to follow, begin with positive comments regarding the student's progress, and then move into statements regarding areas in which improvement is needed. In addition, the mini-conference was designed to provide parents an opportunity to hear and have terms explained that would be used in the actual IEP meeting. Following the recommendations of Wolf and Stephens (1990), each parent was instructed to practice active participation by asking questions about the IEP. Finally, the mini-conferences began and concluded with a positive statement regarding the importance of parental involvement in the educational process (Edge et al., 1984).

**Parent and Teacher Forms for an Annual IEP Meeting.** These forms were designed to inform parents regarding their child's progress on previously established IEP goals and objectives, discuss possible new goals and objectives for the IEP, and help parents understand that their contributions are both important and valued. The parent and teacher forms were designed to be used in conjunction with each other. In other words, the parents were given a completed form for their use, and the teachers conducted the mini-conference from a script that corresponded to the items on the parent form.

### **Treatment Integrity**

To ensure the proper implementation of the intervention, two procedural safeguards were utilized. First, the investigator was provided a copy of all completed parent forms. This served to guarantee that information provided to parents at the mini-conference was accurate and complete. Second, a checklist was constructed to coincide with the teacher's scripts for the mini-conference (see Appendix A). All mini-conferences were either observed or tape recorded and then analyzed according to the appropriate checklist. The checklist consisted of a total of 24 items that teachers were to read or behaviors teachers were to exhibit during the mini-conference, and a total number of items read/behaviors witnessed was recorded for each mini-conference. Using this information, a percentage of steps completed correctly was calculated. In addition, the investigator employed an assistant, a former special education teacher, to obtain inter-rater reliability. The assistant attended one-fourth of the IEP meetings and used the researcher's coding form to collect information. The results produced by the assistant were compared to those obtained by the principal investigator during the same meetings. Agreement was 100% if the investigator and the reliability coder had the same results for the rate-based measures used (e.g., number of times the parent spoke, unprompted, during the meeting). If the

scores were not the same, the smaller number was divided by the larger number, and the result was multiplied by 100, following standard agreement computations for rate-based measures (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987). The researcher and second coder showed an overall 90.0% agreement on the number of times parental input was requested by the special education teacher, 98.8% agreement on requests for parental input from others on the IEP team, 96.5% agreement on the number of parental responses to requests, 98.0% agreement on the number of spontaneous parental suggestions or comments, and 95.5% agreement on the number of unsolicited parental questions.

## **Measures**

In order to assess the effects of the mini-conference on parental involvement in the IEP process, seven different measures were used (see Appendix B and C). These measures included a researcher's coding form, parent comfort surveys, and teacher and administrator perception surveys. The researcher's coding form was designed to allow the investigator to collect empirical data regarding the quantity of parental participations in the IEP meeting. All of the parent, teacher, and administrator surveys are original works, however, the measures utilized by Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) served as a model for their development. The assessment measures all utilized a Likert scale format in which parents, teachers, or administrators were asked to respond on a five-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Category partition scaling commonly has been used to break continua into discrete intervals, and was described by Likert in 1932. Five-item Likert scales are commonly used as they provide a sufficient number of response options to increase the probability of obtaining reliable scores (Nunnally, 1978). Likert scales allow the measurement of subjective phenomena, such as feeling states, that can be difficult to measure (Nugent, Sieppert, & Hudson, 2001).



**Researcher's Coding Form.** This form served as a method for collecting data regarding the quantity of parental participation in the IEP meeting. Specifically, the investigator documented the number of times that parental input was requested, by the special education teacher or any other member of the IEP team, and whether the parent responded to the request. From this information, percentages of parental responses to a request were determined. In addition, the number of unsolicited parent comments or suggestions and questions were documented. The total number was then divided by the total time of the IEP meeting in order to determine the number of comments, suggestions, and questions per minute.

**Parent Comfort.** Two of the six surveys were targeted at soliciting parent perceptions of the IEP process. These measures included a questionnaire for parents that received a mini-conference (C) prior to their child's annual IEP meeting and a questionnaire for parents who did not receive the mini-conference (NC) before their child's annual IEP meeting. Sample survey items from the parent forms included, 'I understood the reason for having the IEP meeting,' 'I talked frequently in the IEP meeting,' 'I understood what was said (including the school terminology) in the IEP meeting,' 'I felt comfortable saying what I thought in the IEP meeting,' 'I helped make the decisions in the IEP meeting,' and 'I was able to contribute to my child's IEP.' These six items appeared on each of the parent surveys and were scored out of a total of 30 points, with a score of 30 being indicative of a high level of parent comfort and participation in the IEP process. Another question aimed at determining overall parental satisfaction with the outcome of the meeting was scored separately as it seemed to address a different issue than the first six questions. This practice was continued for the teacher and administrator surveys.

Additional survey items for parents that received the mini-conference included, "Conferencing with my child's teacher before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the

IEP meeting,” and “I felt more comfortable expressing my opinions and asking questions in the mini-conference with my child’s teacher than in the IEP meeting.” These additional questions were each scored on a five-point Likert scale, with a score of five on each question indicating that the parents felt the mini-conference was helpful in preparing them to participate in the IEP process. Parent responses to these two questions were used solely as an attempt to elicit parental input regarding the effectiveness of the mini-conference. These scores were not compared across the treatment and control groups because both groups did not respond to these two questions.

Lastly, two more statements appeared on the parent survey for an annual IEP meeting in which the parents received a mini-conference. These statements included, “I would be better able to participate in all my child’s IEP meetings if I was always given a chance to conference with my child’s teacher before the meeting,” and “How often do you attend your child’s IEP meetings?” A score of five on the first of these statements was considered the best possible score because of its reflection that parents felt the mini-conference was helpful and would like to receive a mini-conference again in the future. Scoring for the last of these statements was done using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) always to (5) never. A score of five on this question indicated unfamiliarity with the IEP process and a score of one represented knowledge of IEP meeting procedures. As was the case above, responses to these two statements were not compared across treatment and control groups, but were used only to gather parental input.

**Teacher/Administrator Perceptions.** The remaining four questionnaires were aimed at gathering responses to parental participation in IEP meetings from teachers and administrators. These forms asked questions regarding the parental participation in IEP meetings for which parents did (C) and did not (NC) receive a mini-conference. Items common to both forms of the survey included, “The parent(s) understood the reason for having the IEP meeting, “The

parent(s) talked frequently in the IEP meeting,” “The parent(s) understood what was said (including the school terminology) in the meeting,” “The parent(s) felt comfortable saying what they thought in the IEP meeting,” “The parent(s) helped make the decisions (as opposed to merely agreeing with everything that was proposed) in the IEP meeting,” “The parent(s) was able to contribute to their child’s IEP.” Responses to these six questions could yield a maximum of 30 points, with a score approaching 30 being representative of teacher and administrator satisfaction with the level of parent participation in the IEP process. Teachers and administrators were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting, with a score of five indicating the highest level of satisfaction. For IEP meetings in which parents received the mini-conference, surveys asked parents to rate their level of agreement with two additional statements. These two statements were, “Conferencing with the parent(s) before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting,” and “Conferencing with the parent(s) prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation.” A score of five for each of these statements was considered the greatest possible endorsement for the effectiveness of the mini-conference. Again, results yielded from these two statements were not analyzed across the treatment and control groups because teachers and administrators were asked to answer these questions only when the treatment was applied.

### **Rewards for Participation**

As an incentive for teachers to participate in the study, at the recruitment meeting, they were promised one prize for every IEP meeting that was included in the study, regardless of whether it was in the treatment or control group. In addition, at the time of the IEP meeting, parents filled out a raffle ticket entry for prizes to be drawn at the conclusion of the study. In order to fulfill these commitments, the researcher typed a letter asking for donations on

university letterhead, and distributed it to local businesses and restaurants. If a business agreed to participate, the researcher picked up the donated prize(s). A total of 41 prizes were collected for teachers, and roughly 15 prizes were collected for the parent raffle.

At the study's end, a prize ceremony was held in a place of business that was initially contacted in an attempt to obtain a donation. All teachers who had at least one IEP meeting included in the study were invited to the prize ceremony. A drawing was held at the beginning of this ceremony for the parent prizes. Once a parent's name was drawn, the prize was given to the respective teacher to distribute. Pre-printed notes reminding parents of the reason they were receiving a prize were given to teachers to hand out with the prizes. To distribute the teacher prizes, the total number of IEP meetings per teacher was calculated. All prizes were displayed and, for the first round, teachers got to choose a prize in the order of the number of meetings completed. This was done to prevent teachers who had to exert little effort, relative to the other teachers, from getting the best prize. For the successive rounds, teacher's names were drawn randomly. Therefore, if a teacher had a total of four IEP meetings included in the study, their name was entered into each of the drawings for the three rounds following the initial round.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Participants

**Teachers.** Fifteen special education teachers volunteered to participate in the study. However, only fourteen teachers completed the study because one teacher did not receive any parental consent forms. Five of the teachers taught in resource classrooms, five taught life skills, one taught children with autism, two taught in public preschool for children with disabilities (PPCD) classrooms, and one taught adaptive behavior. Teachers had a mean age of 36.7 years and averaged 10.5 years experience. One hundred percent of the teachers were female, 92.9% of the teachers were White, and 7.1% were Hispanic. At least one of the special education teachers was present in each of the IEP meetings included in the study.

The 15 special education teachers who participated in the study distributed a total of 136 consent forms to parents asking them to consider taking part in the study. Fifty-eight of these consent forms were returned agreeing to be involved in the study. The overall return rate of parental consents was 41.9%. Four parents who had been randomly assigned to the control group and one parent who had been randomly assigned to the experimental group returned the consent agreeing to participate but did not attend their child's IEP meeting.

**Administrators.** Twelve administrators participated in the study. Three of the administrators were the principals on their campuses and the other nine were the assistant principals. Eight administrators were female and four were male. All had a masters degree or above. Eighty-three percent of the administrators were White (83.3%), 8.3% were Hispanic, and 8.3% were African-American. One administrator was present at each of the IEP meetings held on their respective campuses.

**Parents.** The parents who participated in the study were the parents of 41 students receiving special education services whose annual IEP meetings were scheduled during the time allotted for data collection. Eighty percent of the IEP meetings were attended by the mother only, while 20% were attended by both parents. Parents who were not high school graduates comprised 19.5% of the sample, parents who were high school graduates made up 39.0%, 24.4% of parents held associates or bachelors degree, and 17.1% of the parents had a graduate degree. Parent characteristics are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
Parent Characteristics

Parent Who Attended IEP Meeting			Parent Education Level			
Mother	Father	Both	< High School	High School Graduate	Associates/ Bachelors	Graduate Degree
33	0	8	8	16	10	7

**Students.** Students who participated in the study were not subjected to experimental conditions of any kind directly; however, data regarding their educational placements and IEPs were collected for the purposes of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The student populations of the participating school sites dictated the disability categories represented in the study, and no disability category was intentionally excluded. Students with speech impairments were 58.5% of the sample, 36.6% of students were classified as other health impaired, and 26.8% were classified as learning disabled. Boys made up 70.7% of the sample ( $n = 29$ ), while girls comprised 29.3% of the sample ( $n = 12$ ). The average age for males was 10.4 years and the average age for females was 10.5 years. Table 4 identifies the students who participated in the study according to disability category and age.

**Table 4**  
 Number of Students by IDEA Disability and Age

Disability <sup>a</sup>								Age			
MR	OI	OHI	LD	AU	VI	SI	ED	3-5	6-10	11-13	14-18
8	4	15	11	7	2	24	1	6	12	15	8

*Note.* MR=Mental Retardation; OI=Orthopedic Impairment; OHI=Other Health Impairment; LD=Learning Disabled; AU=Autism; VI=Visual Impairment; SI=Speech Impairment; ED=Emotional Disturbance.

<sup>a</sup>Some students had more than one disability eligibility. Therefore, the disability numbers exceed the number of participants.

The average number of years that the 41 students had been receiving special education services was 5.5 years (SD = 3.5). The minimum numbers of years in special education was one and the maximum was 12. The average percent of the day that participants were receiving special education instruction was 47.2% (SD = 22.7), with the least amount being zero percent of the day and the most being 100 percent of the day.

### **IEP Meetings**

The average IEP meeting length was 39.3 minutes, with a standard deviation of 16.8. The minimum number of minutes for an IEP meeting was 15 and the maximum was 115 minutes. The mean meeting length was 37.4 minutes for the experimental group and 41.3 minutes for the control group. There was no significant difference in meeting length between the two groups,  $t(39) = .73, p = .47$ . The mean number of people in attendance at the IEP meetings was 8.0, with a standard deviation of 1.8. The minimum number of people in attendance was five and the maximum was 12. The minimum number of meetings attended by one teacher was one and the maximum attended per teacher was five. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for meeting length and number of participants by mini-conference or no conference.

**Table 5****Meeting Length and Number of Participants by Experimental Condition**

Meeting Length in Minutes		Number of People on IEP Team	
Mini-conference	No conference	Mini-conference	No conference
Mean ( <i>sd</i> )		Mean ( <i>sd</i> )	
37.4 (12.2)	41.3 (20.8)	8.2 (1.7)	7.8 (1.9)

**Research Questions**

The following are the initial research questions outlined for this study and the results determined for each. For each group of comparisons reported, a family-wise alpha of .05 was used, and individual alphas were determined by dividing the family-wise alpha by the number of comparisons in the family using a Bonferroni correction (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003).

Parent perceptions, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions were each considered different families of comparisons.

- 1) **Does a mini-conference with the special education teacher before the IEP meeting, in which the parent or parents discuss their child’s present levels of performance, possible goals and objectives for the new IEP, potential educational placements, and are given the opportunity to practice asking questions related to their child’s progress and educational program, result in differences in the perceptions of parent participation in the IEP process, as reported by parents, teachers, and administrators, compared to parent behavior in IEP meetings in which no conference has taken place before the meeting?**



**Parent Perceptions.** Two comparisons were made to determine the extent to which the mini-conference affected parent perceptions of the conference and their participation. The alpha per comparison was .025. There were no significant differences observed between the group that received the mini-conference and the group that did not on either the six-item scale (items 1 through 6),  $t(39) = .71, p = .49$ , or on item 7,  $t(39) = .08, p = .94$ .

**Teacher Perceptions.** Two comparisons were made to determine the extent to which the mini-conference affected teacher perceptions of the conference and parent participation. The alpha per comparison was .025. Significant differences were observed between the group that received the mini-conference and the group that did not on both the six-item scale (items 1 through 6),  $t(37) = 2.97, p = .005$ , and item 7,  $t(39) = 2.37, p = .023$ .

**Administrator Perceptions.** Two comparisons were made to determine the extent to which the mini-conference affected administrator perceptions of the conference and parent participation. The alpha per comparison was .025. As was the case with the parents, there were no significant differences observed between the group that received the mini-conference and the group that did not on either the six-item scale (items 1 through 6),  $t(39) = .81, p = .42$  or item 7,  $t(39) = 1.36, p = .18$ .

**Responses to Individual Survey Items.** Although no inferential statistics were run to determine individual effects on each of the items surveyed due to the probably of increased Type 1 error rate, means and standard deviations for those items are provided below. Generally, all respondents rated all items at the upper range of the scale, with means for items one through six as follows: parents, mean = 27.34 (range 18 to 30); teachers, mean = 26.08 (range 16 to 30); and administrators, mean = 26.29 (range 20 to 30). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1951) for items

one through six was .86 for parents (n = 41), .83 for teachers (n = 39), and .81 for administrators (n = 41).

Mean scores on the parent surveys showed no differences in parent comfort levels or satisfaction with the outcome of the IEP meeting by parent education level. Items one through six had means and standard deviations of 26.26 (3.41), 26.40 (3.52), 29.18 (1.08), and 27.71 (2.36) for parents with less than a high school education, high school graduates, parents with an associates or bachelors degree, and those with a graduate degree, respectively. Means and standard deviations for item seven were 4.75 (.46), 4.60 (.63), 4.82 (.6), and 4.71 (.49).

Item eight on the teacher and administrator survey, “I am satisfied with the level of parental participation in the IEP process,” had a mean of 4.49 and a standard deviation of .87 for teachers and a mean of 4.51 (SD = .7) for administrators. Teachers and administrators scored their satisfaction levels as very high. Table 6 depicts the scores for parent, teacher, and administrator survey items one through eight by conference and no-conference groups.

**Table 6**  
Scores for Parent, Teacher, and Administrator Survey Items by Experimental Condition

Items	Parents		Teachers		Administrators	
	Conf.	No Conf.	Conf.	No Conf.	Conf.	No Conf.
Item 1 (parent understood reason for meeting)	4.90 (.3)	4.75 (.6)	4.90 (.4)	4.55 (.7)	4.76 (.4)	4.75 (.6)
Item 2 (parent talked frequently)	4.24 (.8)	4.35 (.7)	4.45 (.7)	4.30 (1.0)	4.24 (1.1)	4.30 (1.0)
Item 3 (parent understood what was said)	4.48 (.6)	4.5 (.7)	4.67 (.6)	4.00 (.9)	4.48 (.7)	4.25 (.6)
Item 4 (parent felt comfortable saying what they thought)	4.86 (.4)	4.55 (.7)	4.71 (.6)	4.50 (.5)	4.52 (.8)	4.60 (.7)

(table 6 cont.)

Item 5 (parent helped make the decisions)	4.52 (.8)	4.45 (.8)	4.57 (.7)	3.65 (1.1)	4.29 (.9)	3.85 (.9)
Item 6 (parent contributed to their child's IEP)	4.67 (.5)	4.40 (.9)	4.38 (.8)	3.47 (1.1)	4.43 (.8)	4.10 (.7)
Item 7 (you are satisfied with the outcome of the meeting)	4.71 (.6)	4.70 (.6)	4.90 (.3)	4.60 (.5)	4.76 (.4)	4.60 (.8)
Item 8 (teachers/administrators are satisfied with parental participation)			4.76 (.5)	4.20 (1.1)	4.62 (.6)	4.40 (.8)

**2) Does an objective measure of parent participation, i.e., number of unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting, differ between groups of parents who have participated in a mini-conference versus those who have not?**

When the number of parental comments, suggestions, or questions per minute of the IEP meeting were compared between conference and no-conference groups ( $\alpha = .05$ ), there was no significant difference,  $t(39) = .099, p = .92$ .

The mean number of unsolicited parental suggestions or comments was 9.1 (SD = 8.9), with the fewest being zero and the maximum suggestions or comments per meeting being 43. Parents asked unprompted questions an average of 5.1 (SD = 4.5) times during the 41 IEP meetings, with a minimum number of zero and a maximum of 18. When analyzing the number of parent inputs by experimental condition, parents in the control group made an average of 10.6 comments or suggestions per IEP meeting, while parents in the experimental group made 7.8

comments or suggestions, but the difference was not significant,  $t(39) = 1.01, p = .32$ . Parents who did not receive the mini-conference asked an average of 5.1 questions and those parents who received the mini-conference also asked an average of 5.1,  $t(39) = .03, p = .98$ . Parents in the control group made no more unsolicited contributions, with a mean of 15.65 (15.0), than parents in the experimental group, who had a mean of 13.00 (9.4),  $t(39) = .68, p = .50$ . The total number of spontaneous parental suggestions, comments, and questions was divided by the length of the meeting in order to determine the number of parental contributions per minute of the meeting. The average number of contributions per minute was 0.35 (SD = .24). The minimum number of parental contributions was zero and the maximum was 1.15 per minute. The number of contributions per minute for the mini-conference group was .35 (.2) and .36 (.3) for parents who did not receive a mini-conference,  $t(39) = .1, p = .92$ , indicating no difference between groups.

Data regarding the frequency of requests for parental input were also collected. The average number of times parent input was requested by the special education teacher was 1.6 (SD = 2.4) and all other members of the IEP team requested parent input an average of 5.2 times during the IEP meetings (SD = 2.7). The minimum and maximum number of times parent input was requested by the special education teacher during the IEP meetings were zero and 11, respectively. The minimum and maximum numbers were the same for parent input requested by all other members of the IEP team. The mean number of times parental input was requested by the special education teacher for the experimental group was .95 (1.6), while the control group mean was 2.35 (2.8),  $t(39) = 1.98, p = .06$ . Although they were not statistically significant, the difference between special education teacher requests for parental input of the mini-conference group versus the non-mini-conference group approached significance. The means and standard

deviations for number of parental input requests by other members of the IEP team by experimental condition show similar results, 5.24 (2.6) and 5.10 (2.8) for experimental and control groups, respectively. Table 7 shows the frequencies for number of parental contributions per minute and the number of parental requests for participation by both the special education teachers and all other members of the IEP teams by experimental condition.

**Table 7**  
Parent Participation by Treatment and Control Groups

	Special Education Teacher Requests Input		Other Members Request Parent Input		Spontaneous Parent Comments and Questions	
	Mini- conference	No conference	Mini- conference	No conference	Mini- conference	No conference
	Mean ( <i>sd</i> )		Mean ( <i>sd</i> )		Mean ( <i>sd</i> )	
Total number of times	.95 (1.6)	2.35 (2.8)	5.24 (2.6)	5.10 (2.8)	13.00 (9.4)	15.65 (15.0)
Number of times per minute of conference	.03 (.04)	.07 (.1)	.16 (.1)	.14 (.1)	.35 (.2)	.36 (.3)

- 3) **Does parent participation in the IEP process, as measured by number of unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting, vary as a function of SES, as determined by free or reduced lunch status and parental education level, independent of the effects of the mini-conference?**

### **Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Parental Participation**

As discussed above, SES was determined using a designation by the district of students who were eligible for either free or reduced lunch or who were classified as economically disadvantaged. The comparison group was comprised of families who did not have either of those designations. Parent education level was also used to determine whether parents who had

greater levels of education were more likely to participate in the IEP meeting than parents who had less.

**SES: Free or Reduced Lunch and Economic Disadvantage.** The number of parental comments per minute differed between the high and low SES groups,  $t(39) = 4.45, p \leq .001$ . The mean number of parental comments per minute for the high SES group was .46, with a standard deviation of .2. The low SES group had a mean number of comments per minute of .17 and had a standard deviation of .1. The  $\chi^2$  for free or reduced lunch status was  $(1, N = 41) = 2.95, p = .086$  and  $(1, N = 41) = .024, p = .876$  for the mini-conference, indicating no significant differences between groups.

**SES: Parent Education Level.** To determine if parent participation was related to parent education level, a Spearman's rho correlation between the number of parental comments per minute during the IEP meeting and the four rank-ordered groups of parent education levels was computed. There was a significant correlation between parental participation in the IEP meeting and parent education ( $r = .56, p \leq .001$ ). The Mann-Whitney U for parent education level was 196.5,  $p = .714$ , indicating no significant relationship between parent education level and parental participation.

- 4) **Is the student's disability severity, as indicated by the number of minutes of special education service the student receives per day, related to parental participation in the meeting, as measured by unsolicited parent comments per minute of IEP meeting? Are there differences in parental participation between IDEA disability categories?**

## Percent of Student Day in Special Education and Parental Participation

In order to determine if parent participation was related to the severity of the disorder, as indicated by the amount of time the student spent receiving special education services as listed on the student's IEP, a Pearson correlation between the number of parental comments per minute during the IEP meeting and the percent of the student's daily school time spent in special education was computed. There was no significant correlation between parental participation in the IEP meeting and the percent of time the student was served in special education ( $r = .20$ ,  $p = .22$ ).

## IDEA Disability Categories and Parental Participation

Due to the number of disability categories, inferential statistics are inappropriate because of the inflation of Type 1 error rate from a large number of comparisons. Therefore, if a student was classified in a disability category at all, regardless of primary, secondary, or tertiary disability, they were included in the mean for that group's level of parental participation. Parents of students with visual impairments participated the most in IEP meetings with a mean of .62 comments per minute. However, there was only an  $n$  of two in this category. Students with autism, orthopedic impairments, and other health impairments showed the next highest levels of parental contributions (.46, .42, and .40 comments per minute, respectively). Table 8 depicts the  $n$ s, means, and standard deviations for each disability category.

**Table 8**  
Parent Participation in Mean Comments Per Minute by Disability Category

Disability	Frequencies		
	$n$	Mean	$SD$
Mental Retardation	8	.266	.194
Orthopedically Impaired	4	.423	.275

(table 8, cont.)

Other Health Impaired	15	.404	.298
Learning Disabled	11	.283	.312
Autism	7	.461	.206
Visually Impaired	2	.620	.028
Speech Impaired	24	.381	.202
Emotional Disturbance	1	0.00	0.00

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**5) What are participants' perceptions of and satisfaction with the mini-conference?**

Additional survey items for parents that received the mini-conference included, “Conferencing with my child’s teacher before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting,” and “I felt more comfortable expressing my opinions and asking questions in the mini-conference with my child’s teacher than in the IEP meeting.” Responses to these two questions were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (five being the greatest agreement) and were used solely as an attempt to gauge parents’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the mini-conference. The mean score for parents on the first statement was 4.81, with a standard deviation of .5. Teachers and administrators also responded to this statement, resulting in a mean of 4.75 (SD = .64) and 4.55 (SD = .69), respectively. These results indicate that parents, teachers, and administrators all felt that the mini-conference was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting. The mean parental response to the second statement was 4.10 (SD = .91) parents in the mini-conference group reported feeling more comfortable meeting with the special education teacher alone versus with the entire IEP team. These scores were not compared across the treatment and control groups because both groups did not respond to these two questions.



Survey item ten for teachers and administrators, “Conferencing with the parent(s) prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation,” produced a mean of 4.50 (SD = .61) for teachers and 4.20 (SD = .95) for administrators. Again, these scores were not compared across the treatment and control groups because both groups did not respond to this item. These scores show that both teachers and administrators felt that conferencing prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation.

Lastly, two statements appeared on the parent survey for an annual IEP meeting in which the parents received a mini-conference. These statements included, “I would be better able to participate in all my child’s IEP meetings if I was always given a chance to conference with my child’s teacher before the meeting,” and “How often do you attend your child’s IEP meetings?” A score of five on the first of these statements was considered the best possible score because of its reflection that parents felt the mini-conference was helpful and would like to receive a mini-conference again in the future. The mean response for this item was 4.25, with a standard deviation of .85. These scores demonstrate that parents feel that they would be better able to participate in all of their child’s IEP meetings if they were provided a mini-conference in advance of the meeting. Scoring for the last of these statements was done using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) always to (5) never. A score of five on this question indicated unfamiliarity with the IEP process and a score of one represented knowledge of IEP meeting procedures. The mean score for this item was 1.23, with a standard deviation of .70. This score indicates that the parents in the sample report generally attending their child’s IEP meetings. As was the case above, responses to these two statements were not compared across treatment and control groups, but were used only to gather parents’ perceptions of their past participation.

Table 9 depicts the means and standard deviations for parent responses to items eight, nine, and ten as well as teacher and administrator responses to items nine and ten.

**Table 9**  
Scores for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators in Experimental Group

Items	Parents	Teachers	Administrators
	Mean ( <i>sd</i> )	Mean ( <i>sd</i> )	Mean ( <i>sd</i> )
Item 8 (Conferencing with my child's teacher was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting)	4.81 (.51)		
Item 9 (I felt more comfortable expressing opinions and asking questions in the mini-conference than the IEP meeting)	4.10 (.91)		
Item 10 (I would be better able to participate in all of my child's IEP meetings if always given a mini-conference)	4.25 (.85)		
Item 9 (Conferencing with the parent before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting)		4.75 (.64)	4.55 (.69)
Item 10 (Conferencing with the parent prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation)		4.50 (.61)	4.20 (.95)

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In spite of a wealth of literature suggesting that parent involvement in their child's education leads to improved educational outcomes (MacMillan & Turnbull, 1983; Shevin, 1983; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001), parents tend to remain passive during formal IEP meetings (Goldstein, et al., 1980; Lusthaus, Lusthaus, & Gibbs, 1981; Vacc, et al., 1985). In order to address this perceived deficit in parent behavior, one study has been conducted in which an intervention was implemented in an attempt to increase parental participation in the IEP process. In this study, the investigators used three groups of 15 parents each, one group was the control group, one group was given the services of a parent advocate in the IEP meeting, and the other group of parents was sent questions and given a follow-up phone call prior to the IEP meeting. Despite the intervention employed, this study showed no significant results compared to the control group, as determined by parent responses to questionnaires (Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982). There were, however, methodological limitations to this study. Namely, parents were the only participants surveyed at the completion of the IEP meetings, therefore the input of teachers and administrators could not be compared to that of the parents. In addition, there were no data collected other than the impressions of parents measured with survey instruments. The present study was designed to take this study several steps further by investigating the effects of a teacher-parent mini-conference that allows parents an opportunity to gain knowledge, provide input, and receive instruction regarding the unique procedures of an IEP meeting, in order to improve parent participation during IEP meetings. Furthermore, not only were parents surveyed as to their levels of comfort with the process, but teachers and administrators were also surveyed to determine whether they perceived differences in behavior between parents in the two groups.

Finally, direct observations of parents and other meeting participants were made to determine if the control group differed from the mini-conference group with respect to specific instances of verbal behavior. In addition, given the suggestions of several scholars in this literature (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001; Winters, 1993; Witt, Miller, McIntyre, & Smith, 1984) that SES and disability may be related to parent participation, these variables were investigated in terms of how they related to the outcomes of the study.

### **Perceptions of Parents**

The results of the study demonstrate that parents felt a high level of comfort and satisfaction with the IEP meetings, regardless of how much they participated in the proceedings or if they were assigned to the experimental or control groups. These findings are concurrent with what would be expected given the findings of Goldstein and Turnbull (1982) that showed even though there was significantly more parent involvement recorded in the IEP meetings that had a parent advocate in attendance, all groups of parents indicated satisfaction with the meeting and the IEP that was developed.

### **Perceptions of Professionals**

Teacher survey results showed significant differences between the group that received the mini-conference and the group that did not on both the six-item scale (teacher perceptions of parent comfort) and item seven (satisfaction with outcome of the meeting). However, results for administrators showed no difference between the treatment and control groups. These results are particularly interesting when contrasted with the objective measures of parent input or number of comments per minute, which were also not significantly different between conference and no-conference groups. These results could be explained by the fact that teachers who had conducted

the mini-conferences were more cognizant of who had received the mini-conference than the administrators who had not conducted the mini-conference.

Studies of social psychology may offer additional insight into why teachers surveyed report better impressions of parents with whom they have had mini-conferences than those with whom they have not. For example, in a classic study, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif (1961) found that intergroup relations can be improved by applying the same techniques used to facilitate cooperation and harmony within groups. Specifically, groups that work together toward superordinate goals that are not achievable without multi-member participation develop more group unity. It may be the case that teachers' perceptions of the parents were changed merely by meeting with them briefly and individually prior to the large-group IEP meeting, and working together toward building a better IEP for the student. It is possible that although the questions on the teacher surveys asked about parent participation in the meeting, that what they actually may have measured was teacher comfort with the parents, which may be increased with familiarity and the experience of working together with them. In addition, it is also plausible that teachers' perceptions of those parents who exerted the effort to attend the mini-conference were improved. Thus, teachers could have construed participation in the experimental group as an expression of parental attitudes of concern for where their child is functioning, both academically and socially, and a parental desire to establish the best possible program for their child.

Another explanation for the differences in teacher and administrator perceptions could be related to the findings of Gilliam and Coleman (1981) that parents and principals were ranked much higher in importance than in their actual influence over the IEP proceedings. It is possible that administrators do not, in actuality, exercise as much authority in IEP meetings as generally attributed to them. This could be interpreted to mean that administrators may not be as vested in

the IEP process as intended by law or that administrators do not significantly impact the outcomes of IEP meetings. Thus, the differences in teacher and administrator scores could be a reflection on the fact that most administrators do not have a background in special education and rely mainly on their special education teachers to maintain compliance. Specifically, administrators may not be aware of the extent to which special education law goes to include parents in the IEP process. Therefore, administrators may not have a clear understanding of what optimum parental participation should look like.

Regardless of the reason or reasons for perceived differences in parental participation by teachers and administrators, the mini-conference did improve teacher perceptions and could potentially impact the parent-teacher relationship positively. This increased familiarity between parents and teachers could result in a more collaborative IEP team and, potentially, a more productive IEP meeting and/or provision of special education services (Dabkowski, 2004).

### **Role of Parents in IEP Meetings**

The overall mean number of unsolicited parental comments or suggestions (9.12) and parent questions (5.12), with the average number of parent comments, suggestions, or questions being 0.35 per minute, demonstrates a low percentage of time that parents speak in IEP meetings. This equates to 21 comments per hour made by parents. These findings are in accordance with those of Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky (1988) that showed parents asked few questions during IEP meetings, with the number of parent questions ranging from zero to 15 and the average number of questions asked being 4.5. Thus, using the authors' criteria for determining whether parents were active or passive participants, the parents in this study would also be classified as passive. However, it is important to remember that parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with the meetings overall.

These findings are particularly interesting given that IDEA mandates the IEP meeting provide an opportunity for parents, professionals, and other participants with specialized knowledge of the child to contribute their knowledge and participate in the planning and placement decisions involved in formulating an IEP. Furthermore, literature supports the legislation by stating that the contributions of all participants to decisions about the child's program and placement have great bearing on the child's progress in school (Gilliam, 1979). However, the results of this study could possibly indicate that parents feel more comfortable allowing educators to perform the functions for which they are specifically trained. Parents could view the education professionals as experts and themselves as merely recipients of information. It is possible, therefore, that a high degree of parental participation is unnecessary to cause parents to be satisfied with the meeting and its outcomes.

### **Perceived Advantages of Mini-Conferencing Prior to the IEP Meeting**

The survey results for those IEP meetings that had a mini-conference in advance of the meeting indicate that parents, teachers, and administrators all felt that the mini-conference was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting. Hughes and Ruhl (1987) found that eighty-six percent of teachers contacted parents prior to the IEP meeting. However, 80% use this contact primarily to schedule the meeting and 71% to explain the purpose and procedures of the IEP process. Only 29% of teachers used the pre-meeting contact to explain test results and only 28% reported taking the opportunity to explain parent rights. The mini-conference script addresses these findings by providing a concise format for conducting a pre-IEP meeting conference with parents and helps to ensure that relevant information is discussed at that time. Interestingly, during the implementation of the study, the researcher was approached by two of the participating special

education teachers seeking permission to distribute copies of the mini-conference script to their student teachers as a guide for future practice.

It can also be concluded that parents felt more comfortable meeting with the special education teacher alone versus the entire IEP team, with the mean for this survey item being 4.10 (.91). In addition, results show that both teachers and administrators felt that conferencing prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation. Finally, the scores demonstrate that parents feel that they would be better able to participate in all of their child's IEP meetings if they were provided a mini-conference in advance of the meeting.

Overall, parents responded favorably to the provision of the mini-conference and the mini-conference improved teacher perceptions of parents. Therefore, the mini-conference may prove to be a strong tool, both financially and otherwise, in including parents in the IEP process. However, additional studies should be conducted in an attempt to replicate these results before instituting policies.

### **The Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Disability Severity on Parental Participation**

The literature reviewed suggested that the effects of socioeconomic status (SES) and disability severity on parental participation needed to be explored (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). The findings of this study show that family SES, as measured by parent education level, is positively correlated with parent participation ( $rho = .56$ ) (number of unsolicited comments, suggestions, or questions) in IEP meetings. Thus, parents who were more highly educated offered more input at their child's IEP meeting. It is possible that this occurred because parents who have a high level of education are more comfortable with the school terminology used in IEP meetings or perhaps these parents are less intimidated by the IEP process than less educated parents. Another possible explanation could be that parents of a



higher education level may feel that their involvement in the IEP meeting can have positive effects for their children.

A previous study by Witt, Miller, McIntyre, and Smith (1984) found more educated mothers were found to be less satisfied with the results of IEP meetings than other parents of disabled children. However, Lynch and Stein (1982) found that regardless of SES, parents reported similar attitudes about their child's special education program and perceptions of their involvement in it. The present study supports the finding of Lynch and Stein. Specifically, the means for summed parent responses to items one through six and item seven (scored individually) did not show evidence that more highly educated parents were more comfortable or had higher levels of satisfaction than less educated parents. It may be the case that special education, as a group of professionals, is adequately meeting the needs of parents who come to school for their child's IEP meetings. These results could also be explained by the fact that education professionals could be cognizant of parent education level and tailor the IEP proceedings to meet the needs of individual parents.

The present study did not show a significant relationship between the number of minutes a student was served in special education, which was used as a proxy for disability severity, and parent participation in the IEP meeting. Although data were collected regarding disability categories and parental participation, the large number of categories relative to the number of participants in the study prevents inferences from being made to the general population of families with children served in special education. In this sample, parents of students with visual impairments participated the most in IEP meetings with a mean of .62 comments per minute. However, there was only an *n* of 2 in this category, which does not allow for generalizability of these results. Students with autism, other health impairments, and speech impairments showed

the next highest levels of parental contributions (.46, .40, and .38 comments per minute, respectively).

### **Limitations of This Study**

When interpreting this study's results, the reader needs to consider that this study is limited by its small sample size and the fact that only eight of the thirteen disability categories were represented in the sample. Other limitations that should be mentioned include that the entire study was completed in one school district and involved only those special education teachers that volunteered to participate. Thus, only experienced special education teachers, as opposed to novice teachers, were included in the study. An additional limitation of this study is that the content of parental comments, suggestions, and comments were not collected.

Other limitations could possibly include the number of parental consents obtained, the fact that some parents consented and then did not attend the IEP meeting, and the possibility that those who did not participate in the study would have been less satisfied than the parents who did participate. Because the return rate of parental consents was only 41.9%, it could be construed that only those parents who are routinely involved in their child's education agreed to be included in the study. Thus, it may have excluded parents who are not actively involved on a regular basis: the exact population that provided the impetus for the investigation in the first place. Future studies of parental involvement in the IEP process need to aspire to 100% participation in order to obtain a totally accurate and representative picture of what is occurring. To accomplish this, it might be helpful to offer additional or different incentives for parent participation, perhaps monetary rewards, that would be of greater significance to parents. Parents who consented and then did not attend the IEP meeting, along with parents who did not give consent initially, potentially might have been less satisfied with the outcomes of the IEP

meeting than those who did participate. One possible reason for this could be that parents who knew the IEP meeting was going to be emotional or quite involved could have declined to be included in the study. The researcher was told this was the case for one of the parents given information regarding the study. In this case, the student was transitioning to a new campus and the parents were very concerned about issues related to the transition. Another possible reason for this could be that parents who are less satisfied or have a lower comfort level with IEP meetings did not want to include another person, an outsider, in the IEP proceedings.

### **Implications for Practice**

Given that SES was found to be positively correlated with the amount of parental participation, educational professionals must remain cognizant of this trend and take extra measures to help parents of a low SES status be better able to participate in their child's IEP meeting. Also, in light of the low number of parental input requests made by the special education teacher during IEP meetings, regardless of whether the parent was assigned to the mini-conference or no conference group, special education teachers need to make a conscious choice to check for parent understanding and solicit parental input in the IEP meeting when reviewing progress and making suggestions for the future. It could also be prudent to explore the necessity of training administrators in the laws, regulations, and procedures affiliated with special education.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Because the mini-conference was found to be useful but did not improve the rate of parental participation in the actual IEP meeting, other methods for doing so must be employed. Part of the difficulty encountered with the mini-conferencing method is that if parents do not reliably attend their children's IEP meetings, it is equally hard to get them to attend a pre-

meeting conference. Thus, techniques for increasing parental participation that do not require an additional meeting might be more beneficial. Another possible strategy could be to provide mandatory parental training sessions, required at the inception of special education services, which stress the value of parental input in the IEP process. In addition, because family SES level, as measured by parent education level and free or reduced lunch status, was found to correlate to the amount of parental participation in the IEP meeting, ways to increase the participation of low SES parents must be devised. Finally, future research needs to be conducted in order to determine the extent to which administrators are knowledgeable regarding special education issues.

Several researchers have discussed the effects of parental involvement in special education. MacMillan and Turnbull (1983) state that parents can benefit from involvement when they enjoy the experience, when they gain an increased understanding of the educational program, by learning techniques that enable them to work more effectively with their child, when their self-esteem is increased because of being able to contribute meaningfully, gaining emotional support, and when they feel a sense of belonging. For the child, the possible benefits of having parents who are involved include more rapid developmental gains, better relationships with their parents, an improved instructional and/or social climate at school, and pride of having a parent who is involved with their education. Shevin (1983) also offers possible positive effects of informed parental participation. First, informed participation allows the parent to be in a position to provide continuity to the child's program. Secondly, it gives the parent access to information regarding resources and alternatives for their child. Next, informed participation serves to guarantee that the goals selected by the IEP team are realistic and feasible, in addition to being appropriate. Finally, this type of parental involvement works to ensure that there is one

person on the IEP team that is working as the child's advocate. This is especially so because parents are free from any conflicting responsibilities that professionals might face. Additionally, Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) state that collaboration between parents and professionals can benefit students with disabilities by providing multiple perspectives and resources to improve educational outcomes. Additionally, they argue that collaboration can benefit the collaborators themselves. This occurs when collaborators make resources, such as motivation and knowledge, available to one another. Thus, collaboration can increase their own resources as a result of the personal support and the sharing of resources that may occur in a collaborative enterprise.

Although these are all effects that may occur when parents are active participants in the IEP process, the positive effects of parental involvement in special education have not yet been empirically validated. Therefore, it is logical that future research should focus on identifying specific ways that parent participation is helpful in producing positive student gains and/or ensuring that special education services are individualized to the needs of the student. Attending IEP meetings to document the actual content of parental contributions and record instances in which parental participation prompted change with regard to proposed programming or placement could potentially substantiate or negate the importance of parental participation in the IEP process.

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**APPENDIX A**

**MINI-CONFERENCE FORMS**

**Mini-Conference For An Annual IEP Meeting: Parent Form**

One of the things that the research has shown us is that parents will often choose not to talk or actively participate at their children’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, even though it is better for the child if they do. They may find it scary or intimidating to be at a meeting with so many education professionals. Parents may feel that they don’t know enough about education and special education to be helpful. However, you spend a lot of time with \_\_\_\_\_ and know him/her better than we ever will. Your input is extremely important to the meeting and one of the things I will do today is to try to help you feel comfortable in participating in that meeting. To accomplish this, we will practice coming up with questions that you might ask in the formal IEP meeting.

What we are going to do today is discuss some of the things that we will talk about at your child’s formal Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. The things we discuss today are just to help us get a better understanding of the IEP process and begin coming up with ideas about how best to help your child. This is only a first attempt to get some ideas down on paper, and the formal IEP will be developed when the entire IEP team can contribute to the decision-making process.

1) The purpose for having the IEP meeting is to look at how your child is performing in school, what additional things we can do to help your child do better in school, and to develop an individual education plan (IEP) for your child.

2) Your child’s present levels of performance are (what your child can do independently):

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## Teacher's Script for Mini-Conference

All items that begin with the word **teacher** should be read **exactly as written**. Other instructions for implementation procedures are **bolded**. All numbered items correspond to an item on the parent form. *Parents should be given a completed form and a copy of any computerized printouts with possible goals and objectives to refer to during the mini-conference. An additional copy of the completed parent form should be provided to the researcher.*

**Teacher:** One of the things that the research has shown us is that parents will often choose not to talk or actively participate at their children's Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, even though it is better for the child if they do. They may find it scary or intimidating to be at a meeting with so many education professionals. Parents may feel that they don't know enough about education and special education to be helpful. However, you spend a lot of time with \_\_\_\_\_ and know him/her better than we ever will. Your input is extremely important to the meeting and one of the things I will do today is to try to help you feel comfortable in participating in that meeting. To accomplish this, we will practice coming up with questions that you might ask in the formal IEP meeting.

**Teacher:** What we are going to do today is discuss some of the things that we will talk about at your child's formal Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. The things we discuss today are just to help us get a better understanding of the IEP process and begin coming up with ideas about how best to help your child. This is only a first attempt to get some ideas down on paper, and the formal IEP will be developed when the entire IEP team can contribute to the decision-making process.

1) **Teacher:** The purpose for having the IEP meeting is to look at how your child is performing in school, what additional things we can do to help your child do better in school, and to develop an individual education plan (IEP) for your child.

2) **Teacher:** Your child's present levels of performance are (**brief overview**):

**Teacher:** What is a question you have about your child's present levels of performance? (**wait for parent response and answer any questions**)

**Teacher:** Now we are going to look at possible goals and objectives for \_\_\_\_\_ IEP. Goals are broad statements about what your child needs help with (example: subtraction) and objectives are more specific statements about exactly what your child needs to learn (example: borrowing when subtracting) in order to correctly perform the bigger goal (subtraction).

3) **Teacher:** Because your child is able to do the above things independently, I feel comfortable mastering the following goals/objectives on your child's current IEP: (**can write see attached on parent form and show parents proposed goals/objectives from a computerized version**)

4) **Teacher:** Because your child has not yet mastered everything on his/her current IEP, we should consider rewriting and continuing the following goals/objectives on your child's IEP:

**(can write *see attached* on parent form and show parents proposed goals/objectives from a computerized version)**

5) **Teacher:** For the coming year, here are some possibilities for additional goals and objectives that might work for students who have needs similar to \_\_\_\_\_. **(can write *see attached* on parent form and show parents proposed goals/objectives from a computerized version)**

**Teacher:** You can make comments or suggestions at this point. Give me a question that you have about these goals and objectives. **(Wait for parent response and answer any questions)**

**Teacher:** What changes would you like to see? Are there any other ideas that you might have that would make the IEP better or more suited to \_\_\_\_\_ needs? **(Wait for parent response and make note of their input).**

**Teacher:** There are a variety of educational settings in which kids can receive their instruction. **(explain all educational options...regular education, resource, content mastery, life skills, autism unit.)**

**Teacher:** Ask me a question regarding the different educational settings. **(Wait for parent response and answer any questions)**

6) **Teacher:** For the coming year, here are some possibilities for educational programs that might work for students who have needs similar to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Teacher:** Based on what you know of \_\_\_\_\_, what do you think would be the best choice for him/her? **(Wait for parent response and make a note of their input)**

**Teacher:** Do you have any questions about the IEP process? Do you have any questions about the IEP meeting, what will happen, and who will be there? **(Wait for parent response and answer any questions)**

**Teacher:** I want to thank you for meeting with me today. It is important to me that you understand how valuable you are to the IEP process. We are all a team working to develop the best plan to help your son/daughter. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or make suggestions in the IEP meeting. We want to work together to make the best decisions for your child.

If parents suggest something that you are not comfortable with say; “That is certainly a possibility that the team should discuss. Please bring it up in the meeting when we are all there to talk about it.”

## Checklist for Mini-Conference

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** One of the things that the research has shown us is that parents will often choose not to talk or actively participate at their children's Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, even though it is better for the child if they do. They may find it scary or intimidating to be at a meeting with so many education professionals. Parents may feel that they don't know enough about education and special education to be helpful. However, you spend a lot of time with \_\_\_\_\_ and know him/her better than we ever will. Your input is extremely important to the meeting and one of the things I will do today is to try to help you feel comfortable in participating in that meeting. To accomplish this, we will practice coming up with questions that you might ask in the formal IEP meeting.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** What we are going to do today is discuss some of the things that we will talk about at your child's formal Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. The things we discuss today are just to help us get a better understanding of the IEP process and begin coming up with ideas about how best to help your child. This is only a first attempt to get some ideas down on paper, and the formal IEP will be developed when the entire IEP team can contribute to the decision-making process.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1) **Teacher said:** The purpose for having the IEP meeting is to look at how your child is performing in school, what additional things we can do to help your child do better in school, and to develop an individual education plan (IEP) for your child.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2) **Teacher said:** Your child's present levels of performance are (**brief overview**):

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** What is a question you have about your child's present levels of performance?

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and answered any questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** Now we are going to look at possible goals and objectives for \_\_\_\_\_ IEP. Goals are broad statements about what your child needs help with (example: subtraction) and objectives are more specific statements about exactly what your child needs to learn (example: borrowing when subtracting) in order to correctly perform the bigger goal (subtraction).

\_\_\_\_\_ 3) **Teacher said:** Because your child is able to do the above things independently, I feel comfortable mastering the following goals/objectives on your child's current IEP:

\_\_\_\_\_ 4) **Teacher said:** Because your child has not yet mastered everything on his/her current IEP, we should consider rewriting and continuing the following goals/objectives on your child's IEP:

\_\_\_\_\_ 5) **Teacher said:** For the coming year, here are some possibilities for additional goals and objectives that might work for students who have needs similar to \_\_\_\_\_.



\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** You can make comments or suggestions at this point. Give me a question that you have about these goals and objectives.

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and answered any questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** What changes would you like to see? Are there any other ideas that you might have that would make the IEP better or more suited to \_\_\_\_\_ needs?

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and made note of their input.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** There are a variety of educational settings in which kids can receive their instruction.

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher explained all educational options...regular education, resource, content mastery, life skills, autism unit.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** Ask me a question regarding the different educational settings.

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and answered any questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6) Teacher said: For the coming year, here are some possibilities for educational programs that might work for students who have needs similar to \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** Based on what you know of \_\_\_\_\_, what do you think would be the best choice for him/her?

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and made a note of their input.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** Do you have any questions about the IEP process? Do you have any questions about the IEP meeting, what will happen, and who will be there?

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher waited for parent response and answered any questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher said:** I want to thank you for meeting with me today. It is important to me that you understand how valuable you are to the IEP process. We are all a team working to develop the best plan to help your son/daughter. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or make suggestions in the IEP meeting. We want to work together to make the best decisions for your child.

If necessary:

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher said: "That is certainly a possibility that the team should discuss. Please bring it up in the meeting when we are all there to talk about it."

**For Study Administrator Use Only**

School Code # \_\_\_\_\_ ID Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Code # \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

**RESEARCHER'S CODING FORM**

- 1) Meeting start time: \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting ending time: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Is the child receiving free or reduced lunch? YES or NO
- 3) What is the child's disability? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How long has the child been receiving special education services? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) How many minutes per day is the child receiving special education services? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Does the child have his/her own aide? YES or NO
- 7) Did the parents receive a mini-conference prior to the IEP meeting? YES or NO
- 8) The participants present for the IEP meeting are: (place # next to appropriate title)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Special education teacher(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Representative from agency or transitioning school
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular education teacher(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor	<input type="checkbox"/> Student teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Diagnostician/ School psychologist	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Related service personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Interpreter
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent advocate/legal representative	<input type="checkbox"/> Dyslexia specialist
		<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse

Desired Behavior	# of Times Behavior Occurred
Parent(s) input was requested by the special education teacher	
Parent(s) input was requested by any other member of the IEP team	
Parent responded	
Parent(s) talked without prompt: a. Parent(s) made a suggestion or comment	
Parent(s) talked without prompt: b. Parent(s) asked a question	
Parent(s) referenced the mini-conference / script for mini-conference	

<b><u>For Study Administrator Use Only</u></b>		
School Code # _____	ID Code # _____	Teacher Code # _____

**APPENDIX C**

**QUESTIONNAIRES**

**Questionnaire for Parents (Form C)**

What is your child's age? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your child's grade? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your child's gender? Please circle one. Male or Female

Are you the child's mother or father? Please circle one. Mother or Father

What is the highest degree or level of school that you have completed? (If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.)

- |  |                        |                        |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ Grades K-3                               | _____ High School      | _____ Associate Degree |
| _____ Grades 4-6                               | _____ Graduate/GED     | _____ Bachelor's       |
| _____ 7 <sup>th</sup> or 8 <sup>th</sup> grade | _____ Some college     | _____ Degree           |
| _____ 9 <sup>th</sup> grade                    | _____ credit, but less | _____ Master's Degree  |
| _____ 10 <sup>th</sup> grade                   | _____ than 1 year      | _____ Professional     |
| _____ 11 <sup>th</sup> grade                   | _____ 1 or more years  | _____ Degree(MD,       |
| _____ 12 <sup>th</sup> grade-No                | _____ of college, no   | _____ DDS, DVM, JD)    |
| _____ Diploma                                  | _____ degree           | _____ Doctorate Degree |
|  |                        | _____ (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) |

For the remaining questions, please answer according to your experiences with this IEP meeting only. To complete this portion, please rate your level of agreement with each statement according to the following scale:					
	1	2	3	4	5
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
1. I understood the reason for having the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I talked frequently in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I understand what was said (including the school terminology) in the IEP meeting?	1	2	3	4	5
4. I felt comfortable saying what I thought in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I helped make the decisions in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was able to contribute to my child's IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am satisfied with the outcome of my child's IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5

8. Conferencing with my child's teacher before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I felt more comfortable expressing my opinions and asking questions in the mini-conference with my child's teacher than in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I would be better able to participate in all my child's IEP meetings if I was always given a chance to conference with my child's teacher before the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
Please answer the next question according to the following scale:					
11. How often do you attend your child's IEP meetings?	1	2	3	4	5
	always	Frequentl y	sometimes	rarely	Never

**For Study Administrator Use Only**

School Code # \_\_\_\_\_ ID Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Code # \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire for Parents (Form NC)

What is your child's age? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your child's grade? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your child's gender? Please circle one. Male or Female

Are you the child's mother or father? Please circle one. Mother or Father

What is the highest degree or level of school that you have completed? (If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.)

- |  |                                 |                           |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| _____ Grades K-3                               | _____ 12 <sup>th</sup> grade-No | _____ Associate Degree    |
| _____ Grades 4-6                               | _____ Diploma                   | _____ Bachelor's Degree   |
| _____ 7 <sup>th</sup> or 8 <sup>th</sup> grade | _____ High School               | _____ Master's Degree     |
| _____ 9 <sup>th</sup> grade                    | _____ Graduate/GED              | _____ Professional Degree |
| _____ 10 <sup>th</sup> grade                   | _____ Some college credit,      | (MD, DDS, DVM,            |
| _____ 11 <sup>th</sup> grade                   | but less than 1 year            | JD)                       |
|  | _____ 1 or more years of        | _____ Doctorate Degree    |
|  | college, no degree              | (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)          |

For the remaining questions, please answer according to your experiences with this IEP meeting only. To complete this portion, please rate your level of agreement with each statement according to the following scale:

	1	2	3	4	5
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
1. I understood the reason for having the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I talked frequently in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I understand what was said (including the school terminology) in the IEP meeting?	1	2	3	4	5
4. I felt comfortable saying what I thought in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I helped make the decisions in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was able to contribute to my child's IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am satisfied with the outcome of my child's IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
Please answer the next question according to the following scale:					
8. How often do you attend your child's IEP meetings?	1	2	3	4	5
	always	frequently	sometimes	rarely	never

**For Study Administrator Use Only**

School Code # \_\_\_\_\_ ID Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Code # \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire for Teachers and Administrators (Form C)

Regarding your experiences with this IEP meeting only, please rate your level of agreement with each statement according to the following scale:					
	1	2	3	4	5
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
1. The parent(s) understood the reason for having the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parent(s) talked frequently in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The parent(s) understand what was said (including the school terminology) in the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The parent(s) felt comfortable saying what they thought in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The parent(s) helped make the decisions (as opposed to merely agreeing with everything that was proposed) in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parent(s) was able to contribute to their child's IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am satisfied with the outcome of the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am satisfied with the level of parent participation in the IEP process.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Conferencing with the parent(s) before the IEP meeting was helpful in preparing for the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Conferencing with the parent(s) prior to the IEP meeting increased parental participation.	1	2	3	4	5

**For Study Administrator Use Only**

School Code # \_\_\_\_\_ ID Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Code # \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire for Teachers and Administrators (Form NC)

Regarding your experiences with this IEP meeting only, please rate your level of agreement with each statement according to the following scale:					
	1	2	3	4	5
	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
1. The parent(s) understood the reason for having the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The parent(s) talked frequently in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The parent(s) understand what was said (including the school terminology) in the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The parent(s) felt comfortable saying what they thought in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The parent(s) helped make the decisions (as opposed to merely agreeing with everything that was proposed) in the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The parent(s) was able to contribute to their child's IEP.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am satisfied with the outcome of the IEP meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am satisfied with the level of parent participation in the IEP process.	1	2	3	4	5

**For Study Administrator Use Only**

School Code # \_\_\_\_\_ ID Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Code # \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**

**CONSENT FORMS**

Dear Parents,

My name is Beth Ashby Jones, and I am a doctoral student at Louisiana State University. This letter is to inform you about a study I am conducting in an effort to better involve parents in the individual education plan (IEP) process. As a special education teacher, I realize that the IEP process can be very overwhelming and confusing. I am attempting to find a way that all members of the IEP team can participate to the fullest extent possible in the development of the IEP. I am asking that you consider being a part of this study. If you agree to take part in my study, you will receive some level of contact by your child’s special education teacher prior to his/her IEP meeting. Because I am trying to obtain the most accurate information possible, it will be necessary that a researcher attend your child’s IEP meeting. In addition, you will be asked to complete a short, one-page questionnaire at the conclusion of your child’s IEP meeting.

Names and other confidential information obtained in this study will be kept confidential and will not be included in the written report of the findings. All data will be identified by ID numbers only. If you are interested in the results of this study, you certainly can be provided with that information. In the event that you have any questions regarding the study, you can either contact me or my advisor at:

Beth Ashby Jones  
Louisiana State University  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
225 Peabody Hall  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803  
e-mail: [bashby1@lsu.edu](mailto:bashby1@lsu.edu)  
phone: (225) 578-6867

Kristin Gansle, Ph.D.  
Louisiana State University  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
225 Peabody Hall  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803  
e-mail: [kgansle@lsu.edu](mailto:kgansle@lsu.edu)  
phone: (225) 578-7213

**There is no cost to participate in this study.** I recognize that to participate in this study might require additional time and effort on your part. **Therefore, as a token of my appreciation for your time and efforts, at the study’s end, all parents who participated and completed the study will be entered into a drawing for various gift certificates to local restaurants and businesses.**

**If you are willing to take part in this effort to better include parents in the IEP process, please sign and date on the space provided below.** If you have questions about your rights or concerns about the study, please contact Robert Mathews, Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at LSU: (225) 578-8692. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Beth Ashby Jones

-----  
***Please sign, date, and return this portion of the consent form to your child’s special education teacher.***

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study being conducted by Beth Ashby Jones regarding the IEP process. I understand that I will be contacted by my child’s special education teacher prior to his/her IEP meeting. I also understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire and that a researcher will attend my child’s IEP meeting.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Fills Out This Section: Special Education Teacher’s Name: _____ ID # for Study: _____
--



Estimados Padres de Familia:

Mi nombre es Beth Ashby Jones, soy estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad Estatal de Louisiana. Esta carta es con el fin de informarles acerca de un estudio que estoy realizando, en un esfuerzo para involucrar a los padres de una mejor manera en el proceso del Plan Individual de Educación (IEP).

Como maestra de educación especial me doy cuenta de que el proceso IEP puede ser agobiante y confuso. Estoy tratando de encontrar una manera para que todos los miembros del equipo IEP puedan participar hasta el máximo punto posible en el desarrollo de IEP.

Por este motivo, les estoy solicitando que consideren ser parte activa de este estudio. Si ustedes están de acuerdo en tomar parte en mi estudio, el maestro de IEP de su hijo se pondrá en contacto con ustedes antes de la reunión de IEP. Puesto que estoy tratando de obtener la información más precisa posible, será necesario que un investigador asista a la junta de IEP de su hijo. Además, al final de la reunión IEP de su hijo se les solicitará que completen un cuestionario corto de una página.

Los nombres y otra información confidencial obtenida por medio de este estudio se mantendrán totalmente confidenciales y no serán incluidos en el reporte escrito de las conclusiones. Todo dato será solamente identificado por medio de números de identificación. Si usted está interesado en los resultados de este estudio, ciertamente se le podrá proporcionar esta información. En caso de que usted tenga alguna pregunta o duda concerniente a este estudio, se puede poner en contacto ya sea conmigo o con mi consejero en:

Beth Ashby Jones  
Louisiana State University  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
225 Peabody Hall  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803  
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phone: (225) 578-6867

Kristin Gansle, Ph.D.  
Louisiana State University  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
225 Peabody Hall  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803  
e-mail: [kgansle@lsu.edu](mailto:kgansle@lsu.edu)  
phone: (225) 578-7213

No hay ningún costo por participar en este estudio. Yo reconozco que participar en él requiere tiempo y esfuerzo adicional de su parte. Por lo tanto, como prueba de mi aprecio por su tiempo y esfuerzo, al final del estudio todos los padres que participaron y completaron el estudio podrán entrar a un sorteo para ganar certificados de regalo o vales para negocios y restaurantes locales.

Si usted está dispuesto a tomar parte de este esfuerzo con el fin de incluir a los padres en el proceso IEP, por favor firme y ponga la fecha en el espacio proporcionado abajo. Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos o alguna preocupación concerniente a este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con Robert Mathews, Presidente de la Mesa Directiva de Revisión. Teléfono (225) 578-8692.

Muchas gracias por su cooperación.

Atentamente,  
Beth Ashby Jones.

-----  
Por favor firme, ponga la fecha y devuélvale esta parte de la forma de consentimiento a la maestra de educación especial de su hijo.

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_, estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio que está siendo realizado por Beth Ashby Jones con respecto al proceso de IEP. Entiendo que seré contactado por el maestro de educación especial de mi hijo, antes de su reunión de IEP. Asimismo, entiendo que se me solicitará completar un cuestionario y que un investigador asistirá a la reunión IEP de mi hijo.

Firma \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre del niño \_\_\_\_\_

<p>El maestro llenará esta sección: Special Education Teacher's Name: _____ ID # for Study: _____</p>
---

## VITA

Beth Ashby Jones was born in Midland, Texas, on June 22, 1976. She moved to Carrollton, Texas, in 1991 and graduated from Newman Smith High School in 1994. Beth went on to pursue her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies at Texas A&M University. She graduated *Cum Laude* in 1998 and immediately continued her education, earning a master's in educational psychology in 2001, also from Texas A&M University. After completing her master's degree, Beth taught resource math for four years in College Station, Texas. The last two years of this time, Beth served as special education lead teacher for her campus. In the spring of 2003, while teaching, Beth began her postgraduate studies at Texas A&M University. Beth married Curtis Jones in July of 2004 and transferred to Louisiana State University to complete her doctorate, which will be conferred at the August 2006 Commencement. Beth and Curtis plan to move to Anna, Texas, and Beth will be the lead special education teacher for two campuses in Melissa ISD, with the promise of moving into a position as special education coordinator for the district in a year's time.