

PARENTAL PERCEPTION OF PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:
EXAMINING DIFFERENCES ACROSS CHILD EDUCATIONAL LEVELS AND
HISPANIC AND WHITE FAMILIES

A Dissertation

by

SHELLEY KATHLEEN KRACH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2003

Major Subject: School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Parental Perception of Participation in Special Education:
Examining Differences Across Child Educational Levels and
Hispanic and White Families. (August 2003)

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This study discussed past research, litigation, and legislation that pertained to the topics of parental involvement in special education. Past barriers were discussed that kept parents from interacting and suggestions were provided for future help in overcoming these barriers. In particular, parental perceptions of their roles as communicators and decision makers in the special education process were examined in terms of ethnicity and child's educational level. Very few items found differences between the perceptions of Hispanic parents when compared to the perceptions of white parents; and some items found as children advance academically, there is less agreement among parents that they were able to be good communicators and good decision makers. Still, this research study showed that, overall, parents in Texas perceive that schools are allowing them to at least adequately fulfill these roles. Thus, the results of this study are much more positive than past research, which indicated that parents felt left out of their children's education. This more positive perception could be a result of legislation

passed to ensure parental roles in educational decision making; it could be a result of actions taken by the state of Texas to monitor the enactment of this legislation; or it could be because schools are taking a more active role in providing best practice services to students and parents in terms of communication and decision-making opportunities; or it could be because the parents who answered the survey were particularly compliant or complacent.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the two most important people in my life.

To my mother, Dorothy Hart,

for building in me the importance of education and never giving up.

To my husband, Josh Krach,

for teaching me that love is more important than anything else.

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I grew up hearing that the best way to produce a good child was to give them roots and wings. Roots to provide the practicalities of life like nourishment, security, stability, and balance. Wings to let your ideas soar through creativity, idealism, and hope. I believe that this statement holds true to produce a good researcher as well. When I was presented with the idea of having co-chairs, I was skeptical. Why run back and forth between two people to get things approved? One would certainly be easier. But, luckily for me, I agreed to the suggestion. Between them, Dr. Hector Ochoa provided me with the wings I needed to let my ideas soar, and Dr. Doug Palmer gave my ideas roots so that they could germinate and go from dream to reality. Without both their roots and wings, I am not sure if this dissertation would ever have gotten finished. I owe them both a tremendous debt of gratitude for their help.

A special mention should go to two other people who strongly influenced my professional life. One, Dr. Loren Helwig, through his ability to see situations as they really are, provided me with the original ideas for this study. It was through his gentle guidance that I began to realize the value and importance of our work. Thank you. The other, Dr. Linda Parrish, took what I had seen in my internship and used it to emphasize the difference between legal ideology and practical application. She made me want to go out and teach others to see beyond the letter of special education law to its spirit. You are truly my mentor.

In addition, I would like to thank the Texas Education Agency for their assistance in helping my research. In particular, I want to thank Dr. Pamela Baker for her

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Substantial research has developed a clear picture of the ways that parents participate in the education of their children. One researcher in particular, Epstein (1996), has identified six methods of parental involvement in education. She labeled them (1) parenting – schools provide parenting skills to families who need them; (2) communicating – the home and school provide and share information with one another; (3) volunteering – parents aid in the support of students or school programs; (4) learning at home – schools coordinate home learning with classroom work to build academic success; (5) decision making – schools involve parents in decisions concerning their child individually or their child’s school systemically; and (6) collaborating with the community – parents work with community groups to improve school programs and better student learning (for definitions of terms used in this study, see Table 1).

Though Epstein’s definition of parent involvement is the one used in this study, it is important to note that there are researchers who feel that this definition is incomplete. López (2001) challenges this definition by stating that it ignores the parental actions at home that emphasize student success. Specifically, there is no mention of parents transferring a work ethic to the child, parents having children do manual work to emphasize the importance of school, and parents educating their children in non-academic pursuits to ensure future employment. Valenzuela (1999) challenges Epstein as well by dissecting the cultural implications of the term “education.” She wrote, “*Educación* is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. ...Though

TABLE 1. Definitions

Term	Definition
Educational Level	The level of education a child achieves in terms of what type of school attended: elementary school, middle school/ junior high, or high school.
High Incidence Disability	Disabilities falling in the following categories: Specific Learning Disability, Speech Language, Mental Retardation, and Emotionally Disturbed (Litton, Rotari, & Day, 1989).
Hispanic	People of any race who describe their origin as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other origin they consider to be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	A written document created by a team of professionals and the child's parents to provide a free and appropriate education to a child with a disability (30 C.F.R., Sec. 300.340).
Parent Participation	Ways parents are involved in their child's education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) parenting – schools provide parenting skills classes. (2) communicating – the home and school share information. (3) volunteering – parents support school programs. (4) learning at home – join home learning and class work. (5) decision making – parents make decisions for their child. (6) community collaboration – work with community to improve school (Epstein, 1996). (7) transmission of a work ethic – parents educate their children on the importance of hard work (López, 2001).
Special Education	Specifically designed educational instruction that comes at no cost to the parent that meets the individualized needs of a child with a disability (30 C.F.R., Sec. 300.26).

inclusive of formal academic training, *educación* additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others.” (p. 23)

Regardless of the complete definition, not all parents are equally involved in their children’s educations. In fact, very few general education legal mandates require parents to be involved at any level. Even highly motivated parents may become less involved because of uncontrollable factors such as jobs, additional children, or their child’s educational level (e.g., elementary, middle, or high school) (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995; Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 2001), or because of controllable factors such as lack of cultural knowledge (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Montecel, et al., 1993; Gault, 1989; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986), communication problems (Harry, 1992a; Harry, 1990; Correa, 1989; Gault, 1989; Buscaglia, 1975), or school client (First, 1995; Harry, 1992c; Lontos, 1992; Correa, 1989; Bennett, 1988; Lynch & Stein, 1987; Marion, 1981).

Unlike parents who have children in general education, parents whose children receive special education services do not have a choice whether to be involved in their children’s educations. Involvement has been determined by legislation as mandatory – parents *are required* to be involved at least at the communicating and decision-making levels (34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.344). The legal requirements mandating that parents be involved in their children’s special education planning were not arbitrarily chosen. Current legislation is the product of years of litigation and lobbying by parents on behalf of their children. Tables 2 and 3 provide a brief description of some of these efforts. Historically, parents had little voice in the decisions concerning their children’s educational needs and goals. It was not until 1975, with the passage of the Education of

TABLE 2. Notable Legal Cases

Date	Case	Court Ruling
1923	Meyer v. Nebraska, (Supreme Court)	It is the parents' duty to educate their child. It is a violation of the 14th Amendment to forbid the teaching of foreign languages in the school.
1971	PARC vs. Pennsylvania, (Supreme Court)	"Retarded children" are permitted access to free and appropriate education (FAPE) appropriate to their learning capacities, and to a re-evaluation of these capacities at least every two years or upon parental request. Schools must provide notice to parents before any change is made in the educational status of a child with mental retardation.
1972	Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education	All children are to be provided publicly supported, alternative educational services if necessary for them to be educated.
1982	Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley	States need not provide additional services above and beyond those needed to adequately meet the child's educational needs.
Now	Angel G. v. Texas Education Agency (TEA)	Advocacy, Inc. filed a case in Texas stating that TEA failed to provide FAPE because of an ineffective monitoring system. A better monitoring system is now in place with improved methodology for obtaining parental input.

TABLE 3. Notable Legislation

Date	Law	Regulation
1974	Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)	<p><u>Privacy/ confidentiality:</u> Schools must have written consent from the parent before releasing any identifiable student educational record(s) (with a few limited exceptions).</p> <p><u>Parental access to records:</u> Parents have the right to inspect and review the educational records of their child.</p> <p><u>Parental amendment of records:</u> If parents think that their child's record is inaccurate, they can request that it be changed. The school must review this request, make a decision, and inform the parents of this decision. Parents then have the right to a hearing if they are unhappy with the school's decision.</p>
1975-1997	Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	<p><u>Consent:</u> Parents must give informed consent prior to the assessment or placement of their child.</p> <p><u>FAPE:</u> The state must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to each student.</p> <p><u>IEP:</u> An IEP is a document that reflects the eligibility and placement decisions of the child.</p> <p><u>IEP team:</u> The IEP team must include the parent(s) of the child, and must allow parents to bring any other person they feel may have knowledge about the child. Team meetings must be announced to parents ahead of time and be offered at an agreed-upon time and place. If the parents cannot attend, the school should use alternate methods to get participation from the parent.</p> <p><u>Independent evaluations:</u> Parents can request an independent evaluation if they feel it necessary.</p> <p><u>Due process:</u> Parents have the right to mediation and/or a due process hearing if they have a dispute.</p>

All Handicapped Children Act (EHA; P.L. 94-142), that parents were given the opportunity to become involved as decision-makers for their children's educational placement (20 USC 1400; Lynch & Stein, 1987).

The parent's role of decision maker was expanded to that of an equal partner to the school after the reauthorization of the Individual's with Disability Act (IDEA) in 1997 (20 U.S.C. § 1414). According to these requirements, parents consistently give the right to participate in each step of the process. In particular, IDEA 1997 allows parents to accept or deny evaluations and services for their child and to participate in the planning of any of these services. In addition to providing parents with an equal partnership role in decisions regarding their children's educations, IDEA 1990 and IDEA 1997 set down complex guidelines for the referral, assessment, and placement of children in special education services.

IDEA and its regulations provide a fixed, legal framework for schools to use in providing services to children. Although having each step specifically spelled out for both parties can be beneficial, it can also cause difficulty between schools and parents. One problem with this extremely legalized set of regulations is that it forces parents and schools to work together in a structured and pre-set manner. Given the legal requirements of IDEA, parent/school interactions often entail highly contextualized legal language (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) delivered in structured settings according to rules and rituals often known only to the school (Payne, 1995) and its attorneys.

These communication barriers often cause parents to feel disconnected from schools; consequently, parents often find themselves left out of the decision-making process. Instead of being active participants in decisions concerning their children's education, parents may become passive recipients of information (Lusthaus, Lusthaus, & Gibbs, 1981) and sign off on decisions already made by the schools (Wright & Wright, 1999). In such cases, they may feel frustrated and intimidated by the system (Correa, 1989), with the potential result that they give up trying to work with the school staff and limit their involvement to the bare minimum necessary (Harry, 1990).

This frustration may be felt more strongly by ethnically diverse families compared to white families (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). The exact impact is mostly unknown, however, because most research has focused only on white families, ignoring those students and families with linguistic and cultural differences (Lynch & Stein, 1987). Thus, there is little research about the quality of ethnically diverse parent participation in the schools in general, or Hispanic parent participation in particular (Casas & Furlong, 1994). This unfortunately leaves educators with little knowledge of how to give Hispanic parents what they need to enable them to be effective contributors to the special education process (Rhodes, 1996).

The special education process is compartmentalized, and includes referral, assessment, and placement decisions. Of these, the placement decision is the time when parental involvement should be strongest according to IDEA in terms of communication and decision-making. Placement decisions are made at team meetings in which parents and school professionals convene to develop a child's Individualized Education Program

(IEP), a document that describes the needs of the child and proposes methods to provide him or her with an appropriate education. This document is usually developed during an IEP team meeting, in which those involved in the education and assessment of the child confer to discuss test results, classroom observations, and special and regular education placement options. Parents are supposed to be equal partners in this team meeting (20 U.S.C. § 1414), but because of parent-school barriers, this meeting can be a particularly intimidating and overwhelming experience for all families in general, and for Hispanic families (Correa, 1989; Sanchez, 1996) in particular.

A review of the literature revealed five basic barriers that keep parents from participating in the special education process. These are: 1) communication problems, 2) cultural differences, 3) lack of school knowledge and/or parental knowledge, 4) feelings of disconnection with or intimidation by the school, and 5) educational level of the child.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore several of these barriers (communication issues, cultural differences, and the educational level of the child) in terms of parents' perception of their involvement in making decisions concerning their child's special education determination and placement. IEP development will be the focus because the majority of special education- specific parental involvement occurs during the IEP team meeting. Cultural differences and educational level also were chosen because, until now, research has been mostly limited to the parental involvement of white parents (Casas & Furlong, 1994) in elementary school (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995).

Because the predominant cultural focus will be on the experience of the Hispanic parent, and because communication is probably one of the major barriers for Spanish-dominant families, this barrier will be explored in more detail as well. Additional emphasis is placed on parental perceptions of how well schools follow the legal guidelines set forth by IDEA. Thus, the purpose of this study is to address the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Are there differences among parents' perceptions of the quality of home-school communication across parental ethnic characteristics and child's educational level?
2. Are there differences among parents' perceptions in developing their child's IEP across parental ethnic characteristics and child's educational level?

Significance of the Study

At this time, we know that the benefits of parental involvement for all children in the schools have long since been established by researchers (Freedman, Aschheim, & Zerchykov, 1989; Henderson, 1987), as well as legally mandated for parents whose children are in special education (20 U.S.C. § 1414). Given this knowledge, it is imperative that the field moves beyond researching the efficacy of parental involvement to examining how well schools are actually involving parents in terms of communication and decision making. Investigations of schools' efficiency at involving parents, particularly of students considered at-risk, are critical. When schools attempt to identify at-risk children, they must include many Hispanic children in this group because they have a much higher than average dropout rate (Montecel, et al., 1993) and their families are much more likely to live in poverty (Gault, 1989) than white children. In addition,

because more than half of all students in special education are over the age of 12 (an age group typically considered to be in middle or high school) (OSEP, 2002), differences in parental involvement per the educational level of the child are important to examine as well.

Few studies now exist with large sample sizes that examine parental involvement in special education. Thus, one aim of this study is to add new, more reliable information to the field. Considering the narrowed focus of this dissertation on Hispanic parents and parental perceptions across their children's different educational levels, the results from this study are intended to provide professionals across fields with necessary information to perform research, shape policy decisions, and better provide services to Hispanic children and families.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Special education laws provide that all children have the right to an education. Parents were a major force behind the litigation and legislation that provided these rights to children with special needs (Baca, 1998). Once they obtained a free and appropriate public education for their children, parents pushed to have a more influential role in making decisions concerning their children's special education diagnosis and placement. With litigation that led to the passage of special education laws, parents were given such rights, which dramatically changed the relationship between the home and the school (Lynch & Stein, 1982).

But, even with the rulings in special education-related litigation and the passage of special-education legislation, some people believed that their children were not receiving an appropriate education. They believed that schools were inappropriately meeting the needs of children, especially those students from ethnically diverse communities (Casas & Furlong, 1994). Ethnically diverse students were consistently placed in special education classrooms at rates greater than their white counterparts. This raised some concerns that schools may actually have been segregating ethnically diverse students by placing them in special education. It is unknown if schools were doing this intentionally or if segregation was done inadvertently through the use of ethnically or linguistically biased testing or poor pre-referral methods. Regardless, parents took notice (Marion, 1981), and brought the schools back to court (*Diana v. State Board of Education*, 1970; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Larry P. v Riles*, 1987).

One possible reason for this segregation by over inclusion may have been that minority parents were not well informed or actively involved in the decision-making process for their children (Gault, 1989). For the purposes of this study, involved parents will be defined as those who interact with schools in two of the six roles set forth by Epstein (1996); namely, as communicators and decision makers. Communicators have effective techniques to get information sent between the school and the home. Decision makers are actively involved in any decisions regarding educational programs for their children. In addition to being involved, parents must also be informed. Informed parents are defined as those who know their legal rights and how to ensure that these rights are provided to them.

At this time, few studies have examined the level of parental involvement (as communicators, decision makers, or informed parents) among different ethnicities in special education (Casas & Furlong, 1994), and among Hispanic parents in particular (Lynch & Stein, 1987). The purpose of this study is to do just that by investigating differences between how informed Hispanic and white families are about their child's special education placement and how actively involved they perceive themselves to be in their roles as communicators and decision-makers. In addition, this study will examine any differences in perceptions of involvement and informed status across different educational levels (elementary, middle, and high school). The interactions between ethnicity and educational level will be investigated as well.

Toward this goal, a review of the literature was undertaken. Parental legal rights were examined, with a particular emphasis on the legally mandated partnership between

the parents of children with disabilities and the school district. This discussion begins with a history of the legislation and litigation that impacted parent/school partnership and ends with the current legal state, as defined by IDEA, of the parental role in special education.

In addition to a general discussion of IDEA's guidelines, a more thorough examination will be made of requirements concerning IEP development. This will involve a discussion of expected and actual parental roles in their children's IEP team meetings. These meetings are the best examples of the communication role of sharing information with and soliciting information from schools, so it is vitally important to explore this angle. A complete discussion of parental involvement in the IEP meeting, and Hispanic parental involvement in particular, will be a major focus of this study.

Finally, information will be provided on the real and perceived barriers that keep families from exercising their legal rights under IDEA. Some of these barriers, including cultural differences, lack of school or parental knowledge, and the intimidating nature of the school to parents, will be discussed in general. Others, such as parent/school communication and parental participation across educational levels, will be discussed more specifically.

Since effective communication is fundamental to being an informed and involved parent, this particular barrier will be discussed in great detail. Because this dissertation is concerned mostly with Hispanic families, communication issues concerning language differences also will be closely examined. In addition, the methods schools use to

overcome some of the communication barriers between themselves and the home will be addressed.

Second, families perceive their roles differently across their child's educational level. The difference in educational level affects the depth of parental involvement, the number of teachers that parents must deal with (Epstein & Dauber, 2001), how comfortable parents feel when working within their child's school (Eccles & Harold, 1993), and many other factors. For example, a parent whose child has only one teacher in elementary school may find that they have six or seven teachers in middle school or high school (Epstein & Dauber, 2001). This type of experience may inhibit many parents and lead to school/home barriers that need to be addressed. To that end, existing research on educational level will be examined and discussed.

Legal Rights of the Parent

Any discussion of parent participation in special education must begin with an overview of the legislation and litigation that shaped the special education system now in use. Litigation and legislation are two powerful methods that parents of children with special needs have used to force schools to provide services to their children. Initial litigation established that it is discriminatory not to provide an education to children with special needs, and in the eyes of the Supreme Court, such discrimination is unconstitutional (Burgdorf, 1980). Case law stating that all children are entitled to an education was established based on these rulings. This litigation, as well as parental lobbying efforts, forced Congress to establish new laws and policies to provide for these

educational statutes. These laws have since been better defined through the efforts of lobbyists and/or parents who pursued further litigation.

Special education litigation. Before legislation, litigation was the only means by which all children could be ensured access to a free and appropriate public education. In particular, the rulings in two cases are considered to have started the special education movement: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) vs. Pennsylvania* (1972), which involved the education of children with mental retardation; and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (1972), which involved the education of all children with disabilities.

PARC vs. Pennsylvania was a class action case brought by PARC and the parents of thirteen children with mental retardation to acquire educational services for the children (Burgdorf, 1980). *Mills* was a case presented on behalf of seven African American children whose parents had tried and failed to provide an education for them through the public school system. This case argued against the discrimination of these students. The Supreme Court determined that this discrimination was based on the children's disability, not their race; therefore, the decision applied to all children with disabilities, not just African American ones (Burgdorf, 1980). In addition, the judge found that, because schools were using culturally biased measurements, they were effectively segregating children by ethnicity as well as disability (Huefner, 1999).

These two cases allowed children with disabilities to receive access to a public education. In addition, they established a method for parents to be involved in the provision of these services to their children by giving parents the right to notice and the

right to a hearing prior to the placement of their child in special education (Huefner, 2000). These cases raised the public level of awareness of the need for special education and established the foundation for parental involvement as part of the special education process.

Non-discriminatory litigation. Long before PARC and Mills, ethnically diverse parents sought an equal opportunity to education for their children. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case (1954) was brought to court by the parents of African-American students who wanted their children to receive the same quality of education as white children. The Supreme Court found “separate but equal” schooling to be a misnomer (and therefore discriminatory), so it ruled against racial segregation in the schools. Marion (1981) suggests that though this effectively desegregated the schools, African-American parents who had been active participants in their children’s African-American dominant schools were now made to feel unwelcome in their children’s new, white-dominant schools.

In addition, because these ethnically diverse parents were still fighting for equality in overall educational services for their children, the ethnically diverse parents of children with disabilities had still fewer options available to them than did white families (Marion, 1979). Add to this that cultural barriers prohibited many families from making full use of the legal sources available to them (Luft, 1995), and other barriers such as lack of time and money (Baca, 1998) often kept minority families from pursuing their children’s rights through the court system (Chinni, 1996). However, even with these difficulties, some ethnically diverse families attempted to seek out legal

remedies to ensure their children a fair and appropriate education. Though none of these court cases were related directly to parental rights in the schools, the fact that these parents pursued the litigation at all gave them some additional power.

One set of legal battles was launched because ethnically diverse parents often watched as their children were erroneously placed into special education classrooms. The parents felt that these placements must be incorrect because their children were leaving regular education classrooms in disproportionate numbers to enter the special education system. The parents determined that this separation had more to do with racial segregation than with their children's ability levels (Marion, 1981). Although this type of segregation had been commented upon in *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education*, a case that went to court a year later brought it to the forefront.

Diana v. State Board of Education (1970) was filed in California by Mexican-American parents who believed their children were being placed erroneously in special education. They showed that their children were being evaluated in English and therefore were placed in special education classes more because they lacked English-language ability rather than because of actual disabilities (Marion, 1981). The court ordered that the children be tested in their primary language, nonverbally, or through alternative sources (Baca, 1998). This set the standard that appropriate tests in the appropriate language must be used to place children in special education.

Assessment bias again became an issue more than a decade later in *Larry P. v. Wilson Riles* (1987). Six African-American elementary school children in the San Francisco Unified School District were placed in special education classes based upon

their scores on IQ tests that the children's parents considered to be racially biased. The parents reasoned that, because of this biased testing, African-American children were being placed in special education classrooms in larger numbers than their white counterparts. This effectively segregated children more by race than by ability, and therefore went against the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. The Ninth District Court of Appeals sided with the parents in this case, saying that the testing was discriminatory and violated the equal protection clauses of the United States and California Constitutions.

Thus, over time, special education and nondiscriminatory court decisions dramatically altered the status of culturally diverse children and disabled children in the schools (Marion, 1980). But although children were given more access to schools, parents still struggled with the court's poorly defined roles for parents in special education (Turnbull, 1993). Congress passed legislation in an attempt to rectify this and many other concerns about special education. As a result, parental roles were better defined to ensure the rights of children with disabilities. One particular piece of legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), greatly expanded on the court's rulings with regard to such issues as free and appropriate public education, due process, and non-discriminatory testing. But it wasn't until the reauthorization of IDEA (1997) that parents came to be considered equal partners in the special education process.

IDEA overview. The original law (EHA, P.L. 94-142) was signed in 1975 (20 USC 1400). It stated for the first time that parents were considered to be full partners

with the schools in making educational decisions about and for their children with special needs (Gault, 1989; Lynch & Stein, 1987), but the law's actual parameters were fairly narrow. At that time, "full partnership" meant that parents had the right to consent to evaluation and placement and participate in developing the IEP. With the 1997 reauthorization, a more active parent/school partnership was formed. This new partnership meant that parents now were asked for input during evaluation, helped decide eligibility, and aided in the determination of placement (NICHY, 1997).

It is difficult to completely understand the roles assigned to parents under IDEA without first describing the law in further detail. In order to do this, IDEA must be broken down into its prime components for further description. These components are founded on the idea of developing an individualized education program (IEP) that provides each child a free appropriate public education (FAPE) as a product of informed parental consent.

IDEA states that *all children* must be provided a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) regardless of disability, race, religion, and language. A free education means that educational services come at *no direct cost* to the parent or the child (34 C.F.R, 300.300-300.313). What constitutes an appropriate education is defined by the content of the IEP, thus this may differ from school to school and from individual to individual.

Boundaries on what is an appropriate education were established in the 1980s, when further litigation provided definition for the term. Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley (1982) was a case in which parents

requested that the school district provide the best possible program for their child's education. The court returned with a decision that the school district did not need to provide the best possible program, just a program to adequately meet the child's basic educational needs. This case provides the current guidelines that an "appropriate" education means an adequate education, not the best one possible.

Informed consent is also a prime component of parental participation according to IDEA (34 C.F.R., 300.500). One way to help decide if consent is informed is to determine whether the parents can fully understand what they are agreeing to (FocusAS, 2003). This may mean that the terms are translated from jargon to lay speech (Roit & Pfohl, 1984), or from English to Spanish. In addition, consent must be voluntary (FocusAS, 2003). Parents must know they have the choice to disagree if they want to. They need to know that they have room to negotiate and that other options are available to them.

Given these prime components of FAPE, IEP development, equal partnership, and informed consent under the legislation of IDEA and the parental rights of prior notice and rights to due process under prior litigation and IDEA, the question remains: "Were the problems solved?" The answer at this time is, "Not entirely."

Remaining concerns. Though it has been half a century since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), de facto segregation still exists. In a study by First (1995), sixty-three percent of African-American children were found to attend minority-dominant schools, 32% are in schools that are almost completely diverse, and 68% of Hispanic students are in minority-dominant schools. Also, research by Baca and Valenzuela (1998) and

MacMillan and Reschly (1998) found that there is still an overrepresentation of ethnically diverse students in special education.

It has been more than twenty-five years since IDEA first passed, yet referral and assessment procedures often still discriminate against ethnically diverse students. For example, a recent study of the reasons for referral of Hispanic children found that about half of these children are referred for language-related problems, and about a third of these are specific to oral language (Ochoa, RoblesPiña, Garcia, & Bruenig, 1999). In addition, another study examining assessment procedures found that 15% of school psychologists surveyed still use predominantly English-only measures to test for intelligence of children with limited English proficiency (Ochoa, Powell, & Robles-Piña, 1996).

Researchers are not the only ones who viewed special education as discriminatory; parents were taking notice as well. Sharpe (1997) verbally polled a focus group of minority parents of children in schools across Minnesota concerning issues involving students in special education. Hispanic participants' responses indicated discrimination as the main reason they felt their children were over-represented in special education. In addition, they viewed this discrimination as harmful to their children.

Despite their dissatisfaction with the special education system, ethnically diverse parents still want to be involved in their children's special education plans— they just may not know how. Lynch and Stein (1987) found that 95% of Hispanic parents desired more information about their rights and the criteria for placing students in special

education. It appears that these parents want to be effective participants in their children's education – and according to IDEA, it is the job of the school, the district, or a statewide or federal agency to ensure that they are.

One case in particular argued that a statewide education agency was responsible for monitoring how well school districts upheld the regulations set forth under IDEA. This case, *Angel G. vs. Texas Education Agency (TEA)*, was brought before the court by Advocacy, Inc. of Texas and is still awaiting a final decision. Advocacy, Inc.'s complaint was that TEA failed to provide FAPE due to an ineffective monitoring system. They argued that TEA's monitoring system failed to successfully ensure that school districts were in compliance with the regulations set forth by IDEA (Advocacy, Inc, 2002). As a result of this complaint, TEA revised its old district effectiveness and compliance (DEC) process. One difference in the new DEC process is that the compliance review team focuses more on collecting information from parents about their child's special education program, e.g., the Parent Special Education Survey (PSES).

IDEA Steps to Placement

There are certain issues compliance monitors look for, apart from parental feedback, when reviewing a district. Most of these are tied to the current guidelines set forth by IDEA in a description of what is expected from schools and school districts in terms of special education. These guidelines break the process into steps designed to help provide FAPE, and will continue to be the standard set forth for this purpose until the next reauthorization of IDEA.

The first step is a referral of the child by the parent or school to a team of professionals to determine if there is a problem. If this team (sometimes called a Child Study Team, a Student Support Team, or a Pre-Referral Team) decides that the child might have a disability, it requests that the parent consent to an assessment for the child. According to IDEA, parental consent must be voluntary and informed, or it is not legal (34 C.F.R., 300.500). Informed consent means that it was given in a language the parents can understand and uses terms that the parent can understand to explain what will be done.

The next step is an assessment to be performed by a qualified professional who uses tests that are proven to be reliable and valid. If a child being assessed has limited English proficiency, the testing must be done in a manner as to be nondiscriminatory (34 C.F.R., 300.532). After the assessment is completed, an eligibility team meeting takes place. At this meeting, the child's needs are determined by examining both the formal assessment of the child and any informal information provided by parents and teachers. If the team determines that the child is eligible for services based on having a disability, the next step is the development of an IEP.

An IEP defines the services the child will receive in order to get FAPE (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.340). The IEP team must consist of the following individuals: (a) a parent or guardian of the child, (b) a regular education teacher, (c) a special education teacher, (d) a representative of the school who can describe, provide, or supervise the instructional programs for the child, (e) an evaluation interpreter, (f) any other individual with expertise to help the child, and (g) the child, when appropriate (34 C.F.R.,

300.344). In addition, if the parent does not speak English, an interpreter must be present at this meeting (34 C.F.R, 300.345).

The parents' roles are clearly outlined in the IDEA regulations: "Parents participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child; and the provision of FAPE to the child" (34 C.F.R., 300.501). The IEP team meeting is universally established as the meeting that determines the educational placement of the child and the provision of services to ensure FAPE. Parents' input is so important in this meeting that, under IDEA, the school must go through extensive effort to ensure that parents can participate. For example, the school must notify parents in plenty of time to be prepared to attend the meeting, and should provide them with the opportunity to give input on the time and place of the meeting (34 C.F.R., 300.345). If the parents cannot come, other methods of getting their input into their child's IEP (such as phone calls) must be exhausted before the school can hold the IEP team meeting without them (34 C.F.R., 300.345).

If the team (with or without the parents) determines that the child qualifies for services and agrees upon what these services will be, the parents are asked to provide consent for school to offer these services to the child. The final step is to give the child services that will provide FAPE. Frequently, such services consist of placement in a special education classroom for either part of the day or for the whole day. For children with limited English proficiency, FAPE may entail more than just special education. It could require bilingual and/or ESL special education, and appropriate placement and assistance within the regular classroom (Baca, 1998, p. 82).

Placement of the child in services is not the last formal involvement the parent has with the school. Every year, a meeting is held to determine whether the child has met the goals set forth in his or her IEP and to create new goals for the next year based on the child's educational status and abilities (34 C.F.R. 300.432). At any time, a parent can ask for a re-evaluation of the child to check for a continued need for services. With or without parental request, another meeting is held every three years to determine if the child continues to have a disability and to need special education services. This means there is another IEP team meeting, and it may require another formal assessment (34 C.F.R. 300.536).

The final formal step for a parent and a child who receives special education services is to plan for transition services out of the public school, which means preparing for what the students will do once they graduate. The student is usually invited to the IEP meeting at age 14 to begin taking an instrumental role in planning these services. After the student reaches age 16, a statement from the IEP team is needed in the IEP discussing transitional planning (34 C.F.R. 300.347). At the age of majority all rights given to the parents transfer to the competent student (34 C.F.R. 300.347). At this point, it is up to the student what role the parent will hold in any communication or decision-making tasks.

This is the standard procedure if the school district does everything according to law and/or the parent agrees with the school district each step of the way. When such is not the case, IDEA provides procedural safeguards to make sure that parents are informed of their rights (34 C.F.R. 300.504) and that they have some way of asserting

these rights. When parents and schools are in dispute, they must be able to meet with an impartial mediator to work out these differences (34 C.F.R. 300.506). Another option, an impartial due-process hearing, is available when there are issues related to the evaluation and placement of a child or when there is a dispute over FAPE (34 C.F.R. 300.507).

Parents increased their requested for such hearings during the 10 years between 1991 and 2000 (e.g., 4,655 total hearings requested in 1991; 11,068 total hearings requested in 2000) (Ahearn, 2002). Of the hearings requested in 2000, roughly one third (3,274 hearings) were held (Ahearn, 2002). If hearings or mediation fail to enable the parents and schools to reach an understanding, only then is litigation permitted, (34 C.F.R. 300.512).

Focus on the IEP

At this time we will narrow the focus to a single step, the IEP process, in part to examine parental roles as communicators and decision makers. Because it is during the IEP meeting that parents may be frequently asked to perform these roles, this meeting may be viewed as the one of the best opportunities to study parental perceptions of their roles in the special education process. This section will be devoted in part to investigating this rationale for studying the IEP meeting, providing a description of this meeting, and discussing factors influencing the IEP team's decisions.

Rationale for parent participation in IEP team meeting. There are many reasons to focus on parental participation in the IEP team meeting. Parents can provide everyday knowledge about their children that can help evaluators support or reject theories on possible sources of school problems, e.g., the child's behavior at home, the child's

behavior in relation to other children of the same ethnicity and age in their home community, and home life factors impacting learning (Yates & Ortiz, 1998). This information can be as important as the more scientific measurements of the educational professionals (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Additionally, because many ethnically diverse parents have strong feelings about the possible over inclusion of their children in special education (Marion, 1982; Sharpe, 1997), taking active involvement in the decision-making process may help ease their fears concerning their child's placement, and may help foster a healthier home/school relationship.

Description of IEP team meeting. In order to describe parental roles in the IEP meeting, it is first necessary to examine the IEP team meeting in general. This meeting has two general purposes: to determine eligibility based on the child having a disability (34 C.F.R., Sec. 534) and, if a disability exists, to develop an educational program for the child (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.356). For the first of these, an evaluation specialist will discuss the results of the assessment, and the IEP team (sometimes called an eligibility team) will determine if the child has a disability based on these results and/or other outside information.

IDEA provides a list of disabilities for which a child can receive services. This list is limited, so children who do not fall into one of the listed categories cannot receive funds for special education or related services under IDEA. For children over the age of 9, the list of disabilities includes specific learning disability (SLD), severe emotional disturbance (SED), speech or language impairment, mental retardation (MR), orthopedic impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, deafness, deaf-blindness, autism,

traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other health impairment (OHI) (34 C.F.R., 300.7c).

For children 3 to 9 years old, no category is needed (34 C.F.R., 300.7b). The team must first determine that eligibility is met for one of these disabilities and then, based on this diagnosis, decide what services to provide.

Though IDEA has determined this list of disabilities, there are no standardized criteria for diagnosis across states or professionals. For example, an educational diagnosis of SLD in one state may mean that a child has a 15-point discrepancy between IQ and achievement scores (e.g., Texas); while in another state the necessary discrepancy may be 20 points (e.g., Georgia). In addition, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual: Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) features a criterion that non-school related professionals (e.g., independent psychologists, hospitals, etc.) follow requiring a discrepancy of two standard deviations. Now, if professionals cannot agree on what it means to be given a particular diagnosis, it is difficult to imagine that a layperson parent could understand and consent to it. However, the school district needs and wants a definitive decision in order to provide services to the child. The medical model that established the criteria set forth by IDEA does not allow for any shades of variance (Harry, 1992b) and a decision that the child is disabled or not is necessary for the school to receive funds.

This is an area where schools and parents may differ. Parents may view their child's difficulties in a more varied fashion than does IDEA, and thus might dispute their child's classification. In some cases, the variance of interpretation between what is and what is not a disability may be culturally based. For example, Hispanic families may

have a broader concept of what it means to be “normal” (Harry, 1990). Rural families may interpret a reading or writing problem as being acceptable because they may not view these as necessary skills (Harry, 1992b). In addition, parents may interpret their child’s problem as being associated with second language acquisition or a problem at the school instead of a disability (Harry, 1990).

If a child is found to have a disability and is determined to be eligible for services, then the second function of the meeting begins: educational program development. Each child who is eligible for services must receive an IEP. As the name implies, an IEP is individualized, meaning it is specifically designed for each particular child. To accomplish this, all IEPs must include the following information about the child: current level of performance, measurable annual goals, full description of the services to be provided, assessment methods for evaluating these goals, explanation of why the child is not participating in the regular classroom, and any transitional information the child may need if they plan to leave school (34 C.F.R. 300.347). The IEP should be developed at a team meeting with feedback from all of the members.

Status of parental involvement in special education decision-making. By law, parents are considered to be equal members of the IEP team (34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.344). This means that they are decision makers when determining both whether their child has a disability, and what services the child should receive given that they have a disability.

The following section will describe what factors influence the IEP team members in terms of disability determination, finances, program rationality, and ethnic differences. Each IEP team member considers the factors, such as what is needed for a

child to be educated, what services are already in place that might fit a child's needs, and what modifications are necessary for a child to be successful (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.340). In many of these, funding is a major determining factor (Petr & Barney, 1993; Chinni, 1996). Parents often are not aware of funding issues and their relationship to the services that their child receives. In a worst-case scenario, teachers and administrators will make decisions solely on the availability of funds (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Mehan, Herweck, & Meihls, 1986). For example, Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986) interviewed several teachers who said that they did not refer Mexican-American children to special education services because they felt that the lack of bilingual services in the special education program would make special education more harmful than helpful to the child. This decision was made in part because teachers did not think that the school would pay for bilingual special education instruction. This decision is not legal, it is not FAPE, and it was made without parental approval.

But the reality is that there is only so much money to spend in any given district on special education services. The school must determine what to spend on a single child by balancing the idea of equity for all students and the best choice of services for the one (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). IDEA does not make allowances for this concern (i.e., funding should not be a primary deciding factor in determining what services are provided on a child's IEP). This idea is balanced with the decision of the Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley (1982) which assures the schools that they do not have to provide the best services, but only those necessary to provide adequate academic success. Parents still argue that they want

“programs that matched the child’s needs, rather than vice versa” (Petr & Barney, 1993, p. 250). This argument is a healthy one, provided each side balances the needs and rights of the other. If the parent is not involved in decisions concerning services for their child, the school then chooses what it feels is appropriate. In the end, this choice may favor the best interest of the school over the best interest of the child (Chinni, 1996).

In addition to funds, there are other reasons parents may have issues with the placement of their children. One such factor may be parental dissatisfaction with the programs that are being offered. Harry’s (1992a) study found that although many of the Hispanic families did not argue whether their child had a disability, they did not necessarily approve of the programs being offered. Many times, the parents Harry worked with described their children’s classes in negative terms and their schoolwork as infantile and repetitive (Harry, 1990).

In addition to parental dissatisfaction with their children’s placement, Marion (1981) added concerns over stigmatization ascribed to children in special education classes. These labels included words like “mentally ill,” “socially maladjusted,” or “not too smart” (p. 219). When parents did not agree with the other IEP team members, they may have perceived the other members as unaware and unknowing of the needs of their child (Sanchez, 1996). This may lead to a lack of trust or a feeling of disconnectedness between the parent and the school.

In essence, the IEP is a contract between the parent and the school to provide guidance in educational decisions concerning the child (Bennett, 1988). When this contract is signed, the parent is indicating agreement with everything written in that

document and giving consent to the school for the activities described in it to take place. Legally, the parents' signatures are assumed to be a sign that they are providing informed consent. Again, informed consent means that when parents sign this form, they are competent to do so, have done so voluntarily, and did so in full knowledge of what they signed. However, the reality may sometimes be that the only thing the signed paper proves is that the parent was physically at the meeting. There is no way to know the quality of the parental participation or the knowledge that they gained while present (Morgan, 1982).

In an attempt to determine if parents gave informed consent, Lynch and Stein (1987) asked Hispanic parents if they felt that they understood their rights. Seventy-five percent said that they not only understood their rights but they understood their child's IEP as well. Unfortunately, this finding has not been replicated in most other research investigations. McKinney and Hocutt (1982) found that one-fourth of parents asked did not recall that their child had an IEP, and few of those who did know were able to describe what it said. When Harry (1992a) asked Hispanic families she was working with to show her a copy of their children's papers, all of them had a copy of the IEP, but none of them knew what it was called or what it said. Gallegos and Gallegos (1988) found that a majority of Hispanic parents reported they could not understand the forms being sent home from the school. Report cards and IEPs were specifically discussed. And even in Lynch and Stein's (1987) study, when parents did know what an IEP was, only 55% of the Hispanics knew what services were listed on it.

IEPs and IEP meetings can be confusing for parents (Harry, 1990; Smith 2001). Their roles in the decision-making process can be intimidating for all parents, but this may be especially true for ethnically diverse parents (Sanchez, 1996). There are frequently a large number of professionals at an IEP meeting, all of whom are familiar to each other but many of whom are unfamiliar to the parent, and this can be particularly overwhelming for a culturally diverse family (Correa, 1989). Because children with limited English proficiency require more services than English-speaking children and the meeting may need a translator as well, there may be even more people at the meetings than usual, which can further overwhelm the parent (Yates & Ortiz, 1998).

In addition, parents are often viewed by the school as the least powerful, least contributing member of an IEP team (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981). When the parents view themselves as the least powerful member of the team, this often may be manifested by withdrawal from the situation and a demonstration of disapproval through silence (Harry, 1990). Gonzales (1986) expressed that such a silence should cue the other IEP team members that the parent is not yet secure enough to be effectively involved in their child's education. Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) interpret this type of silence differently. They stated that this could mean that parents prefer to be recipients of information at these meetings instead of active participants.

Whatever the reason, the case is that Hispanic parents often are not as actively involved as a full partners should be. Lynch and Stein (1982) found that only 71% of Hispanic parents they observed actively participated in their child's IEP development, and only 47% offered suggestions at the meeting. This may explain why 30% of

Mexican families surveyed by Gault (1989) said that they were not satisfied with their participation in their child's IEP development. This lack of participation and their sense of dissatisfaction reflect that Hispanic parents do not see themselves as equal, active participants in the IEP process. Parent involvement in IEP development is crucial, and Hispanic parents need to be active participants in their child's educational lives and better consumers of special education services (Sanchez, 1996).

Why are these statistics on parental participation in special education so negative? Much of this is probably due to barriers in the home/school relationship. Some of the barriers (culture, funding, communication, etc.) have already been briefly covered, but none thoroughly. In the next section, these barriers will be described in greater detail and some suggestions for improvement will be provided.

Barriers to Parent Participation

Some of the barriers to the participation of parents whose children are in special education appear to be many of the same barriers that parents have whose children who are in general education. A review of the literature finds five themes that may be seen as barriers to parents' participation across all types of educational methodologies. These themes include communication problems (Harry, 1992a; Harry, 1990; Correa, 1989; Gault, 1989; Buscaglia, 1975), cultural differences (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Montecel, et al., 1993; Gault, 1989; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986), the differences in school/ parental knowledge (Harry, 1999; Casa & Furolong, 1994; Gallegos & Gallegos, 1988; Lynch & Stein, 1987; Garate, 1986; Marion, 1980), the frequently disconnected/intimidating nature of the school (First, 1995; Harry, 1992c;

Liontos, 1992; Correa, 1989; Bennett, 1988; Lynch & Stein, 1987; Marion, 1981), and the educational level of the child (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995; Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 2001).

Communication. Parental communication within general education is usually limited to parent/ teacher meetings, notes sent home, and PTA/PTO meetings. The first contact from the school to discuss problems related to a potential disability might be a phone call, an invitation to the child's pre-referral meeting, or a letter sent home describing problems at school. The parent may then receive a request to initiate proceedings to look into special education services (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.503) or be asked to provide written consent for their child's evaluation (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.505). After the assessment, the results are communicated to the parents in verbal form at the IEP team meeting (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.343) and usually in the written form of the child's report. Finally, placement options are discussed with the parent or parents (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.534), who then consent to the written copy of the IEP (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.346 and Sec. 300.505). This written copy is given to the parents, who can review it during or after the meeting if they choose. Once a child is placed in services, the necessity for parents to interact regularly with the school increases. Parents are asked to come to ARD meetings, approve tri-annual assessments, and attend any meetings regarding the changing of placement for their child (e.g., disciplinary issues, increasing or decreasing services, etc.).

All of these communications between the parent and the school take place in one of two formats: verbal or written. Verbal communications range from basic

conversations at the parent's home to advanced IEP team meetings at the child's school. Written communications can consist of informal notes home and memos, or formal consents and IEP documents. Problems with both verbal and written communication seem to be caused mostly by linguistic differences and the school's use of professional language (jargon, acronyms, etc.).

The first of these, linguistic differences, impacts all parents with limited English proficiency; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, only Hispanic parents with limited English proficiency will be discussed. Schools appear to be aware of the need for parents to be informed in their native languages, and many schools even send written materials home in both English and Spanish for parents. These actions are done both for the good of the children and because they are legally mandated. Some IDEA-mandated requirements that account for parental lack of English language proficiency include a translator who is available to a parent during IEP meetings (34 C.F.R. 300.345) and consent information that is provided in the Spanish (34 C.F.R. 300.401). The question then remains: Why are language issues still considered to be an educators' greatest challenge and a parent's greatest frustration (Sharpe, 1997) when working with families with limited English proficiency, if schools are accommodating for these language differences?

One of the reasons may be that the formal, legal language used in IDEA translates poorly (if at all) from English to other languages (Correa, 1989). Frequently, the terms either are unfamiliar to the translator or are provided in a more formal register that the family cannot understand (Lynch & Stein, 1987). This means that although the

words have some translation from English to Spanish, the family still might not know them. As best said by Harry (1992a),

“The problems ... were not simply a matter of translation, of parents not knowing the English word for these activities; they did not know the Spanish name for them either. They did not know that they had a name at all. In other words, they did not realize that a particular activity or event was an established procedure, required by law, with a recognized name and a ritualized manner of implementation. Thus these parents had no context in which to evaluate the significance, indeed, the power, of these documents and proceedings in the lives of their children” (p. 178).

Sometimes the translated terms, though closely resembling their English meaning, have a slightly different connotation to someone from another culture. One reason could be that IDEA uses language that can be defined in different ways (e.g., “learning disabled,” “appropriate,” etc.), so the fact that the interpretation is different is not unusual. Another is that cultural ideas of “normalcy” or “handicap” change across groups of individuals (Harry, 1990). Still another may be that a word actually means something different in another language, but there is no closer translation available (Harry, 1990).

Another type of communication issue that could be a problem is school’s reliance on written communication (Harry, 1990; Gault, 1989). It should be noted that the readability of these written materials (in English or Spanish) tends to be higher than the reading level of many Hispanic families (Romo, 1986). Gallegos & Gallegos (1988)

found that even families who said they could read Spanish have said that they did not understand the technical terms used in these documents. When families cannot understand a document they are signing, serious doubts arise as to whether or not they are giving informed consent (Roit & Prohl, 1984).

Jargon continues to be a problem for parents both in written and spoken forms. Professional meetings often are filled with jargon and acronyms that professional educators know, but parents have no reason to be familiar with. Even teachers who don't use jargon per se often use terms that parents don't understand to explain issues concerning the child (Harry, 1992a). This strict use of professional language or jargon could be because of the complex policies and procedures in IDEA (Correa, 1989), that the concepts the professional is trying to describe are often abstract or contextualized (Harry, 1992a), or that the professional is attempting to impress the parent through the use of long words or uninterpretable labels (Buscaglia, 1975; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). In addition, it is probable that the information is simply confusing no matter what language it is delivered in (Gault, 1989). Parents are asked to understand such terms as percentiles, grade equivalents, (Gault, 1989), curriculum descriptions, and classroom modifications. Parents cannot always talk about these ideas because they lack the background needed to meaningfully contribute to the process (Gault, 1989; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982). It is this lack of background knowledge, both on the part of the teacher and the part of the parent, which concerns the next barrier.

Lack of knowledge of legal rights, educational services, and schools. Many times, teachers assume that families know as much as educators do about laws and

policies affecting their child (Marion, 1980). In fact, few parents understand school practices, policies, and systems (Casas & Furlong, 1994; Garate, 1986). Lynch and Stein (1987) asked a group of Hispanic parents what areas they needed additional training in to help their children with special needs. Almost all responded that they need help in the areas of “special education law, parent and student rights, discipline skills, and criteria for identifying and placing students in special education programs” (p. 108).

Roit & Prohol (1984) generated their own list of skills that parents need in order to be fully informed enough to sign a consent form. It should not be surprising that the list of information that parents want to know to help their children contains the very same items as the list that parents need to know in order to provide informed consent. So, it is reasonable to assume that if parents claim to be lacking this information, they are currently lacking the prerequisite skills to provide informed consent. In fact, research by Gallegos & Gallegos (1988) found that a majority of the Hispanic families surveyed did not know basic information about their children’s special education programs. In another study, Lynch and Stein (1987) found that about one-fourth of Hispanic families surveyed did not feel that they understood their rights as parents, and could not comprehend what was written on their children’s special education forms.

In addition to a general lack of information, many parents lack the knowledge of what is expected from them in terms of home and school interactions (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lintonos, 1992). Many Hispanic families believe they should not question the school’s decisions (Gallegos, & Gallegos, 1988; Lintonos, 1992). Others trust that schools are infallible and will do what is right (Figler, 1981). This idea that the school

knows what is best for the child is sometimes manifested as a hands-off approach by the parents, which schools often interpret as the parents not caring about their child's educational needs (Montecel, et al., 1993; Sanchez, 1996).

These kinds of interpretations show that although parents lack knowledge about schools, schools frequently lack knowledge about parents, too. For example, research shows that the stereotypical school belief that Hispanic parents don't care or don't value education is unfounded (Casas & Furlong, 1994). Another myth about Hispanic parents is that they lack the ability to participate in the decision-making process for their children (Sanchez, 1996). Schools often fail to recognize that parents can be a valuable source of information about the child, a helpful resource to further the child's education, and an ally to the school in the educational process (Commins, 1992). Another misconception is that Hispanic parents choose not to be involved in their children's education. Hispanic parents' lack of participation in their child's academic lives may be less a factor of culture and more a factor of poverty. As Payne (1995) wrote, "what may seem to be very workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to those in poverty" (p. 59). But these misconceptions may not be the major area in which schools demonstrate their lack of knowledge about Hispanic parents. The most basic divide may be the school's lack of understanding of the fundamental cultural gap between the home and the school.

Cultural differences. National cultural data provided for the 1993-94 school year found that educators as a group are 88% white, 8 percent African American, and 3 percent Hispanic (García, 2001). Thus, Hispanic children are often confronted by

cultural differences between their families and their schools. This separateness of ideals, norms, and beliefs may make ethnically different children feel torn between their home and their school (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). Partly, these feelings may arise because the children were raised to value their parents, cooperate with their peers, and show respect through silence (Montecel, et al., 1993), and once they enter school they are expected to be independent, competitive, (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), and to speak out in class. However, it is important to note that just because a group of children and parents may be from the same cultural label (e.g., Hispanic) or even the same country (e.g., Mexico) this does not mean that they will hold the same cultural ideals. Valenzuela (1999) found that not only the between cultural group differences (white and Mexican) but the within cultural group differences (recent immigrants v. American born students, etc.) create anger and prejudice which lead to parents and children feeling alienated from each other as well as from the schools.

In addition, all cultural differences are emphasized when parents meet with schools at the IEP team meeting. Often the goals for special education encourage the cultural ideals of the school over those of the family (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). In fact, some schools may even view the values of the Hispanic family as a handicap to the child's education because those values differ so greatly from the expectations of the school (Montecel, et al., 1993). As Gault (1989) wrote, "When the beliefs and values of minority parents come in contact with the expectations of the schools, the chasm widens between professionals and parents" (p. 38).

This chasm is further broadened by schools' misinterpretation of common Hispanic parental behavior characteristics. López's (2001) research found that parents participate differently in their child's education than school personnel expect. Instead of parental involvement meaning being active communicators and decision makers inside the schools, it may mean that they are training their children outside of the schools to value hard worker. Gault (1989) described schools as misinterpreting Hispanic parental involvement methods as uncaring because they are hesitant to disagree with professionals. Morton (1992) described further school misunderstandings, "Many school administrators and teachers misread the reserve, the non-confrontational manners, and the non-involvement of Hispanic parents to mean that they are uncaring about their children's education" (p. 2). And, it is not only the parents, but also the students, who are considered not to care about their education. In Valenzuela's (1999) study she found that school professionals, "over interpret urban youths' attire and off-putting behavior as evidence of a rebelliousness that signifies that these students 'don't care' about school. Having drawn that conclusion, teachers then often make no further effort to forge effective reciprocal relationships with this group" (p. 21)

A third reason is that Hispanic families are unfamiliar with school expectations and are uncomfortable with the idea of being a part of the school process (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986; Valenzuela, 1999). In general, it is not uncommon for families to feel uncomfortable in their child's school, for whatever reason. This discomfort may lead to further alienation by the family and distancing from the school.

These barriers are not independent of one another. A Hispanic parent may feel inferior to the school for a variety of reasons (Marion, 1981; Lontos, 1992), and this feeling of inferiority may cause them to be less actively involved in their child's life (Yates & Ortiz, 1998). In addition, cultural experiences have encouraged these parents to be silently respectful of authority (Montecel, et al., 1993), which has further removed them from active participation. The school may view this uninvolved parent as uncaring, and may begin to respond negatively and condescendingly to the parent (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). This response may cause the parent to feel even more uncomfortable or defensive. In the end, the barriers may pile so high that parental opinions go either unvoiced (Gonzales, 1986) or unheeded (Harry, 1992a) by the school to the point that the parent feels disconnected.

Disconnection/ intimidation. There are other factors that cause feelings of disconnection, intimidation, and alienation in families. Some of these rest within the school and some within the parent. Schools may not be actively aware of the intimidating nature of their institution or the condemnation of the families by the staff (First, 1995), but families pick up on these undercurrents and this may place them in an adversarial role (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). These feelings of intimidation may come as early as the first phone call (Marion, 1982) or letter (Harry, 1992a) sent home discussing problems with the child. These contacts are often formal in such a way as to discomfort the parent (Harry, 1992a) and threatening in a way that questions the parents' judgment or the way they raise their child (Marion, 1981). These contacts often

leave the parent feeling frightened, (Marion, 1981) and they may respond to this fear by acting defensively toward the school (Bennett, 1988).

Bennett (1988) describes professionals who “would not hesitate, if they thought the child’s educational ‘development’ called for it, to suggest ways the parents might alter the home environment, including how to communicate with and discipline their child [with a disability]. The Hispanic parents, on the other hand, usually found themselves in a rather defensive position with respect to these suggestions that were generally presented as either ‘the way things are done,’ or ‘in the best interests of the child” (p. 11).

This idea of a parent being defensive when met with unwelcoming school climate is undisputed by further research. Harry (1992a) found that when schools were required to work with parents, they often treated parental views as meaningless. Valenzuela (1999) describes parents’ opinions as, “dismissed without serious consideration” (p. 69). Bennett (1988) found educators using practices such as adopting a paternal manner with the parent, discussing all problems as being child-centered (ignoring systemic problems), limiting the areas where parents could provide input, and forcing parents to meet when and where the school requested. These types of activities are not unusual. Several researchers (Correa, 1989; Harry, 1992c; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986) have discussed problems associated when schools fail to cooperate with parents with scheduling, transportation, and child-care. Other authors have discussed how schools do not provide enough time in meetings to sufficiently explain information

about children from all backgrounds (Chinni, 1996), and particularly those from Hispanic backgrounds (Gault, 1989).

Some of the feelings of disconnection with the school have little to do with actions taken by the school itself. Many feelings of insecurity come from within the parent or family. Hispanic parents often feel they lack the skills or training needed to be involved in making decisions for their children (Yates & Ortiz, 1998). In fact, some parents believe that any interference on their part will actually harm their child (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986). Still other parents have little confidence in general about their role in their child's education and parents are fearful about the idea of participating (Marion, 1981; Liontos, 1992). These feelings of insecurity may stem from past, negative experiences in schools (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986), from a fear of alienating the authorities who affect the daily lives of their child (Harry, 1992a), or from a feeling of powerlessness or an inability to challenge school authority (Valenzuela, 1999). Whatever the cause, the effect is that Hispanic parents often feel left out of the process (Lynch & Stein, 1987), resentful to the school (Ascher, 1987), and/or distrustful of its staff (Harry, 1992a).

Child's educational level. All of the other issues described above are true barriers to parent/school interactions. The next issue to be discussed, the child's educational level, is not an actual barrier as much as it is a symptom of many barriers working together. Exactly what these barriers are and how to fix them is currently under dispute. At this time, there is little research concerning parent involvement in middle school and even less research specific to high school (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller,

1995). This is just in general education. A review of the literature found no direct research discussing parent involvement in special education in general, or ethnically diverse parent special education involvement in particular, at either middle school or high school as compared to elementary school. Because this research is not available, this literature review is limited to general education, white parental involvement only.

What we do know is that positive parent/school interactions drop drastically as the educational level of the child increases. A federally mandated study found that parents rated home/school interactions in first grade as mostly positive at 52%, with few negative at 20%. By seventh grade, these numbers even out to 36% positive and 33% negative. The number of parents volunteering in school also decreases from 33% in first grade to 8% in seventh (Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez, 1993). But these discrepancies don't stop when children change from elementary to middle school. Research shows that parent involvement drops as children advance through high school from parents being much more involved with their freshman student's school and much less involved with their senior's (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995, p. 129).

Some researchers focused less on parental involvement as a whole and focused more on particular types of involvement. Chen and Chandler (2001) found that parents whose children were in middle school said they were not given as much information to help them understand child development as elementary school parents were. In addition, parents report receiving more assistance with homework in elementary than at middle school. Dauber and Epstein (2001) found parents report that elementary school teachers

do a better job than middle school teachers at involving parents in their child's school, homework, and reading activities.

There are some theories why these changes exist from elementary to middle and from middle to high school. One possibility is that, because self-contained classrooms show more parent involvement, and these types of classrooms are found mostly at the elementary school level, parents are therefore more involved at elementary school than at middle or high school (Epstein & Dauber, 2001). Another possibility is that middle school students are given pressure from their friends and an understanding from their teen culture that their parents shouldn't be involved at school (Riley, 1994). Another belief is that as children mature from being a child to being an adult, they need less parental support and develop more self-sufficiency (Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995). Eccles and Harold (1993) propose that parents may think adolescents need and want independence, and that they should become less involved to provide this to them. They go on to add that parents may be less involved both from a perceived need to do so and from a decrease in their feelings of efficacy as their child matures. But are these theories supported? Connors and Epstein (1994) found that more than 90% of parents want to be involved with their children's high school, and 80% expressed a desire to be more involved than they currently were. Half of the students expressed that they wanted their parents to be more involved as well.

Overall, there is still a veil of mystery surrounding parental involvement at the middle school and high school level. At this time, it can only be assumed that as children progress from elementary to middle and from middle to high school some types

of barriers are keeping them from being involved. These barriers may be school centered, parent centered, or child centered, but one thing we know is that parents overwhelmingly want a solution to overcome them.

Recommendations

Research on the problems of waning parental involvement as children's educational level increases, is still in its infancy and warrants additional research in order to provide best-practice recommendations. This is not true of the other general barriers to parental participation in the schools (communication, cultural differences, school/parental knowledge, and the intimidating nature of the school) discussed earlier, which have all been examined in great detail by many different researchers. Many of these researchers have also provided possible solutions for breaking down these barriers and strengthening parent/school partnerships in special education. Quite a few of these are the theoretical ideas of these researchers, based on nothing more than their practical knowledge and research done on effective schools (Chavkin, 1996; Correa, 1989; Gonzales, 1986; Ramirez & Casteñada, 1974; and Sosa, 1996) Further research into these techniques specifically with regard to Hispanic families is recommended to determine their efficacy with this population.

For all of these suggestions, the most direct place for a school to start is by addressing parental feelings of intimidation. Many parents had negative experiences themselves while in school (Freedman, Aschhemi, Zerchykov, 1989) and with special education programs in particular (Marion, 1981). It may feel almost like punishment for

them to return to a place where they experienced failure in the past. It should be the school's responsibility to make these adults feel not only welcome, but also valued.

The first step is to make sure that the parent feels safe and comfortable when meeting at the school (Correa, 1989). Because many schools for low-SES families are in dangerous neighborhoods, these parents may not have reliable transportation or else may not have someone to take care of their other minor children, so simply getting to the school might be a problem (Rhodes, 1996). It is important to consider, and if necessary provide, transportation and childcare for such families (Correa, 1989; Rhodes, 1996; Stein, 1983). In addition, many parents work and cannot afford to miss time at their jobs for school meetings. Meetings should be held at appropriate, convenient times (Marion, 1982) agreed upon by both the school and the family. This is not just a good idea; it's the law (34 C.F.R. 300.345).

Schools should ensure that parents do not arrive at a school for a meeting without knowing beforehand what is going to happen and where. Before the IEP meeting, educators should arrange to meet with the parent in the home (Correa, 1989; Montecel, Gallagher, Montemayor, Villarreal, Adame-Reyna, & Supik, 1993; Rhodes, 1996) and discuss what will occur (Montecel, Gallagher, Montemayor, Villarreal, Adame-Reyna, & Supik, 1993; Rhodes, 1996). These discussions could include such topics as what the parent might be able to contribute, what their rights are, and who will be present (Rhodes, 1996).

Because IEP team meetings are multi-disciplinary in nature, a large number of individuals will be present (Rhodes, 1996). Meeting so many strangers at such an

important conference can often be intimidating for the parent (Correa, 1989). One way to make parents feel comfortable is to have the teacher, who should already be known to the parent, escort the parent into the meeting. Another way to make parents more comfortable is to introduce each team member to the parent before the meeting starts (Rhodes, 1996). Parents should leave this meeting with a clear idea of who each individual is and how he or she will be working with their child.

Sometimes families perceive that nobody at the meetings represents them or their child's interest -- only the school's. One way to overcome these feelings is to ask the parent to have someone they trust (a family member, a friend, etc.) accompany them to the meeting (Correa, 1989). In addition, the school could invite community leaders (clergy, physicians, respected elders, etc.) to attend with the parents to help them feel that they have someone there who understands their needs (Correa, 1989). Still another option is to hire and train a person to work as a liaison between the parents and the schools. This person should be able to speak the parents' language, be aware of their cultural needs, and be sensitive to the community (Chavkin, 1996). It might be best if this person works as the interpreter for the family throughout the entire process (Rhodes, 1996). Families need to be able to trust that they are not alone and that they have someone on their side.

Once the school has helped to make the parent comfortable, the next big problem is communication. Parents with limited English proficiency may have trouble understanding both the language used and the intent behind the words. This means that the meetings should be conducted in the parent's home language (Stein, 1983) and the

use of jargon should be limited. Any technical terms should be explained in a clear manner that defines what they mean, discusses the legal rights associated with the terms (Harry, 1990), and provides information about the possible impact of that knowledge on the child. It should be noted that not all words are translatable from English, and that sometimes the terms' meanings can be slightly (or even greatly) different depending on what language they are spoken in.

Discussions with parents should be respectful regardless of the parents' language, background, or income (Sosa, 1996). Respect, in this instance, means that parents are encouraged to be involved in the IEP meetings, ask questions, and provide information about their child (Stein, 1983). Messages sent from the school should be friendly in tone (Montecel, et al., 1993) and welcoming to the family. Speech should be conducted in a tone of voice that does not emphasize the difference in social class between the speaker and the parent, or make the parent feel inferior in any way (Montecel, et al., 1993).

Information should be readable and interesting. For families who are illiterate, non-written options such as phone calls, audiotapes, and videotapes should be used (Chapman & Teller, 1997; Chavkin, 1996; Correa, 1989). For those who are literate, forms should be readable in terms of font type, word size, and explanations of technical and legal terms (Roit & Prohl, 1984). In addition, handouts should be well designed, non-technical (Correa, 1989), and written in the parents' primary language (Rhodes, 1996).

Once parents are at ease and understand what is being said, they may need additional help to know what is going on. For example, parents need to be aware of their rights in the participation of their child's special education program (Rhodes, 1996; Stein, 1983). In addition, they may not be aware of the types of educational services available to their child (Stein, 1983). This information may need to be provided to parents in a form that is easy to understand and readily available in locations where parents will frequent, such as churches, community centers, and markets (Correa, 1989; Lynch & Stein, 1987). Not only do parents need to know what they can do for their children, they need to know how to do it. In order to be active participants in their children's education, parents must be aware of the organizational structure of the school, the responsibilities of each educational team member, and any other information needed to navigate the system (Gonzales, 1986). If parents enter a school with the knowledge that they have rights, what those rights are, and how to make sure those rights are provided to them, they can be more effective advocates for their children.

It is not just parents who need help dealing with the special education system. Schools often lack the proper knowledge of how to work with parents as equal partners. Faculty and staff who are unfamiliar with how to effectively work with families that are culturally or linguistically different from them may complicate this task. One method to prepare school faculty and staff might be to hold an in-service (Lynch & Stein, 1987). A good in-service should help faculty and staff develop sensitivity to cultural differences and family beliefs (Lynch & Stein, 1987), as well as provide techniques to communicate effectively with parents.

In addition to information concerning one-on-one parent interactions, educators must be up-to-date on systemic issues such as the latest litigation and legislation that affects special education or ethnic minorities. They need a working knowledge of the applicable case laws, statutes, and regulations so they can be sure to treat parents in a legally appropriate manner (Marion, 1982).

The final barrier, cultural differences, is difficult to define and tougher to address. School personnel can be educated to be respectful of cultural differences (Harry, 1990), but the wide variations across ethnic groups and among individuals within a given ethnic group make it difficult to provide insight into a culture as a whole. Even in this day and age, it may be necessary to caution educators against stereotyping a group of individuals (Ramirez & Casteñada, 1974) because of these differences. Such training should acknowledge that cultural differences exist, and that these differences affect the way parents interact with schools. For example, a parent's interpretation of children's behavior (i.e., deciding if it is or is not a disability) would depend on the cultural values of the parent (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), and their interpretations would impact the input they provide at the IEP team meeting in terms of diagnosis and placement decisions. It is important to show respect for these opinions and value the ideas behind them.

One way to better understand and value these cultural differences is to ask the local church or clergy to provide insight into the different cultures they serve (Correa, 1989). Another is to interact directly with community members by inviting them to

work at the school as volunteers (Correa, 1989). This should provide both the school and the volunteer with valuable, first-hand insight into what each group thinks.

Not only is parental involvement important, but researchers and legislatures have also determined they are imperative to the overall welfare of every child's education. The suggestions listed provide some techniques to help overcome the most noticeable barriers. And, overcoming these barriers is the best way to enable parents to be good communicators and decision makers for their children.

Conclusion

For years, children with disabilities were refused the right to a public education. Because children are legal minors, they were not capable of demanding these rights on their own (Turnbull, 1993), so their parents have been forced to fight for them. And these parents have often won; they gained ground in their fight to help educate their children through litigation and legislation. Their biggest victory was the passage of EHA (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, a law that provided all children with the right to an education (20 USC 1400). The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 provided even more options for parents to be equal partners with the schools in making decisions that impact the educations of their children (20 U.S.C. § 1414).

IDEA states that all children can receive a free and appropriate public education regardless of disability. It provides a step-by step guideline for schools to follow in order to ensure that all children who need individualized educational planning receive it. Parents are given rights in each of those steps to accept or reject the plans that the school makes, but it is in the IEP team meeting that they are given the strongest power. IDEA

made them equal partners in this meeting to agree or disagree with their child's diagnosis and/or placement (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.344).

But, regardless of what is written in IDEA, not all parents have the same amount of power in these meetings. Barriers stand in the way to some being full and active participants in their child's education. These barriers fall in four major categories: communication, cultural differences, school/parental knowledge, and the intimidating nature of the school. An additional issue that may keep families from being involved with their child's education is the educational level, because as children move from elementary to middle school, parents feel that there are fewer opportunities for involvement (Connors & Epstein, 1994).

Each of these barriers occurs to various degrees for all parents, but there are some that may be seen more strongly in parents of ethno-linguistic differences. Hispanic parents, in particular, often experience all of these barriers, a fact that effectively prevents them and their children from receiving the rights ascribed to them under IDEA. Suggestions for overcoming these barriers include having educators make schools more accommodating to parent's needs, providing understandable information in a non-threatening setting, accommodating for cultural differences, and utilizing community resources to bridge the home/school gaps.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how parents perceive their own participation in their child's education. In particular, Hispanic children and families will be compared to white families for differences in the way they perceive legal issues, communication issues, and IEP development. In addition, all of these issues will be

compared across both ethnicity and educational level for both main effects and interaction effects.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study was the product of a partnership between the Educational Psychology Program at Texas A&M University and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The data were generated from a questionnaire developed by TEA in order to obtain parent feedback on special education programs in Texas. The survey was distributed to parents whose children attend public schools in districts across the state that were being monitored as part of their periodic evaluation procedures conducted by TEA. Though the items on the survey covered several areas related to special education services, only those relating to legal, communication, and IEP issues were chosen for analysis. This chapter will provide an overview of the participants in the study, the development and distribution of the questionnaire, and the methodologies employed to analyze the data.

Participants

Selection of districts. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) collects parent information as part of a program of periodic special education compliance reviews, which are completed using several different methods. The least intrusive of these consists of requesting a district to conduct a self-evaluation; the most intrusive involves TEA performing intensive, on-site visits in the districts.

Regardless of the type of review being done, school districts are usually asked to examine parent involvement in special education. There are three main methods used to do this: self-evaluation, parent roundtable, and the Parent Special Education Survey (PSES). Self-evaluations may be formal or informal, and generally the methodology is

left to the discretion of the district (e.g., in-person interviews, phone interviews, surveys, etc.). The second method, parent roundtables, consists of TEA-directed meetings in which parents discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their district's special education program. The third parent evaluation method, the PSES, is a formal survey mailed to parents from the child's school district based on a purposive sample of parents selected by TEA. This dissertation will explore the year 2000 results from the PSES.

Parents from 76 different school districts throughout the state of Texas were selected to complete the PSES. The school districts were chosen because they were (1) receiving a focused-based district effectiveness and compliance (DEC) visit ($n=47$); (2) receiving a focused-based visit in addition to a DEC, follow-up, combination, or modified DEC visit ($n=8$); (3) required to return a Self Evaluation Document ($n=8$); or (4) because there was no scheduled particular reason for the review ($n=13$).

Selection of participants. TEA distributed the surveys to the school districts, which then sent them out to a TEA-determined, purposive sample of parents. According to TEA, a purposive sample takes into consideration critical attributes that include, but are not limited to, "disability conditions, ethnicity, instructional level, and instructional arrangement" (TEA, 2001, p. 10). Which version of the survey each parent received, English or Spanish, was determined by each individual school district. The determination was made by examining the home language survey, a form that was completed by the parents or guardians at the time of student enrollment, in each student's file. A total of 5,108 parents across 76 districts were selected to receive the survey in the mail.

The participants in this study consisted of ethnically diverse parents and guardians of children receiving special education services in 76 school districts in the state of Texas. Unfortunately, no individual information is available as to which respondent's child attended school in which district, so no descriptive information is available for variables such as the type of district (urban v. rural) or the socioeconomic status of the district. While 1000 participants (19.6%) returned the survey, only 539 participant's input were included in this survey (an explanation why 461 were excluded will be discussed in the procedures section). Of the 539 surveys examined, 90.5% ($n=488$) of the respondents indicated they were parents, compared to 9.5% ($n=51$) who reported themselves as guardian, surrogate parent, other, or provided no response. The ethnic breakdown of the sample included white (62.9%, $n=339$) and Hispanic (37.1%, $n=200$) parents and guardians. Although this researcher realizes that there is a lot of within group differences (García, 200; Valenzuela, 1999) TEA did not survey parents as to their individual nationalities that fall under the category of Hispanic, nor did they query the recentness of their (or their family's) immigration. In addition, because the survey used Hispanic as defined by the U.S. Census to describe any Spanish speaking person from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, this is the definition used in this study.

Participants indicated their children's educational levels as 34.9% ($n=188$) being in elementary school, 27.3% ($n=147$) being in middle school, and 37.8% ($n=204$) being in high school. See Tables 4 and 5 for a breakdown of ethnicity by educational level and for a description of the children by disability. Only participants whose children had

TABLE 4. Parent Respondent's Ethnic Breakdown by Educational Level.

	Elementary School		Middle School		High School		Total	
	White	Hispanic	White	Hispanic	White	Hispanic	White	Hispanic
Frequency	129	59	72	75	138	66	339	200
Percent	68.6	31.4	49.0	51.0	67.6	32.4	62.9	37.1

TABLE 5. Student's Identified Disability by Ethnicity

Disability	Hispanic		White		Total	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Learning Disability	37.4	144	62.6	241	71.4	385
Speech Impairment	33.8	26	66.2	51	14.3	77
Mental Retardation	61.5	16	38.5	10	4.8	26
Emotional Disturb.	27.5	14	72.5	37	9.5	51
Total	37.1	200	62.9	339	100	539

high incidence disabilities (defined by Schwenn (1991) as learning disabilities, mental retardation, speech impairment, and emotional disturbance) were examined. The largest high incidence subgroup represented in the sample consisted of parents or guardians who had children with learning disabilities (n=385, 71.4%). The data on the respondents by ethnicity and child's disability type are described in more detail on Table 5.

Measures

TEA-DEC: Parent Special Education Survey (PSES). The PSES, developed by Dr. Forest-Novy (a former employee of TEA), was designed to provide a method for parents to gather information on their perceptions of their child's special education program. Originally, the PSES was designed as part of the DEC monitoring program to ensure that school districts were following the rules and regulations provided by IDEA (TEA, 2001). It has gone through several revisions; the latest version became available for the 2002-2003 school year. It should be noted that there is no reliability or validity data available on this instrument.

Spanish and English versions of the PSES were created on Scantron[®] forms, and completed forms were electronically scanned into a computer database. The Spanish version is a translation by TEA of the English version, and was determined by the agency to be adequate and accurate. The English version can be found in Appendix A and the Spanish version can be found in Appendix B. The PSES consists of 47 items addressing participant demographics, satisfaction with the district's efforts, and procedural information. Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree, and 6=don't know) for

questions 5-27. For questions 28-47, a similar Likert scale was used for points 1-5; however, the “6” point on the Likert scale was “not applicable. It should be noted that an answer of “don’t know” on items 5-27 might mean either that the respondent didn’t know the answer to the item or that the respondent didn’t know what the item meant. It is impossible to tell which of these the respondent meant based strictly on this information.

Given the directed focus of this study, not all items from this survey were used. Only the items applying to the participants’ demographics and procedural information pertaining to legal, communication, and IEP development issues were used. It should be noted that only those using “don’t know” as the “6” Likert scale descriptor were used. A total of 12 items from the PSES were analyzed for the purposes of this study, a complete list of which can be found in Table 6. Six PSES items (5, 6, 19, 20, 21, and 22) were used to assess communication issues. Additionally, six other items (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 23) were used to assess IEP development issues. These items were chosen to represent each of category based on Epstein’s (1996) definitions of parental involvement.

Procedure

During March 2000, TEA mailed 4,785 English and 323 Spanish surveys (total = 5108) to 76 school districts. The PSES was mailed directly from the child’s school district to the participants that were identified by TEA’s purposive sampling procedure. The participants were instructed to mail the PSES surveys directly to TEA, where the responses were scanned into a computer database. The only identifying information from these surveys is the demographic information (e.g., ethnicity, child’s instructional level,

and child's primary disability) and district identity. The individual electronic raw data file was collected from TEA and analyzed by the author. Because the Scantron[®] forms did not discriminate between English and Spanish versions, and the district identification information was not available, all data were analyzed together regardless of district or survey language.

Of these 5,108 total surveys, approximately 20% were returned to TEA (n=1,000). Completed surveys were returned directly to TEA, where they were scanned into a database. Of the 1,000 surveys returned, 6 were not readable by the Scantron[®], 23 did not answer the question concerning ethnicity, and 127 answered that they were some ethnicity other than White or Hispanic (e.g., African American, Asian, etc.). Ethnic groups other than White and Hispanic were eliminated from the sample because the small numbers were deemed to be insufficient to generalize to these groups. Of the 844 surveys left, 12 were removed from the sample because educational level information was missing and 75 were removed because the respondents indicated that their children were in early childhood education, pre-kindergarten, or kindergarten.

Of the 757 surveys remaining, 173 were removed because the respondents indicated that their children were receiving services for low incidence disabilities and 45 were removed because the respondent did not provide information on the child's disability. Low incidence disabilities (defined by Litton, Rotari, & Day (1989) as any disability other than specific learning disability, speech language, mental retardation, and/or emotionally disturbed) were removed from the sample because they only represent 10% of all children served by special education services (OSEP, 2002) but

represented 22.9% of the remaining surveys. In total, 461 surveys were omitted and 539 completed surveys were analyzed.

Questions chosen for analysis were determined by how well they probed the research questions generated by a review of the literature. For example, to examine school/ parent communication, the item, “Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable” was analyzed. This same item was also able to address the legal issues of prior notice. Because these topics are not independent or concrete, each item will be analyzed separately, but the analyses generated from these items will be discussed with other items addressing the same research questions. The items analyzed by research question are broken down in Table 6.

Data Analysis

The individual items from this survey were combined across two major issues: communication and IEP development. These directly correspond to each of the two research questions. It should be noted that the individual items were determined to be grouped into these issues by this researcher and the two co-chairs of the dissertation committee and were not previously determined by TEA to be related to these topics within the structure or categories of the PSES. These item groupings were exploratory in nature, so each item was analyzed separately on a univariate basis and not as a group on a multivariate basis. Though this meant a loss in overall statistical power, the information gained may help define these categories and provide knowledge on

TABLE 6. Questions and Categories to be Analyzed from DEC-PSES

Issues	PSES Items
Communication	<p>5) The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding.</p> <p>6) The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained.</p> <p>19) Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable.</p> <p>20) Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner.</p> <p>21) The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child's records.</p> <p>22) Opportunities for communications with my child's principal and teachers are available.</p>
IEP Development	<p>My child's individual education plan (IEP) included information about:</p> <p>8) my child's instructional goals and objectives.</p> <p>9) my child's needed special education services.</p> <p>10) the teachers of persons responsible for providing needed services.</p> <p>11) how to evaluate my child's progress in school.</p> <p>12) I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child's individual education plan (IEP).</p> <p>23) The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves.</p>

specific items related to each area. This study is more concerned about Type II error than Type I error because of its exploratory nature.

Each item was divided into two separate analyses. The first analysis looked at each item in terms of the percentage of respondents who answered, “don’t know” versus those who provided another response. This was done to determine how many people could answer the question versus those who did not understand what was being asked or who simply did not know the answer. The second analysis looked at only those questions where the respondent provided an answer other than “don’t know.” Their responses were examined for differences in the means across ethnicity and educational level. In particular, the mean differences were compared for significance using a two-way ANOVA across respondent ethnicity (White American and Hispanic) and educational level of the child (elementary, middle, and high school). A complete list of the items chosen for these analyses across each of the three issues can be found in Table 6.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences among parents’ perceptions of the quality of home-school communication across parental ethnic characteristics and child’s educational level?
Items 5, 6, 19, 20, 21, and 22 will be used to address this research question.
2. Are there differences among parents’ perceptions of in developing their child’s IEP across parental ethnic characteristics and child’s educational level? Items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 23 will be used to address this research question.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter, which describes the findings of this research study and is divided into two sections based upon the research questions focusing on communication and IEP development issues. These two sections will be further divided into the results of individual items that make up each section. Each item is then broken down further into two separate analyses. This arrangement was made necessary because of the way each question was developed. Each question asked for a response that fell on a Likert-style scale of response choices (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree, 6 = don't know). The possible response of 6 = don't know made separate analyses essential.

The first analysis consisted of examining responses and placing them in one of two categories: "know" and "don't know." If parents answered the item with an answer of 1-5, they were placed in the "know" category. If they answered an item with 6, they were placed in the "don't know" category. If they did not answer the item at all, their response was removed from the total.

The second analysis examined the individual ratings for those who provided a rating of 1-5. For the purpose of this analysis, a rating of 6 was considered unanswered. These responses, as well as any actually unanswered responses, were excluded on an analysis-by analysis basis. Because the responses were intervally scaled, the data were capable of being used in comparing means and standard deviations. A 2-way ANOVA

was done on the remaining responses, with ethnicity and educational level as the independent variables and the parental responses for each item as the dependent variable. Main and interaction effects were explored, and an alpha level of .01 was used. This same .01 level was used for all other statistical analyses as well (Table 8 and 9 show all of these results).

With an alpha level of .01 and a total of 36 hypotheses tested (12 items each with 2 main effects and 1 interaction effect) then the experiment-wise error rate is high. Using Bonferroni's test for experiment-wise error rate, there is a 30.36% probability that there will be one or more Type I errors made. The large number of hypotheses tested impact the Type II error rate as well, but with a sample size of more than 500, this is not as great a problem as it could be with a smaller sample. While there were some concerns for Type I error, these concerns were somewhat accounted for by adjusting the alpha level from .05 to .01 alpha. This adjustment did not correct all Type I error problems, but due to the nature of the study this was not the larger concern. Type II error was considered to be more important because the results of this study may impact public policy decisions. Thus, any differences found should not be ignored and need to be put forth as areas needing further research.

Findings for both of the research questions are displayed on three tables. Table 7 addresses the first analysis. It provides the percentages for those who fell in the "know" category within each ethnicity and educational level. Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis. They provide information on the means, standard deviations, statistical significance, and effect size for each of the items.

TABLE 7. Percent by Ethnicity and Educational Level
With Answers Other Than “Don’t Know”

Items	<u>White</u>	<u>Hispan.</u>	<u>Elemen.</u>	<u>Mid.</u>	<u>High</u>
Communication:					
5) The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding.	99.1	96.9	99.4	95.9	99.0
6) The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained.	100	96.4	100	96.6	99.0
19) Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable.	99.7	97.0	100	95.9	99.5
20) Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner.	100	97.4	100	98.0	99.0
21) The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child’s records.	93.8	94.0	97.3	91.8	92.0
22) Opportunities for communications with my child’s principal and teachers are available.	99.4	99.0	98.9	99.3	99.5
IEP Development					
8) My child’s IEP included information about my child’s instructional goals and objectives.	97.0	93.9	96.8	94.4	96.0
9) My child’s IEP included information about my child’s needed special education services.	97.9	98.5	98.9	97.2	98.0
10) My child’s IEP included information about the teachers or persons responsible for providing needed services.	98.8	98.5	99.5	97.3	99.0
11) My child’s IEP included information about how to evaluate my child’s progress in school.	97.6	93.8	97.3	95.8	95.4
12) I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child’s IEP.	99.1	97.0	99.5	95.9	99.0
23) The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves.	98.9	98.0	98.9	98.0	98.5

TABLE 8. Mean and Standard Deviation for Items
Across Ethnicity and Educational Levels

Items	<u>White</u>	<u>Hispan.</u>	<u>Elemen.</u>	<u>Mid.</u>	<u>High</u>
Communication					
5) The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding.	$X=4.15$ $SD=.85$	$X=4.21$ $SD=.69$	$X=4.32$ $SD=.68$	$X=4.14$ $SD=.66$	$X=4.06$ $SD=.95$
6) The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained.	$X=4.05$ $SD=.91$	$X=4.16$ $SD=.69$	$X=4.24$ $SD=.72$	$X=4.01$ $SD=.79$	$X=4.01$ $SD=.95$
19) Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable.	$X=4.90$ $SD=.83$	$X=4.17$ $SD=.59$	$X=4.25$ $SD=.700$	$X=4.01$ $SD=.71$	$X=4.07$ $SD=.81$
20) Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner.	$X=4.08$ $SD=.89$	$X=4.19$ $SD=.71$	$X=4.29$ $SD=.683$	$X=4.01$ $SD=.90$	$X=4.03$ $SD=.95$
21) The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child's records.	$X=4.04$ $SD=.91$	$X=4.15$ $SD=.71$	$X=4.21$ $SD=.781$	$X=4.06$ $SD=.75$	$X=3.97$ $SD=.94$
22) Opportunities for communications with my child's principal and teachers are available.	$X=3.85$ $SD=.99$	$X=4.11$ $SD=.77$	$X=4.09$ $SD=.83$	$X=3.92$ $SD=.86$	$X=3.82$ $SD=1.0$
IEP Development					
8) My child's IEP included information about my child's instructional goals and objectives.	$X=4.02$ $SD=.91$	$X=4.08$ $SD=.74$	$X=4.19$ $SD=.75$	$X=4.00$ $SD=.79$	$X=3.94$ $SD=.97$
9) My child's IEP included information about my child's needed special education services.	$X=4.30$ $SD=.79$	$X=4.37$ $SD=.67$	$X=4.46$ $SD=.62$	$X=4.24$ $SD=.74$	$X=4.25$ $SD=.84$
10) My child's IEP included information about the teachers or persons responsible for providing needed services.	$X=4.12$ $SD=.96$	$X=4.32$ $SD=.61$	$X=4.33$ $SD=.74$	$X=4.12$ $SD=.79$	$X=4.11$ $SD=.99$
11) My child's IEP included information about how to evaluate my child's progress in school.	$X=4.24$ $SD=.79$	$X=4.34$ $SD=.68$	$X=4.45$ $SD=.61$	$X=4.23$ $SD=.65$	$X=4.14$ $SD=.91$
12) I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child's IEP.	$X=4.18$ $SD=.89$	$X=4.28$ $SD=.64$	$X=4.42$ $SD=.70$	$X=4.12$ $SD=.72$	$X=4.10$ $SD=.92$
23) The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves.	$X=3.92$ $SD=1.1$	$X=4.24$ $SD=.77$	$X=4.28$ $SD=.86$	$X=3.93$ $SD=.93$	$X=3.89$ $SD=1.1$

TABLE 9. Fischer's F and Effect Size

Items	Ethnicity	Level	Interaction
Communication			
5) The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding.	F = .973 $\eta^2 = .002$	F = 5.656 ^b $\eta^2 = .021$	F = .399 $\eta^2 = .002$
6) The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained ^a .	F = 2.585 $\eta^2 = .005$	F = 3.543 $\eta^2 = .013$	F = .294 $\eta^2 = .001$
19) Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable.	F = 1.713 $\eta^2 = .003$	F = 4.284 $\eta^2 = .016$	F = .343 $\eta^2 = .001$
20) Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner ^a .	F = 8.241 ^b $\eta^2 = .016$	F = 2.890 $\eta^2 = .011$	F = 1.391 $\eta^2 = .005$
21) The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child's records.	F = 2.587 $\eta^2 = .005$	F = 7.585 $\eta^2 = .030$	F = .043 $\eta^2 < .000$
22) Opportunities for communications with my child's principal and teachers are available.	F = 2.804 $\eta^2 = .005$	F = 7.765 ^b $\eta^2 = .029$	F = .637 $\eta^2 = .002$
IEP Development			
8) My child's IEP included information about my child's instructional goals and objectives.	F = 2.468 $\eta^2 = .005$	F = 4.644 ^b $\eta^2 = .018$	F = .144 $\eta^2 = .001$
9) My child's IEP included information about my child's needed special education services.	F = 3.193 $\eta^2 = .006$	F = 5.200 ^b $\eta^2 = .020$	F = .783 $\eta^2 = .003$
10) My child's IEP included information about the teachers or persons responsible for providing needed services ^a .	F = 2.306 $\eta^2 = .004$	F = 3.889 $\eta^2 = .015$	F = .232 $\eta^2 = .001$
11) My child's IEP included information about how to evaluate my child's progress in school ^a .	F = 10.810 ^b $\eta^2 = .021$	F = 3.298 $\eta^2 = .013$	F = .297 $\eta^2 = .001$
12) I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child's IEP.	F = .742 $\eta^2 = .001$	F = 3.814 $\eta^2 = .014$	F = .015 $\eta^2 < .000$
23) The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves ^a .	F = 15.803 ^b $\eta^2 = .029$	F = 8.261 ^b $\eta^2 = .031$	F = .154 $\eta^2 = .001$

^a Note: Levine's test of unequal variances indicates statistically significant within group differences

^b Statistically significant at $\alpha < .01$

Research Question 1: Are There Differences Among Parents' Perceptions of the Quality of Home-School Communication Across Parental Ethnic Characteristics and Child's Educational Level (Items 5, 6, 19, 20, 21, and 22)?

Item 5: The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” seven of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 99.1% of white respondents ($n = 334$) and 96.9% ($n = 189$) of Hispanic respondents indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1, N=532) 3.55$, $p \leq .10$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 99.5% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 185$), 95.9% in middle school ($n = 140$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 198$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=532) 7.20$, $p \leq .05$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene's Test of Equality of Variances showed no statistically significant differences, $F (5, 517) = 1.817$, $p = .314$, among any of the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample are similar enough to be able to use them to compare against one another.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared using a 2-way ANOVA, no statistical significance, $F (1, 517) = .973$, $p = .324$, was found and the effect size, η^2

= .002, was extremely small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 517) = 5.656, p = .004$, was found for the main effect of educational level but the effect size, $\eta^2 = .021$, was still small. Tukey *HSD* post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant difference, $p = .003$, between those in elementary school, $M = 4.32, SD = .678$, and those in high school, $M = 4.06, SD = .952$. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(2, 517) = .399, p = .671$, and showed a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .002$.

Item 6: The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained.

The responses to this question showed that 100% of white respondents ($n = 337$) and 96.4% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 189$) who answered this question provided an answer other than “don’t know.” Chi square analysis was run and there was determined to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=533) 12.20, p \leq .001$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 100% of the parents of children in elementary school ($n = 187$), 96.6% in middle school ($n = 140$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 199$) indicated that they knew an answer to this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N=533) 7.75, p \leq .025$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were statistically significant, $F(5, 520) = 2.288, p = .045$, within-group differences among the groups of parents. This casts some doubt on the comparability of the groups within the sample because the individual scores are not homogeneous within the group. Thus, it is

questionable if an examination of the group scores will produce results that are representative of a single group's members. This should be considered while examining the results of the 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F(1, 520) = 2.585, p = .108$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 520) = 3.543, p = .030$, was not found for the main effect of educational level, but again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .013$, was very small. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(2, 520) = .294, p = .745$, and showed a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Item 19: Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” five of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 99.7% of white respondents ($n = 336$) and 97.0% ($n = 191$) of Hispanic respondents indicated that they knew an answer to this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=534) 7.26, p \leq .01$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 99.5% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 186$), 95.9% in middle school ($n = 140$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 199$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N=534) 12.35, p \leq .001$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene's Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were no statistically significant, $F(5, 521) = .780, p = .564$, within-group differences among the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample were similar enough to compare with one another. Such a comparison was done using a 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F(1, 521) = 1.713, p = .191$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .003$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 521) = 4.284, p = .014$, was not found for the main effect of educational level, but again, the effect size, $\eta^2 = .016$, was very small. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(2, 521) = .343, p = .710$ with a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Item 20: Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner.

In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don't knows,” seven of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 100% of white respondents ($n = 336$) and 97.4% ($n = 191$) of Hispanics indicated an answer other than “don't know.” Chi square analysis was run and there was determined to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=532) 8.65, p \leq .001$, difference between “knows” and “don't knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 100% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 188$), 98.0% in middle school ($n = 143$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 196$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a

statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=532) 3.74, p \leq .020$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were statistically significant, $F (5, 521) = 2.348, p = .040$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This casts some doubt on the comparability of the groups within the sample because the individual scores are not homogeneous within the group. Thus, it is questionable if an examination of the group scores will produce results that are representative of a single group’s members. This should be considered while examining the results of the 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, statistical significance, $F (1, 521) = 8.241, p = .004$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .016$, was small. Statistical significance, $F (2, 521) = 2.890, p = .056$, was not found for the main effect of educational level, and it should be noted that the effect size, $\eta^2 = .011$, was still very small. The interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F (2, 521) = 1.391, p = .250$, and had a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$.

Item 21: The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child’s records. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” seven of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 93.8% of white respondents ($n = 316$) and 93.8% ($n = 183$) of Hispanic respondents indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1,$

$N=532$) 0.001, $p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 97.3% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 182$), 91.8% in middle school ($n = 134$), and 92.0% in high school ($n = 183$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=532) 6.18, p \leq .05$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed no statistically significant, $F (5, 493) = 1.199, p = .308$, differences within groups of parents among the sample. This signifies that the groups within the sample are similar enough to compare against one another. In order to compare the groups to one another, a 2-way ANOVA was used.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F (1, 498) = 2.587, p = .108$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F (2, 498) = 7.585, p = .108$, was not found for the main effect of educational level, but it should be noted that the effect size, $\eta^2 = .030$, was still very small. Because no significance was found in the main and interaction effects, no post hoc analyses were done.

Item 22: Opportunities for communications with my child’s principal and teachers are available. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” seven of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 99.4% of white respondents ($n = 334$) and 99.0% of

Hispanic respondents ($n = 194$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, χ^2 (1, $N=532$) 0.300, $p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 98.9% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 186$), 99.3% in middle school ($n = 144$), and 99.5% in high school ($n = 198$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, χ^2 (2, $N=532$) 0.42, $p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were no statistically significant, $F(5, 522) = 2.091$, $p = .065$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample are similar enough to compare with one another. This comparison was done using a 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F(1, 522) = 2.804$, $p = .095$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 522) = 7.765$, $p < .000$, was found for the main effect of educational level, but the effect size, $\eta^2 = .029$, was also small.

Tukey *HSD* post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant, $p = .002$, difference between responses by parents whose children were in elementary school, $M = 4.42$, $SD = .695$, versus those whose children were in middle school, $M = 4.12$, $SD = .724$; and a statistically significant difference, $p < .000$, between those in elementary school, $M = 4.42$, $SD = .695$, and those in high school, $M = 4.22$, $SD = .805$. The

interaction effect was found not to be statistically significant, $F(2, 522) = .637, p = .530$, and had with a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .002$.

Summary of results from items concerning communication issues. From the results of the items in this section, there appeared to be an overall lack of statistically significant difference among the perceptions of those respondents from different ethnic backgrounds. That is, except for the question, “Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner.” This item found that fewer white parents felt that this occurred than Hispanic ones. Two of the items in this group (items 5 and 22) were found to have statistically significant differences when compared across educational levels. When there was a difference, parents whose children were in elementary school felt that they had better communication with the schools than did parents of children at the middle and/or high school level. It should be noted that even when there was statistical significance, the effect sizes were small to very small. No statistical significance was found for any interaction effects.

Research Question 2: Are There Differences Among Parents’ Perceptions in Developing Their Child’s IEP Across Parental Ethnic Characteristics and Child’s Educational Level (Items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 23)?

Item 8: My child’s individual education plan (IEP) included information about my child’s instructional goals and objectives. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t know,” of those who answered, 97.9% of white respondents ($n = 324$) and 93.9% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 184$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to

be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1, N=530) 3.04, p \leq .10$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 96.7% of parents of children attending elementary school ($n = 180$), 94.4% middle school ($n = 136$), and 96.0% high school ($n = 192$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=530) 1.13, p \leq .05$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were no statistically significant differences, $F (5, 502) = 1.560, p = .170$, among any of the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample are similar enough to compare with one another.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared using a 2-way ANOVA, no statistical significance, $F (1, 502) = 2.468, p = .117$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F (2, 502) = 4.644, p = .010$, was found for the main effect of educational level and again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .018$, was very small.

Tukey *HSD* post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant, $p = .015$, difference between responses by parents whose children were in elementary school, $M = 4.25, SD = .700$, versus those whose children were in middle school, $M = 4.01, SD = .710$; and a statistically significant difference, $p = .049$, between those in elementary school, $M = 4.25, SD = .700$, and those in high school, $M = 4.07, SD = .806$. The

interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 502) = .144, p = .866$, and showed a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Item 9: My child's individual education plan (IEP) included information about my child's needed special education services. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of "knows" and "don't knows," nine of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 97.9% of white ($n = 328$) and 98.5% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 192$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=530) 0.20, p \leq 1.0$, difference between "knows" and "don't knows" when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 98.9% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 185$), 97.2% in middle school ($n = 140$), and 98.0% in high school ($n = 195$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N=530) 1.31, p \leq 1.0$, difference between "knows" and "don't knows" when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene's Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were no statistically significant, $F(5, 514) = 1.954, p = .084$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample are similar enough to compare with one another.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared using a 2-way ANOVA, no statistical significance, $F(1, 514) = 3.193, p = .075$, was found and the effect size,

$\eta^2 = .006$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 514) = 5.200, p = .006$, was found for the main effect of educational level and again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .020$, was very small.

Tukey *HSD* post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant, $p = .009$, difference between responses by parents whose children were in elementary school, $M = 4.29, SD = .683$, versus those whose children were in middle school, $M = 4.01, SD = .796$; and a statistically significant difference, $p = .007$, between those in elementary school, $M = 4.29, SD = .68$, and those in high school, $M = 4.03, SD = .952$. The interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 514) = .783, p = .458$, and showed a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .003$.

Item 10: My child's individual education plan (IEP) included information about the teachers of persons responsible for providing needed services. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don't knows,” eight of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 98.8% of white ($n = 331$) and 98.5% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 193$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=531) 0.11, p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don't knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 99.4% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 185$), 97.3% in middle school ($n = 142$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 197$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, χ^2

(2, $N=531$) 3.29, $p \leq .20$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were statistically significant, $F(5, 518) = 2.990$, $p = .011$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This casts some doubt on the comparability of the groups within the sample because the individual scores are not homogeneous within the group. Thus, it is questionable if an examination of the group scores will produce results that are representative of a single group’s members. This should be considered while examining the results of the 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F(1, 518) = 2.306$, $p = .129$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .004$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 518) = 3.889$, $p = .021$, was not found for the main effect of educational level, but again, the effect size, $\eta^2 = .015$, was very small. The interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 518) = .232$, $p = .793$, with a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Item 11: My child’s individual education plan (IEP) included information about how to evaluate my child’s progress in school. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” 13 of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 97.6% of white ($n = 323$) and 93.8% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 183$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, χ^2

(1, $N=526$) 4.68, $p \leq .05$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 97.3% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 182$), 95.8% in middle school ($n = 137$), and 95.4% in high school ($n = 187$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, χ^2 (2, $N=526$) 1.05, $p \leq .1$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were statistically significant, $F(5, 500) = 5.478$, $p < .000$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This casts some doubt on the comparability of the groups within the sample because the individual scores are not homogeneous within the group. Thus, it is questionable if an examination of the group scores will produce results that are representative of a single group’s members. This should be considered while examining the results of the 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, statistical significance, $F(1, 500) = 10.810$, $p = .001$, was found but the effect size, $\eta^2 = .021$, was small. Statistical significance, $F(2, 500) = 3.298$, $p = .038$, was not found for the main effect of educational level and again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .013$, was small. The interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 500) = .297$, $p = .743$, and showed a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Item 12: I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child's individual education plan (IEP). In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don't knows,” five of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 99.1% of white ($n = 334$) and 97.0% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 191$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1, N=534) 3.49, p \leq .10$, difference between “knows” and “don't knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 99.5% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 186$), 95.9% in middle school ($n = 140$), and 99.0% in high school ($n = 199$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=534) 7.25, p \leq .05$, difference between “knows” and “don't knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene's Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were no statistically significant, $F (5, 519) = 1.969, p = .082$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This means that the groups within the sample are similar enough to compare with one another. This comparison was done using a 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, no statistical significance, $F (1, 519) = .742, p = .390$, was found and the effect size, $\eta^2 = .001$, was small. Statistical significance, $F (2, 519) = 3.814, p = .023$, was not found for the main effect of educational level and again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .014$, was very small. The

interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 519) = .015, p = .986$, and showed a small effect size, $\eta^2 < .000$.

Item 23: The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves. In the first analysis, an exploration of the percentage of “knows” and “don’t knows,” five of the 539 surveyed respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did answer it, 98.8% of white ($n = 333$) and 98.0% of Hispanic respondents ($n = 193$) indicated that they could answer this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=534) 0.60, p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across ethnicity. In addition, 98.9% of parents of children in elementary school ($n = 186$), 98.0% in middle school ($n = 143$), and 98.5% in high school ($n = 197$) reported that they could provide an answer for this question. Chi square analysis was run and there was determined not to be a statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N=534) 0.55, p \leq 1.0$, difference between “knows” and “don’t knows” when examined across educational level.

Tables 8 and 9 display the results of the secondary analysis for this item. In this analysis, Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances showed that there were statistically significant, $F(5, 520) = 5.659, p < .000$, within group differences among the groups of parents. This casts some doubt on the comparability of the groups within the sample because the individual scores are not homogeneous within the group. Thus, it is questionable if an examination of the group scores will produce results that are representative of a single group’s members. This should be considered while examining the results of the 2-way ANOVA.

When differences among ethnic groups were compared, statistical significance, $F(1, 520) = 15.803, p < .000$, was found but the effect size, $\eta^2 = .029$, was very small. Statistical significance, $F(1, 520) = 8.261, p < .000$, was found for the main effect of educational level but again the effect size, $\eta^2 = .031$, was very small. Tukey *HSD* post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant, $p = .004$, difference between responses by parents whose children were in elementary school, $M = 4.28, SE = .856$, versus those whose children were in middle school, $M = 3.89, SE = .932$; and a statistically significant difference, $p < .000$, between those in elementary school, $M = 4.28, SE = .856$, and those in high school, $M = 3.89, SE = 1.140$. The interaction effect was not found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 520) = .154, p = .857$, and showed a small effect size, $\eta^2 = .005$.

Summary of results from items concerning IEP development. Two questions in this section found statistically significant differences (both items had whites rating lower than Hispanics) across ethnic groups (items 11 and 23). Three of the questions in this section found statistically significant differences between educational levels (items 8, 9, and 23). When differences were found across educational levels, parents with children in elementary school consistently rated higher than parents of middle school and/or high school students.

Conclusion. Results from the first set of analyses, the percentage who answered “don’t know,” showed that the vast majority of parents surveyed indicated they were capable of answering the questions. More than 93% of all parents who answered the items provided an answer other than “don’t know.” When analyzed, only three

communication items (items 6, 19, and 20) found a statistically significant difference between the “know/don’t know” analysis for ethnicity and one (item 19) for educational level. No significant differences were found for IEP development section.

The second set of analyses, the ANOVAs, indicated some educational level effects (parents whose children were in elementary school rated higher than those whose children were in middle and/or high school) for all of the items. There were few statistically significant items for ethnicity differences, but when they did occur white parents rated lower than Hispanic parents. All of the results from the ANOVAs found small to very small effect sizes. Further discussion of these results will be given at the end of the next section.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the issues surrounding parental rights in the special education process. These rights were discussed in terms of litigation that impacted the learning of students with disabilities (Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982; Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education, 1972; and PARC vs. Pennsylvania, 1971) and in terms of legislation that ensured these rights (the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA], 1974; Education of All Handicapped Children Act [EHA], 1975; and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1990-1997).

It is important to note that Epstein's (1996) descriptions of parental involvement may not fit the best with Hispanic parent's views on involvement (López, 2001), but because the emphases of the legislation and the survey were more on Epstein's (1996) ideas of parent involvement in education the following conclusions will be based on those forms of parental involvement. Specifically, special education rights were discussed within the framework of Epstein's (1996) communicator and the decision-maker roles. Each of these roles were explored further as concepts within the two overarching research questions of interest in this study:

1. Are there differences among parents' perceptions of the quality of home-school communication across parental ethnic characteristics and child's educational level?
2. Are there differences among parents' perceptions in developing their child's IEP across parental ethnic characteristics and child's educational level?

In this chapter, the findings from this study will be compared to past findings of other studies. Also, the current study will be critiqued in terms of strengths and weaknesses and implications for future research. Finally, this chapter will discuss suggestions on how this research and past research can be used to remove some barriers that may hinder effective special education interactions between home and school.

Communication Issues

Previous research. Epstein (1996) defines the communicator role as one way in which all parents participate in their children's education. However, research has shown that not all parents feel the same about the quality of home/school communication. One difference was described by Chen and Chandler (2001), who found that parents whose children were in general education at the middle school level reported they were not given as much information to help them understand child development as were elementary school parents. In addition, these same parents report receiving less assistance from the school in preparing them to help their middle school children with homework than do parents whose children are in elementary school. Though this discrepancy was described only for children in general education, it is important to note because there was no research found that addressed the same issues for parents whose children were in special education.

However, unlike parents whose children are in general education, parents of children in special education are required to maintain home/school communication that starts when the first notice is sent to initiate the special education process (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.503) and the first time consent is requested (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.505).

Communication mandates extend to parents when aiding in the evaluation of the child (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.533), determining if the child has a disability (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.534), and making placement decisions for the child (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.344). In fact, every step of the special education process requires some sort of home/school communication.

Past researchers have found problems with communication in the special education process for all parents (Correa, 1989, Gault, 1989; and Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982), with a specific list of problems for Hispanic parents (Harry, 1992a; Gallegos & Gallegos, 1988; Lynch & Stein, 1987, and Romo, 1986). Lynch & Stein (1987) describe some of these problems for Hispanic parents in terms of verbal communication issues associated with professional terms that are either unfamiliar to them or are provided in a more formal register than the family can understand. Romo (1986) describes written problems associated with using text that is too complicated for the average Spanish-speaking parent to understand. Harry (1992a) describes communication problems that are associated with a cultural division in terms of language and ideology that keeps families from being true communicators with the schools in terms of special education. Whatever the reason, when asked by Lynch and Stein (1987) if they could understand their rights as parents and could comprehend the special education forms, about one-fourth of Hispanic families surveyed reported that they could not.

Current study. When examining the overall means of this study in terms of communication, all groups reported an average of either agreement (4) or strong agreement (5). In fact, no mean score was below 4.05 for any ethnicity or educational

level on any question. This means that, overall, the respondents agreed that the school/home communication across verbal and written tasks was as to be expected based on the legal requirements set forth by IDEA. When between-group differences were examined, almost every question was answered more or less the same across ethnicities (with the exception of the question about written notices, in which white families agreed less with the statement than Hispanic ones).

This was surprisingly different from past research findings, which showed significant differences between Hispanic and white perceptions of home/school communication. However, almost all of those studies were completed prior to the reauthorization of IDEA. The impact of requiring translators (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.344) and the impact of parents being made equal members (20 U.S.C. § 1414) could not have been factored into this past research. Other reasons why this data may be different will be described in greater detail in the section on strengths and weaknesses of this study.

In terms of communication issues and educational level, all but two examined questions (item 5 and item 22) found no between-group differences at the .01 level. Items 5 and 22 indicated higher agreement among parents of students in special education in elementary school than among those of middle school or high school students. This difference is similar to that found in past research examining parent involvement across educational level in general education.

The reason for the difference in results between this study and previous studies could be attributed to three main factors: methodology, sampling, and policy changes. The first, methodology, is particularly important. Two of the three primary studies in

this topic were qualitative instead of quantitative (Harry, 1990; Sharpe, 1997). Due to the nature of qualitative studies, this leads to the second issue. Qualitative studies naturally have smaller samples, thus, for each of these studies, the sample was small and self-selected. Policy changes were the factor that might have had the biggest impact on the third study. Lynch and Stein (1987) did a quantitative study with a larger sample size; however, this study was done before the reauthorization of IDEA and the changes made by the TEA district compliance process.

Although any of the previously mentioned differences between prior studies could easily account for the differences, many other factors could also contribute. One may be that participants in this study needed to be able to read and understand the special education process well enough to fill out the survey. Also, all were parents of children who attended school in Texas, and all agreed to respond to these surveys (the vast majority of which were sent to the parents in English).

IEP Development Issues

Previous research. Epstein (1996) described decision-making as another way that all parents interact with schools. Parents whose children are in special education are mandated to make decisions for their children throughout the process, but they probably make the most decisions for their children as an equal member of the IEP team. Researchers have been interested in examining this role of decision maker, but of most specific interest to this study were researchers who studied this in terms of Hispanic parents and families (no prior research could be found in terms of educational level).

In particular, studies by Lynch and Stein (1982) found that only 71% of Hispanic parents observed actively participated in their child's IEP development, and only 47% offered suggestions at IEP meetings. Gault (1989) asked Mexican families if they were satisfied with their participation in their child's IEP, and 30% said they were not. These numbers are unsatisfactory by any estimation, but especially when one considers that IDEA requires all (100%) parents to be equal partners in making decisions concerning their children (20 U.S.C. § 1414).

One explanation for why these numbers are at an unsatisfactory level may be that Hispanic parents are not able to make these decisions because research shows they lack knowledge about their rights (Lynch & Stein, 1987), they lack knowledge about the criteria for placements in special education (Lynch & Stein, 1987), and/or they lack understanding of what an IEP is (Harry, 1992a; and Gallegos & Gallegos, 1988). Another possible explanation is that, although the parents did not argue with the team's decisions, they did not necessarily approve with what was being offered to their child (Harry, 1992a). And finally, the low numbers may have resulted because parents felt that the other members of the team were unaware and unknowing of the needs of their children (Sanchez, 1996), and believed arguing with them would accomplish little. Whatever the reason, any one of these barriers would explain why some parents are not acting as equal partners in terms of making decisions concerning their children.

Current study. The second research question in this study examined IEP development as a way that parents fulfilled the decision maker role. When only the mean scores were examined for IEP development ($M=, 4.09, SD= .20$), they were

statistically significantly lower, $t = 7.39, p = .009$, than those examined for communication ($M = 4.20, SD = .13$). Meaning that, overall, parents felt that they were better able to be decision makers than they were able to be communicators for their child's education. However, most of the mean scores still fell in the agree (4) to strongly agree (5) answer range, with only a few falling in the neutral (3) range.

When group mean differences were examined across educational levels, three of the items (8, 9, and 23) showed statistically significant differences at the .01 level for IEP development items. Again, these differences found higher agreement in parents of elementary school children and lower agreement in parents of middle and high school children. Given that existing research in general education shows all areas of parental involvement as being higher in earlier grades (Chen & Chandler, 2001; Dauber & Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 2001; Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez, 1993; and Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995), this is not a surprising finding. However, the current study may be the first time parental involvement has been examined in special education across the concept of IEP development in terms of parental decision-making.

When between-group mean differences were examined for IEP development, two questions (11 and 23) found statistically significant differences among ethnicities (and both were directed towards whites showing less agreement with the statements than Hispanics). Again, this was a surprising finding given the previous research. These unexpected differences may be due to many of the same reasons addressed in the previous section on communication, all of which will be explained further in the next section.

Overall Strengths and Limitations of Study

The major strength of this study was the sample. Compared with other studies on this topic (e.g., Lynch & Stein, [1987] with a sample of 213 families, Harry [1990] with a sample of 12 families, and Sharpe [1997] with a sample 10-20 Hispanic families) this study's sample size was quite large (539 respondents – 200 Hispanic and 339 white). Because there were two groups (white and Hispanic), the study provided comparison information about both groups instead of focusing on just Hispanic families. Sharpe (1997) compared groups, but only ones whose sample size in each group ranged from five to 10 people (two groups of Hispanics made up 10 to 20 families). Only the study by Lynch & Stein (1987) provided a comparison among ethnicities with a large enough sample size to be somewhat generalizable. However, the study was completed prior to the reauthorization of IDEA, which means it was done before parents were theoretically made equal partners in the process.

In addition to containing a larger number of respondents across two ethnic groups, another strength of this the current study was the purposive nature of the sample of parents whose children were receiving special education in Texas. The participants were chosen across several districts and across various disabilities to better reflect the normal population of parents of special education students in Texas. One weakness of this study was that, though the participants were selected as a purposive sample in general, no specific information was available concerning immigrant status, nation of origin, socioeconomic status, and or descriptive information (e.g., urban, rural, etc.) on the school district. In addition, the U.S. census definition of “Hispanic” is the definition

used in this study so this further complicates the description of who answered the survey. A reflection of the problems associated with using census definitions was expressed by García when he wrote, “I do not know many census-identified ‘whites,’ ‘blacks,’ or ‘Hispanics’ who truly believe they are ‘white,’ ‘black,’ or ‘Hispanic,’ but given the forced-choice responses allowed them in census questionnaires, they are constrained by these choices” (p. 23).

Although there were some problems about sample information, the study does know that the parents were not volunteers (as in the case of Sharpe’s [1997] and Harry’s [1990] study) but were selected in a manner more closely resembling that of Lynch and Stein’s (1987) randomly selected sample. In addition to the sample selection techniques, only the respondents in the current study were aware that their identities were completely anonymous (even to the researcher), perhaps resulting in a decreased number of socially appropriate responses (although there is no certainty that the respondents were actually the parents or guardians as they claimed on the survey). This variable may have been a factor in any of the other abovementioned studies.

Another strength of the study was the survey’s brevity, its availability in both English and Spanish, and its ease of completion. However, although the survey had some positives, it also is at the root of many of the major faults in this study. The survey was written at a higher than sixth-grade level, thus many Spanish-reading parents may have had difficulty understanding the questions (Romo, 1986). One other major problem with the survey was the inclusion of an undefined sixth Likert scale response possibility of “don’t know” or “not applicable.” Though very few people chose this

response, the answers of those who did were rendered unusable in any real sense because they were not explainable. The final drawback on this survey was that it offered no questions regarding parental or family socioeconomic status (SES) in the demographic question section. Without this information, it is impossible to determine if any findings were confounded by the unknown variable of SES.

In addition to survey problems, there were some concerns about data analysis techniques. In particular the first concern was with Type I error given that there was a very real chance of error based on the results of the Bonferroni correction formula. However, because the original purpose of the study was more exploratory in nature, Type I error was not considered as important as Type II error. The worry concerning Type II error for this study may be supported by the small effect sizes of even statistically significant differences that were noted in the results. Overall, this means that although there appear to be several statistically significant results, there do not appear to be many practically significant results.

Though all of the above weaknesses in the study are noteworthy, the most important problem relative to this study may be that it was conceived and completed as part of a correctional policy for the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The study was done *after* TEA had implemented changes designed to improve every aspect of special education, including parent involvement. There were no data to compare the results with prior to these changes; therefore, we cannot say whether or not the overall positive parental perceptions are simply an effect of these changes. And, because Texas is one of

the few to have enacted these changes, this means that the results of this study may have little generalizability beyond this state.

Though all of these problems are noteworthy, it is vital to remember that studies like this are very few. Any data, even flawed data, add essential information to an extant void in the field. Because of this void, the results of this study should not be ignored. Any glimpses into a relatively unknown and unexplored area of study are useful first steps towards a better understanding of the whole.

Suggestions for Further Research

The current version of the PSES has problems that should be changed for future use. Most importantly, the current version lacks enough demographic information on the respondents and their children. Improvements would include breaking down the section on ethnicity to include the nationality of the individual and immigration status. Another addition would be to create a category for those who are biracial. In addition to individual information, district information should be provided. Specifically, this information would include the nature of the district (urban, rural, average income, and average educational level) and an identification of the regional educational service centers for that district. Finally, reliability and validity information should be calculated and reported for the instrument.

Some important aspects of parental rights in special education have been ignored across all of these studies (including this one). In particular, each of these studies looked at parental perceptions in some way (either interviews or surveys) and based their findings strictly on the parents' comments. Parental perception is just that: the

perception of each individual parent based on his or her already established ideas. By rating the Hispanic parent's perceptions against any other group, we are saying that the expectations are the same across groups as well. One parent may expect no interactions from the school, thus their perception would be more positive if they received an average number; whereas, another parent may have expected many interactions and thus felt that the same school was not interacting enough. Due to this, further research in the field needs to focus less on parental perceptions and more on observable behavior.

Studies that measure facts of perceptions might include examining student records for services received across groups. It may involve sitting in on IEP meetings and rating the number of questions or comments made by parents across groups, or discussing the meeting with the parents afterwards to evaluate parental understanding of the procedures. In addition to parental input, special education service providers could provide their own perceptions of parental participation in these meetings. Interviews with the service providers may help generate a new list of research questions about the schools' perceptions of home/school special education communication.

The aim of this research is to determine the areas of strengths and weaknesses in parental participation within the schools. With this in mind, the results from any studies could be used to generate more suggestions for positive home/school interactions. The final portion of this dissertation will continue the discussion started in Chapter 2. Specifically, this chapter will add by discussing suggestions to target the problems blocking effective home school communication and parental involvement in IEP development.

Communication Recommendations

In order for parents to be involved in their children's special education planning, they must be able to communicate effectively with the schools. All parents should be given the opportunity to ask questions and provide suggestions about their children's learning (Stein, 1983). Parents whose primary language is one other than English may have more difficulty doing this, so schools need to provide information clearly in the parents' native language as well as English (Montecel, et. al., 1993).

The way this is ordinarily done is by providing an interpreter who works along side the parent during the entire process (Rhodes, 1996). A better way to do this is to train a bilingual staff member who speaks the family's language to help parents become equal partners in the process (Stein, 1983). If school staff is unavailable, the school should approach community members who speak the language and offer them training in special education laws and school policies (Chavkin, 1996; Correa, 1989). Once communication barriers are removed, then parents can become more effective when asked to make decisions about their child's education.

IEP Development Recommendations

If the first step in enabling parents to be effective decision makers during IEP meetings involves effective communication, the second would be making parents aware of what is expected of them. Schools should work with parents before the meetings to let them know what to expect and to assure them that their input is valued (Rhodes, 1996). Parents need to have their rights and responsibilities made available to them in a way that is readable (Rhodes, 1996) and comprehensive (Stein, 1983).

Parents should be introduced to every member of the IEP team, and invited to the meeting room prior to the IEP meeting for orientation (Rhodes, 1996). They should also be urged to bring their own team members (e.g., friends, family, etc.) to attend meetings with them so that they do not feel overwhelmed by strangers (Correa, 1989). And, most importantly, parent should be made aware early in the relationship that they hold a role in the meetings as decision makers (Montecel, et. al., 1993; Rhodes, 1996). Each of these steps is critical to parents being involved in their child's IEP development.

Conclusion

This study examined parental perceptions of their roles as communicators and decision makers in the special education process in terms of ethnicity and their child's educational level. Very little difference was found between the perceptions of Hispanic parents when compared to the perceptions of white parents. When these differences were found, the white parents agreed less with the items than the Hispanic parents.

Though there were sampling problems as well as the timing of the survey (after IDEA 1997 was implemented and TEA began the DEC process), this may not fully explain why these differences sway in the opposite direction of the previous studies. One possibility may be that because of past research schools have made an effort to help support Hispanic parents in their roles of communicator and decision maker. A second possibility may be that Hispanic parents feel more comfortable with less active communicator and decision maker roles and are reflecting their desire to be more passive with their item responses. Although the results from the survey were unexpected across ethnicity based on past research, the differences across educational level were exactly as

anticipated. Specifically, this study found that parents of middle or high school students show less agreement that they were able to be good communicators and good decision makers than those whose children were in elementary school.

Whatever the differences, the overall finding is that parents in Texas perceive that schools are allowing them to at least adequately fulfill these roles. Thus, the results of this study are much more positive than past research, which indicated that parents felt left out of their children's education. This overall more positive perception could be a result of legislation passed to ensure parental roles in educational decision making; it could be a result of actions taken by the state of Texas to monitor the enactment of this legislation; it could be because schools are taking a more active role in providing best practice services to students and parents in terms of communication and decision-making opportunities; or it could be because the parents who answered the survey, both Hispanic and white, were particularly compliant or complacent. It will be the responsibility of the field to determine through research what the exact implications for this change are.

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APPENDIX A

**Texas Education Agency
District Effectiveness
and Compliance (DEC)**

Parent Special Education Survey

This survey provides parents an opportunity to express their perceptions about the district's provision of special education services to students who have qualified. Responses will be carefully reviewed and results utilized as part of the Texas Education Agency's evaluation of the districts' efforts.

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.
NO POSTAGE IS NEEDED.

If you have more than one child receiving special education services, complete only one survey for EACH CHILD.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey.

FAMILY INFORMATION

Please mark with your # 2 pencil the answer that applies.

1. I am this child's:

- ☐ Parent ☐ Surrogate Parent
☐ Guardian ☐ Other _____

2. Are you? (Optional)

- ☐ White ☐ African American ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Hispanic origin ☐ Native American ☐ Other _____

3. Please mark the appropriate instructional level for this child.

- ☐ Early Childhood ☐ Kindergarten ☐ Middle / Jr. High School
☐ Pre-K ☐ Elementary School ☐ High School

4. Please identify the primary disability of this child.

- ☐ Auditory Impairment ☐ Autism ☐ Deaf-Blindness ☐ Emotional Disturbance
☐ Learning Disability ☐ Mental Retardation ☐ Multiple Disabilities ☐ Orthopedic Impairment
☐ Speech Impairment ☐ Traumatic Brain Injury ☐ Visual Impairment ☐ Other _____
☐ Non Categorical Early Childhood ☐ Other Health Impairment

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Program & Service Areas

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree Don't Know

5. The district has explained special education and related services to my understanding .. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
6. The student evaluation process used by the district is clearly explained. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
7. The development of my child's individual education plan was handled in a timely manner. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

My child's individual education plan (IEP) included information about:

8. my child's instructional goals and objectives. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
9. my child's needed special education services. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
10. the teachers or persons responsible for providing needed services. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
11. how to evaluate my child's progress in school. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

Please answer the following:

12. I have had ample opportunities to review and develop my child's individual education plan (IEP). .. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
13. My child's individual needs have always been considered. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
14. To the maximum extent appropriate, opportunities have been provided for my child to interact with other students without disabilities. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
15. My child is placed in a classroom that best meets his or her needs. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
16. More than one classroom or instructional location (e.g., resource room, regular classroom) was considered when deciding where my child would receive services. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
17. The locations of services provided to my child are appropriate (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
18. The locations of services and programs available to all students in my child's school are accessible (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
19. Written notices from the school concerning meeting dates and times, and proposed actions are clearly written and understandable. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
20. Written notices from the school are provided to me in a timely manner. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
21. The school has always appropriately maintained the confidentiality of my child's records. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
22. Opportunities for communications with my child's principal and teachers are available. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
23. The school district provides the services I believe my child deserves. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

Overall, the persons who work with my child:

24. have appropriate expectations. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
25. are sensitive to the needs of my child. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
26. are flexible in their approach to working with my child. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)
27. help my child to meet his/her educational goals (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

Texas Education Agency: Parent Special Education Survey

Page: 2

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS AREA

□ □ □ □ □ ■ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

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48. Please provide any additional comments or observations in the space below.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Return this survey within 10 days using the enclosed envelope.

No postage is necessary.

Thank you again for your time.

APPENDIX B

AGENCIA DE EDUCACIÓN DE TEXAS

Eficacia y Conformidad Legal del Distrito Escolar

Encuesta para Padres de Familia Acerca de la Educación Especial

Esta encuesta proporciona a los padres de familia una oportunidad para expresar sus opiniones acerca de la calidad de los servicios que provee el distrito escolar a los estudiantes que participan en educación especial. Sus respuestas serán cuidadosamente analizadas y los resultados serán utilizados como parte de la evaluación que la Agencia de Educación de Texas hace del distrito escolar.

FAVOR DE REGRESAR LA ENCUESTA,
UNA VES CONTESTADA, EN EL SOBRE ADJUNTO.
NO NECESITA ESTAMPILLA.

Si usted tiene más de un hijo/a participando en el programa de educación especial, complete una encuesta por CADA HIJO/A.

Gracias por tomarse el tiempo de llenar este cuestionario.

INFORMACIÓN DE LA FAMILIA

Favor de marcar el cuadro que corresponda con un lápiz #2.

1. Yo soy de este/a niño/a

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Padre | <input type="checkbox"/> Padre Substituto |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guardián | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro _____ |

2. Yo soy (opcional).

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blanco | <input type="checkbox"/> Africano Americano | <input type="checkbox"/> Origen Hispano |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asiático o Isleño del Pacífico | <input type="checkbox"/> Americano Nativo | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro _____ |

3. Por favor indique el nivel instructivo adecuado para su hijo/a.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Infancia Temprana | <input type="checkbox"/> Jardín de Niños (kinder) | <input type="checkbox"/> Secundaria (Middle School) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-escolar | <input type="checkbox"/> Primaria | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparatoria (High School) |

4. Por favor indique el tipo de incapacidad que padece este/a niño/a.

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impedimento Auditivo | <input type="checkbox"/> Autismo | <input type="checkbox"/> Sordo-Ciego | <input type="checkbox"/> Perturbación Emocional |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problemas de Aprendizaje | <input type="checkbox"/> Retraso Mental | <input type="checkbox"/> Incapacitados Múltiples | <input type="checkbox"/> Impedimento Ortopédico |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defecto de Pronunciación | <input type="checkbox"/> Herida de Trauma Cerebral | <input type="checkbox"/> Impedimento Visual | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro |
| <input type="checkbox"/> no Categórico | <input type="checkbox"/> Otro Impedimento de Salud | | |
- Infancia Temprana

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PROGRAMA Y ÁREAS DE SERVICIO

Favor de marcar el número que corresponda con un lápiz #2.

- | | <i>Firmemente en desacuerdo</i> | <i>En desacuerdo</i> | <i>Neutral</i> | <i>Firmemente de acuerdo</i> | <i>No sé</i> |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. El distrito me ha explicado el funcionamiento de la educación especial y los servicios relacionados con ella de manera que yo pueda comprender..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. El proceso de evaluación de los alumnos empleado por el distrito es claramente explicado..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. El plan individual de mi hijo/a fue desarrollado a tiempo..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

El plan de educación individual de mi hijo/a a incluyó información sobre lo siguiente:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Las metas y objetivos educacionales de mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Los servicios de educación especial que necesita mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Los maestros y personas responsables de proveer los servicios para mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Como evaluar el progreso de mi hijo/a en la escuela..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Favor de contestar lo siguiente

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. Yo he tenido amplias oportunidades para revisar y desarrollar el plan educativo individual (IEP) de mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Las necesidades individuales de mi hijo/a siempre han sido tomadas en cuenta..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Hasta el máximo posible, mi hijo/a ha tenido oportunidades de relacionarse y participar con otros estudiantes que no tienen incapacidades..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Mi hijo/a ha sido ubicado en el salón de clases mas adecuado para sus necesidades..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Se tomaron en cuenta varios salones de clase antes de decidir el lugar más adecuado para él/ella..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Los lugares donde mi hijo/a recibe servicios son adecuados para él/ella..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Todos los servicios y programas disponibles para todos los estudiantes en la escuela de mi hijo/a son accesibles para mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Los avisos que envía la escuela acerca de fechas de reuniones, horas, y acciones propuestas son escritas claramente y en una forma comprensible..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Los avisos que envía la escuela son enviados a tiempo..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. La escuela siempre ha mantenido el expediente de mi hijo/a en un lugar privado y confidencial..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Existen oportunidades de comunicación con el director/la directora de la escuela de mi hijo y con los maestros..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. El distrito escolar provee los servicios que mi hijo/a merece..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

En general, las personas que trabajan con mi hijo/a:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24. Tienen expectativas apropiadas para él/ella..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Son sensibles a las necesidades que él/ella tiene..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Son flexibles en su modo de trabajar con mi hijo/a..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Ayudan a mi hijo/a para que logre sus metas educativas..... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Texas Education Agency: Spanish-language Survey

Page: 2

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS AREA															
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

01002

VITA

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- | | |
|-----------|---|
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