

2018

Parental Involvement in Individual Education Plan Development for Students with Significant Intellectual Disabilities

Tanya A. Dodge
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Walden University

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Parental Involvement in Individual Education Plan Development for Students with
Significant Intellectual Disabilities

by

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MA, Antioch University McGregor, 2006

BS, Capital University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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Abstract

Research indicates a connection between successful outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities and the individual education program (IEP) team's efforts in the IEP development process. However, little research has been conducted on the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with significant disabilities about parent participation in the IEP development process. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of parent participation in the IEP development process. The conceptual framework of this study was ecological design theory, based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development and Neal and Neal's theory of networked systems. Participants consisted of 4 parents and 5 teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities who have participated in the IEP development process. The interviews conducted with participants were analyzed for patterns and themes. Findings showed that teacher descriptions centered on actions connected with fulfillment of state guidelines, which create the setting in which the IEP development takes place. Parent participants acknowledged compliance to state guidelines based on teacher actions, but parent commentary was centered on elements of the parent-teacher relationship. Responses indicated that actions to strengthen the school-parent partnership may improve parent and teacher experiences of IEP development. This study contributes to positive social change by providing administrators and teachers information to better support the IEP development process toward improved outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem	3
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions.....	8
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study	9
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	13
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	14
Significance of the Study	15
Summary.....	16
Chapter 2: Literature Review	18
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Conceptual Framework.....	19
Ecological Systems Theory.....	19
Literature Review.....	23

Special Education Legislation.....	23
Parental Participation Guidelines.....	25
Contextual Issues Regarding Parental Participation	27
Parent Perceptions.....	29
A Comparison of Parent Perceptions with Researcher Observations	32
A Parallel Program for Comparison	33
Teacher Perceptions	34
Relating to Parents from Diverse Backgrounds.....	35
Supporting Communication	36
Barriers to Partnering.....	36
Attitudes and Experience	37
Researcher Observations.....	37
Comparison and Contrast of Parent and Teacher Perceptions.....	38
The Role of Culture	40
School Culture and Teacher Beliefs	41
Fostering Engagement	45
Strengthening Parent–School Partnerships in the Context of Diversity	47
School–Wide Strategies	49
Tangible Support and Teacher Education.....	50
A Model of Engagement.....	54
Summary and Conclusions	59
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	61

Research Design and Rationale	61
Role of the Researcher	64
Methodology	64
Participant Selection Logic	64
Instrumentation	65
Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	69
Data Analysis Plan	70
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	70
Ethical Procedures	72
Summary	73
Chapter 4: Results	74
Setting	74
Demographics	75
Data Collection	75
Selection of Participants	75
Participant Response	76
Participant Confidentiality and Scheduling	77
Interviewing–Data Collection.....	78
Data Analysis	79
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	80
Credibility	81
Transferability.....	81

Dependability	81
Confirmability.....	82
Results.....	83
Analysis of Participant Responses: Individual Parents.....	83
Analysis of Participant Responses: Individual Teachers	89
Analysis of Participant Responses: Parents as a Group.....	97
Analysis of Participant Responses: Teachers as a Group.....	111
Emergent Themes and Subthemes	130
Setting–Related Experiences	131
Interaction–Related Experiences	140
Addressing the Research Questions.....	145
Summary.....	148
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	149
Interpretation of the Findings.....	149
Setting–Related Experiences	150
Interaction–Related Experiences	151
Limitations of the Study.....	157
Recommendations.....	158
Implications.....	159
Conclusion	161
References.....	163
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	174

Appendix B: Participant Responses and Codes175

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information	75
Table 2. Parent Responses to Interview Question 1	98
Table 3. Parent Responses to Interview Question 2	99
Table 4. Parent Responses to Interview Question 3	101
Table 5. Parent Responses to Interview Question 4	104
Table 6. Parent Responses to Interview Question 5	106
Table 7. Parent Responses to Interview Question 6	108
Table 8. Parent Responses to Interview Question 7	110
Table 9. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 1	112
Table 10. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 2	114
Table 11. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 3	117
Table 12. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 4	120
Table 13. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 5	123
Table 14. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 6	126
Table 15. Teacher Responses to Interview Question 7	129
Table B1. P1 Responses to Interview Questions	177
Table B2. P2 Responses to Interview Questions	178
Table B3. P3 Responses to Interview Questions	180
Table B4. P4 Responses to Interview Questions	182
Table B5. T1 Responses to Interview Questions	183
Table B6. T2 Responses to Interview Questions	185

Table B7. T3 Responses to Interview Questions	187
Table B8. T4 Responses to Interview Quesitons	189
Table B9. T5 Responses to Interview Questions	191

List of Figures

Figure 1. Nested model of ecological systems.....	20
Figure 2. A networked model of ecological systems.....	23
Figure 3. Continuum: from involvement to engagement.....	55
Figure 4. The Ohio Guidelines and interview crosswalk.....	68

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The public school system in the United States provides special education services to students who have an identified disability that interferes with their ability to access the general education curriculum. The primary document for providing these services to each child is the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is a document created by a team of stakeholders to guide the education of students with special needs, including those with significant intellectual disabilities. In other words, the IEP is the document containing the details about how the student will be educated. These details are agreed upon by parents, advocates, education professionals, and sometimes students, who have collaborated in the planning process.

Laws guiding the provision of special education services to students with disabilities, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and No Child Left Behind (2001), mandate that every student is educated in the least restrictive environment and that all stakeholders, including parents, are given a voice. IEP teams are mandated to develop an appropriate educational plan to address each student's developmental and academic needs, yet often parents are under involved in the process (Murray, Munger, Colwell, & Claussen, 2018) even though parent involvement has been found to be a key component in student success (Wilder, 2015; Pomerantz & Monti, 2015; Wang, 2014). Despite the integral nature of the school–parent relationship, when best practice guidelines stipulated by current special education law were compared with the experiences of parents, it was found that the role of parents is often limited to that of

informant (Snyder, 2014). This situation often results from negative experiences of interactions between parents and teachers that hinder parent participation (Westwood, 2014).

Concerning oversight for these education laws, audits are conducted by state departments of education, but these audits are only an examination of the presence and content of required documents. Whether the mandates are being followed is determined by document review. Despite efforts to ensure fidelity to the laws governing special education, students continue to leave high school unprepared for adult living. A recent study of adults with cognitive disabilities at various levels revealed an employment rate of 26.4% and about half of the workers secured competitive employment whereas the other half worked in sheltered workshops (Disability Statistics, 2018). Additionally, employment outcomes remain low among persons with autism, both with and without intellectual disabilities. Although statistics limited to only graduates with significant intellectual disabilities were not found, it can only be assumed that their likelihood of employment is even more limited than their counterparts.

A variety of studies have explored the topic of parent participation in regular education and special education. Additionally, there is little research about the participation of parents of students with significant disabilities in their child's education (Arrendondo, 2016). A gap in research exists around the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities about the IEP development process. Because the primary relationship between the special educator and parents forms

the core of the IEP team, exploring their perceptions could be a key to maximizing parental involvement and student outcomes.

Chapter 1 introduces the problems related to students with significant intellectual disabilities leaving school without the needed skills for full participation in adult living activities despite targeted legislation that includes parents having a voice in the IEP process. Even though IDEA includes the mandate that schools encourage parents to participate in the IEP writing process, there remains a disparity between this ideal and the reality.

Background of the Problem

Despite the efforts of stakeholders over the past 40 years, students with all levels of cognitive disabilities continue to experience poor outcomes as adults. One indicator of success is the 26.4% employment rate of adults with cognitive disabilities (Disability Statistics, 2018) as compared with the 65.7% employment rate for adults without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). To further illustrate, of the 26.4% of working adults with cognitive disabilities, about half secured competitive employment, whereas the other half worked in sheltered workshops. The 73.6% unemployment rate for adults with disabilities (Disability Statistics, 2018) indicates that long-standing legislation such as IDEA, programming, and interventions have not been effective in producing outcomes for adults with cognitive disabilities equitable to the outcomes of nondisabled peers.

The discrepancy in outcomes for those with disabilities is not due to a lack of attention from policymakers. The first piece of federal legislation addressing the issue

was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, or Public Law No. 94–142. Later renamed IDEA, the law contains the following six elements: IEP, free and appropriate public education, least restrictive environment, appropriate evaluation, parent and teacher participation, and procedural safeguards. Although IDEA was amended in 1990 to ensure an adequately planned for and supported a transition to adult life for children with disabilities, it is unclear whether there has been any significant improvement in outcomes. Furthermore, policymakers involved in drafting IDEA recognized that parent involvement in students’ education positively influences outcomes for all students (Pomerantz & Monti, 2015; Wang, 2014; Wilder, 2015) and included it as one of the main aspects. However, these efforts have not resulted in reaching the desired level of parent involvement (Sudit, 2018).

Although it was difficult to find research about teacher perceptions of parent participation in the IEP development process within the last 5 years, a recurring theme in the current literature on the subject reflected a perception on the part of teachers that collaboration with parents is important (Sullivan, 2015; Westwood–Robinette, 2014; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014), yet the parents perceive that they are not a full part of the process (Sullivan, 2015; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). For example, Prunty (2012) reported that many teachers see parents as important sources of information about their child, which is less than the concept of collaboration suggests. D’Haem and Griswold (2016) also found that teacher education tends to focus on giving parents information rather than on forming reciprocal relationships, suggesting that teachers are not being adequately prepared to create and sustain collaboration with

parents. Another area of teacher education that is lacking emerged in a study by Avramidis and Norwich (2015), which indicated that teachers often have negative expectations regarding having children with special needs in their classrooms. Finally, Andrews (2013) found that the participation efforts of parents from cultures that differ from the dominant culture are often not valued or recognized, which have significant implications considering the increasingly diverse nature of the student body.

Despite federal policies and efforts of the public school system and knowing that parent involvement is an important part of the IEP process, outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities remain significantly below outcomes for students without intellectual disabilities. For example, the disparity in employment rates substantiates one important challenge to successful participation that students with cognitive disabilities face as adults. Principals report that levels of parent involvement in their children's education are still below the level they had hoped to see, but the research identified many barriers to parental involvement. More research is needed to advance what is known about outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities, but removing known barriers to parent participation in the IEP development process could make a difference for the better in the interim.

While conducting a review of literature, I found a lack of research focusing on the perceptions of parents and teachers of children with significant intellectual disabilities as pertains to parent participation. The results of this phenomenological study add to the current body of knowledge about the lived experiences of parents and teachers of students with disabilities in regard to the IEP development process, but with a focus on a

little-examined subgroup: students with significant intellectual disabilities. Positive social change can occur when parents and teachers come to a mutual understanding and begin working together, resulting in improved student outcomes. Students with significant intellectual disabilities will experience improved outcomes as contributing members of our communities.

Students with significant intellectual disabilities can have better outcomes as adults when parents and teachers work together, and this study may affect higher parental participation throughout the IEP planning process. This study may encourage parents and teachers to collaborate on creating a future vision for the student and realistic, measurable goals. This process should be mutually shared and include every member of the team, but most essentially the parent and the teacher. Bringing together families and teachers to achieve the best outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities has the potential to make a difference in the lives of those students, their families, and their communities.

Problem Statement

The IEP is a document created by a team of stakeholders to guide the education of students with special needs, including those with significant intellectual disabilities. Legislation, such as Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975), ensures that all stakeholders, including parents, are given a voice. IEP teams are mandated to develop an appropriate educational plan to address each student's developmental and academic needs, yet often parents are under-involved in the process (Murray et al., 2018; Sudit, 2018). However, research over the past 25 years suggests that parent involvement in

students' education positively influences outcomes for all students (Pomerantz & Monti, 2015; Sudit, 2018; Wang, 2014; Wilder, 2015).

Despite the integral nature of the school–parent relationship, the role of parents is often limited to that of an informant (Snyder, 2014). Policymakers involved in drafting IDEA recognized this fact and included parental involvement as one of the main aspects, but the legislative efforts over the past 40 years have not resulted in an increase to the desired level of parent involvement (Sudit, 2018). As long as parents are not participating fully in their child's educational decisions, the legal rights afforded to them are not being exercised, and chances for optimizing student outcomes are limited. Because the primary relationship between the special educator and parents forms the core of the IEP team, more needs to be known about perceptions of parent participation in the IEP writing process. The 73.6% unemployment rate for adults with disabilities (Disability Statistics, 2018), as compared with the 34.3% unemployment rate for adults without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), indicates that current policies, programming, and interventions have not been effective in producing outcomes for adults with cognitive disabilities equitable to the outcomes of nondisabled peers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of parents and special educators about their experiences of parental involvement in the IEP development process in public schools to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Given the centrality of the relationship between parents and teachers in regard to the IEP writing process, it was important to explore and describe

perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities on the IEP writing process. Because there are few studies on the perceptions of the parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities, a phenomenological study was appropriate for understanding their experiences as participants in IEP planning. For this study, parent involvement was defined as any or all the following actions: providing parent input as to any aspect of their child's education, attending IEP and any supplemental meetings, and ongoing communication with the child's teacher.

Research Questions

Central Question: How do parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities describe their experiences of parental involvement in the IEP development process?

Subquestion 1: How did parents perceive their involvement in the IEP development process?

Subquestion 2: How did teachers perceive parental involvement in the IEP development process?

Conceptual Framework

Existing theory can function as a spotlight (Maxwell, 2005, p. 49) that highlights certain aspects of a phenomenon. I chose ecological systems theory as the conceptual framework because I wanted to highlight the interactions between systems—in this case, parents, teachers, and the IEP development process as perceived through their experiences. A reflection of the research questions informed my choice of the ecological

systems theory because of its focus on human development regarding interactions between the individual and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Ecological systems theory was applied to substantiate the relevance of perception experiences of parental participation in the IEP development process. In addition to Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development (2000), Neal and Neal's theory of networked systems was used because of its focus on the connections between human beings and environments (2013). An assumption I made is that the actions of parents and teachers are informed by their perceptions. Therefore, to learn more about parent participation in the process, I needed to know more about the perceptions of the main participants in the process. Understanding the connection between parents' and teachers' perceptions and parent actions in the IEP development process required focusing on the space between individuals and systems that ecological systems theory provides.

Nature of the Study

I selected a qualitative approach because my mindset was in line with the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research as described by Creswell (2014). Within the qualitative approach, several options were considered and ranked concerning the goodness of fit for my study. I ranked phenomenology first because it is concerned with a description of the meaning of the experiences of more than one individual as related to a phenomenon, allowing researchers to describe what and how the phenomenon was experienced. I ranked case study second, because although case study is concerned with the experiences of individuals, the focus is on describing one or more cases over time using multiple forms of data, such as documents, observation, and reports (Creswell,

2014), which would not have allowed me to focus on the perspectives of the participants. I ranked narrative study third, because although it is concerned with the experience of one or more participants, the focus is on building a chronology of people's lives and reducing them to a common story (Creswell, 2014). This approach was rejected because the focus of this study was not on listing a sequence of events to explore the life of an individual (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology was chosen because it is about capturing the essence of a phenomenon based on the described perceptions of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002, p. 104).

To find participants, I contacted a local school district in writing, explaining the details about the study and including a request for name submissions of prospective participants as described in the contact letter. I interviewed participants and took field notes in spaces such as a public library and café, though some were phone interviews. Notes were secured on a password-protected computer. Any paper documents related to the study were secured in a locked filing cabinet to which I have sole access.

Because I sought to find out more about the perspectives of parents and teachers of a specific population of students, I chose convenience sampling to obtain data for generating rich descriptions of the phenomenon. This strategy strengthened confidence my analysis because of the support of more than one example. Four parents and five teachers were chosen based on my ability to access them and must have participated in the independent education plan development process of a student with significant intellectual disabilities.

The participants were asked the same open-ended questions to allow participants' perspectives to be revealed while providing structure to the data collection. Open coding provided a way to see only what the data revealed and minimize personal bias. I read over the interview transcripts, identifying words or ideas mentioned by more than one participant to use as codes. Coding was accomplished without software to organize the data because of the amount of data for the analysis. During the hand-coding process, decisions about including a statement or word were based on its contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon (see Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). After data combing for meaningful statements that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon, I used the statements and themes to write a description of what the participants experienced. Finally, I produced a composite description of the phenomenon that captures the essence of the phenomenon (see Creswell, 2014). My aim was to build on what is known about perceptions of parent participation in the IEP development process to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. My interpretation of results emerged out of an analysis of the codes through the lens of ecological systems theory.

Definitions

Free, Appropriate Public Education: An individualized educational program that is provided at public expense, designed to meet the child's unique needs and from which the child receives educational benefit, and prepares them for further education, employment, and independent living (Dorfman, 2010).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A written statement for each child with a disability that must include a statement of present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable annual goals and objectives, measures, services and supplementary aids, modifications and accommodations (Dorfman, 2012).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth–2) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages 3–21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

No Child Left Behind: legislation that includes increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low–performing schools; more flexibility for states and local educational agencies in the use of federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for our youngest children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Significant intellectual disabilities: A small number of students who are (a) within one or more of the existing categories of disability under the IDEA (e.g., autism, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury, etc.), and (b) whose cognitive impairments may prevent them from attaining grade–level achievement standards, even with the very best instruction. Estimated at 9% of students who have disabilities, or 1% of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Special education: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, and instruction in physical education (Dorfman, 2012).

Student with intensive needs: Students with intensive disability types or accommodation whose needs may include any single or combination of picture supported text, assistive technology, augmentative alternative communication, modified or task-analyzed curricula, physical supports, structured environments and paraprofessional support (Benson & Staugler, 2012).

Assumptions

I assumed that the parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities would answer interview questions and communicate their perceptions and experiences of the IEP development process honestly. I also assumed that with adequate explanation participants would understand the interview directions. Further, I assumed that participants would include a representative sample of parents and teachers that would illustrate their lived experiences. Finally, I assumed that participants would understand the IEP development process.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study included four parents and five teachers of special education students who have significant intellectual disabilities. The research plan included participants from suburban school districts in Southwestern Ohio. Parents and teachers of special education students who did not fit the definition of having significant

intellectual disabilities were not included in the study. Parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities who attended other urban, suburban, rural school districts were not included in this study.

Limitations

There are two notable limitations to the study. First, the research was limited to four parents and five teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. Second, the interviews occurred at only one point in the school year and two suburban school districts in Ohio. These limitations affect the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

Additionally, multiple measures were used to address ethical concerns. First, an informed consent included a written purpose statement explaining the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the participant's rights would be protected during data collection and was contingent upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The reason and use for the interview and its voluntary, confidential nature were explained to participants. Second, as recommended by Creswell (2014) for phenomenological studies, participants were selected based on having experienced the phenomenon of study and being able to express those experiences. Third, participants were assigned an identifier other than their actual name to protect participant confidentiality. Fourth, data collection protocol ensured that each participant was asked the same questions. Fifth, open coding was used to reduce bias. Sixth, a log was used to track details such as how participants were chosen, which design was being used, and how the work proceeded to strengthen credibility (see Miles et al., 2014).

Significance of the Study

Special education law has led to improvements in the education of students with special needs, including students with significant intellectual disabilities. Preservice teachers receive education about the rights of all students and special education laws, and teachers receive professional development about various parts of the provision of special education services. There are also parent resources for support, advocacy, and education about their children's disabilities and services available to parents through local special education resource centers and online groups. Despite these and other resources within and external to the school system, parents still are not participating as fully as possible in the IEP development process (Murray et al., 2018; Myers, 2014). Outcomes for these students will not improve until this problem is resolved through action.

This study includes descriptions of how parents and teachers see parental involvement in the IEP development process, and the results of this phenomenological study add to the current body of knowledge about the lived experiences of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities in regard to the IEP development process. Understanding how people in a relationship see the situation can guide steps to maximize the benefit of the relationship. This understanding is relevant because to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities, there needs to be an understanding of the nature, similarities, and differences between perceptions of the shared experience of stakeholders in the IEP development process. Because parents' rights are potentially violated when they are not a welcome part of the

process, understanding more about parents' perceptions of the process may lead to improved facilitation of their legal rights.

Students with significant intellectual disabilities can have optimal outcomes as adults when parents and teachers work together. This study may affect higher parental participation throughout the IEP planning process by encouraging parents and teachers to collaborate on creating realistic, measurable goals for the student. This process should be mutually shared and include every member of the team, but most essentially the parent and the teacher. Positive social change may be made when parents and teachers come to a mutual understanding and begin working together to improve student outcomes. Students with significant intellectual disabilities can then experience improved outcomes as contributing members of their communities. Bringing together families and teachers to achieve the best outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities has the potential to make a tangible difference in the lives of those students, their families, and their communities.

Summary

Moving from school to independent adult living continues to result in less success than hoped for by professionals and families of students with many students with special needs, including those students with significant cognitive disabilities. For example, employment outcomes remain low among persons with autism, both with and without intellectual disabilities. Additionally, Levy and Perry (2011) found that an average of 24% of these students find work after graduation, about half in competitive employment and half in sheltered settings. More recently, a study of adults with cognitive disabilities

revealed an employment rate of 26.4%, with about half in competitive employment and the other in sheltered workshops (Disability Statistics, 2017). These findings substantiate one of the many challenges with successful participation that these students face as adults.

Recent research describes aspects of central problems, but there is a lack of studies on the experiences of teachers and parents of students with significant intellectual disabilities. In particular, there is little scholarly exploration of the perceptions of teachers and parents about the central mechanism for the provision of special education services, the IEP. Without a mutual understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities of the IEP writing process, the potential outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities will remain limited from the outset.

Chapter 1 introduced the problems related to students with significant intellectual disabilities leaving school without the needed skills for full participation in adult living activities despite targeted legislation that includes parents having a voice in the IEP process. Even though IDEA includes the mandate that schools encourage parents to participate in the IEP writing process, there remains a shortfall between this ideal and the reality. Chapter 2 includes a review of research on parent and teacher perceptions about the IEP development process. Chapter 3 includes a summary of methods that were used in this study. Chapter 4 includes the results from data analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 contains a literature review of current research about parent and teacher perceptions about the IEP process and parent participation. Chapter 2 opens with a discussion of my research strategy, followed by these topics: selections from the history of special education law, focusing on Ohio's guidelines for parental participation and contextual issues regarding parent participation. The next section addresses theoretical foundations, including the theories of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal, followed by a section including parent perceptions and teacher perceptions. The next section contains the role of culture and intervention efforts, followed by a summary with conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

Several databases were used in locating recent, peer-reviewed research articles. Databases included (a) Academic Search Complete, (b) Education Research Complete, (c) ProQuest Central, (d) Dissertation and Theses at Walden University, (e) EBSCO Databases, and (f) PsychArticles. Whenever possible, articles chosen are current, meaning published within the past 5 years. The keywords used, either individually or in combination, included *autism, developmental disabilities, individualized education plan, IEP forms, partnerships, parent participation, parental involvement, teacher perceptions, parent-teacher partnerships, parent-teacher relationships, parent-school relationships, professional development, culture and education, and collaboration.*

Conceptual Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development establishes a foundational framework to study IEP development for special education students. An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's theory, the networked model of ecological systems theory (Neal & Neal, 2013), enriches the ideas of Bronfenbrenner through an emphasis on the direct and indirect interactions between human beings and their environments. Using elements of the models of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal (2013), ecological systems theory provided the framework for the exploration of parent and teacher perceptions of the IEP development process in special education for students with significant intellectual disabilities.

Bronfenbrenner. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development, the development of the child is influenced by the number and quality of connections developed in various settings. Not only are the settings influential, but the connections between settings are influential as well. Bronfenbrenner's concept of the environment consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each of these systems represents relationships that vary from direct contact with the child to indirect contact to the dimension of time.

The microsystem has direct contact with the child and includes places the child typically goes or is a part of, such as the family, school, and neighborhood. The mesosystem encompasses the connections within the microsystem but defines a larger social system. The child has direct contact with each of the elements in the mesosystem,

but it is the relationship between these elements that is described by this system. Though the child is not involved in the relationships between the parts of the system in this layer directly, the relationships between them influence the development of the child. The exosystem defines the next larger social system. The structures in this layer impact the development of the child through interactions with the microsystem, such as interactions with parent work schedules or community resources. The child may not be directly involved but may be influenced by their interacting. The macrosystem is the outermost layer in Bronfenbrenner's model. This layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws. This layer influences the interactions occurring in all other layers. Finally, the chronosystem describes the dimension of time in the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Figure 1 depicts Bronfenbrenner's theory with nested relationships.

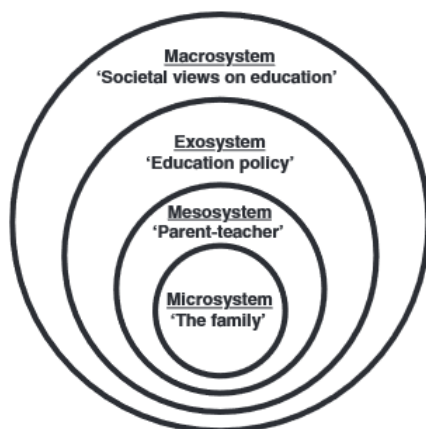


Figure 1. Nested model of ecological systems. This shows relationships as being situated, or nested, within one another and emphasizes the size of each system. From *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Connecting to Neal and Neal. Bronfenbrenner (1977) concluded that the three essential components of the ecological model relate to the focus on the child, the continued focus on the child's experiences, and the interconnectedness of relationships between settings. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), "an ecological orientation points to the additional importance of relations between systems as critical to the child's development," which can include the interaction between home and school, family, and peer groups (p. 514). It is the latter component that Neal and Neal focused on in their theory of networked relationships.

The theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Neal and Neal (2013) provide lenses through which to view the relationship between school and parents using reported perceptions of parents and teachers about parent participation in the IEP development process. Bronfenbrenner (1977) made the distinction of acquiring an understanding of human development through not only the direct observation of the behavior of one or two persons in the same place but also encompassing multiperson systems of interaction in multiple settings, along with environmental factors outside the immediate experience of the focal person. Considering the school and parents as the scope of this study, two microsystems connected directly to the child and that interact, this study was focused on Bronfenbrenner's (1974) mesosystem level.

Neal and Neal. Neal and Neal (2013) redefined setting as "a set of people engaged in social interaction, which necessarily occurs in, and is likely affected by the features of, a place" (p. 727). Neal and Neal defined a *microsystem* as a setting or set of people engaged in social interaction that includes the focal individual. A mesosystem is a

social interaction between participants in different settings that both include the focal individual. An exosystem is a setting that does not include, but whose participants interact directly or indirectly with, the focal individual. The macrosystem is the set of social patterns that govern the formation and dissolution of social interactions between individuals, and thus the relationship among ecological systems. The chronosystem is the observation that patterns of social interactions between individuals change over time, and that such changes impact the focal individual, both directly and by altering the configuration of ecological systems surrounding them.

The networked model of ecological systems theory shifts the focus from where individuals interact and to how and with whom they interact. It allows examination of different microsystems that may overlap, and mesosystems and exosystems that bridge these microsystems. The networked theory of ecological systems maintains the original recognition of Bronfenbrenner (1979) that environmental events and conditions outside any immediate setting containing the person can have a profound influence on behavior and development but puts the focus on the relationship between systems from the viewpoint of the focal person. Figure 2 depicts Neal and Neal's theory, which focuses on the connections between relationships.

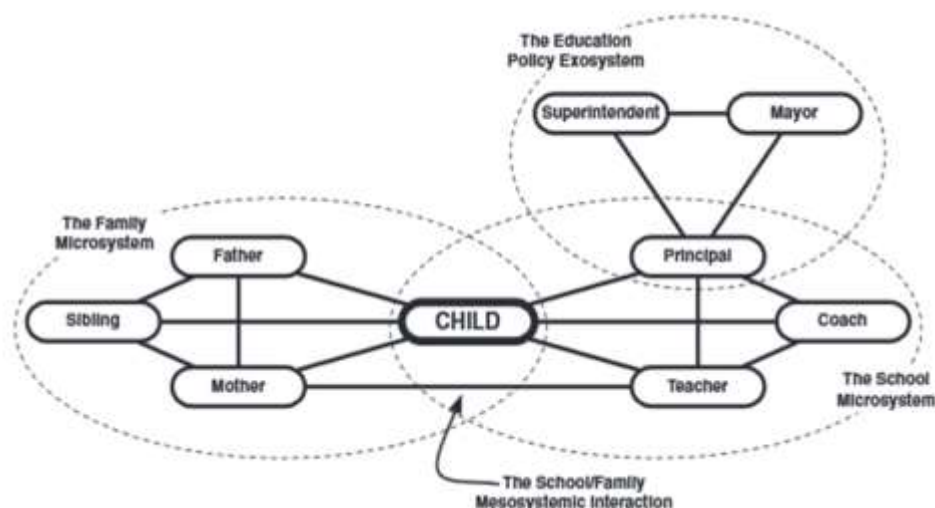


Figure 2. A networked model of ecological systems with the child as focal person. Dotted lines circle microsystems. An example shows the child as focal person and connector of the school and family microsystems, making a mesosystem. The policy exosystem affects the child but does not interact with them directly. Solid lines signify the connections between the persons comprising the system. From “Nested or Networked? Future Directions for Ecological Systems Theory,” by J. W. Neal and Z. P. Neal, 2013, *Social Development*, 22, p. 730.

Literature Review

Special Education Legislation

The IEP development process is a result of the evolution of special education in the public school system as mandated by the special education laws enacted over the past 40 years. Before 1975, individual states had the power to exclude students perceived to be uneducable from receiving a public education (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The

relevance of parent participation in the process is supported by its inclusion in special education legislation.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94–142) established the right of students with special needs to receive a “free and appropriate public education” and put in place procedural safeguards to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their parents. The primary concern of the federal government was the identification of all children with disabilities so that they could be served. Then the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 (PL 98–199) mandated the establishment of parent training and information centers. These amendments also provided funding for research in early intervention and early childhood special education, reauthorized discretionary programs, and established services to facilitate school to work transition. In 1986, PL 94–142 was amended to allow courts to order schools to reimburse parents for legal fees (PL 99–372). In addition, the amendments mandated services for preschoolers and established a program to assist states in developing early intervention services for infants. In 1990, PL 94–142, by now called the IDEA, mandated that the IEP include a plan for movement from school to adult living (PL 101–476). The amendments also reauthorized and expanded the discretionary programs, defined assistive technology devices and services, and added autism and traumatic brain injury to the list of eligibility. In 1997, IDEA amendments mandated that schools state how the student with special needs will be involved with and progress in the general education curriculum. Schools were required to report progress to parents of children with disabilities as frequently as they report to parents of nondisabled children. States were

also required to offer mediation services to help resolve disputes. Students served by special education were required to participate in standardized testing or given alternative assessments that meet their needs. IDEA mandated parent participation in eligibility and placement decisions, development and review of the IEP and transition planning.

In 2004, IDEA increased the focus on accountability and improved outcomes for students with special needs by aligning with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Schools needed not only to meet a child's immediate educational needs but to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Teachers were required to be highly qualified, meaning trained to address the special needs of students with disabilities. IDEA 2004 affirmed the importance of parental information as a source of "relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child" for the development of the contents of the IEP (IDEA Regulations, §300.304[b] [1]).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act was an effort to improve on legislation already in place to support the success of all students. The Every Student Succeeds Act included provisions requiring that all students' education to be based on high educational standards, encouraging interventions developed on the local level, and helping schools identified as having underperforming groups of students and low graduation rates.

Parental Participation Guidelines

The previous laws have emphasized the importance of parental participation in special education programs. The document driving special education services is the IEP. Because this study was conducted in Ohio, Ohio's guidelines are referenced in this section. The state of Ohio's Department of Education (2009) created a document

detailing special education model policies and procedures. According to Section C of the guide disseminated by the Ohio Department of Education, the IEP must contain a statement about the child's future, present levels of performance, measurable annual goals and objectives, how progress will be measured and how often reported, a statement of supplementary aids and services, justification for the level of participation with nondisabled children modification and accommodations, testing, and effective dates (p. 32).

Parental participation is addressed under Section B of guideline VI, which is called "Parental Participation." Under this section, the district must take steps to ensure parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in the IEP meeting by attending. Parents need to be given notice early enough for them to arrange their schedule and the meeting needs to occur at a mutually-agreed upon time and place. A notice must be given indicating the purpose, time and location of the meeting, who will be in attendance, and parents' rights to include individuals who have experience or specialized knowledge about the child in the meeting. The district must make multiple attempts to contact parents to arrange a mutually agreed upon meeting time and place before holding an IEP meeting without parents present (Ohio Department of Education, 2009, p. 31).

Parental consent is mandatory for conducting an initial evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services, providing those services, conducting a reevaluation, changing placement, and releasing personally identifiable information about the child. Parental consent requires that parents are fully informed of all relevant information in their native language or another mode of communication (Ohio

Department of Education, 2009, pp. 12–13). Language referring to parental participation throughout the guidelines is a testament to parents' rights but is also an acknowledgment of the value placed on parental influence on a child's educational outcomes, which research has supported. For example, Cope–Kasten (2013) found that the best outcomes for students receiving special education services are achieved when parent–school partnerships are strong. Additionally, Goldman and Burke (2016) found that poor partnerships lead to costly due process proceedings and rarely result in mutually cooperative solutions.

Contextual Issues Regarding Parental Participation

Strong school and parent partnerships affect academic success, suffer persistent barriers, and require cultivation. Recent studies point to needs and concerns about strong school and parent partnerships. Parental involvement correlates with academic success. The current literature points to a need for relationship building that incorporates the increasing diversity of our society (Snyder, 2014; Myers, 2014; Westwood–Robinette, 2014) and that sustained efforts need to be made by teachers to encourage and facilitate parent involvement (Prunty, 2012).

Practical barriers. First, practical barriers to parental involvement persist (Robinette, 2014). For example, there is a lack of common definition of parent involvement. Without a common conception of what parent involvement should look like, parents and teachers may have different ideas about expectations. Another barrier is a lack of parent knowledge of their rights. If parents are not aware of their rights concerning special education services in the public schools, they may not fully exercise

those rights. Additionally, scheduling can present another barrier to parent participation. Some parents may not be able to attend meetings during the school day, which is when parent meetings are typically scheduled. In some areas, transportation issues are a significant barrier due to a lack of resources on the part of the parents. Negative experiences in the past are another barrier that can lead to less participation in the future. Parents who describe their interactions with schools as difficult may not find themselves participating as actively in the IEP development process as they would have liked.

Engaging parents. Second, parents of children with disabilities may require a more personalized approach to engagement. In a quantitative study, Fishman and Nickerson (2014) found that parents of children with special needs tend to respond to general invitations from school less than parents of typical students, but are more likely to respond to personal invitations for involvement by the child's teacher. As long as reasonable attempts are made by the teacher to secure parental involvement in the IEP process, the legal mandate has been met, making it unlikely that anything other than those attempts will occur in the future. Despite this recognition, little research has captured educational participation by parents of students with students who have disabilities. To capture participation of parents, Arrendondo (2016) conducted a meta-analysis in which the researcher found little existing research about the participation of parents of students with disabilities in their child's education. Rodriguez, Blatz, and Elbaum (2014) found that parents of students with disabilities reported less engagement than parents of general education students, due to perceived school resistance to building trust, negative attitudes towards minority cultural norms, and a lack of social capital on the part of the parents.

Other studies found tended to focus on the IEP meeting itself, rather than the other forms of parent participation possible.

Parent Perceptions

Moving from issues surrounding parent participation and how theory may be applied leads to a need for the perspective of parents on the phenomenon. Despite legislation and guidelines about parents being fully involved in decisions about their child's education, the hoped-for collaboration between parents and schools remains elusive. In fact, a recurring theme in the current literature on the subject reflected a general parental perception that they are not a full part of the process (Elbaum, Blatz, & Rodriguez, 2016; Stanley, 2015; Sullivan, 2015; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Zeitlin & Cursic, 2014). In an article by Zeitlin and Cursic (2014) describing their analysis based on a literature review of 51 peer-reviewed studies on IEP development, parents reported that the computer-based nature of the IEP co-occurred with a sense of disconnection, depersonalization, and mechanization to the process. Parents reported a sense unequal status with school staff along with mistrust on the part of the parents. As a result, communication is not as frequent or meaningful as parents would like, and they aren't being treated as knowledgeable. Words parents used to describe their experiences in meetings are beat up and judged. Parents frequently shared feelings of being kept at a distance with constructed and reinforced boundaries between themselves and the school.

Another study by Sullivan (2015) found that parents perceive that they are not a full part of the IEP process, in particular in decision-making about their child's education. Over half of the 34 parent participant pool reported that not only did they not

have enough time to read over reports beforehand, but also that the IEP team does not listen or respond to their input. Unlike some other studies to the contrary, Sullivan (2015) indicated that this result crossed all socio-economic lines, although the small sample size in this study should be noted. The results of this study indicated that parents continue to struggle to participate meaningfully in the decision-making responsibility of the IEP team.

The study by Tucker and Schwartz (2013), with its sample-size of 135, may lend some perspective to the results found by Sullivan (2014). In this mixed-methods study, Tucker and Schwartz (2013) sought to gain insight into the nature of parents' perceptions about collaboration within the IEP development process. The study covered the following five sections: (a) collaboration, (b) supportive practices and professional behavior, (c) conflict and resolution, (d) service needs, and (e) educational and outcome priorities. The instrument had 36 total questions. Common barriers to collaboration included opportunities to provide input, communication difficulties with school teams, and negative perceptions of school professionals. The group of parents responding to this survey described themselves as willing to be involved in their child's educational program but found it difficult to do so because of their perceived barriers constructed by the school district. Some of these barriers include difficulties with communication and disagreements about school placements, programs, and services. Parents provided input about possible helpful remedies including increasing the type and frequency of communication, accessing information to be better prepared and having their input valued

as a member of the IEP team. Also, they reported a sense that school staff is not knowledgeable about specific disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder.

Another study of African American mothers of children with disabilities in rural special education supported the notion that barriers seem to cross SES lines. In a phenomenological study by Stanley (2015), which consisted of 12 participating mothers with low-income who were chosen using homogeneous and criterion sampling, all the mothers identified perceived caring of their child's teacher and openness to communication as most important to their level of involvement in advocacy for their child. When not present, mothers indicated feeling frustrated and hopeless. It was important to the mothers that professionals validated their concerns, had an open-door policy, and that there was a sense of trust and mutual respect between themselves and school staff. The situation continues, as reflected by a study by Elbaum et al. (2016). In their study of African American parents, over half did not feel respected. Parents desire more and better communication.

The composition of families today often varies from the traditional two-parent household. One variable about the frequency of parent involvement may be single-parenting situations, referring not to marital status but rather how many adults are in the home in a parenting role. In a study by Myers and Myers (2015) using surveys of 504 parents from a larger national study, whether the adults were married, both biological parents of the child, or one or both not biologically related to the child, the presence of a partnering parent increased the frequency of parent involvement as compared with parents who parented alone.

Another result of the change in family composition is a larger number of fathers involving themselves in the IEP process than in years past. In a qualitative interview study of twenty fathers of children with disabilities, fathers reported feeling overwhelmed by the IEP development process (Mueller & Buckley, 2014). At times, they felt that efforts at relating to parents and communication lacked on the part of the schools. Fathers stated that schools need to listen to the parent voice. The study revealed three primary roles played by involved fathers. First, fathers partnered with the child's mother and IEP team. Second, fathers advocated for the needs of their child, and third, fathers became the student in that they had to educate themselves about the IEP process and professional jargon.

A Comparison of Parent Perceptions with Researcher Observations

Price (2014) observed 63 IEP meetings and analyzed the recorded dialogue using discourse analysis. Similar to the findings of Zeitlin and Cursic (2014), Price (2014) found that participants oriented to the meeting as completing the IEP according to legal federal and state procedures, and not necessarily as a place to make decisions together. The overall structure of discussion during the conference generally followed the seventeen IEP form sections to locate problems and offer solutions. Without exception, all IEPs resulted in agreement to the information presented with limited additions to the IEP. Price (2014) observed limited shared decision making. While educators, caregivers, and students did not often engage in making decisions together, everyone worked together to create hopeful thoughts about the future. Thus, the meetings became a specialized meeting in presentation format with legal parameters prescribing decisions,

rather than a fluid parent–teacher conference to discuss student progress and make decisions about educational goals.

The attitude that if parents aren't involved, they are apathetic or resistant remains a common feature of the school climate. Eng, Szmodis, and Mulsow (2014) offer a different perspective on an influence to their level and type of participation. Results of their quantitative study involving parents of 273 students in Cambodia revealed factors indicating the likelihood of parental involvement. For example, parents were more likely to participate in the child's education if extended family valued education and if the parents' social lives revolve around their children. Conversely, parents are less likely to be involved at school if they believe that interventions will not help their child, if religious beliefs dictate that the parent should not be involved, and if gender roles carry edicts such as fathers tending to the education of sons while mothers tend to the education of daughters.

A Parallel Program for Comparison

Another common attitude in schools is that parents would be reluctant to commit their own time to educating their child. Stadnick, Drahohta, and Brookman–Frazee (2013) conducted a mixed methods study to compare the perspectives of parents in two different mental health programs. Thirteen parents of children with ASD participated in one of two distinct programs; the standard community mental health service and the evidence–based practice test group. In both types of therapy, challenging behaviors were the primary target for intervention. A significant difference between the groups, however, was that parents in the test group were expected to have high involvement during and in–

between sessions. Another special feature of the test group was the therapists' use of teaching strategies to introduce and practice skills.

Activities that parents in the test group engaged in were reviewing homework, discussing goals, teaching their child skills, tracking challenging behaviors, and participating in the actual therapy sessions. Parents learned about autism spectrum disorder and techniques to address their child's challenging behaviors at home. All of the parents in the test group reported that they were satisfied with the experience, perceived a strong alliance with the therapist, and saw improvement in the emotional regulation, coping strategies, and social skills of their child as a result of the treatment.

These outcomes are dissimilar from those perceived by families receiving routine community mental health services, which are characterized by parents as having limited parent-provider collaboration. While beyond the scope of the study to examine the relation between parent satisfaction and clinical outcomes, these data suggest that the perception of therapists as effective and a strong therapeutic alliance contributed to both the high level of parent satisfaction and child and parent skill gains. These data are important because they address potential concerns from therapists or administrators that parents may be unwilling to participate in therapy when therapists use highly directive, behavioral, and manualized interventions.

Teacher Perceptions

An understanding of parent participation cannot be complete without also examining the matter from the perspective of teachers. Although it was difficult to find any research about teacher perceptions of parent participation in the IEP development

process within the last 5 years, a recurring theme in the current literature on the subject reflected a perception on the part of teachers that collaboration with parents is essential. Prunty (2012) conducted a mixed methods study over a five month period and including 213 teachers of students with autism spectrum disorder and found that those teachers see parents as important sources of information about their child. As much as the term *collaboration* is used, this view communicates a much less interactive or partnering relationship than may be suggested by the concept of collaboration.

Relating to Parents from Diverse Backgrounds

This type of one-way view of working with parents was identified in a mixed methods study by D'Haem and Griswold (2016): The researchers interviewed and surveyed teacher educators and teacher candidates and found that the emphasis was on giving parents information, not on forming reciprocal relationships. This situation may be in part due to the fear and anxiety reported by both the experienced teachers and the student teachers. The fear coupled with negative feelings generated by experiences with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds partially explains the one-way relational patterns and points to a need for improved teacher training. In fact, Baquedano, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) found that not only are the efforts of many parents from diverse backgrounds unrecognized, at worst they are disregarded and even met with hostility by schools. Although the teacher educators saw the need for teachers to learn how to work with parents from backgrounds other than the middle class, they reported not feeling equipped to provide training on the subject. Another view reported by teachers in a study by Lee (2016) was that the stability of a child's home life is somewhat

predictive of their academic success, suggesting a high value placed on the status of parents. Armed with the skills needed to partner effectively with all kinds of parents, teachers would presumably experience reduced negativity toward parents, which would itself serve to help the situation.

Supporting Communication

One fact remains after recognizing the deficits related to partnering with parents, and that is the value teachers place on parents regarding the academic success of children. Teachers in the Lee (2016) study reported that collaboration needs to be simplified through constant and clear communication. Many methods can be used to support parent–school communication, but two technology–based tools showing promise are a text messaging system (Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013) and a blog–based platform (Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013). Additionally, Lee (2016) reported that providing supports and resources for parents and telling parents how they can be involved are ways to encourage parent participation and build relationships with parents.

Barriers to Partnering

Teachers reported on barriers to parent partnerships. Williams–Diehm, K. L., Brandes, J. A., Chesnut, P. W., & Haring, K. A. (2014), in their 159 participant study examining the relationship between parent involvement and participation in IEP meetings, found two main barriers to collaboration. The first barrier involves schedules. Specifically, a lack of time for collaboration itself and difficulty coordinating times to meet with parents and representatives from outside agencies. The second barrier involved expectations. Teachers reported that parents often have unrealistic expectations for their

child and that regular education teachers often have negative expectations regarding having children with special needs in their classrooms. Both sets of expectations have obvious implications for efforts toward the partnership between parents and schools.

Attitudes and Experience

Researcher observations have shed some light on the subject of teacher attitudes towards working with students who have disabilities. Avramidis and Norwich (2015) found that teacher attitudes are based largely on the nature of the disability, their experience and skill level in working with children with disabilities, and their philosophy about the nature of disabilities. Regarding the nature of the disability, teachers tended to be more willing to accept children with mild disabilities and physical impairments, less willing to accept children who have more complex needs like severe learning and behavioral challenges. They also found that the more experience and skills a teacher had in working with students with special needs, the more favorable their attitude toward such students. Finally, teachers who believed that interventions were futile regarding helping students learn were less favorable about working with students with special needs. Those teachers who believed that interventions could make a difference interacted and persisted more to ensure student understanding than their opposing counterparts.

Researcher Observations

One may wonder how these descriptions compare to the level and quality of participation observed by researchers. Observation by researchers corroborate concerns gleaned through the interviews and surveys of teachers. Studying the concept of partnership, Karila and Alasuutari (2012) observed IEP meetings to examine the

interaction between parent and teachers. They reported two main findings. First, they observed the limited use of parent input. Second, the assumption that parents understand the specialized jargon used in IEPs, and third, the role as perceived by teachers is a dichotomous one. Parents were seen simultaneously as experts on their child, yet seen as targets for instruction. D'Haem and Griswold (2016) concluded that though the participants agreed on the importance of collaborating with parents, they lacked the knowledge and skills to form relationships with parents based on equality and partnership.

Comparison and Contrast of Parent and Teacher Perceptions

Ostensibly due to the difference in vantage point, there are many more differences than similarities in reported thoughts. Both parents and teachers recognize the importance of collaboration between parents and schools, but from that point, differences emerge. The following four paragraphs describe these differences in perceptions about parent participation in the IEP development process.

Parents reported feeling that they are not a full part of the process and is manifested in many ways. For example, parents sense that school staff holds them in a position of unequal status with professionals (Sullivan, 2015). This sense of inequality is gathered from experiences like school staff dictating the flow of the meeting, timing or place of meetings, or by being “gatekeepers” to services for the student. Another indicator is insufficient communication. Parents reported a lack of listening or responding to parent input on the part of the IEP team. Additionally, parents reported a lack of time to read over documents before meeting (Sullivan, 2015). A mechanical feel to meetings

(Price, 2014; Zeitlin & Cursic, 2014), reportedly exacerbated by the presence of a computer in meetings, is another contributor to parents' sense of limited participation. The literature indicates that parents want to be involved in decision-making, but negative perceptions of and past disagreements with school staff, coupled with the sense that staff is not knowledgeable about their child's disability (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013) represent a serious obstacle to full parent participation.

Observations described in current research corroborated parent perceptions (Eng, Smodis & Mulsow, 2014, More & Hart, 2014; Price, 2014; Stadnick, Drahohta, & Brookman-Frazee, 2013; Tucker & Schwartz, 2014). For example, researchers observed the mechanistic format to meetings. Teachers tended to follow the format of the document to structure the meeting. Additionally, More and Hart (2014) found that along with the benefits of using IEP writing software, they also present a challenge to writing truly individualized IEP goals, adding another mechanistic quality to the process. Although researchers observed shared input as to the future vision for the child, shared decision-making was limited (Price, 2014). Another relevant researcher observation was that parents whose extended family and social connections value education and whose culture supports education are more involved than those parents whose family and friends do not (Eng, et al., 2014). Researchers also confirmed that, contrary to typical school lore, parents would participate in interventions at home (Stadnick, Drahohta, & Brookman-Frazee, 2013; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

Teachers reported a belief that collaboration with parents is important (Prunty, 2012) and that there is a need for a multicultural approach (Lee, 2016). Home life is seen

as a significant influence on students (Lee, 2016). Several barriers to collaboration were reported by teachers, however. Schedules, unrealistic expectations of parents and regular education teachers (Williams–Diehm, et al., 2014) and a belief that parents will not participate in highly directive interventions (Stadnick, Drahota, & Brookman–Frazee, 2013).

Researcher observations offer an independent perspective about what teachers have said. For example, researchers observed that teachers limit parent role to the informant (Karila & Alasuutari 2012; Prunty, 2012) about the child and receiver of information/education (D’Haem & Griswold, 2016). Another concern was the uncultural approach typically used in schools regardless of a culturally diverse student body. Researchers found that teacher attitudes were based on the nature of the child’s disability, teacher experience and skill level, and their teaching philosophy (Avramidis & Norwich, 2015). Another issue is that teachers assume that parents understand the professional jargon (Karila & Alasuutari, 2012) used in spoken and written language during IEP development meetings.

The Role of Culture

Concerns about the lack of parent involvement have led researchers to study what forces may be influencing the level of parent involvement. Culture has emerged as perhaps the most central factor (Snyder, 2014). The problem has been framed by various conceptual frameworks, but to generalize: When there is a mismatch between the cultures of the school/teacher and the parent, any lack of parental involvement tends to be attributed to apathy about the value of, or resistance toward, education. Any assumptions

made by the teacher influence their attitudes, which influence their classroom practices.

This cycle is a circular pattern that can be approached at any point around the circle.

School Culture and Teacher Beliefs

Looking at teachers' attitudes to inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2015) found that school culture and teacher beliefs are influencers of teachers' attitudes. This fact underscores the relevance of school culture not only in a school-wide sense but down to the individual as well. For example, when from the top down there is a culture that says all students deserve an education, this type of thinking permeates how students are viewed and treated by faculty and by each other. Focusing chiefly on the teacher belief side of the equation, traits that signal a likelihood of favorability toward inclusion are an acceptance of responsibility for teaching a variety of students at varying ability levels, confidence in classroom management and teaching content, abstract thinkers. Leaders need to encourage collaborative partnerships with parents that include commitment, communication, equity, and respect (Elbaum, et al., 2016). I see the relevance of administrator awareness of the message they are sending out into the school, of considering potential hires based on abstract versus concrete thinking and what role they will be playing in school, and planning professional development to broaden teacher skillsets and thereby raise professional self-confidence.

Physical setting. Culture and parental involvement have been approached by looking at the physical setting of the school itself. Williams-Diehm, et al., (2014) compared level and quality of parent involvement in collaborations with teachers based on rural, suburban, and urban settings. Rural parents were found to be more collaborative

than either suburban or urban parents. Looking at possible reasons why this is the case, they identified the following contributing factors: Rural communities are small and tend to have a common culture. There tend to be only one or a few special educators in a rural school, and they keep students for multiple years. In contrast, suburban and urban communities tend to be comprised of multiple cultures, employ many special educators who are assigned students for one year. The finding led me to wonder how the attributes of the rural setting might be created within suburban and urban settings. In rural areas, one area lacking that was not mentioned in this study, but asserted by Stanley (2015) was access to supportive services, discussed in the Parent Perceptions section of this paper. Ameliorating the lack of services could further strengthen parental capital in the school–parent partnership.

Parent involvement at school. Comparisons of behavior in parents from two different cultural groups have demonstrated that some generalizations can be made that break down the issue of culture even further. Eng, et al. (2014) found that parent beliefs, social networks, religious views, and gender roles influence the type and amount of parental involvement in their child’s education at home and in school. Results were controlled for effects of family wealth, number of children, place of residence, and parent education level. Using social capital theory as a lens, the researchers predicted that parent beliefs, social networks, and trust would be the influencers of parental involvement.

Eng, et al. (2014) generated several findings. They found the following: If parents believe that nothing can or should be done to influence their child’s level of academic achievement, they were less likely to be involved in their education at all. If their religion

held views that precluded parent participation in their child's education, they were less likely to be involved in their child's education. If the parents' social networks were centered on their children or extended family valued education, they were more likely to be involved in their child's education. Last, gender role attitudes. If the parents had clearly defined ideas based on gender, it was more likely that each parent would not be involved in an opposite gendered child's education. In other words, mothers would not involve themselves in their sons' education. Fathers would not involve themselves in their daughters' education. These findings are important for teachers to know because they often assume a lack of visible parental involvement as being parental apathy or resistance. These are assumptions that work against improving parental involvement in children's education.

Continuing comparisons between two cultures, Andrews (2013) looked at school culture versus parent culture. In a qualitative study of Mexican culture and parent involvement, the reasons for the lack of schools' validating parent modes of participation and differences between home and school culture were explored. Andrews (2013) identified four themes: Deference for elders, focus on behavior, academic supervision, and nurturance and moral support. It is important to connect observable behaviors to each of the four themes to understand the relevance of these themes. A teacher would see a student from a Mexican household demonstrate deference for elders in submissive behavior or by a lack of questioning or challenging authority. Such behavior could be perceived as a lack of caring about schoolwork.

The themes of academic supervision and a focus on behavior closely overlap. As stated, Mexican parents tend to focus on behavior when it comes to parenting. In Mexican culture, it would be the norm for the parent to be asked to ensure their child applies themselves in school. It would not be the norm for the parent to be asked to help their child with homework. It seems that such a difference in cultural expectations could lead to erroneous judgments on the part of both the parents and teachers.

Finally, nurturance and moral support. According to Andrews (2013), all Mexican parents believe that it is their responsibility to provide basic needs to their children, such as food, clothing, housing, school supplies and money. Regarding moral support, there is variation in whether Mexican parents believe they are responsible for providing moral support and to what degree. This study shows how a mismatch of cultures can lead to misguided assumptions about parents, which influences teacher attitudes, which influences classroom practice. Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the cultures of the students in their school. Schools need to help parents and students understand what is expected of them. In other words, how the students can best help themselves and how the parents can best support their child's education.

Parent involvement at home. School outreach efforts are particularly important in promoting historically disenfranchised parents' involvement in the schools, whereas enhancing parenting self-efficacy is crucial for supporting their engagement at home. Park and Holloway (2013) sought to identify the factors that promote parental involvement in their adolescent children's education across a variety of racial/ethnic and sociodemographic groups within a nationally representative sample. Analyzing a sample

of 3,248 parents drawn from a larger national survey, the researchers found that school outreach efforts are a strong predictor of parent involvement at school. Findings: White parents were more likely to engage in school-related involvement practices than were Black and Latino parents. Spanish-speaking parents were less involved at the school site than English-speaking parents. Found that black and Latino parents tend to be involved in child's schooling but may be in ways not detected or appreciated by the school. Another study found that although parent participation tended to be low in schools with a high percentage of low-SES families, the level of parent involvement increased in correlation with the number of parent outreach activities held by the school (Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, & Benz, 2013).

Fostering Engagement

In a study to determine the effectiveness of a school-hosted informational forum for parents about empowering parents to engage with the special education process, Walker (2014) found that the majority of attendees left feeling empowered and motivated. Parents learned about their legal rights and their role as a member of the decision-making team. Using pre and post survey, the researcher found that the participants, (for the pre survey, consisting of four parents who self-identified as black and 11 parents who identified as Hispanic; post survey consisting of 7 of those parents), experienced a measurable benefit for a low cost to the school. The researcher credited cultural considerations and parent accommodations with providing parents the opportunity to attend.

With no population are cultural factors and parent accommodations more important than to immigrants who are of the Arab culture. The population of Arabs is a growing population in the U.S. but not familiar to most professionals working within the school system. The Arabic culture is vastly different from that of European or Hispanic populations. For example, communication in that culture is particularly expressive, including big gestures and body movement. Families of Arabic descent may encounter discrimination due to negative perceptions permeating current U.S. cultural climate. Also, disability is stigmatized in the Arab culture. Typically, religion plays a significant role in choices and perceptions on the part of the parents of students. Al Khateeb, Hadidi, and Al Khatib (2014 & 2015) called attention to this growing population, pointing out that literature about this culture is lacking, leaving professionals with little guidance even if they were trying to learn about the culture. Park and Holloway (2013) recommended that a parent coordinator leads outreach efforts because teachers are already heavily burdened with current responsibilities.

Bronfenbrenner, Kessel, Lessen, and White (1986) asserted that the way Americans and others in modern industrial societies think about what it means to be a child, what parents do, and how their lives are affected by life circumstances has changed as a result of changing definitions over time (p. 1226). To advance the idea, they stated that our ideas about what being a child means and even developmental psychology are cultural inventions. Thus, the conceptions and activities of researchers are subject to the evolving values and moral considerations of the society as a whole (p. 1227). Looking at the influence of present-day culture, or multi-culture as in the U.S., on parent

participation is important in the effort to identify ways that schools/teachers can support and encourage parent involvement.

Strengthening Parent–School Partnerships in the Context of Diversity

The theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Neal and Neal (2013), depicted in figures 1 and 2, provide a complete framework for understanding connections and designing interventions to support human systems as opposed to either one theory alone. The following example gives an illustration of the lenses of each theory. Paat (2013) applied Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory to the immigrant family social ecology for social services delivery. Paat described interventions for each level in the model.

At the chronosystem level, Paat (2013) recommended social worker preparation curricula that included advanced practice knowledge to work with culturally diverse populations. Using the networked theory, the focus here could be an observation of how the relationship between the focal person and the teacher changes over time. According to Paat (2013), at the exosystem level an ethnocultural perspective should be taken by community organizations. An example of an intervention at the exosystem level using an ethnocultural perspective would be classes for immigrants to help them with tasks such as acculturation and to secure employment. Another example is an intervention centered on promoting cultural sensitivity to the general public. In the networked model, an exosystemic focus could be the relationship between the persons delivering the training and the immigrant family’s community leaders. Another example would be the

relationship between the persons delivering instruction and the members of the general public.

At the mesosystem level, support groups to promote biculturalism and to bridge language differences are suggested. An example of a networked model focus would be the relationship between a community support group facilitator and a teacher. At the microsystem level of the Paat (2013) example, intervention is with the individual family to help the immigrant children adjust and provide the parents skills to help their children adjust. Nested model adherents could focus on the relationship between the focal person and their family microsystem.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, development occurs within the environment of the systems that influence the life of the focal individual. Neal and Neal spotlight the relational aspect of development through their Networked Model. For my prospective study, using a special education student as the focal person, educational policy represents the exosystem level. The literature suggests that strengthening the connection between parents and schools will require intentional, organized, school-wide strategies based on policy (Avvisati, Gurgand, Guyon, & Maurin, 2014) that includes allocated funds for implementation (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). There should be provision for tangible support Khajehpour & Ghazvini (2011) and teacher education, specifically preservice, professional development, and learning support teams (Avramidis & Norwich 2015; Hirano & Rowe, 2016). Piecemeal outreach will not create or sustain the kind of support many parents need to encourage their participation in their child's education and postschool planning; therefore the function and priorities need to be

clear and developed (Flogaitis, Nomikou, Naoum, & Katsenou, 2012) with stakeholder input.

School–Wide Strategies

An example of a policy–based training program that is intentional, organized, and using school–wide strategies is being developed by a partnership between The Ohio Department of Education and Bowling Green State University (Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). The program is entering its initial implementation phase at the state level in hopes that the model for teacher–parent partnerships (TPPM) will show promise as a way for teachers and families to improve knowledge and collaboration skills, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. It should be noted that the diverse mix of participants is meant to mirror the diversity present in the local community and that participants will receive some incentives for participating.

Development at the school level represents the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner’s model. Even though the approach to supporting parent participation must be institution–wide, research conducted within the past 5 years suggested that partnering efforts be led by the child’s teacher (Prunty, 2012). In the case of students with disabilities, that teacher should be their special educator. The focus at the meso– level using the Networked Model of EST could be the relationship between the parent and teacher. To put setting in perspective as part of the environment influencing parent involvement, Kellar–Guenther, Rosenberg, Block and Robinson (2014) found that other than childcare centers, the setting may not be a powerful determinant of parent involvement. Instead, the strongest determinant of degree of involvement emerged as the communications between the

parent and interventionist. Park and Holloway (2013) recommended that a parent coordinator leads the efforts to reach out because teachers are already heavily burdened with current responsibilities.

Tangible Support and Teacher Education

A review of the literature reveals that tangible support and teacher education are two areas for intervention at this level. Also, Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011) found that a lack of supports may negatively influence teacher attitudes. Extra planning time, co-teaching arrangements, ready-made teaching materials, classroom space, and paraprofessional support are examples of tangible supports that can help influence teacher attitudes for the better (Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011). Education should include cultural awareness, building trust (Eng, et al., 2014; Murray & Mereoiu, 2016), teamwork, defining roles in the IEP process (Eng, 2014; Eng, et al., 2014; Flogaitis, et al., 2012; Williams-Diehm, et al., 2014), and disability awareness and interventions (Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011). Education for teachers must address the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. In keeping with using the lens of ecological systems theory and its concern with relationships, the following paragraphs expand on the education component.

Teacher preparation and professional development. Teachers as a whole are not prepared to interact with parents of students from cultures other than the middle class because they are not culturally aware. This problem does not lie exclusively with present day teachers, but also with preservice teachers, along with their teacher education faculty. Strengthening teacher capacity for building relationships with parents will require content

addressing multicultural issues beginning with teacher preparation programs and continuing through professional development for teachers in the field (Avramidis & Norwich, 2015). A cultural approach to learning (Li, 2013) includes personal reflection about cultural beliefs and social positioning. Teachers can be taught how to create a multicultural atmosphere, make adjustments to ensure content is culturally relevant, and provide a safe place for students to explore their cultural beliefs as they develop their worldview. Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011) asserted that professional development (PD) should include education about the nature of disabilities and the benefit of interventions, yet at present, there is no coherent program for ongoing learning for teachers in active service (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). As of 2016, Vanegas (2016) found that even when parent training is offered, the potential benefit is unknown because there is no research about long-term effectiveness. Recent research supports the effectiveness of preservice teacher training for developing skills for counseling parents about learning processes. In a quasi-experimental study with three treatment groups of 22–26 participants each combining pre, post and follow-up measures with time-series data, Gerich, Trittel and Schmitz (2016) demonstrated that prospective teachers' counseling competence could be successfully fostered by training that includes individual process-oriented feedback.

Experiences with people from other cultures need to be a part of increasing teacher proficiency working with a variety of cultures (Lucas & Villegas, 2013), especially the groups particular to the region where the students live. Home visits are a mutually beneficial way to improve the skills of teacher candidates as well as active teachers. Parents can learn about their child's behavior at school, how they can support

teacher's efforts at school, and ask for information about such topics as resources, academics, school procedures, and strategies (Andrews, 2013). Both Avramidis and Norwich (2015) and Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011) found that teacher attitudes can be influenced by PD because lack of experience, a lack of skill, and beliefs about the futility of intervention persist (Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011). Mutually beneficial relationships are powerful in that they can influence beliefs, important because the beliefs engendered by society represent the macrosystem.

Teachers informed about the IEP process. One result of staff education should be teachers who are knowledgeable about the IEP development process itself and the role of parents in the process, with an eye for improving parent participation in the IEP development process. Some of the recommended actions included in the teacher role are using a structured format for parent input, such as e-mail (Sawyer, 2015), providing an agenda for meetings, preparing prior to meetings (reviewing the child's disability, history, and interventions), making the parent a part of decision-making, showing sensitivity toward the child and their culture (including different racial, ethnic, family composition, and economic backgrounds), and informing parents (jargon, disability, strategies for academic and behavior support at home) (Karbach, Gottschling, Spengler, Hegewald, & Spinath, 2013), and options. As pointed out by Mueller and Buckley (2014), educators need to gain the awareness and acquire the skills to reach out to fathers and other traditionally secondary or absent participants in the process. Hirano and Rowe (2016) recommended that training for teachers that focuses on providing ongoing support for engaging families while training for parents focusing on fulfilling the roles of

evaluators, collaborators, instructors, and advocates. Murray, and Mereoiu (2016) created a model for parent and preservice teacher training, based on a pilot 16-week course for 71 parents of students with special needs and preservice teachers, novel in that the course involved representatives of both parts of the parent-school partnering relationship. The course reportedly led to learning and growth on both sides that included the coming together piece necessary to true mutual understanding across socioeconomic and traditionally defined parent-professional role lines, leading to expansion into a full-scale model for implementation.

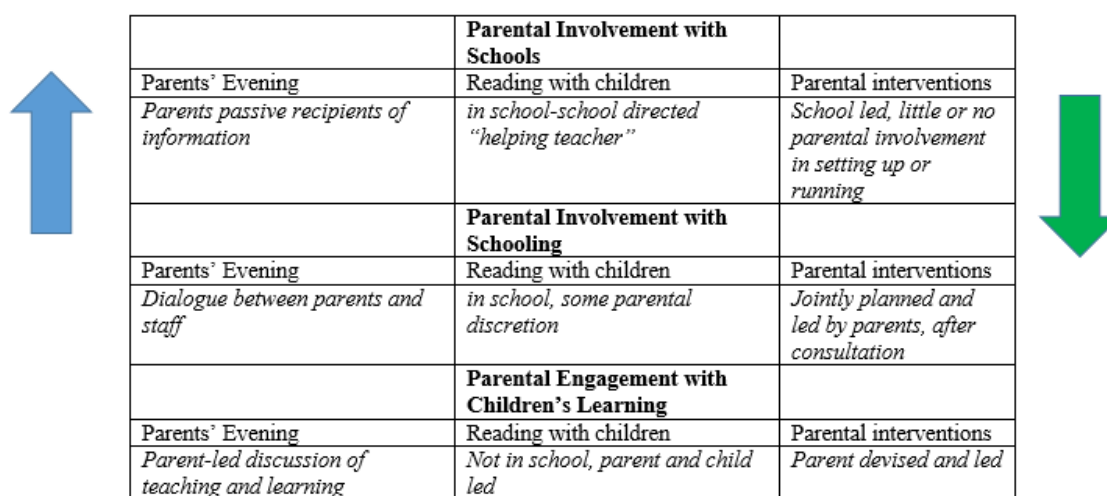
Teachers informed about empowering parents. One result of support and education efforts should lead to teachers who have the skills to empower parents using a variety of techniques (Eng, Szmodis, & Mulsow, 2014; Karbach, et al., 2013; Sawyer, 2015). First, give parents a sense of control (Edwards & DaFonte, 2012). Parents with little education may need support to participate actively in their child's learning (Edwards & DaFonte, 2012). Second, provide information about community resources (Edwards & DaFonte, 2012; Eng, et al., 2014), school activities (Williams-Diehm, et al., 2014), their child's disability and interventions parents can implement at home, and clarify expectations of parent participation (Eng, et al., 2014; Prunty, 2012). Third, build trust through ongoing and frequent communication that involves listening and shared power. Based on a mixed-methods study using the responses of 89 parents and seven teachers to perceptions about communication and technology related to a sense of connectedness, Olmstead (2013) recommended ongoing training for teachers on ways to use technology to communicate with parents and suggested ten minutes during staff meetings devoted to

tech tips. Parents and teachers both indicated that mail, text messages, and flyers were preferred modes of communication except for in the case of behavioral or achievement issues when bi-directional communication was preferred. Fourth, respect cultural values (Edwards & DaFonte, 2012; Eng et al., 2014). Home visits are one way to learn how parents talk to their child, how they get cooperation, and how they interact.

Students with significant intellectual disabilities require the support of their parents for academic learning and functional skill acquisition well into adulthood and even beyond, and parent supports provided by the school should reflect this reality.

A Model of Engagement

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) created a model for understanding the degree of parent engagement with their child's learning and could be used to add yet another aspect to the picture drawn using EST. Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a focus on human development in relation to the environment, while Neal and Neal's networked model provides a relational focus. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) provide a framework for describing the direction and strength of the relationships and systems (see Figure 3).



	Parental Involvement with Schools	
Parents' Evening <i>Parents passive recipients of information</i>	Reading with children <i>in school-school directed "helping teacher"</i>	Parental interventions <i>School led, little or no parental involvement in setting up or running</i>
	Parental Involvement with Schooling	
Parents' Evening <i>Dialogue between parents and staff</i>	Reading with children <i>in school, some parental discretion</i>	Parental interventions <i>Jointly planned and led by parents, after consultation</i>
	Parental Engagement with Children's Learning	
Parents' Evening <i>Parent-led discussion of teaching and learning</i>	Reading with children <i>Not in school, parent and child led</i>	Parental interventions <i>Parent devised and led</i>

Figure 3. Continuum: from involvement to engagement. Blue arrow signifies *School agency*. Green arrow signifies *Parent agency*. Moving from bottom of figure to top indicates progression of high to low levels of school initiative; top to bottom indicates progression of low parent initiative to high. The three columns describe types of involvement. Adapted from “Parental Involvement to Parental Engagement: A Continuum,” by J. Goodall and C. Montgomery, 2014, *Educational Review*, 66, p. 403.

Involvement with the school. The Goodall and Montgomery model (2014) consists of three points. The first point is parental involvement with the school. At this point, communication is mainly one way, from the school to the parent. Example: informational classes for parents hosted by the school. In a geographical area with 32% of its students living in poverty one study showed that for a low cost to the district, a class for parents can increase their level of involvement (Avvisati, Gurgand, Guyon, & Marin, 2014). In the one-year study, parent involvement increased for a group of middle-school parents attending parent-school informational meetings about how to get involved in their child’s education over the course of one year. In fact, researchers found that and these families not only increased their involvement but that attitudes and behaviors of students improved.

One recent study found that not only parent-school relationships but also parent expectations have a positive influence on parent involvement and student outcomes. Although Avvisati, Gurgand, Guyon, and Marin (2014) noted no effect on test scores. Nevertheless, the study does provide evidence that low-cost intervention can achieve

improved parental involvement in the school. Generalizability may be limited because the study was conducted in France.

Involvement with schooling. Point two on the continuum is parental involvement with schooling, taking place either in the school or at home. Interchange of info between parents and school staff. The focus is on the processes which surround learning. Schools still direct the flow of information, but parents are asked for their input. An example would be a parent–teacher conference in which teachers and parents discuss student challenges and possible solutions. Hayakawa, Englund, Warner–Richter, and Reynolds (2013) analyzed data from children living in a low–income area of Chicago. The researchers compared the levels of parent involvement, motivation, and student achievement from preschool through middle school. One group consisted of 989 children who had attended a specialized program for preschoolers that emphasized parent involvement. The other group contained 550 children from the same low–income area who did not attend the specialized program for preschoolers. Englund, Warner–Richter, and Reynolds (2013) found that the students in the specialized program demonstrated higher levels of motivation and achievement than the students who attended the standard program that did not emphasize parent involvement. These results suggest that the earlier schools focus on encouraging parents to become involved in their child’s learning process, the better the outcomes achieved by those students. A meta–analysis of 39 studies from 2000 to 2013 concluded that the most effective mode of parent participation is general supervision of learning activities (Castro, Exposito–Casas, Lopez–Martin,

Lizasoain, Navarro–Asencio, & Gaviria, 2015), further supporting engagement at point 2 on the continuum in the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) model.

Measuring involvement with learning. The third point is parental engagement with learning. At this point, parent actions may be informed by the school but the choice of action and involvement remains with the parent. Parents at this stage are engaged with the learning of their child because of their perceptions about their role as parents. An example would be providing learning opportunities for the child, such as music lessons. At this level of involvement, parents can have a substantial influence on their child’s level of motivation. Borup, Graham, and Davies (2013) conducted a quantitative study using 82 parent–student pairs from an online school. Results of the survey showed that students viewed their interaction with parents about their coursework as significantly more motivational than perceived by their parent. The results suggest that parental engagement with learning can markedly improve student levels of motivation for learning. A study by Bracke and Corts (2012) points to a link between social norms and parent involvement, which would then relate to the student motivation identified by Borup, Graham, and Davies (2013). Results of the quantitative Bracke and Corts (2012) study using surveys to compare two groups of parents, self–described as either “involved” or “not involved” showed that social norms might be the defining variable in determining the type and depth of parent involvement. A 2014 study by Froiland and Davison expanded upon the latter two studies by suggesting a possible causal relationship between parent expectations, parent participation, and student outcomes. The results of all three studies align with the research of Eng, Smoldis, and Mulsow (2014) that showed

a greater likelihood of participation when parents are surrounded by a social group that values parental involvement in education. When social norms carry the expectation of parental involvement in educational decision-making, parents are more likely to engage at that level than in the reverse condition.

Fostering learning partnerships. The interrelated nature of parent motivation, parent participation, and student outcomes (Froiland & Davison, 2014) begs the implementation of parent programming that includes a social psychological component. One program intervening on both sides of the parent-school partnership shows promise. A family involvement project conducted as part of a study by Burke (2013) consisted of weekly adult and family education, yearly school staff training with ongoing consultation to administrators and teachers, and monthly school-site socials to improve family-school communication and relationships. At the conclusion of the 144-family, two-year program, participants reported improvements in the frequency of parent-teacher contact and quality of those relationships. Student academic performance also reflected positive gains.

Burke (2013) showed a multi-pronged approach to building culturally sensitive parent-school partnerships that positively influence student outcomes. The Goodall and Montgomery model (2014) provides a practical tool for measuring levels of parent engagement so that work with parents can move from school directed, which is useful, to fully engaged, which is far more useful to students. Using this model along with the theoretical lenses of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal further illuminates the

examination of social networks and thus, can inform efforts at strengthening the relationships within them.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I described the major ideas in the literature related to special education and outcomes. The first idea was that there is a disparity between the outcomes for students in regular education and students receiving special education. A second idea was that the participation of parents in their child's education improves outcomes for that student. A third idea was that little is known about the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities about parent participation in the process.

According to Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), "we are now in a period of growing chaos in the lives not only of families but in all the day-to-day environments of people of all ages. Re-creating social development is the principal challenge confronting contemporary societies as we enter the 21st century." According to Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), "two complementary trends reinforced each other over time. The first revealed what the authors referred to as 'growing chaos' (p. 122) in families, schools, unsupervised peer groups and other settings in which children and youth spend extended periods of time. The second documented progressive decline in measures of competence and character. The focus of the literature review was on what is known and not known about the perceptions of parents and teachers about the IEP development process. Other components of focus are the legislative history of special education, current research, parent participation in the education of their children, the influence of culture, the

theories of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal, and strengthening relationships between the parents and schools to better the outcomes for students.

To strengthen parent/school partnerships, we must first understand the perceptions of the central participants involved. Using the theories of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal provides a framework for examining the interaction of individuals and systems. It is my hope that gaining insight into perceptions about the IEP development process, in particular, the outcomes of students with significant cognitive disabilities will be improved. The significance of eliminating the disparity between the outcomes of the typical student and a student with significant cognitive disabilities is improving society through ensuring that members of this segment of the population are supported to live as independently and fully as possible in the community.

Understanding the concepts of ecological systems theory is one way to begin looking at the current state of the situation. Bronfenbrenner's contribution is the ecological theory of human development, which was built upon the foundational idea that humans develop in the context of environments and those environments comprise systems. Neal and Neal's contribution is the networked ecological systems theory, which depicts systems as based upon the relationships between the focal person and others who directly or indirectly influence them. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to conduct the study about the perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities about parent participation in the IEP development process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of parents and special educators about their experiences with parental involvement in the IEP development process in public schools. The aim was to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. To accomplish this aim, this study includes descriptions of the IEP planning experience from the perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. It was also important to explore parent and teacher experiences with the IEP process because of the centrality of the relationship between parents and teachers in regard to the IEP writing process. Because I found few studies on the perceptions of the parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities, a phenomenology to advance the understanding of their IEP planning experiences was appropriate for this research. For this study, parent involvement was defined as any or all the following actions: providing parent input on any aspect of their child's education, attending IEP and any supplemental meetings, and communicating consistently with the child's teacher. In this chapter, the chosen methods and procedures are described. Presented first is the introduction to the phenomenon. Second are the research questions and rationale. Third, a description of the research methodology is followed by the data analysis plan. Fourth, issues of trustworthiness are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, qualitative research was the approach because the central question was open-ended (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maxwell 2013; Patton, 2002) and a *how*

question (Yao, 2014; Yin, 2019). Additionally, the study aligned with the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research (see Creswell, 2014). For example, seeing value in an exploration of human perceptions of an event suggests the ontological assumption that reality is subjective. Along with the view that reality is subjective, conducting research in the field, taking participant and researcher interpretations into account, using informal language, and using inductive logic are other signs of alignment with a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). This study was shaped by the constructivist worldview. In this paradigm, the goal is to draw conclusions that are based as purely as possible on the views participants have about the situation (Saha, 2014). Constructivists are often interested in how humans interact within the contexts of living and working and use them to make sense of how others think about the world (Creswell, 2014).

Within the qualitative approach, several options were considered and ranked concerning the goodness of fit for my study. I ranked phenomenology first because it is concerned with a description of the meaning of the experiences of more than one individual related to a phenomenon. The purpose of a phenomenology is to create a description of a phenomenon, including information as to what and how the phenomenon was experienced. I ranked case study second because although case study is concerned with the experiences of individuals, the focus is on describing one or more cases over time using multiple forms of data, such as documents, observation, and reports (Creswell, 2014). This approach did not have the focus on the perspective of the participant that my study requires. I ranked narrative study third because, although it is concerned with the experience of one or more participants, the focus is more on building a chronology of

people's lives and reducing them to a common story (Creswell, 2014). This approach was rejected because the intended focus of this study was not listing a sequence of events to explore the life of an individual (Creswell, 2014).

Consideration of the possible approaches led to my choice of phenomenology as the qualitative approach for my study. Phenomenology was chosen because it is about capturing the essence of a phenomenon based on the described perceptions of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Additionally, phenomenological research is used to seek a deep understanding of the phenomenon of study (Van Manen, 1990). Choosing phenomenology included the assumption that there are essences to shared experiences, and the approach was an appropriate label for my chosen subject matter and guide for making choices related to methodology (Patton, 2002, p. 106). The central question guided this qualitative study, and the subquestions further guided the study:

Central Question: How do parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities describe their experiences of parental involvement in the IEP development process?

Subquestion 1: How did parents perceive their involvement in the IEP development process?

Subquestion 2: How did teachers perceive parental involvement in the IEP development process?

Role of the Researcher

As the key instrument (Creswell, 2014; Janesick, 2011), my role was to interview participants and examine documents related to parent participation. I did not have any relationship with participants involving power over them, such as in a supervisory or instructor relationship. Nevertheless, bias and reactivity could have influenced participant responses and researcher interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). *Bracketing* refers to the process of separating or setting aside (Husserl as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 485). Because I am a special educator specializing in students with significant intellectual disabilities working in a program that serves all districts and neighboring counties, I bracketed my personal experiences related to the phenomenon under study. Because participants were informed of my profession, there was a chance that participants responded differently than they would have otherwise.

Participants were selected based on having experienced the phenomenon of study and being able to express those experiences (see Creswell, 2014). I assigned participants an identifier other than their actual names to protect their confidentiality. A data collection protocol ensured that each participant was asked the same questions. To reduce the likelihood of limiting codes to any preconceived notions of mine, open coding was used to reduce bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants were selected based on convenience. Five parents and five teachers were to be chosen from local school districts in Southwest Ohio. There was the

possibility that the teacher and parent respondents would not be connected to the same student. To be selected, the parent or teacher had to have participated in the independent education plan development process of a student with significant intellectual disabilities. Because I sought to find out more about the perspectives of parents and teachers of a specific population of students, I chose convenience sampling to obtain data for generating rich descriptions of the phenomenon. This strategy served to strengthen confidence in my analysis because of the support of more than one example (see Creswell, 2014). Participants were known to meet the criteria through self-reporting.

In phenomenology, common forms of data collection are in-depth interviews and multiple interviews of between five to 25 individuals (Creswell, 2014). Appropriate sample size in qualitative research depends on study's aspects such as the research questions, conceptual framework, and practical constraints like time and accessibility (Robinson, 2014). Although phenomenological studies with smaller sample sizes are acceptable, having more participants adds to credibility (McQuarrie & McIntyre, 2014). For example, Stegman (2016) conducted a phenomenological exploration of participant perceptions using 10 participants or less. My plan to interview five parents and five teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities was within the five to 25 participant guideline.

Instrumentation

Data were collected from parent and teacher interviews. Using data from two sources provided information about different aspects of the phenomenon (see Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). The interview is the most widely used form of data collection in qualitative

inquiry (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Interviewing participants who have experienced the IEP development process captured data that can be used to further understanding of the experience from the human perspective. For this purpose I created an interview protocol consisting of questions designed to elicit feedback from parents and teachers about their experiences with the IEP development process. Interview questions were developed for both sets of respondents (see Appendix A) following an extensive review of current literature about parent and teacher perceptions of the IEP development process.

Current literature (Elbaum et al., 2016; Stanley, 2015; Sullivan, 2015; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Zeitlin & Cursic, 2014) has suggested that many parents do not feel IEP teams consider their input, do not involve them in decision-making, and do not feel they are respected as equal team members. Research also supported the barriers specific to parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds such as negative professional attitudes and language difficulties, which present a challenge to full participation in the IEP process as intended under legislation and guidelines. Interview items were created that related to these issues; the intent was for answers to the questions to provide data about the phenomenon were used to respond to the research questions. For this study, the creation of interview questions and analysis of data were informed using Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities (2014), a document that governed the provision of special education services in the geographical area of participant residence. Figure 4 depicts the relationship between the guidelines and interview questions used to obtain data and reflects the letter of the law. The interview questions were intended to not only answer to the letter of the law but to explore the

connections between parents and the school within the IEP development process (the spirit of the law through the lens of Bronfenbrenner/Neal and Neal).

Selected Ohio Operating Standards...	Parent Interview Questions	Teacher Interview Questions
School District responsibility (Each school district must take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of a child with a disability are present at each IEP team meeting or are afforded the opportunity to participate, including: (a) Notifying parents of the meeting early enough to ensure that they will have an opportunity to attend; and (b) Scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed on time and place.	Tell me about your experiences with your child's school in regards to the IEP development process. -scheduling	Tell me about your experiences with parent attendance of meetings. -scheduling
Information provided to parents (meeting purpose, time, location and invitees; also must inform that they may bring someone of their choosing who has knowledge or special expertise about the child)	Tell me about your experiences -bringing in someone of your choosing from the community	Tell me about your experiences communicating with parents - about planned meetings -about parent rights
Other methods to ensure parent participation (If neither parent can attend an IEP team meeting, the school district must use other methods to ensure parent participation, such as individual or conference telephone calls.)	Tell me about your experiences -communicating with the school -attending the IEP meeting -feelings/thoughts about the last meeting attended (feeling valued, etc.)	Tell me about your experiences -gaining parent participation -communicating with parents -feelings/thoughts about the last meeting you held
Conducting an IEP team meeting without a parent in attendance (may be held if unable to convince parents to attend. A record of attempts to contact [phone, mail, visit] parents must be kept)	-any experiences not attending the IEP meeting in person	Tell me about -any experiences when the meeting was held without parent attendance
Use of interpreters or other action, as appropriate (The school district must take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of the IEP team meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents with deafness or whose native language is other than English.)	Tell me about your experiences with -professional jargon either on the IEP forms or in reference to special education services in general -technology present in meetings	Tell me about your experiences with -helping parents understand the language used on forms -interpreters in meetings
Parent copy of child's IEP	-level of parent input in the process -what else do you think is important for me to know	-level of parent input in the process -what else do you think is important for me to know?

Figure 4. The Ohio Guidelines and interview crosswalk. The Ohio Guidelines guided the research and interview questions. Standards are from 3301–51–07 Individualized Education Program section Parent Participation, p. 122 of Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities, 2014.

Interview. Because the aim of an interview is to elicit participants to share their perspectives and experiences about a phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 73), I created my semistructured interview using open-ended questions. Maxwell suggested that the creation of interview questions must involve anticipating how people will understand the question and how they are likely to respond (2013, p. 101). Ignoring cultural norms can

result in damaged relationship and limited usefulness of responses. To gain access to detailed descriptions of participant experiences of the phenomenon, I asked about specific events as opposed to questions about general experiences (see Maxwell, 2013, p. 103). Creswell recommended crafting a protocol of about five open-ended questions, bounded by questions that invite the participant to share and those that ask for any other info the participant wants to share (2014). Clarifying questions and probes were used as needed to evoke participant sharing about experiences, attitudes, and perspectives (Keightley, Pickering, & Allett, 2012, p. 508). I collected data by a one-time interview of each participant in either a library conference room or a café, as agreed upon with the participant. Each interview was projected to take approximately one hour.

Garnering parent engagement. Interview question 1 relates to the first mandate of the Ohio Guidelines for Districts (Figure 4, top left box). The purpose of this question was to get parents and teachers to share about efforts to garner parent engagement in the IEP process.

Right to invite. Interview question 2 relates to the second mandate. The purpose of this question was to find out about parent and teacher experiences with the parent right to bring anyone they choose to the meeting who knows their child.

Attempts to contact. Interview question 3 and 4 relate to the third and fourth mandates. The purpose of these questions was to find out about modes of communication with parent who is not able to attend the IEP meeting in person and documentation of attempts to contact.

Understanding the process. Interview question 5 and 6 relate to the fifth and sixth mandates. The purpose of these questions was to find out what measures are taken to ensure parents understand the proceedings.

Other. Interview question 7 relates to all six mandates. The purpose of this question was to elicit any more information from the participant that is related to parent participation in the IEP development process but was not previously shared.

Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The plan to find participants was to contact local school districts to gain permission to conduct research through a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of schools. I e-mailed teachers directly to invite them be a part of the study. I sent them a parent recruitment flyer to distribute to parents. My plan was to garner teacher participation through direct e-mail and parent participation by teacher referral. A handheld digital recorder was to be used to supplement my interview notes (Janesick, 2011; Patton, 2002) for the purposes of this study. Interview recordings were stored on a thumb drive, and the actual recorder cleared to enhance confidentiality practices. Both the notes and thumb drive were secured in a locked file cabinet to which I have sole access. The data accounting log containing a listing of data sources with contact dates, consent forms and contact summary forms, used to document the most salient information from each interview (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) was also placed in the locked filing cabinet, where it will remain for 5 years.

Data Analysis Plan

I used a multi-step process recommended by Creswell (2007) to process the data. Creswell crafted a six-step process (2007), which is reflected in the following: First, I identified personal experiences of the phenomenon. Second, I listed significant statements that address how participants experience the phenomenon. Third, I grouped the significant statements into meaningful units or themes. I identified patterns, developed codes, and make comparisons (Gibbs, 2011, para 1). Open coding provided a way to see only what the data revealed and minimize personal bias (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As cited in Maxwell (2013, p. 107) the process of open-coding, attributed to Corbin and Strauss, is to read the data and develop labels based on what terms and categories emerge as most important. Fourth, I outlined participant descriptions of their experiences. Fifth, I provided a description of how the experience or structural description occurred. Sixth, I crafted a composite description that incorporated textural and structural descriptions, and captured the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the inherently inseparable nature of researcher from their theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens (Creswell, 2009) presents a risk of researcher bias. Several measures will be taken to minimize the influence of researcher bias on the dependability of this study. First, as written in previous sections of this paper, open coding will be used as a way to reduce bias. In the open coding method of coding, labels emerge from the data (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Other dependability evaluation tools to be

employed are reflexivity, member checks, audit trails and triangulation. Researcher reflexivity includes awareness of my reflections during the research process and will also support confirmability, referred to as objectivity in quantitative research. Member checks involve participant review to ensure their perceptions are captured satisfactorily in their view (Creswell, 2014). After interview recordings are transcribed, participants will be invited to review them for accuracy. Any divergence of the transcript from participant recollection of their responses will be noted on the participant's contact summary form. The documents listed in the data storage section will provide the audit trails needed to further enhance the confirmability of this study.

Finally, triangulation, a means in which researchers strengthen a study through using a combination of methods, individuals, and settings (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). Hatch (2002, p. 92) will serve to verify or extend information from other sources. For this phenomenology, triangulation will include parent and teacher interviews conducted in multiple settings and using a document for context. The Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities (2014) document will give context to the perceptions about the IEP development process experienced by the participants in this study.

The practice of comparing official documents with information the researcher hears is a recognized form of analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 293). Documents used in phenomenological study range from personal, such as a journal, to public, such as archival material (Creswell, 2014). These operating standards address Ohio Administrative Code Rules 3301-51-01 to 09, 11 and 21 and federal Part B of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requirements that apply to special education services in public schools. Use of this document is relevant because the phenomenon of focus takes place within the context of special education law and guidelines.

Although the risk of researcher bias will remain, using multiple measures to mitigate risk factors for bias will minimize the influence of researcher bias on the dependability of this study.

Ethical Procedures

As required, data collection did not commence until I obtained IRB approval. Next, I secured signed consent forms and confidentiality agreements and placed them on file in a locked cabinet in my office and with Walden's IRB.

Informed consent. The proposed procedure for providing informed consent included a written purpose statement that explained the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the participant's rights would be protected during data collection and was contingent upon IRB approval. I explained the reason and use for the interview and its voluntary, confidential nature to the participants.

Confidentiality. In addition to storing the previously listed documentation in a locket filing cabinet to which I have sole access, participants were assigned a unique identifier. The unique identifier consisted of a combination of a number and a letter. The result was a single document per participant that listed actual participant names, with all other documents having included only the unique identifier. The names of participants

were shared solely with the IRB. Finally, findings from the research were published using pseudonyms for participant and organization names.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of parents and special educators about their experiences with parental involvement in the IEP development process in public schools. The ultimate aim was to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. In this Chapter, the chosen methods and procedures were described. Presented first was the introduction to the phenomenon. Second, the research questions and rationale were given. Third, a description of the research methodology was followed by the data management plan. Fourth, issues of trustworthiness were discussed. The chapter concluded with a summary. In Chapter 4, the findings, results, and analysis are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of parents and special educators about their experiences with parental involvement in the IEP development process in public schools to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Therefore, I explored and described the IEP planning experience from the perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. The central question that guided this qualitative study was: How do parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities describe their experiences in the IEP development process? There were two subquestions: First, what statements describe how parents experience involvement in the process? Second, what statements describe how teachers experience parental involvement in the process? In this chapter, I report details about data collection and analysis, discuss evidence of trustworthiness, and present the results.

Setting

There were no known personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at time of study that may have influenced interpretation of the study results. The settings for interviews consisted of a library or café, though four were phone interviews.

Demographics

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

<i>Identifier</i>	<i>Role/District</i>	<i>Child with SID*</i>	<i>Current Age of Child</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Interview venue</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>parent/1</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>cafe</i>
<i>P2</i>	<i>parent/1</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>cafe</i>
<i>P3</i>	<i>parent/2</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>cafe</i>
<i>P4</i>	<i>parent/2</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>library</i>
<i>T1</i>	<i>teacher/1</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>6-8</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>phone</i>
<i>T2</i>	<i>teacher/1</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>9-12</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>phone</i>
<i>T3</i>	<i>teacher/1</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>9-12</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>phone</i>
<i>T4</i>	<i>teacher/2</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>9-12</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>phone</i>
<i>T5</i>	<i>teacher/2</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>9-12</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Caucasian</i>	<i>cafe</i>

*Significant Intellectual Disability

Participant demographic information

Data Collection

Selection of Participants

To begin data collection, it was necessary to have a signed letter of cooperation from each potentially participating school district in Southwestern Ohio. This step took longer than anticipated. I had estimated that within 2 weeks I could have signed letters from superintendents, but it took 4 weeks. I sent a letter explaining my study to each superintendent and only one in seven potential districts sent it back within the expected

timeframe. I sent the same e-mail out again, and three more superintendents responded by signing and returning a letter of cooperation. Three superintendents never responded.

After securing the signed letters of cooperation, I used district websites to e-mail potential teacher participants using the teacher and parent recruitment flyers, which teachers were asked to send to the parents of all students in their class. The flyers included a request that interested persons send me their contact information using the provided e-mail address. I contacted each respondent to introduce myself and explain the study in more detail. One of the criterion for selection, listed on the teacher and parent recruitment flyers, was that the participant was a teacher or parent of a student who took the alternate assessment. Because students served by special education are required to participate in standardized testing or given alternative assessments that meet their needs, qualifying for the alternate assessment was used to qualify teachers and parents of students with significant intellectual disabilities. Only students with significant intellectual disabilities qualify for the alternate assessment and comprise about 9% of special education students, or 1% of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Before concluding each initial contact, respondents were asked whether they were willing to participate and to schedule an interview. All respondents decided to move forward as participants in this study.

Participant Response

Although my plan was to have 10 participants, I identified five teachers but only four parents who fit the criteria based on self-reported information and offered them a choice of meeting with me individually in the library conference room or in a café. There

were only four parent participants because only four parents responded to the parent recruitment flyer. One participant chose the library and the other eight chose the café, equaling nine participants in all. Participants were either a teacher or a parent from one of four cooperating districts. There were no respondents from two districts. Two teachers and two parents were from one district, three teachers and two parents were from another.

Participant Confidentiality and Scheduling

Once the respondents agreed to participate, I completed a participant contact information form and assigned a unique identifier, explaining that other than the participant contact form all references to them would be using just the unique identifier. These steps were taken to ensure confidentiality in data collection and anonymity in data reported. In the initial phone call, I scheduled an appointment to interview the respondent, noted on a log sheet to keep track of dates and times. Two weeks elapsed between securing letters of cooperation—documents signed by the school districts delineating researcher and partner roles and responsibilities along with specific research activities to which the districts consented—and responding back to teachers. Interviews were conducted over 2 weeks following the phone contact.

Next, over a 2-week period, I met prospective participants as scheduled. I reviewed consent information and obtained participant signature on two identical consent forms, one of which I gave to the participant and the other, later to be stored in the locked filing cabinet in my home office. The consent information that was reviewed included a statement that any information provided would be kept confidential, except in a situation of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor, in which case I would have been legally bound

to contact law enforcement or child protective services. I also explained that personal information would not be used for any purposes outside of this research project, and I would not include the participant's name or anything else that could identify them in the study reports, instead referring to the participant by a unique identifier. In addition, I explained that data would be kept secure by password protection and storing names separately from the data. I explained that data would be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university. Finally, participants were informed that the IRB approved the research project, meaning the research would be conducted according to strict ethical and procedural guidelines.

Interviewing–Data Collection

I conducted interviews for about 1 hour each, which were audiorecorded digitally for transcription purposes. I decided that rather than purchase and use a handheld digital recorder as written into my methodology, I would use a digital recording app on my phone, which is password protected. The recording was transferred to my personal computer and from there to a password–protected thumb drive. The recording was then be deleted from the app and the computer. Although the library environment where one interview was conducted was quieter than that of the café, no problems hearing or intelligibility of the recordings presented in any of the nine interviews.

The participants were asked the same open–ended questions to allow their perspectives to be revealed while providing structure to the data collection. The interviews were semistructured to provide flexibility in the process, facilitating exploration and textualization of participant reported perceptions of the phenomenon (see

Appendix A for interview instrument). Types of interviewer responses or questions included probes, clarifying questions, and feedback. The participants interviewed face to face all seemed interested and comfortable during their interview, as evidenced by their relaxed posture, eye contact, and conversational tone. The participants interviewed over the phone also seemed interested and comfortable, based on the moderate rate and tone of their speech.

Data Analysis

Open coding provided a way to see what the data reveal and minimize personal bias. Open coding provides the reader a sense of reassurance that the researcher was open to what the data say rather than the preconceived notions of others (Miles et al., 2014). I read over the interview transcripts, identified words or ideas mentioned by more than one participant, and used these as codes. Coding was accomplished without the use of software to organize the data because the amount of data was not prohibitive. The process of coding consisted of two rounds: (a) important phrases were extracted from interview transcripts and (b) these phrases were combed for essential ideas and repeating words. During the hand-coding process, decisions about including a statement or word were based on its contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon (see Miles et al., 2014).

After data were combed for meaningful statements that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon, I used the statements to write a description of what the participants experienced. Finally, I produced a composite description of the phenomenon that captured the essence of the phenomenon (see Creswell, 2014) to add to information on perceptions of parent participation in the IEP

development process and improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. My interpretation of results emerged out of an analysis of the themes, subthemes, and corresponding codes through the lens of ecological systems theory.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Although phenomenological studies with smaller sample sizes are acceptable, having more participants adds to credibility (McQuarrie & McIntyre, 2014); therefore, interviewing nine participants fit the five to 25 participant guideline. Participants were selected based on having experienced the phenomenon of study and being able to express those experiences (see Creswell, 2014). However, the research was limited to four parents and five teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities, and the interviews occurred at only one point in the school year and from two suburban school districts in Ohio comprised of mainly middle class Caucasian families and teachers. These limitations affect the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

Multiple measures were also taken to address ethical concerns. First, I provided a consent form that explained the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the participant's rights would be protected during data collection and was contingent upon IRB approval (approval no. 09-28-17-0304899). The form also explained that interviews were voluntary and confidential. Next, I assigned participants an identifier other than their actual name to protect participant confidentiality. Data collection protocol ensured that each participant was asked the same questions, and open coding was used to reduce bias. To further strengthen credibility, I report on details like how participants

were chosen, which design was used, and how the work proceeded (Miles et al., 2014) throughout this chapter.

Credibility

Researcher reflexivity included awareness of my reflections during the research process and supported confirmability, referred to as objectivity in quantitative research. Member checks involve participant review to ensure their perceptions are captured satisfactorily in their view (Creswell, 2014). After interview recordings were transcribed, participants were invited to review them for accuracy. Any divergence of the transcript from participant recollection of their responses was noted on the participant's contact summary form.

Transferability

Although generalizability would not be an appropriate aim for an exploratory phenomenology, some measures were taken to enhance the opportunity for potential application to other contexts and situations. For example, the participants were asked the same open-ended questions to allow participants' perspectives to be revealed while generating rich, thick description. The variation in perspectives gained from teacher and parent participants served to contribute data from two vantage points of experience of the phenomenon.

Dependability

Dependability evaluation tools included audit trails and triangulation. Triangulation is a way for researchers to strengthen a study by using a combination of methods, individuals, and settings (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). For this

phenomenology, triangulation included parent and teacher interviews conducted in multiple settings and the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities (2014), which gave context to the perceptions about the IEP development process experienced by the participants in this study. Hatch (2002) was also used to verify or extend information from other sources.

Comparing official documents with information the researcher hears is a recognized form of analysis (Patton, 2002). Documents used in phenomenological study range from personal, such as a journal, to public, such as archival material (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the Ohio Administrative Code Rules 3301–51–01 to 09, 11 and 21 and federal Part B of the IDEA requirements were used because they apply to special education services in public schools. Use of this document was relevant because the phenomenon of focus takes place in the context of special education law and guidelines. The documents listed in the data storage section provide the audit trails needed to further enhance the confirmability of this study.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, the inseparable nature of the researcher from their theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens (Creswell, 2009) presents a risk of researcher bias. Several measures were taken to minimize the influence of researcher bias on the dependability of this study. First, open coding was used as a way to reduce bias. In the open coding method of coding, labels emerge from the data (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Researcher reflexivity included awareness of my reflections during the research process and supported confirmability, referred to as objectivity in quantitative research.

Results

Analysis of Participant Responses: Individual Parents

Parent Participant P1. P1 used the words *connect* and *team* to describe how he sees the IEP development process. “We’ve brought in family, providers . . . people from different perspectives.” P1 also stated that it is important to support the teacher, and that he communicated mainly with the child’s teacher. P1 shared that “we wanted to make sure the school knew we were present and very involved in his success.” P1 indicated that he had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with the child’s teacher. P1 reported that he attended every IEP meeting in person.

Additionally, P1 shared a sense of overwhelm as a parent: “We’re quick to say, ‘You handle it, you’re the expert’ when we are really the experts . . . on our child.” P1 remarked on the need for flexibility and making the meeting convenient for parents to participate. P1 also suggested that schools educate parents about expectations and roles in the IEP development process, as at times he did not understand what was being said. P1 stated, “I still struggle with some of the jargon, but if you have a good teacher you can ask about things and get an explanation.” P1 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and how the school staff members work together are topics he suggested.

P1 also gave advice, highlighting the importance of being linked with practical resources such as pairing school staff with community workers like service coordinators. P1’s advice for school staff persons was: “Listen, enter into that person’s world. Do not

personalize. If the parent doesn't feel like you care than you might be fighting the parent, and that's not what your job is." P1 also gave advice for parents of color: "Prejudice exists in the system. There will be some people who have a problem with you being in their school building, but be willing to work through it. Do not let yourself be intimidated because those who are willing to push . . . will be the ones who get the available resources." See Appendix B for Participant P1 responses and codes as well as responses and codes for the other parent participants and teacher participants.

Parent Participant P2. P2 talked about the procedural aspects of the IEP development process, such as receiving a parent input form and IEP draft prior to the meeting. P2 said that she knew by reading the form that she could bring in anyone of her choosing, and she did. It is not unusual for P2 to invite her child's service coordinator from the Board of Development Disabilities and others who are involved in her child's life. For P2, continuity between school and home is very important. In addition, P2 has invited specialists when the team seemed to need help with a particular problem her son was having. "Everybody talked about the behavior but no one seemed to know what to do . . . so we brought in the autism special team." P2 listed the following types of communication used: notebook, phone, texting, communication binder, e-mail, classroom apps, and video clips. P2 stated that she communicate mainly with her child's teacher. P2 indicated that she had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with the child's teacher. P2 used terms like the teacher is invested, takes the time, creative, and community to describe her positive experiences with communication. P2 reported that she attended every IEP meeting in person. P2

remarked on the need for flexibility and making the meeting convenient for parents to participate. P2 remarked, “The sad thing is, there probably are a lot of parents who don’t know they absolutely can reschedule.” P2 learned about the parent right to request another meeting date after his transition from early childhood program to school–age. When P2 contacted her child’s school to request rescheduling due to conflicting prior commitments, the school secretary said, ‘Oh, don’t worry about it, you can just come in and sign all the documents.’ P2 asserted that many parents “just go along” and that they “worry about being judged.” P2 suggested that providing documents in simpler language would give parents the sense that school is making an effort to be a partner. The transition from early childhood program to school–age was mentioned by P2. She indicated that there should be some communication from school about what to expect. P2 shared that at times she did not understand what was being said. P2 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and how the school staff members work together were suggested. P2 remarked, “The parent–teacher relationship is critical. We’ve not had it a couple times . . . and you start feeling you have to go to your child’s school every day to make sure they are being educated.” Finally, P2 suggested, “Take the time to have a conversation to make sure everybody’s on the same page.” P2 stated, “You’re not going to get a parent involved . . . if they’re struggling to get food . . . or keep from getting evicted.” P2 highlighted the importance of being linked with practical resources. P2 asserted that the process is better when everybody is engaged and invested in the process, stating that her participation was influenced by “teachers that

just invested in and took the time to get to know [my child]. We've had good relationships with the teachers we've had the longest." P2 stated, "Take a few minutes and listen, not thorough your culture but find out about their culture. We have to somehow figure out how to connect with each other over common ground . . . I think it's about being nonjudgmental I've heard teachers and people who make judgments about kids because they way that their lunch comes in or they're not clean, but even though you want to make judgments, take the time to find out about their story and think, "What can I do to help?"

Parent Participant P3. P3 stated that she was very involved in the process when her child was in preschool and that it was very family-centered, but that changed when he began school-aged program. "When he got to kindergarten, was my first experience with feeling like I didn't have as much say." P3 reported having mixed experiences overall with the IEP development process. At times she felt that the teacher and classroom assistants likes and enjoy her child, but was shocked and discouraged when others seemed to have a negative stance. Only when P3 felt a need for "reinforcement" did she bring in someone from the community to attend the IEP meeting." P3 stated that, "for years I didn't bring in anybody from the outside . . . but I felt like this year I needed additional reinforcements to hear what I was hearing how he was being treated." P3 listed the following types of communication used: notebook, phone, texting, communication binder, e-mail, classroom apps, and video clips. P3 prefers texts for their immediacy and video clips because watching them, she learns a lot about her child's functioning at school. Regarding texting, "Rather than waiting for me to check my e-mail when I get

home after 6 o'clock, I can take care of it right then." P3 indicated that she had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with her child's teacher. P3 reported that she attended every IEP meeting in person. P3 indicated that there should be some communication from school about what to expect. P3 stated, "Early Childhood was family-centered and I was very involved in decision-making. Once my child was in kindergarten, all of a sudden I am being told everything instead of asked to help make decisions for my child." P3 stated that understanding particular terms was not a problem for them. Regarding use of technology in meetings, P3 shared that the IEP was displayed on a large screen and that it was helpful, but cautioned, "Do not go through the IEP too quickly." P3 also remarked that when a computer has been used in meetings, usually someone other than the teacher did the actual typing and therefore it was not a distraction. P3 stated, "Actually, it made things more efficient than actually cutting and pasting to make changes." P3 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and how the school staff members work together are topics parents suggested. P3 related a mixed experience with participation. "I've felt at times like I've been very involved and listened to and also in others where I had to . . . fight more than I think I should have to make sure [my child's] educational needs are being met." P3 shared, "One thing I really like is that the teacher sends me video clips." From the videos, P3 sees how her child is functioning at school and how the staff interacts with them. "Video clips are very helpful. Being able to see [for myself] was fantastic!"

Parent Participant P4. P4 talked about the procedural aspects of the IEP development process, such as receiving a parent input form and IEP draft prior to the meeting. P4 also remarked that she felt there was good communication with teachers such that by meeting time everything had already been discussed. P4 stated that meetings are informative and that she appreciates when teachers offer to do IEP meetings by phone. She has always felt that her opinion was valued. “They wanted to know my opinion on what goals I wanted [my child] to reach.” She felt that she was guided through the IEP development process, and she appreciated when “they offered suggestions, too.” P4 has never felt a need to involve anyone other than herself, “I did all of it, I didn’t need anyone to come in and sit with me.” P4 listed the following types of communication used: notebook, phone, texting, communication binder, e-mail, classroom apps, and video clips. P4 indicated that she had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with the child’s teacher. P4 stated, “I tried to be available to school. With me working, the phone made it a whole lot easier to communicate.” P4 stated that she always attended the IEP meetings, almost always by phone due to her work schedule. P4 remarked on the need for flexibility and making the meeting convenient for parents to participate. P4 remarked that the school has always “made the process easy” for them to be a part. P4 stated that understanding particular terms was not a problem for them. P4 made the comment that meeting size did make a difference. “I felt intimidated if it was a big round table with more than just the teacher and maybe one therapist there.” P4 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and

how the school staff members work together are topics parents suggested. P4 shared that she felt “overwhelmed” and “intimidated” in IEP meetings including more than one or two school staff members.

Analysis of Participant Responses: Individual Teachers

Teacher Participant T1. T1 reported, “It’s hard to get the parents involved. I would say 75% of them don’t attend . . . and if they do they don’t know what’s going on and they don’t really care.” T1 stated that she is required to contact parents at least 3 times in 3 different ways to engage their participation in the IEP development process, but that she attempts to communicate using multiple modes. T1 reflected, “The parent did come to the last meeting I held. It was a parent that had a lot of input about her student’s IEP. And so she was there early, she wanted suggestions, she wanted our feedback but we wanted her input put in so that was really good.” T1 indicated having had meetings or creating an IEP devoid of any parent participation in creating the document. T1 shared, “I’ve had several meetings without parent attendance, and normally we [teachers and therapists] might go over the document, sometimes it’s just kind of glossed over, and we [teachers and therapists] sign it and we move on.” T1 is the sole teacher participant reporting any experiences at her current school involving a language need other than English. “This year I’ve had some parents who don’t quite understand the IEP and the verbiage that we use and at one point we had a parent get an advocate to help them understand. I try to go through and explain everything, and ask, do you understand, does it make sense to you, but I know a lot of people will say yes even when it doesn’t. I had parents a couple years ago who didn’t speak any English so we had a translator come to

the meeting.” T1 indicated that despite the language barrier, no documents were given to parents in their native language. T1 reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T1 stated, “Sometimes, I think if the parent is assertive, they’ll ask. But if they feel like we know more than them, or that we’re the expert, they’re hesitant to say they don’t understand. They normally just agree with everything. I try to ask them more questions. Instead of just sit back, but most the time they just go along with what we say.” T1 shared about her usual experiences, “I send home a parent input form home at the beginning of the year, but a lot of the time I don’t get that back. They either fill it out and they send it back and then they come, or fill it out and bring it with them, or they don’t do anything at all. A lot of times in the past 2 years I’ve been mailing it instead of sending it home with the kids, but even still I put an envelope in there and a stamp and even then they don’t always mail it back.” T1 volunteered, “I think that as special ed teachers we really need to work on helping the parents understand more that we are really here to serve them and not that we’re just trying to get paperwork done and not try to help their child. It’s good to ask questions. It’s not scary, school’s not threatening.”

Teacher Participant T2. T2 indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T2 indicated that she attempts to communicate using multiple modes. T2 stated, “Usually I will call a parent, send a note home, or text them. I send papers home with questions on them and the parent can either call me or write back, whatever’s most convenient for them.” T2 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school

year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T2, reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T2 indicated that she has no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting she held. T2 shared about the last meeting held, “When I sent the reminder home I put the wrong time on it. And so the day of the meeting I felt really bad. We kind of went over it with the student and then when the mom showed up I went over the IEP with her. Once again, I sent the questionnaire out about a month ahead of time and they responded with the info and said that they would be attending the meeting. I sent a note home and I did talk to them on the phone. I also sent a reminder. Some parents I don’t give my text number to. And that’s one of the ones. I just call the ahead of time and then I send them a note reminder.” T2 recalled, “All the therapists and the psychologist attended the meeting. We went ahead and had the meeting with the student and went over everything on the IEP. And the parents gave us the OK to do that because it was hard for them to make it in. And we sent the IEP home and let them know if they had any questions they could get back with us.” T2 reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T2 explained, “We try to write out what different acronyms mean and spell out what different names are so they’re not confused. When you sign up for services, some places have multiple names, and when they get something in the mail they may not know what it is, so we try to walk them through the procedure of different agencies. T2 sends a parent input form home prior to the IEP meeting. T2 reported that she typically has a high response rate from parents. T2 shared, “On occasion you get people who don’t respond,

but for the most part we've had pretty good success. 90% of my parents that I have either fill out the form and return it, or call me back and let me know. Sometimes the forms are more of a pain for people." T2 stated that the norm is for parents to both complete and return parent input forms or to answer the parent input questions over the phone. T2 delineated between a stereotype and her own experience, "People assume that because parents' economic status isn't very high they may not be involved, but that's not always the case. Sometimes I think people are unclear of what's wanted of them, as far as on the part of the parents, they might not know quite what they are supposed to do, or you get some parents that are nonreaders like their kids. You may need to call them as opposed to just sending a note home and you wonder why they don't respond, maybe they can't read it. Be aware of what level people are on and compassionate toward their needs." In other words, T2 sees the apparent under-involvement as a side-effect of other factors rather than a lack of desire to participate.

Teacher Participant T3. T3 indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T3 specifically stated that she is required to contact parents at least 3 times in 3 different ways to engage their participation in the IEP development process, but that she attempts to communicate using multiple modes. T3 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T3, reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T3 indicated that they had no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. T3

indicated having had meetings or creating an IEP devoid of any parent participation in creating the document. T3 stated, “We did go over the IEP with the student. Usually, it depends on the student and what their level is, but usually we’re able to discuss and they understand. Then we send the IEP home for the parent to sign.” T3 reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T3 shared, “I keep the language simple, straightforward. Some parents do ask questions if they don’t understand, but some you can kind of tell they might be confused about something or whatever and I’ll try to reiterate or say, ‘If you have any questions, feel free to ask questions.’” T3 reported that she typically has a high response rate from parents. T3 stated that the norm is for parents to both complete and return parent input forms or to answer the parent input questions over the phone. T3 elaborated about the benefit of more than one family member of the child attending meetings. “It’s nice when both parents can make it [to meetings]; seeing another family member and listening to their viewpoint.” T3 offered advice regarding the teacher’s role in helping students with transitions. “Also, we stress the importance of getting them transitioned from school to adulthood properly, like making sure day hab[ilitation] has been planned and not wait for the last minute. You might have a waiting list, there’s several out there, you want to find the one that fits. You want to start them going a couple days a week through the school year and increase it throughout the year to make a smooth transition for the kids. They always think, ‘We got time.’ It’s like, ‘No, really, you’re running out of time.’”

Teacher Participant T4. T4 indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T4 indicated that she

attempts to communicate using multiple modes. T4 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T4, reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T4 indicated that she had no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. T4 recalled that her last IEP meeting was at the home of a student who was being raised by his grandmother and who was on home instruction. To accommodate the guardian's needs, the meeting was held at the student's home. "All the communication goes through the grandma and she's very up to date on things that she wants done with her grandson, from different types of switches to bringing some things from my classroom to home for the home instructor. She definitely researches and knows what's out there and available to him. A lot of parents where I teach now understand and know what they want from their children. T4 reported that a parent not attending is rare, but when it happens she is able to elicit their participation some other way, such as notes home. T4 shared that at a prior position in another school, language was a common barrier. T4 indicated that despite the language barrier, no documents were given to parents in their native language. T4 reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T4 described, "At the district I'm at now, sometimes the parents know more than we know, they're very informed. One time when I was in the elementary level we had *prevocational* on an IEP and it offended some parents. Right out of the gate when we read the goal they were offended until we explained what it was. I think we have a good relationship with our parents and they

know they can ask anything in the meeting and we'll provide answers the best we can."

T5 reported that she typically has a high response rate from parents. T5 stated that the norm is for parents to both complete and return parent input forms or to answer the parent input questions over the phone. About parent participation in general, T4 volunteered that after IEP meetings she demonstrated technology and interventions used in the classroom for interested parents. T4 indicated that a few make an effort to carry over technology and/or interventions at home, but "usually it kind of gets lost at home. There's not much follow through." T4 shared that in her experience, parents of low income status tend not to be as involved as more affluent parents.

Teacher Participant T5. T5 indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T5 stated, "Since we teach in a pretty good district, we have most parents attend meetings. In some cases, like when I've had a student for years and the IEP doesn't change a lot, we opt to discuss progress and goals via telephone . . . However it takes place, I try to have parent involvement." T5 indicated that she attempts to communicate using multiple modes. T5 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T5 reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T5 stated, "It has changed through the years. We used to work with families to find a good date, but the last few years, we schedule the meeting and I tell the parents at the beginning of the year when the meeting will take place. Of course we are flexible when conflicts arise but with such advanced

notice, that rarely happened. I send invitations the first week of school and then a reminder and parent input forms closer to the approaching meeting.” T5 indicated that she had no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. T5 stated, “I would say the parent input forms only come back 50 percent of the time. Usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where I connect with families and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom.” T5 both reported that a parent not attending is rare, but when it happens she is able to elicit their participation some other way, such as notes home. T5 stated, “If we know the parents are not coming. We correspond outside of a meeting setting and sign off on the IEP when appropriate.” T5 reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T5 stated, “I am very casual in my meetings. I am sure that a draft has gone home at least a week prior to the meeting. We do not read the document word for word because the parents had that opportunity prior to the meeting. Instead, I use that time to answer any questions.” T5 sends a parent input form home prior to the IEP meeting. T5 stated that the norm is for parents to both complete and return parent input forms or to answer the parent input questions over the phone. T5 reported that she typically has a high response rate from parents. T5 elaborated about teacher efforts to engage parents throughout the IEP development process. “I try to involve parents constantly in their child’s education. This doesn’t just happen at IEP time. I make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous.” Regarding gaining parent participation in general, T5 stated, “I think each educator needs to come to a system they are comfortable with that works for their

situation. Consulting co-workers to see how they do it is always beneficial as well.”

Analysis of Participant Responses: Parents as a Group

Summary of parent responses to Question 1. Question 1 asked parents about their experiences with their child’s school in the IEP development process. P2 and P4 talked about the procedural aspects of the IEP development process, such as receiving a parent input form and IEP draft prior to the meeting. She also remarked that she felt there was good communication with teachers such that by meeting time everything had already been discussed. P3 stated that she was very involved in the process when her son was in preschool and that it was very family-centered, but that changed when he began school-aged program. “When he got to kindergarten, was my first experience with feeling like I didn’t have as much say . . .” P3 reported having mixed experiences overall with the IEP development process. At times she felt that the teacher and classroom assistants likes and enjoy her son, but was shocked and discouraged when others seemed to have a negative stance. Only when P3 felt a need for “reinforcement” did she bring in someone from the community to attend the IEP meeting. P4 stated that meetings are informative and that she appreciates when teachers offer to do IEP meetings by phone. She has always felt that her opinion was valued. “They wanted to know my opinion on what goals I wanted [my child] to reach.” She felt that she was guided through the IEP development process, and she appreciated when “they offered suggestions, too.” See Table 2 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 1.

Table 2

Parent Responses to Interview Question 1

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	Did not answer.	
P2	Teachers send home preplanning doc that asks questions, gives a chance to give input, child's strengths and weaknesses, what we want to work on at home, "There's <i>always been a good attempt to get information from us.</i> " We always get the notices and the IEP usually comes home before the meeting, but the meeting is anticlimactic <i>because we've already talked about everything.</i> "	preplanning doc, parent input form, good attempt to get parent info for IEP, good communication with teachers, draft, by meeting time have already talked plan over
P3	"I was <i>very involved</i> in the process when he was in preschool. <i>Um when he got to kindergarten</i> , was my first experience with feeling like <i>um I didn't have as much say</i> and like I was being pressured to go in a direction that I didn't feel comfortable with." "We felt the IEP was just very negative and written to highlight areas he struggled with as opposed to goals and objectives for a way for him to reach his goals in a positive way." After <i>years of mixed experiences</i> , "we're back in a <i>good place where our input is valued and the focus is on moving Jalen forward</i> as opposed to using the IEP to point out deficits."	very involved, transition from early childhood to school-age programs: move from family-centered to school-centered, negative, discouraged, felt need to bring in someone only when felt needed reinforcement, some staff seemed to like and enjoy him, others did not (which was shocking, discouraging), environment, placement
P4	"It was <i>very informative</i> . They <i>wanted to know my opinion</i> on what goals I wanted [my child] to reach. They <i>offered suggestions</i> too. They <i>helped guide me</i> through it. I always got a rough draft sent home and wanted to know if there were any changes that needed to be made, but usually there were not."	meetings are informative, teacher made it convenient by doing phone conferences, opinion valued, offered suggestions, guided parent through, rough draft, no changes needed

Summary of parent responses to Question 2. Question 2 asked parents about their experiences with the right to bring a person of their choosing to the IEP meeting. P1 used the word "team" to describe how he sees the IEP development process. "We've brought in family, providers . . . people from different perspectives." P1 stated that it is important to support the teacher." P2 said that she knew by reading the form that she could bring in anyone of her choosing, and she did. It is not unusual for P2 to invite her child's service coordinator from the Board of Development Disabilities and others who

are involved in her child's life. For P2, continuity between school and home is very important. In addition, P2 has invited specialists when the team seemed to need help with a particular problem her son was having. "Everybody talked about the behavior but no one seemed to know what to do . . . so we brought in the autism special team." P3 stated that, "for years I didn't bring in anybody from the outside . . . but I felt like this year I needed additional reinforcements to hear what I was hearing how he was being treated." P4 has never felt a need to involve anyone other than herself, "I did all of it, I didn't need anyone to come in and sit with me." See Table 3 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 2.

Table 3

Parent Responses to Interview Question 2

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	"We've brought in family, providers . . . people from <i>different perspectives.</i> "	team, perspectives, support for teacher
P2	"Everybody talked about the behavior but <i>no one seemed to know what to do</i> . . . so we brought in the autism special team. He also has a service coordinator that comes to his meetings. It says on the form you can bring someone of your choosing so we did."	service coordinator, form says can bring in someone, continuity between home and school, try to involve everyone involved in his life
P3	"For years I didn't bring in anybody from the outside into the IEP meeting, but this year I did. I feel that I can express myself well, but I felt like this year I <i>needed additional reinforcements</i> to hear what I was hearing how he was being treated and how his educational needs were being handled." "I was surprised that after 2 weeks I was getting the impression of, 'Yah, this kid is not going to work out in our classroom.' It was <i>shocking and disheartening</i> to me as a parent. Now that he's in a different placement he's back to his regular self again and he drags us down the driveway to get to the bus. He jumps up and down when he gets to the top of the bus and he's happy, he doesn't sleep all evening when he gets home."	negative vs positive view of student, important to parent that they feel like staff likes their child, needed reinforcements
P4	"I believe in the beginning I may have used an advocate. I did all of it, I didn't <i>need anyone to come in and sit with me.</i> It wasn't needed."	not needed

Summary of parent responses to Question 3. Question 3 asked parents about their experiences with communicating with the school. P2, P3, and P4 listed the following types of communication used: notebook, phone, texting, communication binder, e-mail, classroom apps, and video clips. P3 prefers texts for their immediacy and video clips because watching them, she learns a lot about her child's functioning at school. Regarding texting, "Rather than waiting for me to check my e-mail when I get home after 6 o'clock, I can take care of it right then." P1 and P2 stated that they communicate mainly with their child's teacher. P1 shared that it was important to him that "we wanted to make sure the school knew we were present and very involved in his success." All four of the parent participants indicated that they had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with their child's teacher. P1 used terms like connect, support. P2 used terms like the teacher is invested, takes the time, creative, and community to describe her positive experiences with communication. P4 stated, "I tried to be available to school. With me working, the phone made it a whole lot easier to communicate." See Table 4 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 3.

Table 4

Parent Responses to Interview Question 3

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	“Whatever he needed at the school, we were gonna make sure <i>his needs were supplied</i> .” “ <i>We wanted to make sure the school knew were present and . . . very involved</i> in his success.”	Main interactions with teacher, some with principal; involvement, parents connect relationship between student and school, supporting teacher, made self available to school
P2	positive, behavior, “it made sense to have a <i>notebook</i> or a paper that went back and forth.” <i>texting</i> back and forth, teacher’s personal number, “it’s good to know that your <i>teacher is invested enough to take the time to text</i> . I recommend it [texting] because it gives the parent a glimpse of what their child is doing at school . . . You can really see pictures of your child doing the activity.” “Quite frankly, when he has a really <i>good teacher I don’t really feel a need</i> .” “We’ve always made an effort to bring in things the school needs, like the time the middle school boys were eating the teacher out of house and home.”	positive experiences with communication, notebook, texting, like when teacher is invested, take the time, teachers as point person, creative, community
P3	“There’s been a lot of different forms of communication. This year, the teacher communicates <i>by text</i> and <i>I like that the best</i> . She texts both me and my husband at the same time, which is nice so we stay on the <i>same page</i> . My preference anymore has been texting, because like the teacher he has now <i>sends texts to both my husband</i> and I if there’s something we need to know. At least if I’m busy or he’s busy, at least we both have the same information and can <i>respond</i> , rather than waiting for me to check my e-mail and by the time I get home after 6 o’clock get the kids in the bath before I even get to the backpacks, and it can be something as simple as he needs more pullups I can take <i>care of it right then</i> instead of have to remember to do it later.”	communication binder, texts, e-mail, video clips, apps like Seesaw and Remind; texts and video clips preferred
P4	“I believe in the beginning we used a <i>notepad</i> to communicate with, um then we kind of got away from that because <i>phone</i> , with me working, made it a whole lot <i>easier to communicate</i> . <i>Any questions I ever had, um, they were great about it</i> .”	tried to be available to school, notepad, phone

Summary of parent responses to Question 4. Question 4 related to experiences with parent participation when not attending the IEP meeting in person. P1, P2, and P3 reported that they attended every IEP meeting in person. P4 stated that she always attended the IEP meetings, almost always by phone due to her work schedule. P1 shared a sense of overwhelm as a parent: “We’re quick to say, ‘You handle it, you’re the expert’ when we are really the experts . . . on our child.” P1 suggested that schools educate parents about expectations and roles in the IEP development process. P1, P2, and P4 remarked on the need for flexibility and making the meeting convenient for parents to participate. P2 remarked, “The sad thing is, there probably are a lot of parents who don’t know they absolutely can reschedule.” P2 learned about the parent right to request another meeting date after his transition from early childhood program to school–age. When P2 contacted her child’s school to request rescheduling due to conflicting prior commitments, the school secretary said, ““Oh, don’t worry about it, you can just come in and sign all the documents.”” P2 asserted that many parents “just go along” and that they “worry about being judged.” P2 suggested that providing documents in simpler language would give parents the sense that school is making an effort to be a partner. The transition from early childhood program to school–age was mentioned by P2 and P3; both indicated that there should be some communication from school about what to expect. P3 stated, “Early Childhood was family–centered and I was very involved in decision–making. Once my child was in kindergarten, all of a sudden I am being told everything instead of asked to help make decisions for my child.” Conversely, P4 remarked that the school has always “made the process easy” for them to be a part. See

Table 5 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 4.

Table 5

Parent Responses to Interview Question 4

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	re: not attending meeting, “Never happened.” “Usually you’re so <i>overwhelmed</i> as a parent. ‘Man I’m <i>so wiped out</i> , This is hard.’ <i>We’re quick to say, ‘You handle it, you’re the expert’</i> when we are really the experts . . . on our child.”	attends every IEP meeting, overwhelmed, educating parent about roles and expectations, flexible scheduling
P2	For a meeting to go over a special evaluation, the teacher sat down with us and <i>explained everything</i> later. For the IEP meetings, <i>we’ve never not been there.</i> ” “I called to reschedule it because they wanted it to be at 8:15 in the morning and I needed it to be at 8:30 in the morning . . . The secretary said, ‘Oh no, don’t worry about it, this works for the therapists, you can just come in and sign all the documents.’ So I thought, well maybe I’m confused. So I said, ‘Is this the IEP meeting where we talk about his assessment results and develop the goals?’ ‘Well, yes.’ I said, ‘Here’s the thing, put this down on his file, circle it in orange, put a pain in the butt parent sticker on it, but there will never be a meeting . . . where both his parents aren’t going to be present. So you can either reschedule the meeting or make it for another day.’ The fact that that was the first thing she said troubled me. The <i>sad thing is, there probably are a lot of parents who don’t know they absolutely can reschedule.</i> ” “When you read through all the stuff on the IEP . . . you just kind of go, ‘Ahhh’. It’s a lot.”	<i>attends every IEP meeting, transition from preschool to kindergarten, sadly many parents don’t know can reschedule (and not told this by school), parent rights document, parents worry about being judged, parents just go along, use simpler language on docs so parents know school is making an effort to be a partner, should offer alternative times to meet to accommodate parents who don’t have flexible jobs</i>
P3	None.	attends every meeting
P4	“The process has been <i>made easy</i> . Um, there were times that I wasn’t able to be there for his IEP and the teachers would do a <i>phone call</i> for me so that I could be able to be a part of it and yet you know be able to be on my lunch hour at work and not have to travel all the way to school, so it was a whole lot more <i>convenient</i> for me.”	convenient, school made the process easy

Summary of parent responses to Question 5. Question 5 asked parents about their experiences with professional jargon either on the IEP forms or in reference to special education services in general and technology present in meetings. P1 and P2 shared that at times they did not understand what was being said. P1 stated, “I still

struggle with some of the jargon, but if you have a good teacher you can ask about things and get an explanation.” P3 and P4 stated that understanding particular terms was not a problem for them. Regarding use of technology in meetings, P3 shared that the IEP was displayed on a large screen and that it was helpful, but cautioned, “Do not go through the IEP too quickly.” P1 stated that at the last meeting one of the staff used a tablet but it did not affect the meeting either way for the parent. P3 also remarked that when a computer has been used in meetings, usually someone other than the teacher did the actual typing and therefore it was not a distraction. P3 stated, “Actually, it made things more efficient than actually cutting and pasting to make changes.” P4 made the comment that meeting size did make a difference. “I felt intimidated if it was a big round table with more than just the teacher and maybe one therapist there.” P1, P2, P3, and P4 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and how the school staff members work together are topics parents suggested. P2 remarked, “The parent–teacher relationship is critical. We’ve not had it a couple times . . . and you start feeling you have to go to your child’s school every day to make sure they are being educated.” Finally, P2 suggested, “Take the time to have a conversation to make sure everybody’s on the same page.” See Table 6 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 5.

Table 6

Parent Responses to Interview Question 5

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	“I still <i>struggle</i> with some of <i>the jargon</i> .” “ <i>There’s no time to do all the explanation</i> , but if you have a good teacher, you can talk to the teacher later and ask about things and get an explanation . . .” Re: tech Usually no devices in meeting, but at last one someone used their tablet, it was not a problem for me. Most parents just sit and smile, but I ask questions if I don’t understand.	struggles with jargon, acronyms, overwhelming, teacher explanations about the process and terms, helpful
P2	“I think of myself as fairly assertive, but even for me it can be a <i>little intimidating</i> to say, “I don’t have the faintest idea what you’re talking about.” “ <i>The relationship between the parent and the teacher is so critical</i> , because we’ve not had it a couple time and so it’s like you start feeling you have to go to your child’s school every day to make sure they are being educated.” “It’s one time a year, <i>take the time to have a conversation</i> ; to make sure everybody’s <i>on the same page</i> .”	no tech used in meetings, skilled teacher pivotal to the process, like talking about child strengths and next steps, trust, parent—teacher relationship critical, educate parents about how goals created and how will be addressed, take time to have a conversation
P3	“In the beginning I might have asked what IDEA stands for, but other than that the only thing I can think of that I have ever asked about are the minutes of therapy on his IEP. I have been in meetings where they displayed the IEP on a <i>smartboard</i> . <i>I liked it</i> . It was good to make sure everybody was looking at the same thing. It was easy to see if any changes were being made. Generally there was someone else besides the teacher who would type the changes in right there.”	in beginning asked meaning of acronyms otherwise, no problems with jargon; Smartboard, computer, do not go through the IEP too quickly, beneficial to know how the school staff work together (i.e. teacher and therapists)
P4	“I don’t recall any technology present in the meetings. It was just a round table meeting when I would attend. No, I did not [ask questions]. I felt like it was pretty much <i>plain and simple</i> for pretty much anyone to understand.”	no tech, understood language

Summary of parent responses to Question 6. Question 6 asked parents to share their perceptions about their level of input in the process. P1 and P2 highlighted the importance of being linked with practical resources. P1 talked about pairing school staff with community workers, such as service coordinators. P2 stated, “You’re not going to get a parent involved . . . if they’re struggling to get food . . . or keep from getting evicted.” Helping parents navigate services was also mentioned by P1. “Our child’s teacher has really been driving the transition process by working with the support coordinator. Otherwise, the whole process would be overwhelming.” P2 asserted that the process is better when everybody is engaged and invested in the process, stating that her participation was influenced by “teachers that just invested in and took the time to get to know [my child]. We’ve had good relationships with the teachers we’ve had the longest.” P3 related a mixed experience with participation. “I’ve felt at times like I’ve been very involved and listened to and also in others where I had to . . . fight more than I think I should have to make sure [my child’s] educational needs are being met.” P4 shared that she felt “overwhelmed” and “intimidated” in IEP meetings including more than one or two school staff members. See Table 7 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 6.

Table 7

Parent Responses to Interview Question 6

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	<i>“Pairing his teacher with his SSA (home service support) has been a real benefit. They got together and scheduled for us to tour some [day habs].”</i>	pairing teacher and community worker, linking, helping parents navigate services
P2	<i>“Teachers that just invested in him and took the time to get to know him, although I tell Mrs. Steiner all the time she has the easy Jordan, so I know that the participation definitely has been colored by the relationships because with the two teachers we’ve had for the longest we’ve had good relationships.” “You’re not going to get a parent involved in their kids’ education if they’re struggling to get food and they’re just trying to tie everything together. It’s hard to make sure you child is going to school every day if you’re trying to keep from getting evicted from your house. If they have no other supports the teacher can get sucked into that kind of stuff too.”</i>	get everybody engaged, invested teacher, good relationship with teacher, linkage to services, teacher and community worker working together, teacher driving transition process
P3	<i>“I’ve felt at times like I’ve been very involved and listened to and also in others where I had to be more of an advocate when the focus was on what wasn’t working for him. I’ve had to fight more than I think I should have had to make sure his educational needs are being met.</i>	mixed experiences (involved and feeling listened to vs feeling need to be an advocate)
P4	<i>“One thing I would make a suggestion on is that when attending meetings maybe the teacher or maybe a therapist could attend and not a whole lot of people at the table, because sometimes as a parent it can be intimidating to see so many people sitting there. It can be kind of overwhelming.”</i>	overwhelmed by meeting with a lot of staff in attendance

Summary of parent responses to Question 7. Question 7 asked parents to share any remaining thoughts about parent participation that they did not share previously. P1 gave advice for school staff persons. “Listen, enter into that person’s world. Do not personalize. If the parent doesn’t feel like you care than you might be fighting the parent, and that’s not what your job is.” P1 gave advice for parents of color. “Prejudice exists in the system. There will be some people who have a problem with you being in their school building, but be willing to work through it. Do not let yourself be intimidated because those who are willing to push . . . will be the ones who get the available resources.” P2 stated, “Take a few minutes and listen, not thorough your culture but find out about their culture. We have to somehow figure out how to connect with each other over common ground . . . I think it’s about being nonjudgmental I’ve heard teachers and people who make judgments about kids because they way that their lunch comes in or they’re not clean, but even though you want to make judgments, take the time to find out about their story and think, “What can I do to help?” P3 shared, “One thing I really like is that the teacher sends me video clips.” From the videos, P3 sees how her child is functioning at school and how the staff interacts with them. “Video clips are very helpful. Being able to see [for myself] was fantastic!” See Table 8 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 7.

Table 8

Parent Responses to Interview Question 7

Parents	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
P1	<p>Advice for school staff: <i>listen, enter into that person's world, do not personalize.</i></p> <p>"If the parent doesn't feel like you care than you might be fighting the parent, and that's not what your job is."</p> <p>For parents in minority: <i>expect prejudice exists</i>, "There will be some people who have a problem with you being in their school building," but be <i>willing to work through it</i>, do not let yourself be intimidated, those who are willing to push through those blind walls will be the ones who "get all the resources available."</p>	<p>African American experience of the school system, prejudice, intimidate, listen, understand parent frustration, customer service, caring, genuine interest in child</p>
P2	<p>Advice for school: "Stop and listen to the person . . . it just might change the filter that you're looking at them through. <i>We're dealing with people from other cultures where there's a language barrier, and that's been a struggle. It's like take a few minutes and listen, not through your culture but find out about their culture.</i></p> <p>For example, several of the cultures the male speaks and the women doesn't get to speak. Because that's their culture. It won't do any good if you go in with an <i>attitude</i>. We have to somehow figure out how to <i>connect with each other over common ground</i> which is we both want to figure out how to get good services for your child. So I think it's about being <i>not judgmental</i>."</p> <p>"I've heard teachers and people who make judgments about kids because the way that their lunch comes in or they're not clean, or whatever, but even though you want to make those kinds of judgments take the time to find out about their story, try to think, "What can I do to help?"</p>	<p>connecting with parents, cultural understanding, non-judgmental, listen, connect over common ground, take the time to learn about their (parents') lives</p>
P3	<p>"One thing I really like that his current teacher does is she sends me <i>video clips</i>. For example, she sent one of him eating. I was able to see how independently he was eating at school, what the utensils looked like, and observe how the staff interact with him. He was doing so well in the clip, I sent for the same utensils from Amazon so he could use the same ones at home. I even showed the video to his grandmother, and she remarked at how gentle the staff was when talking to him. They were encouraging, like saying, "You've got this buddy." So, I would say <i>video clips are really helpful</i>. She could have texted me or whatever but being able to see it was fantastic!"</p>	<p>connecting with parents, video clips</p>
P4	No answer.	

Analysis of Participant Responses: Teachers as a Group

Summary of teacher responses to Question 1. Question 1 asked teachers to share about their experiences with parent attendance of meetings. Four of the 5 teacher participants indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T5 stated, “Since we teach in a pretty good district, we have most parents attend meetings. In some cases, like when I’ve had a student for years and the IEP doesn’t change a lot, we opt to discuss progress and goals via telephone . . . However it takes place, I try to have parent involvement.” T1 reported the opposite, stating, “It’s hard to get the parents involved. I would say 75% of them don’t attend . . . and if they do they don’t know what’s going on and they don’t really care.” See Table 9 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 1.

Table 9

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 1

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	<i>“Most parents do not attend meetings. Um, I think I would say about 75% of parents don’t attend their meetings um and very few parents do and if they do, they don’t know what’s going on and they don’t really care. It’s hard to get the parents involved Even after all the attempts to contact them they still don’t show up and just sign it and move on.”</i>	hard to engage parents, even after attempts to contact 75% don’t attend IEP meetings, they don’t know what’s going on and don’t care,
T2	<i>“I’ve had really good attendance from parents probably in the 25 years. Um, I generally get I would say 99% of parents attending meetings. Um, you know on occasion you get a parent that can’t make it and if they can’t make it we just set up another time and sometimes they don’t make other times and we do it over the phone like a phone conference.”</i>	really good parent attendance, if can’t make it offer to reschedule or do by phone
T3	<i>“95% of the parents show up. Um, I think when I worked with the younger students it was more 100 % because they’re just starting to experience all the stuff and then by the time they get up to high school they’re kind of getting done. Every once in a while I have someone from the high school not show up, but we usually contact them by phone and kind of go over it and send it home for them to sign.</i>	95% parent attendance, if don’t show up just call and go over it then send it home
T4	<i>I worked in 2 different school districts. One school district was a lower income district, where parents did not come to meetings that frequently. And then at my higher end school district, all the parents usually attend meetings, unless they’ve been doing this for the past 20 years. Sometimes you like to do a phone interview and send the IEP home and then have them sign it. These are the parents we’ve had a close relationship and they understand how the classroom works. In the low income school, parents couldn’t get off work, other’s I think don’t understand what the IEP is, and so for them it’s just easier to not show up or say, ‘Send it home and I’ll sign it.’ That way they don’t have to answer questions or maybe ask questions themselves. At my school district in New Mexico a lot were Spanish speaking and so there was a language barrier. They had a translator there, whether it was a principal, the main supervisors for the IEP meeting or one of the assistants that spoke Spanish.”</i>	low-income school, low parent involvement: barriers to attending are work, not understanding what the IEP is, non-English speaker; affluent school, high parent involvement. if do meeting by phone means have a relationship with parents and they understand what’s going on in the classroom

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T5	“Since we teach in a pretty good district, we have most parents attend meetings. Occasionally we have a family with poor attendance, but I would say <i>90% attend regularly</i> . At the high school level I could have students up to 8 years. In some cases like this when the IEP doesn’t change a lot, we opt to discuss progress and goals <i>via telephone, e-mail, or written correspondence</i> . However it takes place, I <i>try to have parental involvement</i> .”	most parents attend but because have students 8 years some do by phone (but parent still involved)

Summary of teacher responses to Question 2. Question 2 asked teachers to share about their experiences communicating about planned meetings. T1 and T3 stated that they are required to contact parents at least three times in three different ways to engage their participation in the IEP development process, but all five teachers indicated that they attempt to communicate using multiple modes. T2 stated, “Usually I will call a parent, send a note home, or text them. I send papers home with questions on them and the parent can either call me or write back, whatever’s most convenient for them.” All but T1 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T2, T3, T4, and T5 reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T5 stated, “It has changed through the years. We used to work with families to find a good date, but the last few years, we schedule the meeting and I tell the parents at the beginning of the year when the meeting will take place. Of course we are flexible when conflicts arise but with such advanced notice, that rarely happened. I send invitations the first week of school and then a reminder and parent input forms closer to the approaching meeting.” See Table 10 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 2.

Table 10

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 2

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	“You have to [make] 3 attempts. Normally <i>I send out the invitation</i> , I do <i>phone calls</i> , I do <i>e-mails</i> and there’s been times when I’ve called parents and they say, ‘Oh, I’m not coming to that.’ I’ve had a couple parents pretend they don’t know what I’m talking about and just hang up. Some parents respond and they have a whole list of things that they want done at the meeting, it just kind of depends. I had a parent who was sending me e-mails every day once I initiated the contact about the meeting. She wanted this and she wanted that. That’s very good but it’s very rare.”	3 attempts to contact using 3 different ways(paper, phone, e-mail), parents avoid contact
T2	“Usually I will <i>call</i> a parent, uh <i>send a note home or text</i> them with different questions, if I know uh what we’re going to be talking about for example it might be transition for kids to move on, um <i>I’ll send papers home with questions on them and the parent can either call me or write back</i> , whatever’s most <i>convenient</i> for them. If they don’t fill out the paperwork they generally call me back so I’m aware what’s needed for their child. For the most part I have good parents and I can give out my cell number or they can call directly into our classroom. There’s definitely not one form over another. Some like to e-mail. Um yah, so there’s really not really a preferred form.	phone, text, questionnaire, e-mail, whatever is convenient for parents
T3	“ <i>We have to show that we um tried at least 3 x to contact the parent, and usually I’ll try to do that 3 diff ways</i> . I will <i>send home an invitation</i> and along with a <i>questionnaire</i> to give me info on some things they might want on their child’s IEP Then I usually send a <i>text</i> message reminding of the meeting and then right before the meeting I’ll give them a <i>quick call</i> and just kind of finalize that they’re going to come. Every once in a while I’ve had one not show up [because the] cab didn’t show up or for whatever reason. At the beginning of the year the school psych sets up all the IEP meetings so I like to give them a heads up. A lot of times I’ll let them know a couple months in advance. I make sure I send home the <i>questionnaire about a month before the meeting</i> so I have that information for when I write the draft, and I like to send a <i>draft of the IEP at least 2 weeks before the meeting</i> .”	invitation, questionnaire, text, call, give advance notice of meeting date
T4	“ <i>At the beginning of the year</i> , because our high school is so big, I <i>send out a letter</i> with a date letting them know this is the time, this is the date, if they have any problems or can’t make it, please let me know and I’ll <i>reschedule</i> . I’ll have conversations with parents through <i>e-mail, phone or text</i> through the year preparing for the IEP and reminders. And I have actually a Remind app too for my classroom.”	e-mail, text, phone, apps, lets parents know can reschedule if needed

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T5	“It has changed through the years. We used to work with families to find a good date, but the last few years, <i>we schedule the meeting</i> and I tell the parents at the beginning of the year when the meeting will take place. This has actually been a much more efficient process. Of course we are <i>flexible</i> when conflicts arise but with such advanced notice that rarely happens. I <i>sent invites the first week of school</i> and then a <i>reminder and parent input forms closer to the approaching meeting.</i> ”	flexible when scheduling conflicts arise

Summary of teacher responses to Question 3. Question 3 asked teachers to share about their experiences gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. Four of the 5 teacher participants indicated that they had no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. T1 reflected, “The parent did come to the last meeting I held. It was a parent that had a lot of input about her student’s IEP. And so she was there early, she wanted suggestions, she wanted our feedback but we wanted her input put in so that was really good.” T2 shared about the last meeting held, “When I sent the reminder home I put the wrong time on it. And so the day of the meeting I felt really bad. We kind of went over it with the student and then when the mom showed up I went over the IEP with her. Once again, I sent the questionnaire out about a month ahead of time and they responded with the info and said that they would be attending the meeting. I sent a note home and I did talk to them on the phone. I also sent a reminder. Some parents I don’t give my text number to. And that’s one of the ones. I just call the ahead of time and then I send them a note reminder.” T4 recalled that their last IEP meeting was at the home of a student who was being raised by his grandmother and who was on home instruction. To accommodate the guardian’s needs, the meeting was held at the student’s home. “All the communication goes through the grandma and she’s very up to date on

things that she wants done with her grandson, from different types of switches to bringing some things from my classroom to home for the home instructor. She definitely researches and knows what's out there and available to him. A lot of parents where I teach now understand and know what they want from their children. They're pretty involved." T5 stated, "I would say the parent input forms only come back 50 percent of the time. Usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where I connect with families and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom." See Table 11 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 3.

Table 11

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 3

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	<p>“The parent did come to the last meeting I held. It was a parent that had <i>a lot of input</i> about her student’s IEP. She wanted all these accommodations put in for her son. And so she was there early, she wanted suggestions, she wanted our feedback but we wanted her input put in so that was really good. I think we were <i>able to come to agreement</i> during that meeting . . . <i>She was willing to listen and we wanted to listen</i> so it was good.”</p>	<p>parent had a lot of input, wanted accommodations, parent wanted suggestions and feedback, parent gave input, we were in agreement, both parent and teacher listened to each other</p>
T2	<p>“<i>Conferences or orientation night</i>. The parents came in and discussed um kind of what they needed for their child or we discussed what some of the work options were going to be. And if they needed to <i>discuss</i> further, we would set up another date to meet. We always send out a <i>one-call</i> from the principal. <i>We send papers home</i>. And the last IEP meeting? Yah, I <i>send a note home with an invitation</i>, they <i>read over everything</i>, they <i>responded</i> to me what they wanted for their child and everything went smoothly.”</p>	<p>orientation, parent-teacher conference, one-call, invitation, note home</p>
T3	<p>“When I sent the reminder home I put the wrong time on it. And so the day of the meeting I felt really bad. We kind of went over it with the student and then when the mom showed up I went over the IEP with her. Once again, I sent the <i>questionnaire out about a month ahead of time</i> and they responded with the info and said that they would be attending the meeting. I sent a <i>note home</i> and I did talk to them on the <i>phone</i>. I also <i>sent a reminder</i>. Some parents I don’t give my text number to. And that’s one of the ones. I just call the ahead of time and then I send them a note reminder. This student is graduating and unfortunately the parents <i>are not following through</i> with things that I feel they should follow through with, for example aren’t interested in signing up with BVR, they haven’t followed up with the Board of Disabilities, so he’s basically going to sit at home after he graduates.”</p>	<p>give some parents cell number, student attends meeting too, often no parent follow through with accessing community services for student, depends on family values</p>

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T4	<p>“The last meeting I held was a meeting for a home instruction student who I don’t have in my classroom but I’m the case manager. All the communication goes through the grandma and she’s very up to date on things that she wants done with her grandson, from different types of switches to bringing some things from my classroom to home for the home instructor. She definitely researches and knows what’s out there and available to him. A lot of parents where I teach now understand and know what they want from their children. They’re pretty involved. A lot of parents with nonverbal students with physical disabilities too come in and they’re like, ‘First of all, she has a nurse 24 hours a day, she’s not going to be left alone to have purchase something with money. So please don’t teach that to her because it’s pointless.’ <i>90% [of the parents] are realistic, and then you have that 10% that never get out of the unrealistic expectations</i> and no matter the disability or what anybody says they’re still not going to have realistic expectations. All you can do is <i>inform them</i> and if they don’t like the goals and things you just try to <i>modify and accommodate as much as you can</i>, and if you don’t make progress or master the goal there’s really nothing you can do about it if you’ve done all the modifications.”</p>	<p>higher income parents have specific ideas about what they want for their child and communicate them</p>
T5	<p>“I would say the <i>parent input forms</i> only come back <i>50 percent</i> of the time. When they do I share with the team hopefully prior to their goal writing. Usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where <i>I connect with families</i> and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom.”</p>	<p>50% fill out input forms</p>

Summary of teacher responses to Question 4. Question 4 asked teachers to share about any experiences when the meeting was held without parent attendance. T1 and T3 indicated having had meetings or creating an IEP devoid of any parent participation in creating the document. T1 shared, “I’ve had several meetings without parent attendance, and normally we [teachers and therapists] might go over the document, sometimes it’s just kind of glossed over, and we [teachers and therapists] sign it and we move on.” T3 stated, “We did go over the IEP with the student. Usually if its, it depends on the student and what their level is, but usually we’re able to discuss and they understand. Then we send the IEP home for the parent to sign.” T2 recalled, “All the therapists and the psychologist attended the meeting. We went ahead and had the meeting with the student and went over everything on the IEP. And the parents gave us the OK to do that because it was hard for them to make it in. And we sent the IEP home and let them know if they had any questions they could get back with us.” T4 and T5 both reported that a parent not attending is rare, but when it happens they are able to elicit their participation some other way, such as notes home. T5 stated, “If we know the parents are not coming. We correspond outside of a meeting setting and sign off on the IEP when appropriate.” See Table 12 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 4.

Table 12

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 4

Teachers	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
T1	"I've had several <i>meetings without parent attendance</i> , and normally we might go over the document, sometimes it's just kind of glossed over, and we sign it and we move on."	lots of meetings with no parents; if no parents, IEP quickly glossed over; regular ed teachers just sign off on it and saying "whatever," educate other teachers and give IEP at a glance, other teachers don't care or think the students need individualized plans
T2	"All the therapists and the psychologist attended the meeting. We went ahead and had the meeting with the student and went over everything on the IEP. And the parents gave us the OK to do that because it <i>was hard for them to make it in</i> . And we sent the <i>IEP home and let them know if they had any questions they could get back with us</i> ." <i>1 out of 10 are by phone</i>	parent attendance: 1/10 by phone 9/10 attend in person, linking
T3	"We did <i>go over the IEP with the student</i> . Usually if its, it depends on the student and what their level is, but usually we're able to <i>discuss and they understand</i> . Then we <i>send the IEP home for the parent to sign</i> ."	if not parent attends or if doing by phone, IEP sent home
T4	<i>I haven't had any without parent attendance [here]</i> . I sat through a student teaching with the lower income district where <i>parents did not attend</i> and so the general education teacher, supervisor, and special education teacher would just go over the goals, and then sign off on the IEP that they had so many chances for the parent to come and they'd send usually a copy in the backpack and a lot of times they didn't even get any response from that. At my current school this year, I have not [had any phone meetings]. Last year I had a students who had surgery and I told the mother that I would come to the <i>house</i> to talk to her and go over the IEP. That way I could check up on him too. It was nice. I think that's the nicest IEP meeting I ever had."	parents in affluent school always participate in the meetings, we will do home visit if needed (like when had sick student); in low income school it was common for parents not to attend
T5	"That <i>rarely happens</i> . If we <i>know the parents are not coming</i> . We <i>correspond outside of a meeting setting and sign off on the IEP</i> when appropriate."	rarely no parent involvement, but if parent not coming, we correspond with them outside of meeting and sign off on the IEP

Summary of teacher responses to Question 5. Question 5 asked teachers to share about their experiences with helping parents understand the language used on forms. T1 is the sole teacher participant reporting any experiences at their current school involving a language need other than English. “This year I’ve had some parents who don’t quite understand the IEP and the verbiage that we use and at one point we had a parent get an advocate to help them understand. I try to go through and explain everything, and ask, do you understand, does it make sense to you, but I know a lot of people will say yes even when it doesn’t. I had parents a couple years ago who didn’t speak any English so we had a translator come to the meeting.” T4 shared that at a prior position in another school, language was a common barrier. Both T1 and T4 indicated that despite the language barrier, no documents were given to parents in their native language. All 5 teacher participants reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand. T1 stated, “Sometimes, I think if the parent is assertive, they’ll ask. But if they feel like we know more than them, or that we’re the expert, they’re hesitant to say they don’t understand. They normally just agree with everything. I try to ask them more questions. Instead of just sit back, but most the time they just go along with what we say.” T2 explained, “We try to write out what different acronyms mean and spell out what different names are so they’re not confused. When you sign up for services, some places have multiple names, and when they get something in the mail they may not know what it is, so we try to walk them through the procedure of different agencies. T3 shared, “I keep the language simple, straightforward. Some parents do ask questions if they don’t understand, but some you can kind of tell

they might be confused about something or whatever and I'll try to reiterate or say, 'If you have any questions, feel free to ask questions.' "T4 described, "At the district I'm at now, sometimes the parents know more than we know, they're very informed. One time when I was in the elementary level we had prevocational on an IEP and it offended some parents. Right out of the gate when we read the goal they were offended until we explained what it was. I think we have a good relationship with our parents and they know they can ask anything in the meeting and we'll provide answers the best we can." T5 stated, "I am very casual in my meetings. I am sure that a draft has gone home at least a week prior to the meeting. We do not read the document word for word because the parents had that opportunity prior to the meeting. Instead, I use that time to answer any questions." See Table 13 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 5.

Table 13

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 5

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	<p>“This year I’ve had some <i>parents who don’t quite understand</i> the IEP and the verbiage that we use and at one point we had a parent <i>get an advocate you know to help them understand even more</i>. I try to go through and <i>explain everything, and ask, do you understand</i>, does it make sense to you, but I know a lot of people <i>will say yes even when it doesn’t</i>. One parent was able to say, “I don’t understand everything,” so she was able to get an advocate . . . The advocate was able to explain some of the things that I couldn’t get to with her, so that went well. And then I had parents a couple years ago who <i>didn’t speak any English</i> so we had a <i>translator come to the meeting</i> who helped them understand and put some of the terms that we use into a way they could understand what we were saying instead of nodding and just saying, ‘Yes.’ Sometimes we have to do the extra thing to get them to understand.” “Sometimes, I think if the parent is assertive, they’ll ask. But <i>if they feel like we know more than them, or that we’re the expert, they’re hesitant to say they don’t understand</i>. They normally <i>just agree with everything</i>. I try to ask them more questions. Instead of just sit back, but most the time they just go along with what we say.”</p>	<p>helping parents understand, had parent get an advocate to help her understand, had a translator help non-English speaking parents understand, parents usually just go along, parent input helpful, help parents understand, reach out, make contact about positive things</p>
T2	<p>“We try to write out what different acronyms mean and spell out what different names are so they’re not confused. When you sign up for services, some places have multiple names, and when they get something in the mail they may not know what it is, so we try to <i>walk them through the procedure</i> of different agencies. <i>I try not to use acronyms</i>. I try to <i>spell things out</i>, and in parentheses when I first write it, I usually write what kind of agency it is and what they’re trying to help their kid with so when they refer back to that they can remember BVR is Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, what their service is.”</p>	<p>parent education about acronyms and procedures of different agencies</p>
T3	<p>“I am <i>pretty straightforward</i> with everything on there, so I’ll just <i>reword things</i> so they understand. I keep the language simple, straightforward. Some parents do ask questions if they don’t understand, but some you can kind of tell they might be confused about something or whatever and I’ll try to reiterate or say, ‘if you have any questions, feel free to ask questions.’ “</p>	<p>simplify language, explain how things work, invite questions, nice when other come because learn more about student, transition from early childhood to school age program can be hard for parents</p>

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round codes
T4	<p>“I know, at least at the district I’m at now, <i>sometimes the parents know more than we know, they’re very informed</i>. One time when I was in the elementary level we had <i>prevocational</i> on an IEP and it offended some parents. We had to explain that it’s not they’re going to wash windows one day, or shred paper, that you have to start with the skill and the skill set and that way it’s setting a routine for them and expectations. Right out of the gate when we read the goal they were offended until we explained what it was. I think we have <i>a good relationship with our parents and they know they can ask anything in the meeting</i> and we’ll provide answers the best we can . . . and if they ask a question that we don’t know about, maybe a transitional thing or a facility, those kinds of things, we’ll definitely check into it for them or get the Board of DD, somebody that would know more than I do.”</p>	<p>need to educate parents about the jargon we use, have a good relationship with parents and they know they can ask anything</p>
T5	<p>“I am very casual in my meetings. I am sure that a <i>draft has gone home at least a week prior to the meeting</i>. We do not read the document word for word because the parents had that opportunity prior to the meeting. Instead, I use that time to <i>answer any questions about the students schedule or school day as well as answer questions about terms or procedures they are not familiar with</i>. This gives the parents credit where credit is due and makes for <i>much more efficient use of time</i>.”</p>	<p>send draft home before meeting, casual in meetings, use the time to answer parent questions</p>

Summary of teacher responses to Question 6. Question 6 asked teachers to share about the level of parent input in the process. All teacher participants send a parent input form home prior to the IEP meeting. T2, T3, T4, and T5 reported that they typically have a high response rate from parents. T1 shared about her usual experiences, “I send home a parent input form home at the beginning of the year, but a lot of the time I don’t get that back. They either fill it out and they send it back and then they come, or fill it out and bring it with them, or they don’t do anything at all. A lot of times in the past 2 years I’ve been mailing it instead of sending it home with the kids, but even still I put an

envelope in there and a stamp and even then they don't always mail it back." T2 empathized, "On occasion you get people who don't respond, but for the most part we've had pretty good success. 90% of my parents that I have either fill out the form and return it, or call me back and let me know. Sometimes the forms are more of a pain for people." The common experience among T2, T3, T4, and T5 is that the norm is for parents to both complete and return parent input forms or to answer the parent input questions over the phone. About parent participation in general, T4 volunteered that after IEP meetings she demonstrated technology and interventions used in the classroom for interested parents. T4 indicated that a few make an effort to carry over technology and/or interventions at home, but "usually it kind of gets lost at home. There's not much follow through." T5 elaborated about teacher efforts to engage parents throughout the IEP development process. "I try to involve parents constantly in their child's education. This doesn't just happen at IEP time. I make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous." See Table 14 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 6.

Table 14

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 6

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	<p>“I send home <i>a parent input form home at the beginning of the year</i>. You know, just tell me about your child, likes and dislikes, all of those kinds of things. A little closer to the meeting I send home a follow up, 2 paragraphs about things that go in section 3 of the IEP . . . and the bottom paragraph talks about any other things they wanted addressed. <i>A lot of the time I don't get that back . . . input for the IEP, um, it's helpful even when they fill out the form at the beginning of the year cuz it just helps me to know their child a little bit more, especially when the IEP like the second week of school, they either fill it out and they send it back and then they come, or fill it out and bring it with them, or they don't do anything at all.</i> A lot of times in the past 2 years I've been mailing it instead of sending it home with the kids, but even still I put an envelope in there and a stamp and even then they don't always mail it back.”</p>	<p>send parent input form home, often do not get them back, parent input helpful</p>
T2	<p>“We have <i>good parent input</i>. We <i>send home something at the beginning of the year</i>, “Tell me something about your student” and some of their interests, when's a <i>good time to call</i> them, what time of day, what is the <i>best way to contact</i> them, and then as far as IEP meetings we'll send home a few pages of questions and give them some time to fill it out and send it back, and see what they would like us to try and incorporate into their son or daughter's IEP, what kind of <i>goals they would like us to work on</i>. I think we've had pretty good success with parents being involved. On occasion you get people who don't respond, but for the most part we've had pretty good success. <i>90% of my parents that I have either fill out the form and returned it, or call me back and let me know in some form of communication. Sometimes the forms are more of a pain for people</i>, so even if I can discuss with them and see what page we're on I would say we have pretty good return success of people returning papers or returning calls.”</p>	<p>good parent input, send home form but also call (realize paper can be a pain for some parents)</p>
T3	<p>“We really want to <i>make sure that they are aware</i>, because a lot of the kids that we have are turning 18 or have already turned 18 so we want them to be aware of <i>guardianship</i>. We want them to get signed up at the Board of Disabilities. Sometimes they sign up when they're younger, but at 16 they have to go through a re-eval and I think some of the parent's aren't aware of that, and the parents think they already have services but they don't, and <i>other parents don't take advantage of all the things the Board has for them</i>. I don't know if they're just not aware or what. I had this one student I was doing extended school year and home instruction with. For whatever reason, <i>Mom just didn't follow through</i>. I told her, ‘I'll do whatever, even beyond what I'm paid to do. I'll go with you, I can help. I can do everything but do it for you.’ So you offer it to them in such cases.”</p>	<p>inform parents about guardianship and available resources, offer to help</p>

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T4	<p>“For <i>parent input, definitely like 50/50</i>. In the beginning of the year, you send home papers asking for things that they want us to work on with their children. Some fill it out and will have some realistic goals and others will never fill it out, even if you text or talk to them frequently, they think I know their child and agree with what I put on the IEP. <i>After the IEP I’ll go in and show them things</i>, some switches or some things they don’t have at home, but that I have in the classroom and show them <i>what we’re doing</i> and they’ll be like, ‘Oh yah, I get that, I trust what you’re doing. I like that.’ I actually had a student get some different switches for Christmas this year, because after that meeting I invited her into the classroom to <i>show her</i> some different kinds of switches that we use. So they could <i>carry over at home</i>. <i>Usually</i>, it kind of <i>gets lost at home</i>. There’s <i>not much follow through</i>.”</p>	<p>½ parent fill out input form, others talk with teacher, believes they trust teacher, show parents how work with child in classroom and educate about tech used</p>
T5	<p>“I <i>try to involve parents constantly</i> in their child’s education. This doesn’t just happen at IEP time. I <i>make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous</i>. We keep parent communication <i>notebooks</i>, we <i>e-mail</i>, I <i>use the remind app</i>, I <i>do newsletters</i> and I <i>do provide parent input forms at IEP time</i>. I have 8 different options so I try to send a different one each year. This way I am learning new things about familiar students.”</p>	<p>try to involve parents, notebooks, apps, input forms, e-mail, newsletters</p>

Summary of teacher responses to Question 7. Question 7 asked teachers to share about anything else they thought was important to know about parent participation in the IEP development process. T1 volunteered, “I think that as special ed teachers we really need to work on helping the parents understand more that we are really here to serve them and not that we’re just trying to get paperwork done and not try to help their child. It’s good to ask questions. It’s not scary, school’s not threatening.” T3 elaborated about the benefit of more than one family member of the child attending meetings. “It’s nice when both parents can make it [to meetings]; seeing another family member and listening to their viewpoint.” T4 shared that in her experience, parents of low income status tend not to be as involved as more affluent parents. T2 delineated between a stereotype and her own experience, “People assume that because parents’ economic status isn’t very high they may not be involved, but that’s not always the case. Sometimes

I think people are unclear of what's wanted of them, as far as on the part of the parents, they might not know quite what they are supposed to do, or you get some parents that are nonreaders like their kids. You may need to call them as opposed to just sending a note home and you wonder why they don't respond, maybe they can't read it. Be aware of what level people are on and compassionate toward their needs." In other words, T2 sees the apparent under-involvement as a side-effect of other factors rather than a lack of desire to participate. Regarding gaining parent participation in general, T5 stated, "I think each educator needs to come to a system they are comfortable with that works for their situation. Consulting co-workers to see how they do it is always beneficial as well."

T3 offered advice regarding the teacher's role in helping students with transitions. "Also, we stress the importance of getting them transitioned from school to adulthood properly, like making sure day hab[ilitation] has been planned and not wait for the last minute. You might have a waiting list, there's several out there, you want to find the one that fits. You want to start them going a couple days a week through the school year and increase it throughout the year to make a smooth transition for the kids. They always think, 'We got time.' It's like, 'No, really, you're running out of time.'" See Table 15 for a comparison of summarized responses to Interview Question 7.

Table 15

Teacher Responses to Interview Question 7

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T1	<p>“I think that as special ed teachers we really need <i>to work on helping the parents understand more that we are really here to serve them</i> and not that we’re just trying to get paperwork done and not try to help their child. <i>It’s good to ask questions. It’s not scary</i>, school’s not threatening. I think <i>some parents are just fearful of the school environment</i> and I think that there’s not much you can do to help them overcome that fear except keep trying to <i>reach out, keep trying contact them with positive things</i> to say and let them know you’re that you’re <i>here to help</i> other than that, until they overcome that there’s not much you can do.”</p>	<p>helping parents understand, we’re here to serve them, reach out, positive statements</p>
T2	<p>“We have kids on all different levels and all <i>different backgrounds</i>. People assume that because their economic status isn’t very high the parents may not be involved, but that’s not always the case. Sometimes I think people are <i>unclear of what’s wanted of them</i>, as far as on the part of the parents, they might not know quite what they are supposed to do, or you have to realize too that you get some <i>parents that are nonreaders</i> like their kids, they may not know what their meeting date is. You may need to <i>call them</i> as opposed to just sending a note home and you wonder why they don’t respond, maybe they can’t read it. Be aware of what level people are on and <i>compassionate toward their needs</i>.” “Sometimes <i>transportation is an issue</i>, or they don’t have a phone, or it may be cut off. We’ve even picked them up in the school van.”</p>	<p>parents with low economic status want to be involved but might not know what’s wanted of them, what they are supposed to do, might be nonreaders, might not have reliable transportation or phone access; be aware and compassionate toward parent needs</p>
T3	<p>It’s nice when both parents can make it [to meetings], actually one of my students, I just met his dad, so that was <i>nice seeing another family member and listening to their viewpoint</i>. It is nice when you have more. At the elementary I had one parent who nitpicked every little thing. It was every comma, period, exclamation point. After a while it just dragged on forever. That is someone who is at the beginning stage and going overboard. I believe he was in an early intervention program and this was their first school age experience.”</p>	<p>students and parents need teacher to drive the transition from school to adult programs</p>

(table continues)

Teachers	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
T3 (cont.)	“Also, we just stress the importance of getting them transitioned from school to adulthood properly, like making sure day has been planned and <i>not wait for the last minute</i> . You might have a <i>waiting list</i> , there’s several out there, you want to find the one that fits. You don’t want to just throw them in that. You want to start them going a couple days a week through the school year and increase it throughout the year to make a <i>smooth transition</i> for the kids. Or maybe they want to go a job program at the career center. You know, just <i>things they may not have thought of</i> . They always think, ‘We got time.’ It’s like, ‘No, really, you’re running out of time.’ That’s an important thing at this age.”	
T5	“I think each educator needs to come to a <i>system</i> they are comfortable with that works for their situation. <i>Consulting</i> co-workers to see how they do it is always beneficial as well. You never know when you will find that trick you wish you had years ago.”	advice for teachers: use system you are comfortable with, consult with co-workers

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Although in responding to interview questions, participants provided data in reference to the specifics listed in the guidelines for districts, by far the most energy and time was spent on sharing about relational issues. In other words, teachers and parents indicated that the auditable, referring to procedural compliance, aspects of the IEP process are taking place. Parents are notified of the meeting, scheduling takes place, parents attend either in person or by phone, some bring other persons from the community who are involved with their child, and a copy of the IEP is given to parents. The following are the two identified themes, corresponding sub-themes and codes that will guide the following sections:

Setting-Related Experiences

- meetings (notification of parents, scheduling, record of attempts)

- information provided to parents (meeting details, bringing others to meetings)
- parent participation (alternative ways to participate, meeting without parent attendance)
- ensuring parent understanding (interpreter, parent copy of child's IEP)

Interaction–Related Experiences

- communication (pacing, feelings during)
- roles (defining, expectations)
- trust (nonjudgmental language, understanding procedures and interventions, sense of genuine concern for child)
- special considerations (culture, non–English speakers, literacy, family resources)

Setting–Related Experiences

Meetings. Ohio's guidelines require school districts to make an effort to garner the attendance of one or both parents of the child with a disability are present at each IEP team meeting or given the opportunity to participate, including given ample advance notice and "scheduling the meeting on a mutually agreed upon time and place (Ohio Department of Education, 2009)". T1 and T3 specifically stated that they are required to contact parents at least 3 times in 3 different ways to engage their participation in the IEP development process, but all 5 teachers indicated that they attempt to communicate using multiple modes. T2 stated, "Usually I will call a parent, send a note home, or text them. I send papers home with questions on them and the parent can either call me or write back,

whatever's most convenient for them." All but T1 mentioned that the IEP meeting schedule is communicated at the beginning of the school year, so that the parent knows months ahead of time when the meeting is to be held. This method, T2, T3, T4, and T5 reported, has made the scheduling more efficient because with advance notice there has been little need for rescheduling. T5 stated, "It has changed through the years. We used to work with families to find a good date, but the last few years, we schedule the meeting and I tell the parents at the beginning of the year when the meeting will take place. Of course, we are flexible when conflicts arise but with such advanced notice, that rarely happened. I send invitations the first week of school and then a reminder and parent input forms closer to the approaching meeting."

P1, P2, and P4 remarked on the need for flexibility and making the meeting convenient for parents to participate. P2 learned about the parent right to request another meeting date after her child's transition from early childhood program to school-age. When P2 contacted her child's school to request rescheduling due to conflicting prior commitments, the school secretary said, "Oh, don't worry about it, you can just come in and sign all the documents." P2 remarked, "The sad thing is, there probably are a lot of parents who don't know they absolutely can reschedule." Participant responses indicate that meetings are commonly offered during the school day with no additional information given to parents explicitly informing them about the possibility of meeting outside the school day, such as early morning or evening.

Information provided to parents. Ohio's guidelines state that parents must be informed of meeting purpose, time and place, who has been invited, and that the parent

may bring someone of their choosing who has “knowledge or special expertise of the child (Ohio Department of Education, 2009)” to the meeting. Participant responses indicate that a formal invitation, which includes the required information, is sent home to parents prior to an IEP meeting taking place. All parent participants reported an awareness that they were permitted to invite a person of their choice to the IEP meeting. P1 used the word “team” to describe how he sees the IEP development process. “We’ve brought in family, providers . . . people from different perspectives.” P1 stated that it is important to support the teacher.” P2 said that she knew by reading the form that she could bring in anyone of her choosing, and she did. It is not unusual for P2 to invite her child’s service coordinator from the Board of Development Disabilities and others who are involved in her child’s life. For P2, continuity between school and home is very important. In addition, P2 has invited specialists when the team seemed to need help with a particular problem her son was having. “Everybody talked about the behavior but no one seemed to know what to do . . . so we brought in the autism special team.” P3 stated that, “for years I didn’t bring in anybody from the outside . . . but I felt like this year I needed additional reinforcements to hear what I was hearing how he was being treated.” P4 has never felt a need to involve anyone other than herself, “I did all of it, I didn’t need anyone to come in and sit with me.” Only when P3 felt a need for “reinforcement” did she bring in someone from the community to attend the IEP meeting. .” T3 elaborated about the benefit of more than one family member of the child attending meetings. “It’s nice when both parents can make it [to meetings]; seeing another family member and listening to their viewpoint.”

Parent participation. Ohio's guidelines state that when parents cannot attend and IEP meeting in person, districts must have alternative ways for parents to participate. P2, P3, and P4 listed the following types of communication used: notebook, phone, texting, communication binder, e-mail, classroom apps, and video clips. P3 prefers texts for their immediacy and video clips because watching them, she learns a lot about her child's functioning at school. Regarding texting, "Rather than waiting for me to check my e-mail when I get home after 6 o'clock, I can take care of it right then." P1 and P2 stated that they communicate mainly with their child's teacher. P1 shared that it was important to him that "we wanted to make sure the school knew we were present and very involved in his success." All four of the parent participants indicated that they had positive experiences with school communication, which most of the time was with their child's teacher. P4 stated, "I tried to be available to school. With me working, the phone made it a whole lot easier to communicate."

Four of the 5 teacher participants indicated that parent attendance of meetings is high and that the parents who do not attend in person do so by phone. T5 stated, "Since we teach in a pretty good district, we have most parents attend meetings. In some cases, like when I've had a student for years and the IEP doesn't change a lot, we opt to discuss progress and goals via telephone. However it takes place, I try to have parent involvement." T1 reported the opposite, stating, "It's hard to get the parents involved. I would say 75% of them don't attend . . . and if they do they don't know what's going on and they don't really care."

When teacher participants were asked to share about their experiences gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held, 4 of the 5 teacher participants indicated that they had no problem gaining parent participation in the last meeting they held. T1 reflected, “The parent did come to the last meeting I held. It was a parent that had a lot of input about her student’s IEP. And so she was there early, she wanted suggestions, she wanted our feedback but we wanted her input put in so that was really good.” T2 shared about the last meeting held:

When I sent the reminder home I put the wrong time on it. And so the day of the meeting I felt really bad. We kind of went over it with the student and then when the mom showed up I went over the IEP with her. Once again, I sent the questionnaire out about a month ahead of time and they responded with the info and said that they would be attending the meeting. I sent a note home and I did talk to them on the phone. I also sent a reminder. Some parents I don’t give my text number to. And that’s one of the ones. I just call the ahead of time and then I send them a note reminder.

T4 recalled that her last IEP meeting was at the home of a student who was being raised by his grandmother and who was on home instruction. To accommodate the guardian’s needs, the meeting was held at the student’s home:

All the communication goes through the grandma and she’s very up to date on things that she wants done with her grandson, from different types of switches to bringing some things from my classroom to home for the

home instructor. She definitely researches and knows what's out there and available to him. A lot of parents where I teach now understand and know what they want from their children. They're pretty involved.

T5 stated, "I would say the parent input forms only come back 50 percent of the time. Usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where I connect with families and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom."

When asked about their experiences with participation when not attending the IEP meeting in person, parents P1, P2, and P3 reported that they attended every IEP meeting in person. P4 stated that she always attended the IEP meetings, almost always by phone due to her work schedule. P4 stated that meetings are informative and that she appreciates when teachers offer to do IEP meetings by phone.

Ohio's guidelines allow for an IEP meeting to be held without parent participation, but a record of attempts to contact the parents must be kept. When teachers were asked to share about any experiences when the meeting was held without parent attendance, T1 and T3 indicated having had meetings or creating an IEP devoid of any parent participation in creating the document. T1 shared, "I've had several meetings without parent attendance, and normally we [teachers and therapists] might go over the document, sometimes it's just kind of glossed over, and we [teachers and therapists] sign it and we move on." T3 stated, "We did go over the IEP with the student. Usually if its, it depends on the student and what their level is, but usually we're able to discuss and they understand. Then we send the IEP home for the parent to sign." T2 recalled, "All the

therapists and the psychologist attended the meeting. We went ahead and had the meeting with the student and went over everything on the IEP. And the parents gave us the OK to do that because it was hard for them to make it in. And we sent the IEP home and let them know if they had any questions they could get back with us.” T4 and T5 both reported that a parent not attending is rare, but when it happens they are able to elicit their participation some other way, such as notes home. T5 stated, “If we know the parents are not coming. We correspond outside of a meeting setting and sign off on the IEP when appropriate.”

Ensuring parent understanding. Ohio’s guidelines state that the school district must “take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings, including providing the parents a copy of the IEP and arranging for an interpreter (Ohio Department of Education, 2009).”

When parents were asked about their experiences with professional jargon either on the IEP forms or in reference to special education services in general and technology present in meetings, P1 and P2 shared that at times they did not understand what was being said. P1 stated, “I still struggle with some of the jargon, but if you have a good teacher you can ask about things and get an explanation.” P3 and P4 stated that understanding particular terms was not a problem for them. Regarding use of technology in meetings, P3 shared that the IEP was displayed on a large screen and that it was helpful, but cautioned, “Do not go through the IEP too quickly.” P1 stated that at the last meeting one of the staff used a tablet but it did not affect the meeting either way for the parent. P3 also remarked that when a computer has been used in meetings, usually

someone other than the teacher did the actual typing and therefore it was not a distraction. P3 stated, “Actually, it made things more efficient than actually cutting and pasting to make changes.” P1, P2, P3, and P4 made statements about teacher explanations being helpful to the parent. Educating parents about how goals are created and how they will be addressed, the process and terms, and how the school staff members work together are topics parents suggested.

T1 was the sole teacher participant reporting any experiences at their current school involving a language need other than English:

This year I’ve had some parents who don’t quite understand the IEP and the verbiage that we use and at one point we had a parent get an advocate to help them understand. I try to go through and explain everything, and ask, do you understand, does it make sense to you, but I know a lot of people will say yes even when it doesn’t. I had parents a couple years ago who didn’t speak any English so we had a translator come to the meeting.

T4 shared that at a prior position in another school, language was a common barrier. Both T1 and T4 indicated that despite the language barrier, no documents were given to parents in their native language. All 5 teacher participants reported using rewording and providing definitions for terms and acronyms to help parents understand.

T1 stated:

Sometimes, I think if the parent is assertive, they’ll ask. But if they feel like we know more than them, or that we’re the expert, they’re hesitant to say they don’t understand. They normally just agree with everything. I try

to ask them more questions. Instead of just sit back, but most the time they just go along with what we say.

T2 explained, “We try to write out what different acronyms mean and spell out what different names are so they’re not confused. When you sign up for services, some places have multiple names, and when they get something in the mail they may not know what it is, so we try to walk them through the procedure of different agencies.” T3 shared, “I keep the language simple, straightforward. Some parents do ask questions if they don’t understand, but some you can kind of tell they might be confused about something or whatever and I’ll try to reiterate or say, ‘If you have any questions, feel free to ask questions.’” T4 described:

At the district I’m at now, sometimes the parents know more than we know, they’re very informed. One time when I was in the elementary level we had prevocational on an IEP and it offended some parents. Right out of the gate when we read the goal they were offended until we explained what it was. I think we have a good relationship with our parents and they know they can ask anything in the meeting and we’ll provide answers the best we can.

T5 stated, “I am very casual in my meetings. I am sure that a draft has gone home at least a week prior to the meeting. We do not read the document word for word because the parents had that opportunity prior to the meeting. Instead, I use that time to answer any questions.” About parent participation in general, T4 volunteered that after IEP

meetings she demonstrated technology and interventions used in the classroom for interested parents.

Interaction–Related Experiences

Communication. Parent and teacher responses indicated that decisions made about communication may either serve to build or weaken school–parent relationships. P4 made the comment that meeting size did make a difference. “I felt intimidated if it was a big round table with more than just the teacher and maybe one therapist there.” P2 suggested, “Take the time to have a conversation to make sure everybody’s on the same page.” P4 shared that she felt “overwhelmed” and “intimidated” in IEP meetings including more than one or two school staff members. P4 remarked that the school has always “made the process easy” for them to be a part. P1 used terms like connect, support. P2 used terms like the teacher is invested, takes the time, creative, and community to describe her positive experiences with communication. P4 stated, “I tried to be available to school. With me working, the phone made it a whole lot easier to communicate.” P3 shared, “One thing I really like is that the teacher sends me video clips.” From the videos, P3 sees how her child is functioning at school and how the staff interacts with them. “Video clips are very helpful. Being able to see [for myself] was fantastic!”

T5 elaborated about teacher efforts to engage parents throughout the IEP development process. “I try to involve parents constantly in their child’s education. This doesn’t just happen at IEP time. I make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous.” T5 elaborated about teacher efforts to engage parents

throughout the IEP development process. “I try to involve parents constantly in their child’s education. This doesn’t just happen at IEP time. I make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous.” P1 shared a sense of overwhelm as a parent, “We’re quick to say, ‘You handle it, you’re the expert’ when we are really the experts . . . on our child.” T5 stated that usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where I connect with families and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom.”

Roles. Participant responses indicated that roles need to be defined and expectations made explicit. P1 suggested that schools educate parents about expectations and roles in the IEP development process. T4 indicated that a few parents make an effort to carry over technology and/or interventions at home, but “usually it kind of gets lost at home. There’s not much follow through.” The transition from early childhood program to school-age was mentioned by P2 and P3, both indicated that there should be some communication from school about what to expect. P3 stated, “Early Childhood was family-centered and I was very involved in decision-making. Once my child was in kindergarten, all of a sudden I am being *told* everything instead of asked to help make decisions for my child.” P4 shared that she has always felt that her opinion was valued. “They wanted to know my opinion on what goals I wanted [my child] to reach.” P4 felt that she was guided through the IEP development process and appreciated when “they offered suggestions, too.” T3 offered advice regarding the teacher’s role in helping students with transitions. “Also, we stress the importance of getting them transitioned from school to adulthood properly, like making sure day hab[ilitation] has been planned

and not wait for the last minute. You might have a waiting list, there's several out there, you want to find the one that fits."

Trust. Participant responses pointed to the centrality of trust to the parent–school interaction. Comments suggested that using nonjudgmental language and conveying a sense of genuine concern are elements needed to foster trust. P2 asserted that many parents “just go along” and that they “worry about being judged.” P2 remarked, “The parent–teacher relationship is critical. We’ve not had it a couple times . . . and you start feeling you have to go to your child’s school every day to make sure they are being educated.” P2 asserted that the process is better when everybody is engaged and invested in the process, stating that their participation was influenced by “teachers that just invested in and took the time to get to know [my child]. We’ve had good relationships with the teachers we’ve had the longest.” I think it’s about being nonjudgmental I’ve heard teachers and people who make judgments about kids because they way that their lunch comes in or they’re not clean, but even though you want to make judgments, take the time to find out about their story and think, “What can I do to help?” P3 related a mixed experience with participation. “I’ve felt at times like I’ve been very involved and listened to and also in others where I had to . . . fight more than I think I should have to make sure [my child’s] educational needs are being met.” At times P3 felt that the teacher and classroom assistants liked and enjoy P3’s son, but was shocked and discouraged when others seemed to have a negative stance.

In addition to using nonjudgmental language and genuine concern, understanding procedures and interventions may support trust between parents and teachers. P2 and P4

talked about the procedural aspects of the IEP development process, such as receiving a parent input form and IEP draft prior to the meeting. P2 added that she felt there was good communication with teachers such that by meeting time everything had already been discussed. P3 stated that she was very involved in the process when her son was in preschool and that it was very family-centered, but that changed when he began school-aged program. “When he got to kindergarten, was my first experience with feeling like I didn’t have as much say . . .” P3 reported having mixed experiences overall with the IEP development process. Teachers may be able to enhance mutual trust by explicitly informing parents about procedures and interventions pertaining to their child’s special education process.

Special considerations. Issues related to cultural and socioeconomic diversity also influence participant experiences of school-parent interaction. Cultural differences, spoken and written language barriers, problems with literacy, and lacking basic resources are other interaction-related considerations that emerged. T1 volunteered, “I think that as special ed teachers we really need to work on helping the parents understand more that we are really here to serve them and not that we’re just trying to get paperwork done and not try to help their child. It’s good to ask questions. It’s not scary, school’s not threatening. T2 stated, “We have kids on all different levels and all different backgrounds. People assume that because their economic status isn’t very high the parents may not be involved, but that’s not always the case. Sometimes I think people are unclear of what’s wanted of them, as far as on the part of the parents, they might not know quite what they are supposed to do, or you have to realize too that you get some

parents that are nonreaders like their kids, they may not know what their meeting date is. You may need to call them as opposed to just sending a note home and you wonder why they don't respond, maybe they can't read it. Be aware of what level people are on and compassionate toward their needs." "Sometimes transportation is an issue, or they don't have a phone, or it may be cut off. We've even picked them up in the school van." T4 shared that in her experience, parents of low income status tend not to be as involved as more affluent parents. T2 delineated between a stereotype and their experience. In other words, T2 sees the apparent under-involvement as a side-effect of other factors rather than a lack of desire to participate. P1 gave advice for parents of color. "Prejudice exists in the system. There will be some people who have a problem with you being in their school building, but be willing to work through it. Do not let yourself be intimidated because those who are willing to push . . . will be the ones who get the available resources." P2 stated, "Take a few minutes and listen, not thorough your culture but find out about their culture. We have to somehow figure out how to connect with each other over common ground. "P1 and P2 highlighted the importance of being linked with practical resources. P1 talked about pairing school staff with community workers, such as service coordinators. P2 stated, "You're not going to get a parent involved . . . if they're struggling to get food . . . or keep from getting evicted." Helping parents navigate services was also mentioned by P1. "Our child's teacher has really been driving the transition process by working with the support coordinator. Otherwise, the whole process would be overwhelming." P2 suggested that providing documents in simpler language would give parents the sense that school is making an effort to be a partner.

Addressing the Research Questions

This phenomenological study addressed one central question and two sub-questions. The questions are as follows:

Central Question. What statements describe how parents and teachers experience parent involvement in the IEP development process? The central research question is answered by answering the subquestions. To comment about parent and teacher experiences in general, it is notable that teachers approach the IEP development process from the requirements set forth by state guidelines, comprising the setting-related experiences described in subquestion 2. Parents approach the IEP development process mainly from Interaction-related concerns, which refers to the context of the relationship and exchange between parents and teachers in schools.

Subquestion 1. What statements describe how parents experience parent involvement in the IEP development process? Although acknowledging compliance to state guidelines based on teacher actions through descriptions of setting-related experiences, the bulk of parent commentary was about interaction-related experiences. Interaction-related experiences are comprised of communication, roles, trust, and special considerations. Regarding Interaction-Related Experiences, communication (pacing, feelings during), parents talked about the pacing of communication and their feelings during communication. One parent cautioned that teachers pace meetings at a rate that allows parents to follow along. This comment could indicate that perhaps that parent has had experiences in which they struggled to keep up. Another expressed a desire for teachers not to rush meetings because for families those meetings are seen as the time set

aside once a year specifically to talk about their child's strengths, needs, and educational goals. This comment could indicate that perhaps this parent has felt rushed during her child's IEP meeting.

Another important aspect of interaction in the IEP development process involves the roles of participants, what the parent can expect from the school, and what will be expected from the parent. One parent commented that they think the roles and expectations need to be explicitly defined and communicated to the parent. Issues around trust emerged through suggestions that teachers use nonjudgmental language when speaking about children, the parents, or their situation. Another part of trust of concern to parents is that they understand procedures and interventions. Parents expressed a desire to be educated about the procedures relevant in the IEP development process and interventions proposed or already used with their child. The last trust issue centered on a sense of genuine concern for child. Parents want to sense that teachers, and the other professionals who work with their child, value, like, and are concerned about their child. When any of these elements of trust are missing, the overall relationship between parents and the school is lacking.

Subquestion 2. What statements describe how teachers experience parent involvement in the IEP development process? Although some teacher statements referred to interaction-related experiences, the bulk of teacher descriptions centered on actions connected with fulfillment of state guidelines, which create the setting in which the entire IEP development takes place. Setting-related experiences are comprised of meetings, information provided to parents, parent participation, and ensuring parent understanding.

Regarding setting–related experiences, meetings (notification of parents, scheduling, record of attempts Teachers report providing information to parents, such as scheduling and notifications, following guidelines about documents, notifications, and facilitating parent participation), information provided to parents (meeting details, bringing others to meetings), parent participation (alternative ways to participate, meeting without parent attendance). The collected data indicated that most teacher–participants experience active parent involvement throughout the IEP development process. One teacher participant reported a lack of active parent participation despite multi–modal efforts to communicate with parents. One teacher remarked about the lack of interest in the IEP development process shown by regular education teachers. All teachers endorsed taking measures to ensure parent understanding (interpreter, parent copy of child’s IEP).

Descriptions of parent and teacher participants fall under two broad themes: setting–related experiences and interaction–related experiences. Setting–related experiences, which are connected to the procedures required by the state guidelines, are comprised of meetings, information provided to parents, parent participation, and ensuring parent understanding. Interaction–related experiences, which refer to the context of the relationship and exchange between parents and teachers in schools, are comprised of communication, roles, trust, and special considerations.

- Meetings (notification of parents, scheduling, record of attempts)
- Information provided to parents (meeting details, bringing others to meetings)
- Parent participation (alternative ways to participate, meeting without parent attendance)

- Ensuring parent understanding (interpreter, parent copy of child's IEP)

Interaction–Related Experiences

- Communication (pacing, feelings during)
- Roles (defining, expectations)
- Trust (nonjudgmental language, understanding procedures and interventions, sense of genuine concern for child)
- Special considerations (culture, non–English speakers, literacy, family resources)

Summary

In Chapter 4, I shared information related to the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities about the IEP development process. First, I described how the data were collected and stored. Next, I gave a rich, thick description of parent and teacher responses to the semistructured interview protocols, followed by a description of the analytical process and analysis itself. The analysis of the findings produced the following two thematic units: setting–related experiences and interaction–related experiences. Finally, I discussed how issues related to trustworthiness were addressed. In Chapter 5, ecological systems theory using the models of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Neal and Neal (2013) will be applied to the data analysis, leading to a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This phenomenological study was conducted to explore the perceptions of parents and special educators about their experiences of parental involvement in the IEP development process in public schools to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. This study includes a description of the IEP planning experience from the perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. The interview questions were intended to explore the experiences and connections between parents and the school within the IEP development process.

Data analysis indicated that teachers and parents feel that the auditable aspects of the process are taking place, meaning the content that the state auditors look for when monitoring mandated documents and processes. Parents and teachers focused on relational issues, indicating that the most meaningful aspect of the process for them is the relationship between the parent and the school. While Chapter 4 presented the results of those interviews, the findings are discussed in this chapter. Moreover, Chapter 5 addresses the limitations of this research as well as recommendations for future research and implications for the IEP development process.

Interpretation of the Findings

Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Neal and Neal's (2013) theories ecological systems coupled with the context of the Ohio guidelines informed my conclusion that a focus on relationship building between parents and schools could strengthen efforts to improve outcomes for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Through conducting this

study, I intended to learn how parents and teachers of student with significant intellectual disabilities describe their experiences in the IEP development process.

In this study, two main themes emerged from the data: setting–related experiences and interaction–related experiences. Setting–related experiences refer to the aspects of experiences that are affected by factors in the environment in which the IEP development process takes place. Interaction–related experiences are those experiences characterized by the qualities of interpersonal interactions between parents and teachers over time.

Setting–Related Experiences

My data suggest that using strategies like communicating meeting dates and times at the beginning of the school year, sending questionnaires home ahead of time, and eliciting parent input throughout the school year contribute to positive feelings on the part of the parent and greater consensus during in–person meetings. Unlike the results reflected in current literature, no parent participants in this study reported a lack of time to read over documents before meeting (Sullivan, 2015). As to the option to bring others to the IEP meeting, my data show that parents are aware of that right and tend to use it only when feel a need for “reinforcements.” Less commonly, parents include specific persons to supplement what school staff and they themselves can contribute.

As to the requirement that the district must make multiple attempts to contact parents to arrange a mutually agreed upon meeting time and place before holding an IEP meeting without parents present, consistent with Williams–Diehm et al. (2014), my data indicated that these things are being done, but issues with scheduling and transportation could be better addressed by districts. Consistent with the literature (Robinette, 2014), I

found that scheduling can be difficult and that parents are not informed that they can request a meeting time outside of school hours. No teachers stated that they share this with parents. Also consistent is data showed that transportation is one of the practical barriers to parent participation (Robinette, 2014). In such situations, access to supportive services could reduce parent nonparticipation (Stanley, 2015). According to my data, creative solutions, such as holding meeting in the student's home and offering alternatives for parents who lack reliable or available transportation were indicated. Another way to increase parent participation in the process is to have students in the same classroom for multiple years as opposed to changing teachers each school year (Williams–Diehm et al., 2014). Almost all teacher participants in this study have students for multiple years and reported high levels of parent engagement. One parent shared that her family has had good relationships with the teachers they have had the longest. Data suggest that offering multiple ways to participate, such as in–person, by written note, or by phone, offer the best chances for garnering parent participation in the IEP development process. In the less common situation in which parents can or will not participate, all teachers reported reaching out to parents using multiple modes of communication.

Interaction–Related Experiences

Communication. For many parents, the level of parent participation is influenced most by a parent perceiving that their child's teacher cares about the child and is open to communication (Stanley, 2015). Although Tucker and Schwartz (2013) found that common barriers to collaboration included a lack of opportunities to provide input,

communication difficulties with school teams, and negative perceptions of school professionals, none of the parent participants in this study reported these problems. In the case of difficulties with communication and disagreements about school placements, programs, and services, my data indicated that essential elements of relating, such as trust and mutual understanding, were issues when communication between parent and school was less than ideal in the eyes of the parent. Consistent with the teachers in a study by Lee (2016), my data indicated that successful collaboration depends on constant and clear communication. Many methods can be used to support parent–school communication, including technology–based platforms (Ho et al., 2013; Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013). Participants in this study mentioned that phone and texting programs like Remind and video clips were especially helpful. Contrary to the reviewed literature, no participant parents in this study reported a sense that school staff is not knowledgeable about specific disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder.

Although parent participants in this study did not support the sense that school staff holds them in a position of unequal status with professionals (Sullivan, 2015), data suggest that an awareness of parent feelings during interaction and the pace of those interactions could strengthen the parent–teacher relationship. Parent participants in this study cautioned that teachers should pace meetings at a rate that allows parents processing time, especially because families see the IEP meeting as the time set aside once a year to talk about their child’s strengths, needs, and educational goals. Although the literature suggests that a sense of inequality is gathered from experiences like school staff dictating the flow of the meeting, timing or place of meetings, or by being

“gatekeepers” to services for the student, none of the parent participants in this study reported feeling demeaned as a result. Although parents in this study described a meeting progression that followed the IEP form, they did not report a mechanical feel to meetings (Price, 2014; Zeitlin & Cursic, 2014) due to the presence of a computer in meetings. Parents in this study indicated that the presence of technological devices, such as computers and iPads, in meetings did not interfere with the process in any way.

My data suggested that schools need to listen to the parent voice and recognize that they may not understand the jargon used by educators. Although my data did not corroborate that of Elbaum et al. (2016) as to African American parents not feeling respected, the data supported fathers’ feeling overwhelmed by the IEP development process (Mueller & Buckley, 2014). My data also revealed that to some parents, meeting sizes over two attending staff persons can contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and intimidated. Unlike the findings of Sullivan (2015) that parents reported a lack of listening or responding to parent input on the part of the IEP team, my data indicate that overall parents felt that their opinions were valued, and they were appreciated for their input.

Roles. Another important aspect of interaction in the IEP development process involves the roles of participants, meaning what the parent can expect from the school and what will be expected from the parent. My data support the findings of Lee (2016) that telling parents how they can be involved encourages parent participation and builds relationships with parents. Participants in this study suggested that schools educate parents about expectations and roles in the IEP development process, including how to

carry over technology and/or interventions at home and how transition will change the role of the parent in decisions about their child's education. For example, early childhood programs were reported to be family centered by involving parents in decision-making, but that without explanation during the move to school-age programming, the parent was treated as if they had no power in the decisions made about their child's education. Another important role shift happens during the transition from high school to adult programming, according to my data. Teacher participants mentioned that parents usually need to be guided through the process explicitly, such as by teachers explaining available programs and prompting parents about paperwork and deadlines for enrollment or run the risk of no linkage being secured.

Consistent with the literature, my data indicated that there are no universal definitions or expectations on the part of parents and teachers regarding the IEP development process. Ideas about what constitutes parent involvement may differ among parents and teachers, yet neither may even be aware of this difference. For example, if the parent is from another culture or socioeconomic background, they might not know what they are supposed to do due to literacy issues or cross-cultural understanding. Sometimes, expectations on the part of the school change, but the change is not explained to parents before the actual transition begins. At times, teachers perceive that parents may have unrealistic expectations about possible future outcomes for their child. In addition, literature indicates that regular education teachers sometimes have negative expectations regarding having children with special needs in their classrooms (Williams-Diehm et al., 2014). In fact, definitions and expectations may not be discussed directly during any

parent–teacher interactions. To facilitate parent participation, all teachers need to use a multicultural approach (Lee, 2016) and explicitly define how the school defines participation, roles, and expectations. For example, more than one parent shared about instances when they felt school staff made assumptions based on parent race, which then influenced the manner of school responses to parents of color. The lack of alignment of definitions and expectations and a lack of explicit communication to address these matters weakens interaction and limits the school–parent partnership overall.

Although some parents do not participate because of their own past negative experiences with school (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), no parents reported this situation about themselves in this study. All but one of the participant teachers reported full parent participation in the process currently, but all teachers reported having experience with this situation and indicated that when parents did not participate fully, this was likely due to negative past experiences. Although parents in this study did not report that shared decision–making was limited, as found by Price (2014), data pointed to a belief on the part of participants that some parents “just go along” and that they “worry about being judged.” My data mirrored Sullivan’s (2005) finding that parents made suggestions that teachers use nonjudgmental language when speaking about children, the parents, or their situation.

Home life is commonly seen as a significant influence on students (Lee, 2016) and as a result, teachers and parents may make the erroneous judgment that a lack of participation or student success are due to parent shortcomings. For example, one teacher participant generalized that parents of low income status tend not to be as involved as

more affluent parents due to less interest, while another teacher shared the insight that the apparent under-involvement was not due to a lack of interest but was simply a side-effect of the lack of resources, such as transportation. Such judgments may seem subtle but can lead to language that may damage that important linkage between parents and teachers. Sullivan (2015) and Stanley (2015) found that parent participation is supported when parents sense that teachers, and the other professionals who work with their child, value, like, and are concerned about their child. When parents feel they can trust the teacher, the parent-school linkage is strengthened.

Another important way to build a trusting relationship between school and parents is to make sure parents understand procedures and interventions, such as how goals are developed or home interventions they may choose to implement to help their child. Districts should consider providing help sheets that include such information as common terms used/acronyms in special education, the progression of the IEP process itself, how to access community resources, and expectations for both parents and schools. My data revealed a belief that only a few parents make an effort to carry over technology and/or interventions at home, but even then, “usually, it kind of gets lost at home. There’s not much follow through.” Conversely, like Sullivan (2015), my data show that parents expressed a desire to be educated about the procedures relevant in the IEP development process and interventions proposed or already used with their child. Other researchers have confirmed that, contrary to typical school lore, parents would participate in interventions at home (Stadnick, Drahohta, & Brookman-Fraze, 2013; Tucker &

Schwartz, 2013). Such measures hold practical value but also help build a sense of trust and communicate genuine concern for the child.

Limitations of the Study

There are four notable limitations to the study. First, the sample size was small. The research was limited to four parents and five teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. While the small sample size allowed the researcher greater depth in interviewing and analysis of the transcripts, its size potentially limits the breadth of the findings of the study. Second, the participants were self-selected, which presents the chance of bias, however, in qualitative research the goal is acquiring a sample that is made up of people who have experienced the phenomena and who can provide rich, thick description of those experiences (Morse, 1991). There is a possibility that the participant group consists of people who are more likely to be exceptionally participatory in the phenomenon of study as compared with other potential participants who did not respond to the flyer. Whether the difference would have been noteworthy in terms of qualitative purposes is unknown. Third, the interviews occurred at only one point in the school year and one suburban school district in Ohio. Because the data provided a snapshot of participant responses at one point in time, there is a possibility that multiple data points would have influenced the overall picture painted by the data. Despite these limitations, the study provided data to compare against results reported in current literature. Nonetheless, these limitations will affect the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

Recommendations

My recommendations were drawn first from the limitations of the design and, second, from the findings. The limitations of my design, particularly the small sample size and self-selected status of the participants, invite consideration of future research using larger sample sizes and a different method of participant selection, particularly if adding breadth to the pool of data is desired. A study design using multiple data points could also broaden the data relative to any changes in perceptions over time. Because of the dearth of research specific to special education services for students with significant intellectual disabilities, future research that is restricted to this segment of the population of students receiving special education services is recommended.

My findings were developed using the theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Neal and Neal (2013) as the theoretical lens through which the data were viewed. I concluded that future action should focus on the interactional aspects of parent participation in the IEP development process. Future research may be helpful for possible development of theory-based programming and protocols for parent education about: first, IEP development processes, specific disabilities and learning and development, and community resources; second, how to facilitate their child's learning in the home, such as carry-over of interventions used at school; and, third, how to facilitate parent collaboration for intervention-planning with the rest of the IEP team. As parents become more confident in their ability to contribute to the planning and schools create a culture of partnering with parents, the result could be strengthened parent-teacher relationships. The development of such educational programming and protocols using a combination of

an evaluative model of engagement along with ecological systems theory as the foundation for strengthening the relationships between parents and schools is recommended.

Implications

Because the diverse nature of the U.S. population is projected to continue to increase, it is imperative that districts need to move toward a culture of multiculturalism that includes excellent customer service. Part of the customer service effort must be explicit discussion about expectations on the part of our schools and on the part of parents. The nature of the school–parent partnership must be spelled out for all participants in the IEP development process. It follows that strengthening relationships between every level of the school community and stakeholders, most of all children and families, can only lead to better outcomes for our students with significant intellectual disabilities. The implication here is that school staff has to adopt the idea that providing customer service as part of their core job. To facilitate change, the following are recommended:

- Create and implement professional development for current regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and other school professionals about relationship building (customer service), parent rights, and diverse cultures.
- Create and implement a course to teach administrators how to foster a culture of “service with a smile” for diverse populations in their districts, schools, and classrooms.

- To better understand the cultures of the people who make up the local community, teachers would benefit from creating intentional relationships with persons from minority communities.
- Preservice teacher coursework focusing on partnering with parents that includes serving stakeholders from diverse backgrounds for strengthening mutual understanding and partnering relationships.
- Parent education to teach parents about:
 - partnering with the school, including how to actively participate as part of the IEP team and options such as scheduling meetings outside of school hours;
 - the processes involved in IEP development;
 - available community resources;
 - different issues related to significant intellectual disabilities and education;
 - possible behavioral interventions to use outside of school;
 - how to facilitate their child's learning in the home;
 - easy environmental modifications respecting their child's needs;
 - tools such as augmentative and alternative communication, adapted equipment, and modified curricula to facilitate independence.
- Districts should consider providing help sheets that include such information as common terms used/acronyms in special education, the progression of the IEP process itself, how to access community resources, and expectations for both parents and schools.

Conclusion

This research set out to explore the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities about parent participation in the IEP development process. Specifically, this study describes the IEP planning experience from the perspectives of parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities. Ultimately, the aim is to improve outcomes for this segment of the student body. Parents and teachers of students with significant intellectual disabilities shared their perspectives on the phenomenon of study. The interview questions were intended to explore the experiences and connections between parents and the school within the IEP development process for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Parents and teachers were asked questions corresponding to state guidelines for the provision of special education services. Although important data about participant experiences from a procedural standpoint were captured, participant responses led to a focus on aspects of the IEP development process pertaining to relationships between parents and the school, most fundamentally but not exclusively the connection with their child's teacher.

My findings suggested that future action should focus on the interactional aspects of parent participation in the IEP development process. Recommendations for future research focused on students with significant intellectual disabilities stemmed from the limitations of the research design and the findings. Future research using different parameters, such as a larger sample size or multiple data points were recommended. Another suggestion for future research was to use a combination of an evaluative model of engagement such as that of Goodall and Montgomery (2014) along with ecological

systems theory as the foundation for developing educational programming and protocols for professional school staff, administration, parents and other stakeholders. Using this model along with the theoretical lenses of Bronfenbrenner and Neal and Neal further illuminates the examination of social networks and thus, can inform efforts at strengthening the relationships within them. Positive social change may be made when parents and teachers come to a place of mutual understanding and begin working together in a unified manner. To this end, I endeavored through this study to offer a contribution by providing administrators and teachers information to support the IEP development process, with the overarching aim of improving student outcomes as contributing members of our communities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Parent Interview:

1. Tell me about your experiences with your child's school in regards to the IEP development process.
2. Tell me about your experiences bringing in someone of your choosing from the community.
3. Tell me about your experiences communicating with the school.
4. Tell me about any experiences not attending the IEP meeting in person.
5. Tell me about any experiences with professional jargon either on the IEP forms or in reference to special education services in general and technology present in meetings.
6. Tell me about your level of input in the process
7. Tell me about anything else you think is important for me to know.

Teacher Interview:

1. Tell me about your experiences with parent attendance of meetings.
2. Tell me about your experiences communicating about planned meetings.
3. Tell me about your experiences gaining parent participation in the last meeting you held.
4. Tell me about any experiences when the meeting was held without parent attendance.
5. Tell me about your experiences with helping parents understand the language used on forms.
6. Tell me about the level of parent input in the process.
7. Tell me about anything else you think is important for me to know.

Appendix B: Participant Responses and Codes

Table B1

P1 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	Did not answer.	
2	"We've brought in family, providers... people from <i>different perspectives</i> ."	team, perspectives, support for teacher
3	"... Whatever he needed at the school, we were gonna make sure <i>his needs were supplied</i> ." "We wanted to make sure the school knew we were present and... very involved in his success."	Main interactions with teacher, some with principal; involvement, parents connect relationship between student and school, supporting teacher, made self available to school
4	re: not attending meeting, "Never happened." "Usually you're so overwhelmed as a parent. 'Man I'm so wiped out, This is hard.' We're quick to say, 'You handle it, you're the expert' when we are really the experts... on our child."	attends every IEP meeting, overwhelmed, educating parent about roles and expectations, flexible scheduling
5	"I still struggle with some of the jargon." "There's no time to do all the explanation, but if you have a good teacher, you can talk to the teacher later and ask about things and get an explanation..." Re: tech Usually no devices in meeting, but at last one someone used their tablet, it was not a problem for me. Most parents just sit and smile, but I ask questions if I don't understand.	struggles with jargon, acronyms, overwhelming, teacher explanations about the process and terms, helpful
6	"Pairing his teacher with his SSA (home service support) has been a real benefit. They got together and scheduled for us to tour some [dayhabs]."	pairing teacher and community worker, linking, helping parents navigate services
7	Advice for school staff: <i>listen, enter into that person's world, do not personalize</i> . "If the parent doesn't feel like you care than you might be fighting the parent, and that's not what your job is." For parents in minority: <i>expect prejudice exists</i> , "There will be some people who have a problem with you being in their school building," but be willing to work through it, do not let yourself be intimidated, those who are willing to push through those blind walls will be the ones who "get all the resources available."	African American experience of the school system, prejudice, intimidate, listen, understand parent frustration, customer service, caring, genuine interest in child

Table B2

P2 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	Teachers send home preplanning doc that asks questions, gives a chance to give input, child's strengths and weaknesses, what we want to work on at home, "There's <i>always been a good attempt to get information from us.</i> " We always get the notices and the IEP usually comes home before the meeting, but the meeting is anticlimactic <i>because we've already talked about everything.</i> "	preplanning doc, parent input form, good attempt to get parent info for IEP, good communication with teachers, draft, by meeting time have already talked plan over
2	"Everybody talked about the behavior but <i>no one seemed to know what to do . . .</i> so we brought in the autism special team. He also has a service coordinator that comes to his meetings. It says on the form you can bring someone of your choosing so we did."	service coordinator, form says can bring in someone, continuity between home and school, try to involve everyone involved in his life
3	Positive behavior, "it made sense to have a <i>notebook</i> or a paper that went back and forth." <i>texting</i> back and forth, teacher's personal number, "it's good to know that your <i>teacher is invested enough to take the time to text.</i> I recommend it [texting] because it gives the parent a glimpse of what their child is doing at school . . . You can really see pictures of your child doing the activity." "Quite frankly, when he has a really <i>good teacher I don't really feel a need.</i> " "We've always made an effort to bring in things the school needs, like the time the middle school boys were eating the teacher out of house and home."	positive experiences with communication, notebook, texting, like when teacher is invested, take the time, teachers as point person, creative, community
4	For a meeting to go over a special evaluation, the teacher sat down with us and <i>explained everything</i> later. For the IEP meetings, <i>we've never not been there.</i> " "I called to reschedule it because they wanted it to be at 8:15 in the morning and I needed it to be at 8:30 in the morning . . . The secretary said, 'Oh no, don't worry about it, this works for the therapists, you can just come in and sign all the documents.' So I thought, well maybe I'm confused. So I said, 'Is this the IEP meeting where we talk about his assessment results and develop the goals?'"	attends every IEP meeting, transition from preschool to kindergarten, many parents don't know can reschedule (and not told this by school), parent rights document, parents worry about being judged, parents just go along, use simpler language on docs so parents know school is making an effort to be a partner, should offer alternative times to meet to accommodate parents who don't have flexible jobs

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
4 (cont.)	<p>'Well, yes.' I said, 'Here's the thing, put this down on his file, circle it in orange, put a pain in the butt parent sticker on it, but there will never be a meeting . . . where both his parents aren't going to be present. So you can either reschedule the meeting or make it for another day.' The <i>sad thing is, there probably are a lot of parents who don't know they absolutely can reschedule.</i>" "When you read through all the stuff on the IEP . . . you just kind of go, 'Ahhh'. It's a lot."</p>	
5	<p>"I think of myself as fairly assertive, but even for me it can be a <i>little intimidating</i> to say, "I don't have the faintest idea what you're talking about." "The <i>relationship between the parent and the teacher is so critical</i>, because 've not had it a couple time and so it's like you start feeling you have to go to your child's school every day to make sure they are being educated." "It's one time a year, <i>take the time to have a conversation</i>; to make sure everybody's <i>on the same page.</i>"</p>	<p>no tech used in meetings, skilled teacher pivotal to the process, like talking about child strengths and next steps, trust, parent-teacher relationship critical, educate parents about how goals are created and addressed, take time to have a conversation</p>
6	<p>"<i>Teachers that just invested in him and took the time to get to know him</i>, although I tell Mrs. Steiner all the time she has the easy Jordan, so I know that the <i>participation definitely has been colored by the relationships</i> because with the two teachers we've had for the longest we've had good relationships." "You're <i>not going to get a parent involved in their kids' education if they're struggling to get food</i> and they're just trying to tie everything together. It's hard to make sure you child is going to school every day if you're trying to <i>keep from getting evicted from your house</i>. If they <i>have no other supports</i> the teacher can get sucked into that kind of stuff too."</p>	<p>get everybody engaged, invested teacher, good relationship with teacher, linkage to services, teacher and community worker working together, teacher driving transition process</p>
7	<p>Advice for school: "Stop and listen to the person . . . it just might change the filter that you're looking at them through. <i>We're dealing with people from other cultures where there's a language barrier, and that's been a struggle. It's like take a few minutes and listen, not through your culture but find out about their culture.</i> For example, several of the cultures the male speaks and the women doesn't get to speak. Because that's their culture. It won't do any good if you go in with an <i>attitude</i>. We have to somehow figure out how to <i>connect with each other over common ground</i> which is we both want to figure out how to get good services for your child. So I think it's about being <i>not judgmental.</i>" "I've heard teachers and people who make judgments about kids because the way that their lunch comes in or they're not clean, or whatever, but even though you want to make those kinds of judgments take the time to find out about their story, try to think, "What can I do to help?"</p>	<p>connecting with parents, cultural understanding, nonjudgmental, listen, connect over common ground, take the time to learn about parents' lives</p>

Table B3

P3 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	<p>“I was <i>very involved</i> in the process when he was in preschool. <i>Um when he got to kindergarten</i>, was my first experience with feeling like <i>um I didn’t have as much say</i> and like I was being pressured to go in a direction that I didn’t feel comfortable with.” “We felt the IEP was just very negative and written to highlight areas he struggled with as opposed to goals and objectives for a way for him to reach his goals in a positive way.” After <i>years of mixed experiences</i>, “we’re back in a <i>good place where our input is valued and the focus is on moving Jalen forward</i> as opposed to using the IEP to point out deficits.”</p>	<p>very involved, transition from early childhood to school-age programs: move from family-centered to school-centered, negative, discouraged, felt need to bring in someone only when felt needed reinforcement, some staff seemed to like and enjoy him, others did not (which was shocking, discouraging), environment, placement</p>
2	<p>“For years I didn’t bring in anybody from the outside into the IEP meeting, but this year I did. I feel that I can express myself well, but I felt like this year I <i>needed additional reinforcements</i> to hear what I was hearing how he was being treated and how his educational needs were being handled.” “I was surprised that after 2 weeks I was getting the impression of, ‘Yah, this kid is not going to work out in our classroom.’ It was <i>shocking and disheartening</i> to me as a parent. Now that he’s in a different placement he’s back to his regular self again and he drags us down the driveway to get to the bus. He jumps up and down when he gets to the top of the bus and he’s happy, he doesn’t sleep all evening when he gets home.”</p>	<p>negative vs positive view of student, important to parent that they feel like staff likes their child, needed reinforcements</p>
3	<p>“There’s been a lot of different forms of communication. This year, the teacher communicates <i>by text</i> and <i>I like that the best</i>. She texts both me and my husband at the same time, which is nice so we stay on the <i>same page</i>. My preference anymore has been texting, because like the teacher he has now <i>sends texts to both my husband</i> and I if there’s something we need to know. At least if I’m busy or he’s busy, at least we both have the same information and can <i>respond</i>, rather than waiting for me to check my e-mail and by the time I get home after 6 o’clock get the kids in the bath before I even get to the backpacks, and it can be something as simple as he needs more pullups I can take <i>care of it right then</i> instead of have to remember to do it later.”</p>	<p>communication binder, texts, e-mail, video clips, apps like Seesaw and Remind; texts and video clips preferred</p>

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
4	None.	attends every meeting
5	“In the beginning I might have asked what IDEA stands for, but other than that the only thing I can think of that I have ever asked about are the minutes of therapy on his IEP. I have been in meetings where they displayed the IEP on a <i>smartboard</i> . <i>I liked it</i> . It was good to make sure everybody was looking at the same thing. It was easy to see if any changes were being made. Generally there was someone else besides the teacher who would type the changes in right there.”	in beginning asked meaning of acronyms otherwise, no problems with jargon; Smartboard, computer, do not go through the IEP too quickly, beneficial to know how the school staff work together (i.e. teacher and therapists)
6	“I’ve felt at times like I’ve <i>been very involved</i> and listened to and also in others where I had to be more of an advocate when the focus was on what wasn’t working for him. <i>I’ve had to fight more</i> than I think I should have had to make sure his educational needs are being met.	mixed experiences (involved and feeling listened to vs feeling need to be an advocate)
7	“One thing I really like that his current teacher does is she sends me <i>video clips</i> . For example, she sent one of him eating. I was able to see how independently he was eating at school, what the utensils looked like, and observe how the staff interact with him. He was doing so well in the clip, I sent for the same utensils from Amazon so he could use the same ones at home. I even showed the video to his grandmother, and she remarked at how gentle the staff was when talking to him. They were encouraging, like saying, “You’ve got this buddy.” So, I would say <i>video clips are really helpful</i> . She could have texted me or whatever but being able to see it was fantastic!”	connecting with parents, video clips

Table B4

P4 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	“It was <i>very informative</i> . They <i>wanted to know my opinion</i> on what goals I wanted [my child] to reach. They <i>offered suggestions</i> too. They <i>helped guide m</i> through it. I always got a rough draft sent home and wanted to know if there were any changes that needed to be made, but usually there were not.”	meetings are informative, teacher made it convenient by doing phone conferences, opinion valued, offered suggestions, guided parent through, rough draft , no changes needed
2	“I believe in the beginning I may have used an advocate. I did all of it, I didn’t <i>need anyone to come in and sit with me</i> . It wasn’t needed.”	not needed
3	“I believe in the beginning we used a <i>notepad</i> to communicate with, um then we kind of got away from that because <i>phone</i> , with me working, made it a whole lot <i>easier to communicate</i> . Any <i>questions I ever had, um, they were great about it.</i> ”	tried to be available to school, notepad, phone
4	“The process has been <i>made easy</i> . Um, there were times that I wasn’t able to be there for his IEP and the teachers would do a <i>phone call</i> for me so that I could be able to be a part of it and yet you know be able to be on my lunch hour at work and not have to travel all the way to school, so it was a whole lot more <i>convenient</i> for me.”	convenient, school made the process easy
5	“I don’t recall any technology present in the meetings. It was just a round table meeting when I would attend. No, I did not [ask questions].I felt like it was pretty much <i>plain and simple</i> for pretty much anyone to understand.”	no tech, understood language
6	“One thing I would make a suggestion on is that when attending meetings maybe the teacher or maybe a therapist could attend and not a whole lot of people at the table, because sometimes as a parent it can be <i>intimidating to see so many people sitting there. It can be kind of overwhelming.</i> ”	overwhelmed by meeting with a lot of staff in attendance
7	No answer.	

Table B5

T1 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	<p>“<i>Most parents do not attend meetings.</i> Um, I think I would say about 75% of parents don’t attend their meetings um and very few parents do and if they do, <i>they don’t know what’s going on and they don’t really care.</i> It’s <i>hard to get the parents involved.</i> Even after all the attempts to contact them they still don’t show up and just sign it and move on.”</p>	<p>hard to engage parents, even after attempts to contact 75% don’t attend IEP meetings, they don’t know what’s going on and don’t care</p>
2	<p>“You have to [make] 3 attempts. Normally <i>I send out the invitation,</i> I do <i>phone calls,</i> I do <i>e-mails</i> and there’s been times when I’ve called parents and they say, ‘Oh, I’m not coming to that.’ I’ve had a couple parents pretend they don’t know what I’m talking about and just hang up. Some parents respond and they have a whole list of things that they want done at the meeting, it just kind of depends. I had a parent who was sending me e-mails every day once I initiated the contact about the meeting. She wanted this and she wanted that. That’s very good but it’s very rare.”</p>	<p>3 attempts to contact using 3 different ways(paper, phone, e-mail), parents avoid contact</p>
3	<p>“The parent did come to the last meeting I held. It was a parent that had <i>a lot of input</i> about her student’s IEP. She wanted all these accommodations put in for her son. And so she was there early, she wanted suggestions, she wanted our feedback but we wanted her input put in so that was really good. I think we were <i>able to come to agreement</i> during that meeting . . . <i>She was willing to listen and we wanted to listen</i> so it was good.”</p>	<p>parent had a lot of input, wanted accommodations, parent wanted suggestions and feedback, parent gave input, we were in agreement, both parent and teacher listened to each other</p>
4	<p>“I’ve had several <i>meetings without parent attendance,</i> and normally we might go over the document, sometimes it’s just kind of glossed over, and we sign it and we move on.”</p>	<p>lots of meetings with no parents; if no parents, IEP quickly glossed over; regular ed teachers just sign off on it and saying “whatever,” educate other teachers and give IEP at a glance, other teachers don’t care or think the students need individualized plans</p>

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
5	<p>“This year I’ve had some <i>parents who don’t quite understand</i> the IEP and the verbiage that we use and at one point we had a parent <i>get an advocate you know to help them understand even more</i>. I try to go through and <i>explain everything, and ask, do you understand</i>, does it make sense to you, but I know a lot of people <i>will say yes even when it doesn’t</i>. One parent was able to say, “I don’t understand everything,” so she was able to get an advocate . . . The advocate was able to explain some of the things that I couldn’t get to with her, so that went well. And then I had parents a couple years ago who <i>didn’t speak any English</i> so we had a <i>translator come to the meeting</i> who helped them understand and put some of the terms that we use into a way they could understand what we were saying instead of nodding and just saying, ‘Yes.’ Sometimes we have to do the extra thing to get them to understand.” “Sometimes, I think if the parent is assertive, they’ll ask. But <i>if they feel like we know more than them, or that we’re the expert, they’re hesitant to say they don’t understand</i>. They normally <i>just agree with everything</i>. I try to ask them more questions. Instead of just sit back, but most the time they just go along with what we say.”</p>	<p>helping parents understand, had parent get an advocate to help her understand, had a translator help non-English speaking parents understand, parents usually just go along, parent input helpful, help parents understand, reach out, make contact about positive things</p>
6	<p>“I send home a <i>parent input form home at the beginning of the year</i>. You know, just tell me about your child, likes and dislikes, all of those kinds of things. A little closer to the meeting I send home a follow up, 2 paragraphs about things that go in section 3 of the IEP . . . and the bottom paragraph talks about any other things they wanted addressed. <i>A lot of the time I don’t get that back</i> . . . input for the IEP, um, it’s helpful even when they fill out the form at the beginning of the year cuz it just helps me to know their child a little bit more, especially when the IEP like the second week of school, <i>they either fill it out and they send it back and then they come, or fill it out and bring it with them, or they don’t do anything at all</i>. A lot of times in the past 2 years I’ve been mailing it instead of sending it home with the kids, but even still I put an envelope in there and a stamp and even then they don’t always mail it back.”</p>	<p>send parent input form home, often do not get them back, parent input helpful</p>
7	<p>“I think that as special ed teachers we really need <i>to work on helping the parents understand more that we are really here to serve them</i> and not that we’re just trying to get paperwork done and not try to help their child. <i>It’s good to ask questions. It’s not scary</i>, school’s not threatening. I think <i>some parents are just fearful of the school environment</i> and I think that there’s not much you can do to help them overcome that fear except keep trying to <i>reach out, keep trying contact them with positive things</i> to say and let them know you’re that you’re <i>here to help</i> other than that, until they overcome that there’s not much you can do.”</p>	<p>helping parents understand, we’re here to serve them, reach out, positive statements</p>

Table B6

T2 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	<i>"I've had really good attendance from parents probably in the 25 years. Um, I generally get I would say 99% of parents attending meetings. Um, you know on occasion you get a parent that can't make it and if they can't make it we just set up another time and sometimes they don't make other times and we do it over the phone like a phone conference."</i>	really good parent attendance, if can't make it offer to reschedule or do by phone
2	<i>"Usually I will call a parent, uh send a note home or text them with different questions, if I know uh what we're going to be talking about for example it might be transition for kids to move on, um I'll send papers home with questions on them and the parent can either call me or write back, whatever's most convenient for them. If they don't fill out the paperwork they generally call me back so I'm aware what's needed for their child. For the most part I have good parents and I can give out my cell number or they can call directly into our classroom. There's definitely not one form over another. Some like to e-mail. Um yah, so there's really not really a preferred form."</i>	phone, text, questionnaire, e-mail, whatever is convenient for parents
3	<i>"Conferences or orientation night. The parents came in and discussed um kind of what they needed for their child or we discussed what some of the work options were going to be. And if they needed to discuss further, we would set up another date to meet. We always send out a one-call from the principal. We send papers home. And the last IEP meeting? Yah, I send a note home with an invitation, they read over everything, they responded to me what they wanted for their child and everything went smoothly."</i>	orientation, parent-teacher conference, one-call, invitation, note home
4	<i>"All the therapists and the psychologist attended the meeting. We went ahead and had the meeting with the student and went over everything on the IEP. And the parents gave us the OK to do that because it was hard for them to make it in. And we sent the IEP home and let them know if they had any questions they could get back with us." 1 out of 10 are by phone</i>	parent attendance: 1/10 by phone 9/10 attend in person, linking
5	<i>"We try to write out what different acronyms mean and spell out what different names are so they're not confused. When you sign up for services, some places have multiple names, and when they get something in the mail they may not know what it is, so we try to walk them through the</i>	parent education about acronyms and procedures of different agencies

procedure of different agencies. I try not to use acronyms. I try to spell things out, and in parentheses when I first write it, I usually write what kind of agency it is and what they're trying to help their kid with so when they refer back to that they can remember BVR is Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, what their service is."

- 6 *"We have good parent input. We send home something at the beginning of the year, "Tell me something about your student" and some of their interests, when's a good time to call them, what time of day, what is the best way to contact them, and then as far as IEP meetings we'll send home a few pages of questions and give them some time to fill it out and send it back, and see what they would like us to try and incorporate into their son or daughter's IEP, what kind of goals they would like us to work on. I think we've had pretty good success with parents being involved. On occasion you get people who don't respond, but for the most part we've had pretty good success. 90% of my parents that I have either fill out the form and returned it, or call me back and let me know in some form of communication. Sometimes the forms are more of a pain for people, so even if I can discuss with them and see what page we're on I would say we have pretty good return success of people returning papers or returning calls."*
- 7 *"We have kids on all different levels and all different backgrounds. People assume that because their economic status isn't very high the parents may not be involved, but that's not always the case. Sometimes I think people are unclear of what's wanted of them, as far as on the part of the parents, they might not know quite what they are supposed to do, or you have to realize too that you get some parents that are nonreaders like their kids, they may not know what their meeting date is. You may need to call them as opposed to just sending a note home and you wonder why they don't respond, maybe they can't read it. Be aware of what level people are on and compassionate toward their needs." "Sometimes transportation is an issue, or they don't have a phone, or it may be cut off. We've even picked them up in the school van."*
- good parent input, send home questionnaire, if don't fill out form they call (realize paper can be a pain for some parents)
- parents with low economic status want to be involved but might not know what's wanted of them, what they are supposed to do, might be nonreaders, might not have reliable transportation or phone access; be aware and compassionate toward parent needs
-

Table B7

T3 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	“95% of the parents show up. Um, I think when I worked with the younger students it was more 100 % because they’re just starting to experience all the stuff and then by the time they get up to high school they’re kind of getting done. Every once in a while I have someone from the high school not show up, but we usually contact them by phone and kind of go over it and send it home for them to sign.	95% parent attendance, if don’t show up just call and go over it then send it home
2	“We have to show that we um tried at least 3 x to contact the parent, and usually I’ll try to do that 3 diff ways. I will send home an invitation and along with a questionnaire to give me info on some things they might want on their child’s IEP Then I usually send a text message reminding of the meeting and then right before the meeting I’ll give them a quick call and just kind of finalize that they’re going to come. Every once in a while I’ve had one not show up [because the] cab didn’t show up or for whatever reason. At the beginning of the year the school psych sets up all the IEP meetings so I like to give them a heads up. A lot of times I’ll let them know a couple months in advance. I make sure I send home the questionnaire about a month before the meeting so I have that information for when I write the draft, and I like to send a draft of the IEP at least 2 weeks before the meeting.”	invitation, questionnaire, text, call, give advance notice of meeting date
3	“When I sent the reminder home I put the wrong time on it. And so the day of the meeting I felt really bad. We kind of went over it with the student and then when the mom showed up I went over the IEP with her. Once again, I sent the questionnaire out about a month ahead of time and they responded with the info and said that they would be attending the meeting. I sent a note home and I did talk to them on the phone. I also sent a reminder. Some parents I don’t give my text number to. And that’s one of the ones. I just call the ahead of time and then I send them a note reminder. This student is graduating and unfortunately the parents are not following through with things that I feel they should follow through with, for example aren’t interested in signing up with BVR, they haven’t followed up with the Board of Disabilities, so he’s basically going to sit at home after he graduates.”	give some parents cell number, student attends meeting too, often no parent follow through with accessing community services for student, depends on family values
4	“We did go over the IEP with the student. Usually if its, it depends on the student and what their level is, but usually we’re able to discuss and they understand. Then we send the IEP home for the parent to sign.”	if not parent attends or if doing by phone, IEP sent home

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
5	<p>“I am pretty straightforward with everything on there, so I’ll just reword things so they understand. I keep the language simple, straightforward. Some parents do ask questions if they don’t understand, but some you can kind of tell they might be confused about something or whatever and I’ll try to reiterate or say, ‘if you have any questions, feel free to ask questions.’</p>	<p>simplify language, explain how things work, invite questions, nice when other come because learn more about student, transition from early childhood to school age program can be hard</p>
6	<p>“We really want to make sure that they are aware, because a lot of the kids that we have are turning 18 or have already turned 18 so we want them to be aware of guardianship. We want them to get signed up at the Board of Disabilities. Sometimes they sign up when they’re younger, but at 16 they have to go through a re-eval and I think some of the parent’s aren’t aware of that, and the parents think they already have services but they don’t, and other parents don’t take advantage of all the things the Board has for them. I don’t know if they’re just not aware or what. I had this one student I was doing extended school year and home instruction with. For whatever reason, Mom just didn’t follow through. I told her, ‘I’ll do whatever, even beyond what I’m paid to do. I’ll go with you, I can help. I can do everything but do it for you.’ So you offer it to them in such cases.”</p>	<p>inform parents about guardianship and available resources in the community, offer to help link</p>
7	<p>It’s nice when both parents can make it [to meetings], actually one of my students, I just met his dad, so that was nice seeing another family member and listening to their viewpoint. It is nice when you have more. At the elementary I had one parent who nitpicked every little thing. It was every comma, period, exclamation point. After a while it just dragged on forever. That is someone who is at the beginning stage and going overboard. I believe he was in an early intervention program and this was their first school age experience.”</p> <p>“Also, we just stress the importance of getting them transitioned from school to adulthood properly, like making sure day hab has been planned and not wait for the last minute. You might have a waiting list, there’s several out there, you want to find the one that fits. You don’t want to just throw them in that. You want to start them going a couple days a week through the school year and increase it throughout the year to make a smooth transition for the kids. Or maybe they want to go a job program at the career center. You know, just things they may not have thought of. They always think, ‘We got time’ It’s like, ‘No, really, you’re running out of time.’ That’s an important thing at this age.”</p>	<p>students and parents need teacher to drive the transition from school to adult programs</p>

Table B8

T4 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	I worked in 2 different school districts. One school district was a lower income district, where <i>parents did not come to meetings</i> that frequently. And then at my higher end school district, <i>all the parents usually attend meetings</i> , unless they've been doing this for the past 20 years. Sometimes you like <i>to do a phone interview</i> and send the IEP home and then have them sign it. These are the parents we've had <i>a close relationship</i> and they understand how the classroom works. In the low income school, <i>parents couldn't get off work, other's I think don't understand what the IEP is, and so for them it's just easier to not show up or say, 'Send it home and I'll sign it.'</i> That way they don't have to answer questions or maybe ask questions themselves. At my school district in New Mexico a lot were Spanish speaking and so there was a <i>language barrier</i> . They had a translator there, whether it was a principal, the main supervisors for the IEP meeting or one of the assistants that spoke Spanish."	low-income school, low parent involvement: barriers to attending are work, not understanding what the IEP is, non-English speaker; affluent school, high parent involvement. if do meeting by phone means have a relationship with parents and they understand what's going on in the classroom
2	" <i>At the beginning of the year</i> , because our high school is so big, I <i>send out a letter</i> with a date letting them know this is the time, this is the date, if they have any problems or can't make it, please let me know and I'll <i>reschedule</i> . I'll have conversations with parents through <i>e-mail, phone or text</i> through the year preparing for the IEP and reminders. And I have actually a Remind app too for my classroom."	e-mail, text, phone, apps, lets parents know can reschedule if needed
3	"The last meeting I held was a meeting for a home instruction student who I don't have in my classroom but I'm the case manager. All the communication goes through the grandma and she's very up to date on things that she wants done with her grandson, from different types of switches to bringing some things from my classroom to home for the home instructor. She definitely researches and knows what's out there and available to him. A lot of parents where I teach now understand and know what they want from their children. They're pretty involved. A lot of parents with nonverbal students with physical disabilities too come in and they're like, 'First of all, she has a nurse 24 hours a day, she's not going to be left alone to have purchase something with money. So please don't teach that to her because it's pointless.' <i>90% [of the parents] are realistic, and then you have that 10% that never get out of the unrealistic expectations</i> and no matter the disability or what anybody says they're still not going to have realistic expectations. All you can do is <i>inform them</i> and if they don't like the goals and things you just try to <i>modify and accommodate as much as you can</i> , and if you don't make progress or master the goal there's really nothing you can do about it if you've done all the modifications."	higher income parents have specific ideas about what they want for their child and communicate them

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
4	<p><i>I haven't had any without parent attendance [here]. I sat through a student teaching with the lower income district where parents did not attend and so the general education teacher, supervisor, and special education teacher would just go over the goals, and then sign off on the IEP that they had so many chances for the parent to come and they'd send usually a copy in the backpack and a lot of times they didn't even get any response from that. At my current school this year, I have not [had any phone meetings]. Last year I had a students who had surgery and I told the mother that I would come to the house to talk to her and go over the IEP. That way I could check up on him too. It was nice. I think that's the nicest IEP meeting I ever had."</i></p>	<p>parents in affluent school always participate in the meetings, we will do home visit if needed (like when had sick student); in low income school it was common for parents not to attend</p>
5	<p>"I know, at least at the district I'm at now, <i>sometimes the parents know more than we know, they're very informed.</i> One time when I was in the elementary level we had <i>prevocational</i> on an IEP and it offended some parents. We had to explain that it's not they're going to wash windows one day, or shred paper, that you have to start with the skill and the skill set and that way it's setting a routine for them and expectations. Right out of the gate when we read the goal they were offended until we explained what it was. I think we have <i>a good relationship with our parents and they know they can ask anything in the meeting</i> and we'll provide answers the best we can . . . and if they ask a question that we don't know about, maybe a transitional thing or a facility, those kinds of things, we'll definitely check into it for them or get the Board of DD, somebody that would know more than I do."</p>	<p>need to educate parents about the jargon we use, have a good relationship with parents and they know they can ask anything</p>
6	<p>"For <i>parent input, definitely like 50/50.</i> In the beginning of the year, you send home papers asking for things that they want us to work on with their children. Some fill it out and will have some realistic goals and others will never fill it out, even if you text or talk to them frequently, they think I know their child and agree with what I put on the IEP. <i>After the IEP I'll go in and show them things, some switches or some things they don't have at home, but that I have in the classroom and show them what we're doing</i> and they'll be like, 'Oh yah, I get that, I trust what you're doing. I like that.' I actually had a student get some different switches for Christmas this year, because after that meeting I invited her into the classroom to <i>show her</i> some different kinds of switches that we use. So they could <i>carry over at home. Usually, it kind of gets lost at home. There's not much follow through.</i>"</p>	<p>½ parent fill out input form, others talk with teacher, believes they trust teacher, show parents how work with child in classroom and educate about tech used</p>
7	<p>"I've worked in in a non-English speaking setting and suburban, well-educated setting and there is a big difference in between IEPs and the understanding of things and the importance of education and follow through with parents. <i>You know, some of the lower income settings, it's not maybe money, job, different things, but they're not as involved.</i>"</p>	<p>low income=low involvement</p>

Table B9

T5 Responses to Interview Questions

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
1	“Since we teach in a pretty good district, we have most parents attend meetings. Occasionally we have a family with poor attendance, but I would say <i>90% attend regularly</i> . At the high school level I could have students up to 8 years. In some cases like this when the IEP doesn't change a lot, we opt to discuss progress and goals <i>via telephone, e-mail, or written correspondence</i> . However it takes place, I <i>try to have parental involvement</i> .”	most parents attend but because have students 8 years some do by phone (but parent still involved)
2	“It has changed through the years. We used to work with families to find a good date, but the last few years, we <i>schedule the meeting</i> and I tell the parents at the beginning of the year when the meeting will take place. This has actually been a much more efficient process. Of course we are <i>flexible</i> when conflicts arise but with such advanced notice that rarely happens. I <i>sent invites the first week of school</i> and then a <i>reminder and parent input forms closer to the approaching meeting</i> .”	flexible when scheduling conflicts arise
3	“I would say the <i>parent input forms</i> only come back <i>50 percent</i> of the time. When they do I share with the team hopefully prior to their goal writing. Usually the greatest input comes from the IEP meeting table. This is where I <i>connect with families</i> and learn valuable personal info about my students and their life outside of the classroom.”	50% fill out input forms
4	“That <i>rarely happens</i> . If we <i>know the parents are not coming</i> . We <i>correspond outside of a meeting setting and sign off on the IEP</i> when appropriate.”	rarely no parent involvement, but if parent not coming, we correspond with them outside of meeting and sign off on the IEP
5	“I am very casual in my meetings. I am sure that a <i>draft has gone home at least a week prior to the meeting</i> . We do not read the document word for word because the parents had that opportunity prior to the meeting. Instead, I use that time to <i>answer any questions about the students schedule or school day as well as answer questions about terms or procedures they are not familiar with</i> . This gives the parents credit where credit is due and makes for <i>much more efficient use of time</i> .”	send draft home before meeting, casual in meetings, use the time to answer parent questions

(table continues)

Question	Round 1 codes	Round 2 codes
6	<p>“I <i>try to involve parents constantly</i> in their child's education. This doesn't just happen at IEP time. I <i>make an effort to see that communication and parent input is constant and continuous</i>. We keep parent communication <i>notebooks</i>, we <i>e-mail</i>, I <i>use the remind app</i>, I <i>do newsletters</i> and I <i>do provide parent input forms at IEP time</i>. I have 8 different options so I try to send a different one each year. This way I am learning new things about familiar students.”</p>	<p>try to involve parents, notebooks, apps, input forms, e-mail, newsletters</p>
7	<p>“I think each educator needs to come to a <i>system</i> they are comfortable with that works for their situation. <i>Consulting</i> co-workers to see how they do it is always beneficial as well. You never know when you will find that trick you wish you had years ago.”</p>	<p>advice for teachers: use system you are comfortable with, consult with co-workers</p>