

Parent Satisfaction with the IEP Process: Parents of Students with Mild Disabilities and
Parents of Students with Severe Disabilities

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Stephanie E. Shaffer, M.Ed.

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Dianne M. Gut, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Special Education

John E. Henning, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair of the Department of Teacher Education

Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the level of parental satisfaction, regarding the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process. The study further examined the satisfaction level of parents of students with severe disabilities compared to parents of students with mild disabilities. Participants in the study were parents of students with IEPs in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. An 11-item survey was completed by all participants. Questions on the survey included the level of satisfaction regarding the identification process, IEP meetings, communication between parents and special education staff, and overall satisfaction with the IEP process. The surveys were separated into two categories for data collection; mild to moderate disabilities and moderate to severe disabilities. It was proposed that parents with students having moderate to severe disabilities would have higher overall levels of satisfaction based on the increased amount of time spent with the student and parent, and lower teacher to student ratio. While this hypothesis was reinforced by the data, there was a fair amount of satisfaction from parents of students with mild to moderate disabilities. The primary area for dissatisfaction across both groups was the level of involvement parents felt they had during IEP meetings.

Parental participation in a child's education has been a popular topic in the education world for several years. The topic of parental participation within the field of special education takes on even greater importance. Before the 1980s, many parents and guardians relied on the support and training of the school professionals to make decisions regarding their student's education; however, recent movements have relegated parents to an equal partner in creating and designing an education plan for their child. An increasing amount of research in the past twenty years suggests that parental involvement leads to a positive learning experience and greater success in school (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Research also demonstrates that parents who actively participate in their child's education have higher levels of satisfaction regarding the IEP process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (1975) along with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA ,1990; 1997) spelled out that parents should have an active role in every aspect of the educational programming for students who are receiving special education services. IDEA was created in order for educators and parents to share responsibility in the planning of the child's education (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000).

Defining IDEA and IEP

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2000) made active parent participation a federally mandated requirement. It was designed so that schools and families would have equal responsibility in creating an equal educational experience for students receiving special education services. The individualized education program (IEP) is a large piece of Part B of IDEA. The IEP directs, "(a) educational needs, (b) goals and objectives, (c) placement, (d) evaluation criteria, (e) present levels of educational performance, (f) duration of programming modifications for students who receive special education services" (Fish, 2008; Individuals

With Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004). In a sense, a student's IEP is a plan for the services a student will receive. The IEP also signifies parental consent, accountability, and responsibilities of different education personnel. In order for parents and education personnel to share equal responsibility in the educational programming of the student, an IEP meeting must be held. Members of an IEP meeting team include parents of the student with a disability, the student with the disability (if the student is at least 14 years old), at least one general education teacher, special education teacher, local educational agency representative, a campus administrator, and any other individuals who are familiar with the student and his or her needs, such as related services personnel (IDEIA, 2004). It is the responsibility of the IEP team to collaborate in order to create a plan for the student's education, based on the needs of the student and the most effective way of delivering all services to that child.

While there is a minimum of collaboration required between the educator and the parents, more often than not, additional quality collaboration is needed in order to create the most effective IEP for the student. It is the school district personnel's responsibility to ensure that parents are taking an active role in the process and assuring parents are aware of their procedural rights (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). This being said, the average parent often enters the IEP meeting already at a disadvantage. Typically at an IEP meeting, the school staff far outnumbers parents and the special education jargon and constant changing federal mandates are difficult for even educators to understand, let alone parents.

Additionally, parents new to the IEP meeting process may still be dealing with the emotional stress of having a child diagnosed with a disability (O'Donovan, 2007).

When district personnel are arranging IEP meeting dates and times, they must notify the parents of the child with the disability and ensure the meeting date and time is convenient for them as well. According to Fish (2008), “meeting times and places should be convenient for all IEP team members, including parents” (p. 8). It should also be noted that parents and/or guardians of the students must be provided the chance to *agree* on the date and time. Despite all efforts made by the federal government through IDEIA, as well as by school districts; parents continue to feel alienated and feel that educators are controlling most of the decisions regarding their child’s IEP. Parents reported leaving the IEP meeting as more of a recipient of information, rather than an equal partner in making decisions regarding their child’s educational process (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). This problem is even more prevalent in low income and culturally diverse families. Wright’s Law (1997) compares the IEP to a “medical treatment plan” (p. 3).

As a parent or legal guardian of a child with special needs, attending an IEP meeting can present opportunities to be part of the decision making process. While parental involvement has been a topic of discussion in the realm of education for quite some time, the idea of parental satisfaction is also of growing concern (Miles-Bonart, 2002). Research conducted in the mid-1990s regarding parental satisfaction identified a wide range of parental concerns. Parents wanted to be made aware and provided with the materials their child was expected to know and learn. Parents also had a certain expectation level for how the IEP meeting should be run and the outcomes and decisions made during the meeting. Parents also reported being unsure of and displeased with how the IEP process is conducted (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995).

Defining Parent Satisfaction

Parental satisfaction has become an important piece when evaluating special education services for children with special needs. Evaluating parent satisfaction regarding the special education services their child receives is crucial for many reasons. First, measuring parent satisfaction is connected to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA states that parents must be on decision-making teams regarding all special education services for their child (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). If parents are not asked to be involved or are not happy with the services being provided, they have the right to due process. Therefore, if parents are actively involved and satisfied, the chance for conflict and legal due process is greatly reduced (Summers et al., 2005). Second, measuring parent satisfaction is important as family outcomes can be both positive and negative and include stress, depression, or increased empowerment, increased parent self-efficacy, and more involvement and support with the school (King, King, Rosenbaum, & Goffin, 1999; Laws & Millward, 2001).

Over the years, various studies have measured parent satisfaction. Previous studies have asked parents to rate areas such as the amount of services their child receives, the quality of the services, and the quality of the relationships they have with the education professionals (Summers et al., 2005). Although parents attend their child's IEP meeting, they report feeling disconnected from the process itself. For example, a study conducted by Lynch and Stein (1982) surveyed 400 parents regarding their involvement in IEP meetings. Approximately 71% reported 'active' involvement in the meetings, whereas only 14 % gave specific opinions and recommendations for their child's education plan. A similar study was done by Able-Boone, Goodwin, Sandall, Gordon, and Martin (1992) who surveyed 290 parents about their involvement in early intervention services. During this study many parents stated that the

Independent Family Service Plans (IFSP) did not accurately reflect the families' views and priorities. Another survey conducted by McWilliam, Lang, Vandiviere, Angell, and Collins (1995) surveyed 539 parents regarding their satisfaction with the special education services their child was receiving. A large majority of parents claimed they were not given choices regarding services and in some cases the child was receiving services different than those requested by the parents. Families also reported they were not informed when changes were made to the services their child was receiving. Sixty-percent of those surveyed reported the primary problem was a lack of communication between the teacher and the parents. Additionally, a Turnbull and Ruef (1997) study found that many parents were frustrated with poor communication on behalf of the teachers and the teachers' unwillingness to consider new and different ideas and perspectives.

Despite the research and legislative mandates, a large majority of the research conducted in recent years regarding parent satisfaction revealed that parent involvement in and satisfaction with special education services is often minimal (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). Parents report that overall special education experiences have been negative due in large part to the negativity they experienced during the initial IEP process. Even if parents had a good experience with the majority of educators and school personnel, there were still feelings of adverse relationships between them and other educators. Parents reported that initial IEP meetings were 'traumatic, confusing, and complicated' and those exact feelings were what led to feelings of dissatisfaction (Fish, 2008).

Perhaps another reason for the lack of participation and satisfaction among parents in special education is due to a lack of knowledge regarding their child's disability and special education in general. Teachers and school personnel often assume parents come to IEP

meetings with knowledge. In turn, parents are often embarrassed to admit their lack of special education knowledge (Simpson, 1996). If parents are unable to understand the jargon associated with special education, they often perceive themselves as unprepared and inferior to the educators. When this happens, parents often allow educators to make the bulk of the decisions, which leaves parents dissatisfied later on (Rock, 2000). Rather than convincing parents to agree to their recommendations, educators should be using the parents' knowledge. Goodall and Bruder (1986) emphasized that "no one knows a child better than his or her parent" (p. 25).

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the level of parental satisfaction regarding the IEP process for parents of children with mild to-moderate disabilities as compared to the level of satisfaction reported by parents of children with moderate to intensive disabilities. The study was limited to parents of students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. This study involved a total of 65 parents/families of children with a wide range of disabilities. The study was designed to extend existing research regarding parent satisfaction by addressing the differences in satisfaction levels between the two intensity categories: mild-moderate and moderate-intensive. This study also addressed the following questions:

1. Does the intensity of the disability play a role in parent satisfaction?
2. What step(s) of the IEP process is perceived most negatively by parents and how can it be changed?

Method

Participants

The parents of 45 students with IEPs in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, residing in the researcher's school district participated in this survey. The severity level of the disabilities ranged from very mild to intensive disabilities. The children's diagnosed disability also varied across the 13 categories identified by IDEA. Table 1 provides disability category and severity level for the participants. The largest group consisted of students with mild to moderate disabilities, in particular, those diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. All participants in this study remained anonymous.

All parents were recruited with the help of the school district board office and the director of special education in the school district. Letters providing informed consent and surveys were sent home with 191 students with IEPs in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Parents who chose to participate in the study granted consent by completing the survey and returning it to their child's school. Surveys were then forwarded to the researcher. Of the 191 surveys sent to parents, 55 surveys were completed and returned, a participation rate of approximately 29%.

Table 1

Disability and Severity level of Participants' Children

Category of Identified Disability	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
Autism	2	4
Deafness	0	0
Visual Impairment	0	0
Multiple Disabilities (MD)	2	5
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	0	0
Other Health Impaired (OHI)	5	0
Hearing Impairment	0	0
Deaf-Blindness	0	0
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0
Mental Retardation	1	1
Emotional Disturbance (ED)	5	0
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	22	0
Speech-Language Impairment	8	0
Total	45	10

Procedure and Instrumentation

An 11-item forced choice rating scale was sent to all parents of students with IEPs in the district in order to determine their satisfaction levels with the IEP process. After examining existing literature and similar questionnaires used in previous research, an 11-item survey was produced. The survey and consent letters were sent to parents of students with

IEPs in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Participants were asked to circle their responses on a one through five rating scale. Circling a one indicated the parent was very unsatisfied with the IEP process, a two indicated the parent was unsatisfied, a three was neutral or no opinion, a four indicated the parent was satisfied, and a five indicated the parent was very satisfied with the IEP process. Parents were also asked to indicate their child's disability label and the severity of the disability. Once the survey was complete, parents returned it to their child's intervention specialist. The intervention specialists were then asked to forward the surveys back to the researcher. The actual survey questions are listed below:

1. How do you feel about the way in which your student was identified as possibly needing special education services?
2. How do you feel about the testing process?
3. How satisfied are you with the IEP meetings you have attended?
4. How satisfied are you with the services provided by the special education department?
5. How satisfied are you with the communication between the special education staff and yourself?
6. How do you feel about your level of involvement in the IEP process?
7. How do you feel about your child's level of involvement in the IEP process?
8. What is your OVERALL level of satisfaction of the IEP process?

Parents were also invited to share any additional comments related to their concerns and satisfaction levels of the IEP process.

Results

Various results are presented for the entire sample of 55 participants, as well as for the two different groupings of severity levels. Information regarding parental responses for each

question is provided first, separated by disability severity level. Second, the overall level of parent satisfaction is provided. Lastly, a summary of parents' comments regarding their various responses is provided.

Possible Identification

Table 2 provides information regarding parental satisfaction about how their child was identified as possibly needing special education services. As the table shows, 13% of the parents of students with mild to moderate disabilities were very satisfied by the way in which their child was identified. On the other hand, 30% of parents of students with moderate to intensive disabilities were very satisfied. More than half of the 55 parents, in both severity level categories indicated they were satisfied with the way in which their child was identified. Of the five response options, no parents circled a three indicated they were neutral/unknown/not applicable. Thirteen percent of the parents in the mild to moderate category indicated they were unsatisfied, compared to 10% of parents in the moderate to intensive category. Lastly, 11% of parents in the mild to moderate group indicated feeling very unsatisfied with the identification process, whereas, 0% of parents in the moderate to intensive group indicated being very unsatisfied.

Table 2

Participant Satisfaction with Special Education Identification Process

Satisfaction Level	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	5 (11%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	6 (13%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	29 (64%)	6 (60%)
5-very satisfied	6 (13%)	3 (30%)
Total	45	10

Testing Process

Table 3 summarizes parents' responses to the question regarding their level of satisfaction with the special education testing process. Similar to question one, parents of children with moderate to intensive disabilities had higher levels of satisfaction regarding the testing process. Ten percent of parents of children with moderate to intensive needs reported being very satisfied with the testing process, while 70% reported being satisfied. Forty-seven percent of parents with children with mild to moderate disabilities were satisfied and 29% were very satisfied. Six percent of parents of students with mild to moderate disabilities reported they were very unsatisfied with the testing process; while 13% reported being unsatisfied. Parents of children falling in the moderate to intensive category reported 10% being very unsatisfied and 10% unsatisfied.

Table 3

Parental Satisfaction with Testing Process

Satisfaction Level	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	3 (6%)	1 (10%)
2-unsatisfied	6 (13%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	21 (47%)	7 (70%)
5-very satisfied	13(29%)	1 (10%)
Total	45	10

IEP Meetings

The information in Table 4 summarizes parental responses regarding how parents felt about the IEP meetings they attended. Thirteen percent of the parents with students in the mild to moderate category felt very unsatisfied, while 47% felt unsatisfied with IEP meetings. Twenty-seven percent of those parents reported feeling satisfied and 13% reported being very satisfied. On the other hand, 90% of parents with children in the moderate to intensive category reported feeling either satisfied or very satisfied with the IEP meetings they attended. Only 10% indicated they felt unsatisfied with the meetings they attended. The large differences in responses to this question may be due to the close working relationship teachers, students, and parents have when a child is identified as having a moderate to intensive disability.

Table 4

Participant's Satisfaction with IEP Meetings

Satisfaction Level	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	6 (13%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	21 (47%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	12 (27%)	5 (50%)
5-very satisfied	6 (13%)	4 (40%)
Total	45	10

Special Education Services

Table 5 summarizes participants' perceptions regarding their level of satisfaction with the services provided by the special education department. These services could include, but are not limited to, small group testing, scribing, speech therapy, and reading intervention. Data from parents of children with mild to moderate needs reported that 24% were very satisfied with the services being provided to their child, while 42% were satisfied. There were no parents in either category that reported being neutral/unknown/not applicable. Twenty-four percent of parents of children with mild to moderate disabilities reported being unsatisfied, while 8% of parents reported being very unsatisfied. Only two of the categories received responses from the parents of children with moderate to intensive needs. Seventy percent of parents reported being satisfied with the special education services and 30% of parents reported being very satisfied.

Table 5

Parental Satisfaction with Special Education Services

Level of Satisfaction	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	4 (8%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	11 (24%)	0 (0%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	19 (42%)	7 (70%)
5-very satisfied	11 (24%)	3 (30%)
Total	45	10

Communication

Table 6 summarizes results regarding parents' feelings towards communication between themselves and the special education staff. Data confirmed the hypothesis that parents of students with moderate to intensive needs had higher rates of satisfaction. Fifty percent of the parents with children in the moderate to intensive category responded that they felt very satisfied with the level of communication and 30% were satisfied. The remaining 20% responded they felt unsatisfied. There were no responses from this group that reported being very unsatisfied or unknown/neutral/not applicable. In comparison, parents with children in the mild to moderate category were primarily very unsatisfied with 35% falling into that category. Thirty-one percent reported they were unsatisfied with the amount of communication; 2% indicated they were neutral, while 22% were satisfied and 11% very satisfied.

Table 6

Parental Ratings of Satisfaction with Communication

Level of Satisfaction	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	16 (35%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	14 (31%)	2 (20%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	10 (22%)	3 (30%)
5-very satisfied	5 (11%)	5 (50%)
Total	45	10

Parental Involvement

Table 7 provides information parental responses regarding their level of involvement in their child's IEP meetings. The data reinforces the hypothesis that parents of children with moderate to intensive needs reported higher levels of satisfaction regarding the IEP process. The data from this question had the largest difference between the two groups of parents. Sixty percent of parents with children with moderate to intensive needs reported being very satisfied with their involvement in the IEP meetings, while only 2% of the parents in the mild to moderate category reported feeling this way. Thirty percent of parents with children in the moderate to intensive category reported feeling satisfied with their involvement in IEP meetings. Only 11% of parents in the mild to moderate felt the same way. Of the remaining parents in the moderate to severe category, 10% felt unsatisfied with their involvement in their child's IEP meetings. While 46% of parents of students with mild to moderate needs reported feeling very unsatisfied with their involvement in IEP meeting and 40% felt unsatisfied.

Table 7

Parental Satisfaction with IEP Involvement

Levels of Satisfaction	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	21 (46%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	18 (40%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	5 (11%)	3 (30%)
5-very satisfied	1 (2%)	6 (60%)
Total	45	10

Student Involvement

The data provided in Table 8 summarizes the responses from parents regarding their child's involvement in the IEP meetings. This question resulted in a large number of neutral/unknown/not applicable responses. Thirty-seven percent of parents with children in the mild to moderate category reported 'neutral' and 80% of parents with children in the moderate to intensive category reported feeling 'neutral.' This could possibly be explained by the fact that many students do not participate in their IEP meetings until they are 14 years old. Moreover, there were parents who were satisfied with their child's involvement in the IEP meeting. Twenty-six percent of parents with children in the mild to moderate category were satisfied, while 8% were very satisfied. Only 10% of the parents in the moderate to intensive category were satisfied. No parents indicated they were very satisfied.

Table 8

Parental Satisfaction with Student Involvement in IEP process

Level of Satisfaction	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	4 (8%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	8 (17%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	17 (37%)	8 (80%)
4- satisfied	12 (26%)	1 (10%)
5-very satisfied	4 (8%)	0 (0%)
Total	45	10

Overall Parental Satisfaction

Table 8 summarizes data regarding overall ratings of parental satisfaction. The data supports the hypothesis that parents of students with moderate to intensive needs would have higher levels of overall satisfaction regarding the IEP process. Eighty percent of parents with children in the moderate to intensive category reported they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the overall IEP process. Thirty-five percent of parents in the mild to moderate category reported feeling satisfied with the overall IEP process, while 20% reported feeling very satisfied. Thus, a total of 55% of parents with children with mild to moderate needs reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied. No data indicated any parents that felt neutral/unknown/not applicable towards the overall IEP process.

Table 9

Parents' Overall Satisfaction with the IEP Process

Levels of Satisfaction	Mild-Moderate	Moderate-Intensive
1-very unsatisfied	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
2-unsatisfied	19 (42%)	1 (10%)
3-neutral/unknown/not applicable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4- satisfied	16 (35%)	4 (40%)
5-very satisfied	9 (20%)	4 (40%)
Total	45	10

Additional Comments

The following comments were additional comments and explanations written in the open-ended portion of the surveys where parents could explain their responses. Most of the comments provided reasons why a parent felt satisfied or unsatisfied.

Dissatisfaction. Comments regarding parental dissatisfaction with the IEP process include, “IEP meetings primarily focused on the negative attributes of my son.” “All of the goals set are not always tracked. Limited follow through.” “I felt as if I was her only advocate in the beginning.” “Updates were not provided as promised.”

Additionally, parents commented on specific teacher behaviors. They said, “Meetings are often rushed with teachers coming in and out.” “General education teachers do not attend meetings or are unable to attend for the entire meeting.” One parent reported a “Lack of cohesiveness among the special education teachers and the general education teachers. General education teachers do not always know all needs.”

Satisfaction. One parent reported satisfaction with experience and said, “Very happy with everything the special education teachers have done for my daughter.”

Suggestion. One parent offered a specific suggestion and said, “I felt more rigorous testing should occur to truly identify the specific learning disability. Testing should also be done according to the Multiple Intelligences Theory.”

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to compare perceptions of parents of children with mild to moderate disabilities to parents of children with moderate to intensive disabilities regarding their level of satisfaction with the IEP process. A secondary purpose was to determine which step(s) in the IEP process parents were most unsatisfied with and attempting create solutions to change it.

A total of 55 participants completed the 11-item survey. The data collected was separated into two groups, responses from parents with children with mild to moderate disabilities and parents with children with moderate to intensive disabilities. With respect to the number of participants, 45 were parents of students with mild to moderate needs and only 10 were parents of students with moderate to intensive needs. The parents of children with moderate to intensive needs reported higher rates of satisfaction for every category; however, it should be noted that while the percentages were higher, there were more total number of satisfied parents in the mild to moderate group. Nearly all the surveys obtained from parents in the moderate to intensive group indicated a 4 or 5 for overall satisfaction (where a rating of 4 indicated satisfied and 5 indicated very satisfied). Surveys obtained from parents in the

mild to moderate group indicated only a 2 or 4 (where 2 indicated unsatisfied and a 4 satisfied).

The relatively high satisfaction ratings are consistent with the hypotheses put forth in this study. It was predicted that parents of children with moderate to intensive needs would report being more satisfied than parents of children with mild to moderate needs. The prediction was based on a lower student-to-teacher ratio and increased cooperation and communication between the parents and educators.

The areas in which the most parents were unsatisfied (a rating of 2) or very unsatisfied (a rating of 1) were in regards to communication and their feelings about their input in IEP meetings. These findings echo the findings in a study by Turnbull and Turnbull (2001), that a large majority of parents feel that educational plans and decisions were already made for their child prior to the IEP meeting and changes in the plan were not always communicated to them. An increased effort should be made to communicate all thoughts and decisions openly between the parents and the educators. Also, it is recommended that IEP meetings should be scheduled for times when all members can be present and have the time to discuss and create the most appropriate educational plan for the child, rather than having a plan already created for members to sign off on.

It should also be noted that a diagnosis of a mild to moderate disability is not as cut and dry as a diagnosis for a moderate to intensive disability. A large majority of the time it is easier to recognize a developmental or physical disability, which is typical of moderate to intensive disability. Thus, the identification and testing process of a mild to moderate disability may take longer and be much more complicated. This may also play a role in the different levels of satisfaction among the two groups of parents.

Regarding limitations of the study, its random sample selection is a factor to be considered when interpreting the results. Parents who chose to complete the survey may have been parents who were especially happy with the IEP process and willing to share their good experiences. On the other hand, parents who chose to complete the survey may have been parents who have had an uncharacteristically negative IEP experience. There was also no way for the parent to note whether or not the positive or negative experiences were from their current school district. It is possible that the parents and students have moved or transferred school districts.

Results also indicated that parents of children with mild to moderate needs were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied regarding communication between themselves and the educators. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether there was communication on behalf of the educator and not the parent, or whether there was communication on behalf of the parent. It also is unknown whether the lack of communication was from the special education teacher, general education teacher, or paraprofessional. Although past studies indicate that parents of students with special needs most often reference the special education teacher and/or paraprofessional (Spann, Kohler, & Soensken, 2003). Given that the current study was not designed to address these variables, additional work should be conducted to assess the extent to which this data can be replicated in future samples.

Future studies might also consider a larger sample size which would allow for more in-depth statistical analysis, in particular t-tests to determine if the differences between the groups are statistically significant. With a small sample size, it was only possible to report trends in the data. Further studies might also include interviews or focus groups with a select

number of parents to further identify their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with aspects of the IEP process.

This study was designed to evaluate parental satisfaction regarding the IEP process. The results from this study reinforced the need for open communication and collaboration between parents and educators. In the future, school district personnel should evaluate their educators and their willingness and effectiveness in creating a welcoming environment for parents. It is when parents feel welcome and comfortable that they will openly contribute to their child's educational plan.

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