

Least Restrictive Environment: Influences on
Placement Decisions in Rural Appalachian Ohio
A Master's Research Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of
Education and Human Services

Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

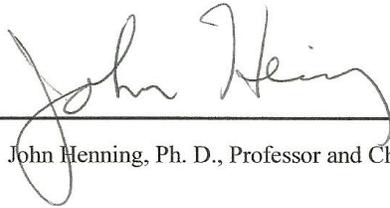
By
Jaclyn Rae Raike, B.S.Ed.

June 2011

This Master's Research Project has been approved
for the Department of Teacher Education



Marta A. Roth, Ed. D. Associate Professor Special Education



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

Table of Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Abstract		4
Chapter 1	Introduction and Statement of the Problem	5
Chapter 2	Review of Literature	7
Chapter 3	Methodology	23
	Setting	23
	Participants	26
	Study Design and Methods	28
	Data Analysis	31
Chapter 4	Results	32
	Subject 1 (Son Currently in Regular Public School)	32
	Preschool Teacher on Subject 1's Son	33
	Subject 2 (Son Currently in Segregated Public School)	34
	Preschool Teacher on Subject 2's Son	35
Chapter 5	Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusions	38
Chapter 6	Implications for Practice	48
References		54
Appendix A	Ohio University IRB Approval	59
Appendix B	Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Parent Subjects	60
Appendix C	Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Preschool Teacher	61
Appendix D	Ohio University Consent Form	62
Appendix E	Consent for Release of Information	65

Abstract

A major component of an IEP for a student with a disability is the decision of where the child will be educated with the least amount of restriction or the most access to typical peers and activities, also known as the least restrictive environment (LRE). Studies have shown that some students are placed in environments that aren't necessarily appropriate for their needs or are more restrictive than necessary based on the services and staff needed to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE). While there have been many court cases and laws over the years that have established how the LRE should be determined and who should participate in the determination of a child with a disability's LRE, there is very little research to determine what factors contribute to LRE placement decisions in Southeast Ohio and rural Appalachia and why students, who are very similar in disability, educational needs, and ability, receive services in more or less restrictive environments. As these are individually determined decisions made by the IEP team, the purpose of this study was to determine what factors contribute to LRE placement decisions in rural Appalachian Southeast Ohio and how students who are so similar can be placed in such different educational placements. Two parent subjects with similar family dynamics were chosen that have male children that are similar in age, medical and educational disability label, and academic abilities and needs. Their children began their education in the same preschool but made different LRE decisions that placed one in a regular public school in a special education classroom and one in a segregated public school only for children with multiple disabilities. Qualitative data were collected through interviews. Findings suggest that the factors that influence placement vary from one family to another based on priorities specific to the family.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all children have the right to be educated in the least restricted environment (LRE). Children with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers in the regular education environment if possible. Students with disabilities should not be removed from the regular education environment unless they cannot be educated in the regular classroom environment with or without the help of supplementary aides and/or services (Palley, 2006). The idea of LRE doesn't just mean that students should be placed in the public school. Students should also have positive interaction with typical students (Hamre-Nietupski & Nietupski, 1981).

State and local school districts continue to exhibit a preference toward more or less inclusion depending on economic and structural factors, rather than on the needs of the individual child even though IDEA mandates that they focus on only the needs of the child. IDEA does not have the ability to ensure that all students are educated in the LRE (Palley, 2006). It allows states to limit the extent to which they alter programs to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities (Palley, 2009).

When schools do not educate students in their appropriate environments, it takes away from the educational experiences of all students, including students with and without disabilities. Students with and without disabilities can build social skills and relationships when all students are educated in the same environment.

Schools throughout the nation determine LRE placement in different ways. LRE decisions appear to be influenced by the severity of the student's academic problems, the presence of behavior problems, and the involvement of students' families. Students with lower

IQ scores or a lack of early intervention tend to have academic problems that are more likely to place them outside the general education classroom or public school. Distractibility and aggressiveness are the most likely behavior issues to lead a student to be in a more restrictive environment. Students with a lack of parental involvement also appear to spend more time outside the general education classroom. African American students also appear to spend more time outside the general education setting than Caucasian American students (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

In Southeastern Ohio, it appears that student gender, behavioral difficulties, and economic status as well as school finances and parental attitudes may contribute to LRE decisions. Many students appear to be educated in environments that may not be appropriate for their educational needs. However, there is a lack of research that supports what factors influence LRE decisions in southeast Ohio.

What are the factors that may be present in Appalachia that may influence parents and professionals to make LRE decisions? Are the factors influencing decisions related to individual needs, the attitudes of others, government policy, or availability of funding and/or services? If students are similar in many ways including gender, educational or medical disability label, behavioral characteristics, and educational needs, why are they placed in different educational placements or least restrictive environments? The purpose of this study was to attempt to answer these questions.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The least restrictive environment (LRE) or least restrictive alternative has been a highly debated concept in special education for years. The least restrictive environment is not a clearly defined term and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. However, it is clearly stated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), that

“To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities including children in public and private institutions or other care facilities are educated with children who are not disabled...or removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Palley, 2006, p 229)”

The issue of LRE is more than just one of educational placement. The LRE is an issue of liberty and freedom. Constraints to freedom are cultural, moral, fiscal, and physical. Education is a field where individual liberties are curtailed in the public interest (Turnbull, Ellis, Boggs, Brooks, & Biklen, 1981). “Restrictiveness is defined as the gauge of the degree of opportunity a person has for proximity to and communication with, the ordinary flow of persons in our society” (Champagne, 1993, p. 5). The general education classroom is the ordinary flow in education (Yell, 1998). The LRE provides the means for enhancing the individual’s freedom and for individualizing the process of selecting needed services while accommodating the state’s legitimate interest and individual’s rights. Although the intention of providing the LRE is good, sometimes the LRE can eliminate more restrictive options that may be more helpful and appropriate to a person with disability. It is important to remember that the proper LRE placement is the least restrictive among those which would adequately serve the person. What is

more restrictive for one person may be less so for another person. Professionals should create less restrictive alternatives rather than focusing on reduction of unduly restrictive choices (Turnbull, et al. 1981). It is also important to remember that special education is not a place or classroom, but a set of services (Huefner, 2006).

The least restrictive environment is not clearly defined, because it has to be individually interpreted for each and every individual. The concept of educating a child in the least restrictive environment is not as simple as placing him/her in the general education classroom. For some, the LRE is the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services, for some it's a self-contained placement in a public school, and for others it's a separate school or residential setting. In all cases, it's the educational setting closest to the general education classroom in which a free appropriate public education (FAPE) can be delivered to a student who requires special education services (Huefner, 2006).

A free appropriate public education (FAPE) is also mandated by IDEA. This means that all special education and related services have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, meet the standards of the state educational agency, include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state involved, and are provided in conformity with the IEP. A FAPE is available to all children with disabilities residing in the state between the ages of three and twenty-one including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school (Latham, Latham, & Mandlawitz, 2008).

The LRE is not the same as mainstreaming or inclusion (Huefner, 2006). Inclusion is defined as placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities. With an emphasis on access to general education settings and curricula, accountability, valued membership in peer groups, and facilitation of friendships that may lead to

natural support networks, inclusive education has been considered a practice that is not only consistent with civil rights, but also a way to alleviate the discouraging outcomes for adults with significant disabilities (Ryndak, Ward, Alper, Storch, & Montgomery, 2010). However, inclusion and mainstreaming are narrower terms than LRE. Inclusion and mainstreaming are required if possible under IDEA, but are not always the LRE for the individual learner (Yell, 1998). The LRE is not only a placement in schools with students who do not have handicaps, but also represents the ongoing efforts to promote positive interactions between students who may have the severest of disabilities and those who have none (Hamre-Nietupski & Nietupski, 1981).

To qualify for the LRE, a person must fall within the definition of a person with a disability. Although the LRE is not clearly defined because it is determined individually in each case, disability has been defined by Section 504, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the IDEA. According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 a person with a disability is

“any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. (Palley, 2009, p. 42)”

Section 504 defines major life activities as “functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working (Palley, 2009, p. 42).” ADA has a similar definition but further defines a physical or mental impairment as

“(A) Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin and endocrine;

(B) Any mental or psychological disorder such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.” (Palley, 2009, p. 43)

In defining a person with a disability for purposes of the ADA, the Supreme Court found that if one’s disabling or limiting condition can be ameliorated with medical care, assistive technology, or personal compensatory skills, one will not qualify for ADA protections. They also held that any disability must be both “substantial and long term.” (Palley, 2009, p. 44)

For the purpose of education, the definition of a child with a disability according to IDEA includes a child who is diagnosed with

“mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.” (Palley, 2009 p. 45)

In all definitions of disability, there is room for interpretation (Palley, 2009).

In order to understand the concept of LRE, one must understand the legal aspects that created it and that have upheld it. The rights-based approach to law assumes everyone has legal rights. However, the law upholds the current structures of power in society, but mostly it protects the rights of those who have power (Palley, 2009). The Bill of Rights states that humans are free from undue government interference in the disposition of one’s time, attention and resources in the choice of associates, place of residence and employment, and the like. The U.S. Constitution permits government to reduce freedom if necessary to protect the rights of others, to prevent harm, or to promote general welfare. Procedural due process is also guaranteed. Before the

government deprives an individual of life, liberty, or property, it must provide him or her with a hearing or procedure to determine the necessity or appropriateness of the deprivation.

Substantive due process places outer limits on what government can do. The LRE comes from substantive due process. The state does not have the power to use more restrictive means than are necessary to accomplish its purpose (Turnbull, et al. 1981).

Before Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, which later became IDEA, Section 504 gave every person with a disability the right to the LRE. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that the practice of segregation based on race could not be used in public education. Although the decision did not involve the education of students with disabilities, advocates argued that the principles were true for all persons. In 1976, in the case of *Hairston v. Drosick*, the principles developed by *Brown v. Board of Education* were used by the court involving the education of a child with spina bifida (Yell, 1998). *PARC v. Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* established that exclusion of children with disabilities from the public school system was a denial of equal protection of laws under the 14th amendment (Huefner, 2006).

Since the 1997 IDEA Amendments, the IEP requires explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with children who are not handicapped in the regular class and in activities. In Ohio, because of the *Ronker vs. Walter* case that took place in 1983 in Hamilton County, teams had to justify greater restriction through a section on the IEP (Block, 1996). This created a presumption in favor of regular classroom placement. Also, IDEA requires parents to be included in placement decisions. A continuum of placements and supplementary services must be offered. This continuum must include regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. Resource rooms and

itinerant instruction are viewed as supplementary services. If a public or private residential program is necessary, it must come at no cost to parents (Huefner, 2006).

As stated earlier, the LRE is required to meet FAPE according to IDEA. If a district fails to provide a required service, the district may be liable for the cost of obtaining that service (Latham, et al. 2008). An analysis of court decisions regarding issues of LRE since the early 1980s has served to clarify guidelines for districts and states to assure these decisions are made in lawful ways. To decide whether a child is receiving a FAPE, the 5th circuit court identified four factors as an indication of whether a child's IEP is reasonable to provide benefit under IDEA. This was a result of the Board of Education v. Rowley case in Texas in 1982. This case involved Amy Rowley, a student who was deaf, whose parents felt she was entitled to a sign language interpreter to provide FAPE (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2010). These four factors are:

1. Whether there is an individualized program based on the student's assessment and performance.
2. Whether the individualized program is administered in the LRE.
3. Whether the services are provided in a coordinated and collaborative manner by the key stakeholders
4. Whether positive benefits are demonstrated both academically and non-academically

The major means of justifying a more restrictive environment is to show that the child is disruptive (Latham, et al. 2008). A school district may not refuse to place a child in a LRE, because it lacks the appropriate placement option. The continuum of placements must be provided but not necessarily within the district's boundaries. The district has the legal option to send a child to another school, public or private on a contractual basis. The neighborhood school

or district of residence is still financially responsible (Yell, 1998). Courts have repeatedly held that the IDEA does not guarantee special education services in a student's neighborhood school. In *Schuldt v. Mankato*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th circuit ruled that a school district did not have to make the neighborhood school wheelchair accessible for a student with spina bifida since an elementary school only a few miles away was fully accessible (Yell, 1998).

In all cases of LRE challenges, someone has to carry the burden of proof. Either the district or the person challenging the LRE placement, which is usually the parent, must prove the correctness or appropriateness of their position. The district appears to be more scrutinized by having a restrictive placement (Yell, 1998).

After reviewing the political and legal principles and context of LRE in IDEA, it becomes important to see how LRE placement decisions are made. LRE is determined differently and individually in each case. The choices that are open to one individual may affect the choices open to other individuals. Financial and availability issues, often concerns in rural areas, may affect how districts present options. Professionals have to make decisions about their own services, what recommendations they will make, and how recommendations are conveyed (Turnbull, et al. 1981).

When making decisions parents and professionals have to be aware that short term restriction can lead to long term independence. However, this has been used to justify unacceptable practices such as institutionalization. Short-term and long-term restrictions must be weighed (Turnbull, et al. 1981). The idea that the general education classroom in the neighborhood school is the LRE for all students is considered by some to be a myth. The myth is appealing because it's simple, providing one placement for all students (Kauffman, 1996).

LRE placement decisions are made on an individualized basis and are determined annually. These are based on the student's IEP (Huefner, 2006). When individualized, professionals and parents should consider the benefit to the student, the affect on peers, the appropriate education needed, integration, and the use of aids and services (Yell, 1998). Placements are supposed to be as close as possible to the child's home. Placement should be in the school the child would attend if they didn't have a disability unless the IEP requires some other arrangement. Consideration is given to any harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs. The child can not be removed from general education placements because of necessary modifications that are needed. The child also can't be removed to avoid accountability for their educational performance (Huefner, 2006).

Parents have differing views on where their child should be placed. Some parents have sought to have their children placed in private schools, while other parents have tried closing separate schools. Parents as well as special education professionals are split about the value of inclusion for children. Parents who advocate for the least restrictive placements and/or inclusion look at the positive impact inclusion can have on students with and without disabilities. Studies have shown that, when students with severe disabilities are included with students without disabilities, the adaptive behaviors of students with severe disabilities improved and the IEP goals are generally met for the year. Studies have also raised the question of whether students without disabilities are negatively impacted by learning alongside peers that do have disabilities. In multiple studies, students without disabilities were not negatively affected by learning alongside students with significant disabilities (McDonnell, Thorson, Disher, Mathot-Buckner, Mendel, & Ray, 2003). In other studies looking at inclusion, students without disabilities performed better and were more responsive in class when being educated alongside students with

significant disabilities, especially when peer tutoring was used as a teaching method (McDonnell, Mathot-Buckner, & Thorson, 2001). Aside from these arguments, there is the argument that parents who are against inclusion often have perceptions of inclusion that aren't necessarily accurate. A study was done on parent perceptions when it comes to inclusion. Parents with children with severe disabilities that had children included in regular classrooms at regular schools and children segregated at special schools were surveyed on their perceptions of inclusion. The parents of children in regular schools were questioned on what their perceptions of their schools were. The parents of children in special schools were questioned on what their perceptions of what they think their children would experience if they were to attend a regular school. Out of the parents that were surveyed that had children with severe disabilities that were being included in the general education classroom, only 4% reported that their children were mistreated by typical students, 2% reported that their child felt resentment from typical peers, 14% reported that their child felt isolated in their regular school, 22% reported a loss of speech services, 20% reported a loss of physical therapy/occupational therapy services, and only 2% reported a loss of program quality. Of the parents that were surveyed that had children with severe disabilities that were attending special schools, 65% felt that their child would be mistreated by typical students, 80% felt that their child would experience resentment from typical peers, 38% felt that their child would experience isolation in a regular school, 63% felt that their child would lose speech services in a regular school, 65% felt that their child would lose physical/occupation therapy services in a regular school, and 30% felt that there would be a loss of program quality if their child attended a regular school. When positive impacts were considered, 74% of parents of children attending a regular school reported that their child had typical friends, and 95% of parents reported that their child had access to extra-curricular

activities. When parents of children attending special schools were surveyed, only 34% of them felt that their child would have typical peers as friends, and only 24% felt that their child would have access to extra-curricular activities (McDonnell, 1987). This study demonstrates the inconsistency between what parents perceive about regular versus special school placement and what the reality may be depending on the restrictiveness of the environment in which a child is currently educated.

Another concern about regular school placement is that the regular education community doesn't feel equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities without extensive training and parents therefore may react to these concerns. Parents of students with learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and visual and hearing impairments support the full continuum of options. The deaf community supports separate schools and pullout settings. Parents of students with mental retardation feel their children are harmed by removal from the regular education environment and benefit from the social and language modeling that is present in that setting. They feel that this promotes more acceptance in the community. Students with severe emotional disturbance and multiple disabilities create a special dilemma and often receive services in residential schools (Huefner, 2006). Younger students are usually found to benefit more from interaction with their peers who do not have disabilities (Etscheidt, 2006).

Disputes and philosophical disagreements about LRE such as those outlined often result in court challenges. From a legal perspective, there are four standards that have arisen from courts' rulings that assist in weighing the appropriateness of placement in LRE; The Roncker standard, The Daniel R.R. Standard, The Rachel H. Standard, and the Fourth Circuit's Three Part Test.

The Roncker standard originated from the 1983 case of *Roncker v. Walter*. The parents wanted Neill Roncker placed in a regular school in a special education classroom. The school district wanted to place him in a special school for children with developmental disabilities. The standard adopted by the 6th circuit required the lower court to reexamine the facts and determine whether Neill's educational, physical, or emotional needs required a service that could feasibly be provided in a special education class in a regular education school. The Roncker feasibility test required a determination of whether the mainstreaming benefits to the child would be far outweighed by the benefits of the separate setting, whether the child would be a disruptive force in the regular setting, or whether the cost of the shift would take away too many funds from other children with disabilities. If the answer to any question was yes, the place change would not be feasible. The standard has been followed in the 6th and 8th circuits which includes the state of Ohio. Cases applying the Roncker standard have largely upheld services in schools other than the child's neighborhood school. The Daniel R.R. Standard came from the *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* case (1989). The parents requested that their son with Down Syndrome be placed in a regular education half-day pre-kindergarten class. The school district said that this placement was not beneficial to his learning. The two-pronged test established in *Daniel R.R.* has become the basic standard for regular classroom placement in the 3rd, 5th, 10th, and 11th circuits (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida) The test asks two questions.

1. Has the school attempted to accommodate the student by providing sufficient supplementary aids and services and sufficient program modifications in the regular education setting?

If the answer is no, then IDEA is violated. In Daniel's case, the answer was yes.

2. If the student cannot be accommodated in the regular education setting, has the public agency mainstreamed the student to the maximum extent appropriate?

In Daniel's case, mainstreaming at lunch and recess met the test (Huefner, 2006). This case required districts to demonstrate that a less restrictive placement was not beneficial rather than making a decision without "testing" the benefit first.

The Rachel H. standard came from the 9th Circuit Court (Arizona, Nevada, California, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington) in the Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H case. From this case, a four factor balancing test was created (Huefner, 2006).

1. What are the educational benefits of full-time placement in a regular classroom?
2. What are the nonacademic benefits of such a placement?
3. What effect does the student with disabilities have on the regular classroom teacher and children?
4. What are the costs of mainstreaming the student?

The Rachel H. standard extended decision-making to include academic as well as social benefits to regular class placement and the relative costs of providing such.

The 4th Circuit's (West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) Three Part test came from the Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education (1997). This case dealt with an eleven-year-old with autism named Mark Hartmann. The Three Part test said that mainstreaming is not required when:

1. A student with a disability would not receive educational benefit from mainstreaming in a general education class.
2. Any marginal benefit from mainstreaming would be significantly outweighed by benefits that could feasibly be obtained in a separate instructional setting.

3. The student is a disruptive force in the general education classroom (Yell, 1998).

IDEA does not refer to weighing academic and nonacademic benefits. However, it seems that in every standard, these things are weighed. IDEA relies on individual goal setting in the IEP. As stated earlier, IDEA does require that children live in the same neighborhood as the school they attend. This leaves the door open for schools to make decisions that are more convenient, feasible, available, and cost effective for them (Huefner, 2006).

IDEA doesn't mention cost factors. Nonetheless, schools and school districts continue to receive most of the funds for special education services from their state governments. States allocate money in different ways, including per classroom, per teacher, by the type of classroom in which a student is located, by a percentage of the actual expenditures that the local system incurs, by district enrollment of students with special needs, and by the number of students with specific disabilities. Assuming that inclusive environments are more costly, these variations in funding may affect the extent to which inclusive educational settings are provided. As a result, some students with disabilities may not be educated in their LRE. LRE decisions may be made on the basis of cost or funding availability (Palley, 2006).

Structural factors are also considered when placement decisions are made. Special education was originally established as a separate system so that children with special needs could be educated by specially trained teachers in smaller classes. As a result of this history, general education and special education teachers are trained differently, and many general education teachers are unprepared for the challenges of teaching children with special needs. This was shown in a study done by the Office of Special Education Programs (2001) that found that out of teachers trained in the last six years, only half were trained to adapt curriculum, and only two thirds were trained in behavior management. Furthermore, many of the techniques

designed for students with special needs are not easily transferable to regular classes. In addition, many general education teachers have not been trained in special education teaching methods or techniques (Palley, 2006). Studies, such as one done by Snyder (1999), have shown that regular education teachers have insufficient contact with special education teachers regarding children with disabilities who were in their classes. Some were not aware of what their students' disabilities were, and as a result, were unlikely to work effectively with those students in their classes. Although these studies may not be representative of the entire population, they suggest some alarming possibilities about the ways in which the IDEA is being implemented in some places. Another structural issue is that regular education teachers often need time and resources to address the needs of students with special needs. These structural factors are not considered when using a rights-based approach to the law. However, in reality, they are clearly important factors that must be considered in order for inclusive programs to be successful (Palley, 2006).

Currently most students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms for at least part of the day. Students with autism and deaf-blindness have the highest percentage of students not in regular schools. Throughout the United States, only 4.4 % of students with disabilities do not attend regular schools. Less than 1.5% are in residential facilities or homebound/hospital settings. More than 45% are being removed for less than twenty-one percent of the day. Thirty percent of students with disabilities receive resource room services from 21-60% of the school day. Twenty-two percent are spending more than sixty percent of the school day in separate classes (Huefner, 2006).

Other trends in LRE placement are evident across the country. African Americans are overrepresented in segregated settings. This is more prominent in higher incidence categories such as mild developmental cognitive disabilities and emotional disturbances. The

disproportionate placements are caused by a lack of a consistent identification process, a bias in assessment instruments, and problems related to other variables such as poverty. Males spend more time out of the general education classroom than do females. If students are younger when initially placed in special education, they spend more time out of the general education classroom. Poor peer relations usually lead to more time out of the general education classroom. Students who are initially placed in a resource room part time spend less time outside the general education classroom than students initially placed in a resource room full time or a self-contained classroom. Students who have learning disabilities in oral expression and/or in basic reading spend more time outside the general education classroom. Students who do not have a family member present at their most recent annual review spend more time outside the general education classroom (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). It appears that State and local school districts continue to exhibit a preference toward more or less restriction depending on economic and structural factors, rather than on the needs of the individual child (Palley, 2006).

In Ohio, 23.96% of students with disabilities spend more than 80% of the day in regular classrooms. Only eight states have a higher percentage. About 47% of students with disabilities spend 40-79% of the day in the regular classroom. Only two states have a higher percentage. About 27% of students with disabilities spend less than 40% in a regular classroom. Forty states have a higher percentage in this group. Less than one percent of students with disabilities are in separate schools, which is the second lowest percentage of any state. Only Hawaii has a lower percentage, and Georgia has the same percentage as Ohio. Less than half of one percent of students with disabilities is educated in residential facilities, parentally placed private settings, correctional facilities, or home/hospital settings. These percentages show that Ohio is moving towards becoming a more inclusive state (Data Accountability Center, 2008).

From the issues outlined, there are a number of questions that need to be asked. Is the least restrictive placement always the most appropriate? Are the factors influencing decisions related to individual needs, the attitudes of others, government policy, or availability of funding and/or availability of services? What are the factors that are considered when placement is reconsidered? Is the placement that was appropriate for a child when he/she entered kindergarten still appropriate for a child as he/she progresses through his/her education?

There are many factors that are present in rural southeastern Appalachian Ohio that may not be present throughout the rest of the nation including lack of services, distance, and a great deal of poverty. However, there is very little known about LRE in rural areas and in particular southeastern Appalachian Ohio. What are the factors that may be present in rural Appalachian Ohio that may influence parents and professionals to make LRE decisions? If two children have similar needs, family structures, and school structures, why are different placement decisions made? The next section of this research project proposes to discover some of the answers to these questions through a comparative parental interview process that attempts to view individual decisions on the bases of these factors.

Chapter 3

Method

As the issue of decision making to determine where special education services were delivered was often not based on the individual needs of the child during the IEP process, it was decided that the most accurate way to discern why certain children are most restricted or not was to conduct a qualitative study. A qualitative case study was done to compare parental decisions with professional decisions through an interview process that attempted to view individual parental decisions on the bases of factors that are found in rural Appalachian Ohio. The factors that were present in rural Appalachian Ohio were unclear as there was very little literature that surrounded this topic in the rural Appalachian Ohio region. The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that may be present in rural Appalachian Ohio that may influence parents and professionals to make least restrictive environment decisions?
2. If two children, while inherently different, have many common characteristics and needs, and those commonalities are reflected in their district of residence/community as well as their family structure, why were LRE decisions so different when they entered kindergarten?

Setting

Athens, Ohio, a small town in the heart of Appalachian, Southern Ohio, has a population of approximately 21, 342. Approximately 15,000 of those residents are enrolled as college students. Of the population, 19,000 residents are white. There are approximately 950 Asians and 800 African Americans. Families in the area are making approximately \$5,300 less than the rest of the families in Ohio with the average income being \$29,629. Of the families in Athens,

fourteen percent are living below the poverty level. Approximately 5% of residents ages 5-20 years old have a disability (US CENSUS, 2010).

Education in Athens, Ohio and its surrounding areas has suffered from a poor economy and a lack of resources. The expenditure per pupil in Appalachian Ohio is approximately \$504 less than the state average in 2008. There are gaps of up to \$2250 below the state average. Teachers in Appalachian Ohio are making approximately \$4530 less than the state average. There are gaps of up to \$19,320 less than the state average (CORAS, 2009). The student dropout rate in the twenty-seven Appalachian counties is 7% higher than the state average. There are very few Appalachian districts performing at the excellent level or the excellent level with distinction on state report cards (CORAS, 2009).

The Ohio Department of Education has a set of standards for special education service delivery in the state of Ohio. They require that more than 49% of students with disabilities be educated in the regular classroom more than 80% of the day, less than 11.75% of students with disabilities be educated in the regular classroom less than 40% of the day, and less than 5.5% of students with disabilities be educated in separate facilities. Each of the 88 counties in the state of Ohio has a county board of developmental disabilities that provides services for individuals with developmental disabilities, but not all provide separate school age programs. In Athens County, there is a school for students with multiple disabilities that serves approximately 50 students in Athens County with multiple disabilities. This school could serve students from any of the five Athens County school districts. It provides transportation, meals, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and adapted physical education to each student if the child meets the requirements to receive those services. Each classroom within the school serves eight

students that were born within sixty months of each other (Ohio Department of Education, 2008-2009).

There were approximately 468 students enrolled in the Athens City School District with disabilities. Of the 468 students enrolled in Athens City Schools with disabilities, 56.25% were being educated in the regular classroom more than 80% of the day and 10.96% were being educated in the regular classroom less than 40% of the day. Statistically, they were meeting the state standard. Athens City Schools did not provide statistical data on how many students with disabilities were being educated in a separate facility. However, it was found that approximately 12 students from Athens City School District were being served in a separate facility at the local county board school for developmental disabilities. This would have put them below the standard of 5.5%, but this did not include students being educated at alternative or private schools. Athens City Schools did not meet adequate yearly progress in reading and math proficiencies for students with disabilities. There was a disproportionality of African Americans with emotional disabilities at Athens City Schools (ODE, 2008-09).

The statistics that Athens City Schools provided regarding special education were similar to other Athens County schools. Only one school within Athens County was meeting adequate yearly progress in the reading and math proficiency levels for students with disabilities but was below the standard for educating students with disabilities for 80% or more of the day in the regular classroom. This was above the standard for educating students with disabilities for less than 40% of the day in the regular classroom and above the standard for educating students with disabilities in a separate facility. This means they were violating all three least restrictive environment standards set by the state. There was only one other school within the county that

violated any of the state least restrictive environment requirements, and that district only violated one standard rather than all three (ODE, 2008-09).

Participants

For this study, there were two parent subjects chosen based on convenience along with the preschool teacher of the two children. One parent subject was a co-worker of the primary researcher. The other parent subject had a child in the primary researcher's classroom. Each subject was a single mother and nurse from rural Appalachian Ohio that had a son with Down Syndrome and moderate cognitive disabilities. Each of their sons was an adolescent and was receiving special education services. Each child was served in an integrated preschool that was located within a segregated school for individuals with multiple disabilities. Each mother had at least one other child that was served in a local public school within the county.

However, the two mothers had made different decisions on which educational placement was their child's least restrictive environment. Both children were living within the Athens City School District. One child was receiving his education at a local public middle school in a segregated classroom with some integration with typical peers. The other child was receiving his education at a segregated school for children with multiple disabilities. During school, he didn't have any integration with typically-developing peers. The child that was educated in the public middle school was spending approximately 50% of his day in the general education classroom with the assistance of an educational classroom aide. The child that was educated in the separate county board school for children with multiple disabilities spent none of his day in the general education classroom.

Each child had similar educational needs. Both children had speech and language delays that required extensive speech and language services. The child attending the public middle school actually had a smaller expressive vocabulary and speech that was more unclear than the child attending the segregated school. Both children spoke in short, one or two-word phrases to express needs and wants. Both children had behavioral concerns with the paramount concern being refusal to participate in classroom activities. Both children would refuse participation and avoid the rest of the class by retreating to classroom bathrooms or sitting on the floor.

Academically, both students participated in classroom activities with the use of picture icons. Each child could count to five, use a computer, and write using hand-over-hand assistance. The student at the segregated school was able to identify and write half the letters in his name, write numbers 1 and 2 independently, and identify the current month and weather when given several choices accompanied with picture icons. Neither student could identify written numbers or letters when asked. Both children followed a picture schedule throughout the day and could adapt to changes made to it if needed.

It was assumed that comparisons of the differences in decisions for placement could be made because the subjects' children have the same disability label for special education eligibility (MD), are similar ages and reside in the same county, but they had different educational placement. This study takes advantage of the naturally-occurring opportunity to view placement decisions related to least restrictive environments for students with multiple disabilities in rural Appalachian Ohio.

The pre-school teacher in this study had many years of teaching preschool at the local county board school for developmental disabilities. She was highly regarded within the school and the community for her work and advocacy for students with multiple disabilities. She retired

from teaching preschool in 2007 and began working for Ohio University as a student teaching supervisor for special education majors. She believed in community involvement and functional academics for students with disabilities.

Study Design and Methods

A qualitative case study was chosen for this study rather than a quantitative study because qualitative studies typically are done in a natural setting rather than a laboratory, have the researcher as the key instrument rather than relying on tools created by other researchers, draw from multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations, or examining documents, use inductive data analysis, use the participants' meanings about the problem or issue rather than the researcher's meanings, use an emergent design, use a theoretical lens, are interpretive, and develop a holistic account by gaining multiple perspectives from the participants and identifying the many factors involved in a situation (Creswell, 2009). These characteristics are most appropriate for this study. There are a variety of qualitative strategies for inquiry including narratives, ethnographies, and case studies (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative strategy for inquiry being used is a case study. One qualitative method will be used for this qualitative case study, a comparative interview.

The questions being asked in this study were:

1. What are the factors that may be present in rural Appalachian Ohio that may influence parents and professionals to make least restrictive environment decisions?
2. If two children, while inherently different, have many common characteristics and needs, and those commonalities are reflected in their district of residence/community as well as

their family structure, why were LRE decisions so different when they entered kindergarten?

These questions were chosen because there was very little research on the factors that were present in rural Appalachian Ohio that may have influenced parents and professionals to make least restrictive environment decisions. Because of this lack of research, it was very difficult to compare the factors in Appalachian Ohio to the rest of the country without initial research being done to define the factors in Appalachian Ohio. Once the factors in Appalachian Ohio were defined, it became possible to answer the question of how these factors compare to the ones present in other parts of the country.

Once questions emerged from the literature, and the study was set up, the researcher had to obtain permission from an institutional review board at Ohio University. This process was mandatory to protect the rights of the human participants. The process required the researcher to obtain permission from each subject to be interviewed after they were informed of the benefits and risks that were involved in the study. They were informed of all aspects of the study and what questions the study was intending to answer. Once informed consent was given by each participant, a semi-structured face-to-face interview at the segregated county board school for development disabilities of each mother and the two boys' preschool teacher was conducted for approximately one hour to determine what factors contributed to the decisions to place each child in the least restrictive environment in which he currently receives special education services.

To verify the accuracy of the interviews and themes that emerged, the process of triangulation was used. After interviews were conducted by each parent subject, the preschool teacher was given an interview for approximately fifteen minutes to verify the answers provided to the researcher by the parent subjects.

The semi-structured interview included the following questions for the mothers:

1. Did you make the decision to place your child at _____ or did a school representative make the decision?
 - a. What were you told about your child's placement?
 - b. Were you informed of placement options available to your son?
2. What were your priorities when you made the placement decision?
 - a. Was socialization with peers important?
 - b. Did the idea of having a safer environment come into play?
 - c. Did you feel that certain professionals including related service providers such as speech and language pathologists or physical therapists in particular places were more competent than others? What/Who convinced you of this issue?
 - d. Were you more comfortable or familiar with people at one place?
3. Why do you feel that your child was placed in his current educational placement?
 - a. Was behavior a factor?
 - b. Was safety a factor?
 - c. Was academic ability a factor?
 - d. Were individual needs considered?
 - e. Was the need for related services (amount and quality) a factor?
 - f. Was convenience a factor? (was number of different teachers/administrators, bus drivers, etc. a factor?)
 - g. Was size of the school a factor?
 - h. Was comfort with personnel a factor?
 - i. Was continuity of programming a factor?
4. Do you feel this was the best placement for your child?

The semi-structured interview included the following questions for the preschool teacher:

1. Did you play a large part in the decision of where _____ was placed? Was his mother active in the decision-making process?
 - a. Did you inform the mother of her son's placement options?
 - b. Did you provide input on what you felt the best placement would be?
2. Why do you feel that _____ was placed in his current educational placement?
 - a. Was behavior a factor?
 - b. Was safety a factor?
 - c. Was academic ability a factor?
 - d. Were individual needs considered?
 - e. Was the need for related services (amount and quality) a factor?
 - f. Was convenience a factor? (was number of different teachers/administrators, bus drivers, etc. a factor?)
 - g. Was size of the school a factor?
 - h. Was comfort with personnel a factor?
 - i. Was continuity of programming a factor?
 - j. Do you feel this was the best placement for _____?

3. What do you feel the priorities of the mothers were when placement decisions were made?
 - a. Was socialization with peers important?
 - b. Did the idea of having a safer environment come into play?
 - c. Did you feel that certain professionals including related service providers such as speech and language pathologists or physical therapists in particular places were more competent than others? What/Who convinced you of this issue?
 - d. Were they more comfortable or familiar with people at one place?
4. Do you feel this was the best placement for each child?

These questions allowed the primary researcher to discover educational as well as personal factors that may have been involved in the decision. Using the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to ask further questions if necessary to uncover the factors involved in the decision-making process (Creswell, 2009).

Data Analysis

Once the semi-structured interviews were completed, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of reasons given for each child's placement according to their mothers and their preschool teacher. Once themes had emerged and were coded, the same process was done with responses from the pre-school teacher. Then a comparative thematic analysis of responses was done by comparing and contrasting the mothers' answers to the teacher's answers. Themes were discovered from each analysis to find the most relevant factors that influenced each mother's decision. Once themes were discovered, they were counted to see which theme(s) emerged as the most relevant.

After data was reviewed results were interpreted. Results are reported in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

In the following chapter, results of the interviews on each parents and the preschool teacher are presented and organized into sections. First, each parent subject's interview is outlined to describe each of their child's educational placement decisions and what factors contributed to each subject's decision. Following the mothers' interview descriptions, a description of the preschool teacher's interview is given. Table 1 provides each of the possible factors and descriptors from the first subject's interview and how it compared to the preschool teacher's opinion about her child's placement decision. Table 2 provides each of the possible factors and descriptors from the second's subject's interview and how it compared to the preschool teacher's opinion about her child's placement decision.

Subject 1 (Son in regular public school)

Subject 1 was interviewed on what she felt contributed to her decision that the regular education environment was her son's least restrictive environment. Subject 1 felt that she made the decision for her son to attend the regular school, and no one else made it for her or forced her to make that decision. She felt she was well informed of her placement options. She said she was advised by the preschool teacher to look at all the options, because her son learns by observing others. "I knew we needed to explore our options because she (the preschool teacher) said we should. She is a professional, and I trusted her." Subject 1's main priority was socialization. "If he spent time with other normal kids, he could learn from them." Safety was a priority for her, but she didn't really consider it when making her decision. Subject 1 didn't feel as though professionals such as related service providers, behavior, convenience, size of the school, comfort with personnel, or continuity of programming were factors in her decision. She did

consider academic ability. She felt her son could do a lot more than what he was showing. He needed to be around students who were achieving more than he was so he would feel motivated to succeed. "I knew eventually he wouldn't be able to keep up with the others kids, and in fourth and fifth grade the big divide happened. I remember the first time I realized it was when he had a Flat Stanley project, and I had to do the whole project for him." She knew there would eventually be a large gap between him and his peers, but she was willing to deal with that when it happened. When asked if she made the right choice, she replied "Oh yeah!"

Preschool Teacher on Subject 1's Son

After completing an interview with Subject 1, an interview was conducted with Subject 1's son's preschool teacher. She verified nearly all the information that Subject 1 provided. She felt that Subject 1 was informed about her son's placement options. She said "I wanted her to know her options. They weren't going to know if he could be successful in the regular education public school without trying it." She agreed that Subject 1's son had learned behaviors. She felt he was stubborn and hid a lot of what he knew. She felt "he needed a new environment." She felt he could do a lot more than what he was doing. She felt that if he stayed at the separate segregated school for children with severe disabilities that he would have gone into a classroom with students that have no language which is very significant when you have a child with a language delay. The preschool teacher did not feel that safety, professionals, comfort or familiarity, convenience, the size of school, or continuity of programming were factors.

There were two inconsistencies in the preschool teacher's interview in comparison to Subject 1's interview. The first one was that the preschool teacher felt that behavior was a factor while Subject 1 felt that behaviors weren't present at that time. The second was that the preschool teacher felt that safety was never a factor, and Subject 1 said she did consider her son's

safety. Both the preschool teacher and Subject 1 felt that the least restrictive environment chosen was the most appropriate option.

Subject 2 (Son Currently in Segregated Public School)

Subject 2 chose a different placement for her son when he departed from the integrated preschool. She chose to have her son continue at the special segregated public school. Her decision was based on completely different factors. When asked, Subject 2 didn't feel that she was informed of her options, but wasn't bothered by this. She stated that she always planned to send him to that school. She said "I didn't even debate the issue at that time." She had worked for and knew the school well. He had attended early intervention at the school, and she was very impressed. They had helped him learn to walk and helped with his protruding tongue. "I want him to be with people like him." She said. She wasn't concerned with socialization with typical peers. She stated that safety was a concern. She felt he wouldn't be safe at the regular education public school because he might be bullied by typical kids. She also wanted her son to have access to all of his related service providers at the special school because, as a single mother, taking him somewhere else for therapy would be hard. She felt the related service providers at the special segregated school were very good, and she felt they worked as a team with the teachers. She did not feel that behavior, convenience, or academic ability were factors. She felt the special segregated school didn't focus as much on academics, but that didn't bother her. She wanted him to work on vocational skills. Her main priorities were her son's comfort level with school personnel and continuity of programming. She and her son knew all the teachers in the building, and she wouldn't know the regular public school teachers if he went there. She also liked the small size of the special segregated school. She felt her son could navigate that school better than a larger public school. She said "I was worried that he wouldn't be able to figure out

where to go. If he didn't know, he wouldn't be able to ask. He wasn't able to communicate very well."

Preschool Teacher on Subject 2's Son

When the preschool teacher was interviewed about Subject 2's son, she provided many different answers. She felt that Subject 2 had a very difficult time in school when she went to school, and this persuaded her to choose a special segregated school for her son. When asked how she knew this, the preschool teacher replied "She told me about it during his last year in the preschool." She admitted that she never told her the negatives of choosing a special school, because she wanted her to make her own decision and she knew "...her decision had already been made." She said that Subject 2 was informed of her placement options, but she already knew where she wanted her son to attend. The preschool teacher didn't feel that her son's needs were considered, and the only things that were considered were the mother's comfort level and belief in the continuity of programming. She didn't feel socialization, safety, related service providers, behavior, convenience, the size of the school, or academic ability were factors. She did, however, feel this was the best placement for this child because his family was comfortable with it. The preschool teacher never stated that she felt that he was in the least restrictive environment.

Table 1 and 2 below display the answers that each subject and the preschool teacher gave to the possible factors affecting the placement decisions.

Table 1

Factors	Subject 1	Preschool Teacher
Was the parent informed?	Yes	Yes
Was socialization with peers a priority?	Yes	Yes
Was safety a priority?	Yes	No

Were certain professionals considered?	No	No
Was comfort or familiarity a priority?	No	No
Was behavior a factor?	No	Yes
Were individual needs considered?	Yes	Yes
Was convenience a factor?	No	No
Was the size of the school a factor?	No	No
Was academic ability a factor?	Yes	Yes
Was comfort with personnel a factor?	No	No
Was continuity of programming a factor?	No	No
Was this the best placement for subject 1's child?	Yes	Yes

Table 2

Factor	Subject 2	Preschool Teacher
Was the parent informed?	No	Yes
Was socialization with peers a priority?	Wanted him to socialize with peers "like him"	No
Was safety a priority?	Yes	No
Were certain professionals considered?	Yes	No
Was comfort or familiarity a priority?	Yes	Yes
Was behavior a factor?	No	No
Were individual needs considered?	Yes	No
Was convenience a factor?	No	No
Was the size of the school a factor?	Yes	No
Was academic ability a factor?	No	No

Was comfort with personnel a factor?	Yes	Yes
Was continuity of programming a factor?	Yes	Yes
Was this the best placement for subject 2's child?	Yes	Yes

After looking at the results from each subject and comparing their answers to those of the preschool teacher, it is clear that there were some inconsistencies and commonalities across the IEP team regarding the two subject's children's placement decisions. What caused those commonalities and inconsistencies? Which LRE was appropriate? What factors were most important in deciding where the child was going to receive special education services? Discussion of possible answers to these questions follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusions

Students with disabilities are guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to be educated in the least restricted environment (LRE). If possible, students with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers. The LRE must be individually interpreted for each individual. The LRE is interpreted by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team which is made up of the parents, an administrator, a general education teacher and/or special education teacher, any special education staff member who has the student or is providing services for the child, and/or the child with the disability (Lytle & Bordin, 2001) The team could also include other individuals at the parents' or districts' discretion (NEA, 1995).

This case study was done in a rural Appalachian area of Southeast Ohio to answer two questions regarding LRE decisions. Those questions were:

1. What are the factors that may be present in rural Appalachian Ohio that may influence parents and professionals to make least restrictive environment decisions?
2. If two children, while inherently different, have many common characteristics and needs, and those commonalities are reflected in their district of residence/community as well as their family structure, why were LRE decisions so different when they entered kindergarten?

To answer these questions, two mothers, each having a son with Down Syndrome, speech impairments, and moderate cognitive disabilities, were interviewed on their experience in determining the LRE placement for their child when entering kindergarten. Each child had attended an integrated preschool located in a special school. Each mother was single raising multiple children as a nurse. Both mothers were residing within the same county and resided in

the same local public school district. Each of the mothers chose a different placement for her child. Each had the same preschool teacher, who had years of experience in recommending placements for preschoolers with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten.

According to IDEA, the LRE placement is based on the student's IEP team and that relevant factors contributing to placement decisions should include the educational benefit to the student with a disability in regular versus special education, the benefit from interacting with nondisabled students, the degree to which the placement may disrupt the education of other students, and the ability to meet the unique needs of the student with a disability (NEA, 1995). Factors that are not permissible are placement by the category of disability, the availability of educational or related services, space availability, or administrative convenience (NEA, 1995).

After each mother was interviewed and results were interpreted, it was found by the researcher that the factors that influence placement vary from one family to another based on priorities specific to the family. Some of the factors that were present were ones that were present in other research case studies discussed in chapter 2, while other factors seemed specific to these particular subjects in southeast Appalachian Ohio.

Arguments can be made for more restrictive placements in special schools and for less restrictive placements in general education classrooms. Generally advocates for more restrictive placements in special schools or segregated classrooms claim that there is the need to protect students from the painful and harmful experience of repeated failure. There is the belief that such failure results in permanent and irrevocable damage. There is the need to target slower, more direct instructional methods in both academic and behavioral skills to children needing special assistance, and there is the concern that children left in the regular setting would fall further behind and become stigmatized by their peers (Leinhardt & Pally, 1982).

Advocates for less restrictive placements such as the general education classroom focus on the effects separation can have and the positive impact inclusion can have on both children with disabilities and children without disabilities. Those who look at the negative effects of separation feel that separating children overtly stigmatizes them, condemns them permanently to the bottom track and lowers everyone's expectations for them. Many argued that the act of separation in itself is so painful that it counteracts any possible gains and, thus, explains the poor results of these children who have been negatively selected (Leinhardt & Pally, 1982). Others who advocate for the least restrictive placements look at the positive impact inclusion can have on students with and without disabilities. Studies have shown that when students with severe disabilities are included with students without disabilities the adaptive behaviors of students with severe disabilities improved, and the IEP goals are generally able to be met for the year. Studies have also raised the question of whether students without disabilities are negatively impacted by learning alongside peers that do have disabilities. In multiple studies, students without disabilities were not negatively affected by learning alongside students with significant disabilities (McDonnell, et al. 2003). In other studies looking at inclusion, students without disabilities performed better and were more responsive in class when being educated alongside students with significant disabilities, especially when peer tutoring was used as a teaching method (McDonnell, et al. 2001). Aside from these arguments, there is the argument that parents who are against inclusion often have perceptions of inclusion that aren't necessarily accurate. This was demonstrated in McDonnell's study (1987) that was discussed in chapter 2. Parents were surveyed on their perceptions of what inclusion would be like for their child if that were their educational placement and what inclusion is like for children who are already in an inclusive environment. The perceptions of both groups of parents varied greatly showing that

children served in inclusive environments often have a very positive experience, and children may be placed in a more restrictive environment based on fears of inclusion that are unwarranted.

These different arguments are the basis for many of the factors that influence placement decisions for all children with disabilities. These arguments also appeared to be the basis for a few of the factors that influenced the placement decisions for the two subjects that were interviewed.

In the case of subject 1, the factors that led to her choosing the regular public school for her son were similar to those that are presented in the argument for a less restrictive environment. Subject 1's main priority was socialization. She felt that "...If he spent time with other normal kids, he could learn from them." She felt that he needed to be around students who were achieving more than he was so he would feel motivated to succeed. Another factor presented by subject 1 as being influential was the preschool teacher's perspective. She felt that "...she was a professional," and she trusted her. This appeared to weigh heavily on her decision. Subject 1 felt that behavior was not a factor influencing her son's placement decision, but according to the preschool teacher, it was a factor. As research on placement decisions has shown, many parents don't see their child's behavior as a reason to place their child in a more or less restrictive placement (Leinhardt & Pally, 1982). This means that they may not be taking in to account all of the needs of other children surrounding their child as a non-biased professional would. For subject 1, her son's academic ability and her expectations for improving his academic abilities were a strong influence on her decision. In making her decision, both subject 1 and the preschool teacher of her son felt she considered the needs of her child when making her decision. As a researcher, it doesn't appear any special circumstances or uncommon factors played in to

her decision. Subject 1 was familiar with the school and the special education teacher at the elementary school that her son was going to attend, but it doesn't appear that this was an important influence in her decision. However, it may be presumed that it did make her more comfortable with the decision that she made.

In the case of Subject 2, the factors that motivated her to choose the separate special school were similar to those that advocate for more restrictive placements. Subject 2 chose to have her son continue his education at the special segregated school for children with multiple disabilities. She said she wanted him "...to be with people like him." She felt he might be bullied by other kids. These types of statements are at the heart of the argument that some believe a more restrictive placement is beneficial. However, research has shown that the idea of children with severe disabilities being bullied by children that are typical may be overblown, and the idea that children with severe disabilities can't be friends with children without disabilities seems to be inaccurate in many cases (McDonnell, 1987). Subject 2 also felt that she wasn't informed of her placement options, which is common among parents with children with disabilities. However, the preschool teacher disagreed and felt that Subject 2 was informed and just chose not to explore other options due to her comfort level with the special school. Comfort level influences many parents to send their child to one place or another. Many parents don't want to leave their own personal comfort zones. This may have been the case with Subject 2. Subject 2 was personally comfortable with the staff at the special school, the other students at the special school, the predictability of the special school, the sheltered environment provided by the special school, the transportation provided by the special school, and maybe most importantly, her perception of her son's happiness and previous success at the separate public school.

In both cases studied during this research, there was no mention of the Subjects' sons participating in the decision-making process. This is a common issue in placement decisions. It is estimated that only 48% to 64% of students with disabilities participate in their IEP meetings (Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004). In preschool, it is possible that these boys would not have been able to participate in their IEP meetings, and therefore were not invited to the meeting and/or asked to share their wishes for an appropriate placement. However, as they got older, it seems possible that each boy would have been able to participate in his IEP meeting and possibly provide additional information on his wishes for placement. Although Subject 1's son has been exposed to both placements, Subject 2 isn't aware of his other options. This may not have made a difference in the placement decision, but students who share responsibility for developing and implementing their IEPs are usually more satisfied and more self-determined (Keyes & Owens-Johnson, 2003).

Although many of the factors that were influential in the placement decisions of these two Subjects were common factors that lead to placement decisions for many children with disabilities, there were a few factors present in Subject 2's case that were relatively unique to this study. Subject 2 had a high comfort level with the special school that her son was attending. This comfort level may be due in part to her previous employment with the agency that provided services to her son. This is not common in all placement decisions. However, the convenience of having a permanent placement while avoiding conflict, having to get to know different professionals and schools, and having to advocate year after year may have also contributed to this comfort level, and these are common contributors to placement decisions and a high comfort level for some parents. Another influence, according to the preschool teacher, was that Subject 2 had a difficult regular public school experience. Another factor that wasn't common in other

research was Subject 2's concern with the convenience and perceived availability of related services including speech therapy. This perception, however, may not be a valid. Research has shown that only a small percentage of parents believe that their child receives less therapy services in a regular school than they would in a special school (McDonnell, 1987). With her being a single mother, she was concerned that she wouldn't be able to get her child to appointments that were to occur outside of the school day due to her hours at work. She felt it would be great to have a speech therapist work with him extensively during the school day. It seems that she was not made aware that speech therapy would be available in a regular school if it was determined as a need in her child's IEP or that she was made aware and chose not to hear it. The district would have had to provide her child with as much speech therapy as the IEP team felt was necessary regardless of funding or resource availability.

This study presented several factors in decision making of LRE that were common to factors presented in other research. However, many factors that were common in other research such as financial resources, available space, and the availability of services didn't appear to be factors that were influential in making these LRE placement decisions. In many other cases, the placement opinion of the parent differed from that of the district administration. It's estimated that in 67% of placement issues, parents and guardians tended to seek a more restrictive setting than the school district (Getty & Summy, 2004). It is not clear whether the school district advocated for a more or less restrictive placement for either of the Subject's children in this study.

Many of the factors that were presented in this case study appear to be linked to Appalachian culture and/or its rural location. This seems to be especially true in Subject 2's case. Both of these Subjects' children would be defined as Appalachian as they were born in the area

defined as Northern Appalachia and currently reside in the Southeastern Ohio Appalachian region. It is common for Appalachians to not trust others as they rely heavily on community, church, and family. This dates back to when Appalachians were isolated due to a lack of travel due to poor or no roads, a lack of industrialization, no telephones, no nearby neighbors or cities, and heavy reliance on family (Mei & Russ, 2007). It seems that Subject 2 had some trust issues with the professionals with whom she wasn't familiar at the regular public school as she stated that she didn't know them and wouldn't be comfortable with them. She had also worked with people at the agency where her son received preschool services and had developed a great deal of comfort working with those professionals. With comfort level taken into consideration, it also appears that this influenced Subject 1's decision to trust the preschool teacher's advice to explore her son's options. She was very comfortable with her son's preschool teacher, and she trusted her as a colleague and friend. She also appeared to know more about the individuals who would be working with her son in either placement that she could have chosen for her son. Subject 2 also appeared to place more value on vocational skills and hands-on learning than on doing academics. This is typical of Appalachian families as they have historically placed more emphasis on work than on education, more emphasis on exposure to something real than on reading or hearing about something and, more emphasis on oral communication than on written communication (Mei & Russ, 2007).

With all of these factors taken into consideration, how can two children that are very similar be placed in very different LRE placements? It appears that in these cases the needs of both the child and family were met by placing each child in a different placement. The decision is made by the IEP team, but it is based on the needs of the child. The needs of the child are determined, in part, by the parent. In many cases, including that of Subject 2, meeting the needs

of the child means satisfying both the child and the parent. In both cases, the preschool teacher felt that the placement decision, particularly at the time, was the best one that could have been made because, in both cases, everyone appeared happy with the outcome. Subject 1 has reevaluated her son's placement numerous times, and has maintained that the regular public school is the appropriate place for his services. Subject 2 hasn't reconsidered her son's placement, because she doesn't feel that a change this late in his education would be successful or necessary. She feels that the outcome would be the same whether her child remained in the segregated school or moved to the regular public school for the remainder of his education.

Although both research questions were answered, there were limitations to this study. One limitation is that this sample was a convenience sample. Each subject was chosen based on knowledge obtained by the researcher due to the connections that she had with each subject. Subject 1 was a coworker of the researcher and Subject 2's son was one of the researcher's students. The researcher had background knowledge in the case of each of the children. Another limitation is that there were only two subjects used in this study and one professional. There was also no administrative point of view added to this study and this study only looked at subjects located in Appalachian Southeast Ohio.

With the limitations of this study considered, it would be beneficial to do further research in this area. It would be beneficial to expand the sample and study more cases and study more cases in other rural and urban areas in and out of Appalachia. This would allow for more data upon which to draw themes and conclusions related to rural Appalachia, and it would allow one to compare factors present in Appalachia to those in other parts of the country. It would also be beneficial to include other IEP team members in the study. Having an administrative point of view, related service personnel or a child with a disability's point of view would enhance the

understanding of the complex processes related to LRE. Another limitation is that the researcher had more knowledge of Subject 1 given then she saw her son on a daily basis than on Subject 2. The researcher's pro-inclusion point of view may have led to conclusions that were biased toward greater inclusion. This point of view has been influenced by the researcher's experiences including her own experience as a teacher in a segregated special school. Understanding families reasons for making such decisions is very complex and may also be very much related to their perceptions about schooling, their advocacy role and willingness to navigate complex systems and specific individuals within them, and their overall beliefs of disability and the roots and continuing influences of those beliefs on their parenting.

After discussing the results, drawing conclusions, reviewing limitations, and making future research recommendations, it is possible to describe implications for practice. This will be discussed in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6

Implications for Practice

There are many implications for practice that can be drawn from the results and conclusions in this study. As stated earlier in Chapter 5, it appears that in the cases involved in this study that the needs of the both of the children were met by placing each child in a different placement even though they are very similar in age, disability label, educational needs, and academic ability. Although the needs of each family appear to be met, it is the opinion of this insider researcher that the needs of each child could have been met by placing them both in a regular public school in a special education classroom that allowed for some inclusion with typical peers, even if the exposure to typical peers may be limited. Given what the IDEA states about least restrictive environments for children with disabilities, those involved in the decision-making process for the two Subjects' children in this study may have made decisions based on parent perceptions and wishes and fears rather than the educational needs of the children and what the law requires.

To prevent teams from making decisions that are less favorable of inclusive environments, a variety of changes could be made. First, parents need to be more informed of their child's educational needs and potential, rights under IDEA, and options for placement. Before holding the IEP meeting for a child who is transitioning from preschool to kindergarten, the team may want to consider meeting to discuss the needs of the child including related services, an educational aide, a functional curriculum, or any special accommodations that may need to be made such as a change in the child's physical environment, class work and/or diet. After needs are determined, school teachers and administrators need to communicate with parents on their child's options for a placement including benefits and limitations. After all

options are given, schools need to assume that the parents know nothing about these placements and offer them the opportunity to visit the placements available to see what services can be offered, what the classrooms are like, what the school is like, and how the curriculum can be modified to meet their child's particular needs. Meeting with other parents or advocates who have children in public schools may also be helpful. These things need to be done before a decision regarding placement is made. This would help prevent some of the fears that are preventing parents from allowing their child to be included in a regular public school. After a visit is made to see all of the options available, schools should encourage parents to meet with school administrators and/or teachers to allow them to ask questions pertaining to the places they visit as they related to their child's needs. These meetings should not focus on the limitations of certain places; they should focus on how the child can have a good learning experience and what it would take to eliminate barriers that create limitations for a child with disabilities.

The second change that could be made is how IDEA regulates schools' LRE placement decisions. IDEA states that IEP teams make the placement decisions and parents must be included. IDEA also requires school officials to make a "good faith" effort to place children with disabilities with their typical peers as much as possible (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). IDEA does not have any provisions in place that guarantee a child is placed in the least restrictive environment other than requiring states to report aggregate data by disability label. If a parent wants their child in a more restrictive placement due to concerns with less restrictive options, rather than concerns related to the child's needs, in some cases, there is no one to advocate for the child to be placed in a less restrictive environment that may be able to meet the needs of the child appropriately. Further, a district might advocate against a more restrictive placement due to funding issues. At times, more restrictive environments, such as separate schools, may cost more

money than a traditional less restrictive placement in a regular public school special education classroom.

In many cases, such as the cases that were studied, the children were preschool-aged students, and were not able to communicate their needs or wishes. Further research needs to be done to find ways to ensure that a child is appropriately placed based on needs instead of just what the school district or the parents want. Currently, the only thing required if a child is placed in a more restrictive placement than a regular public school, is a statement explaining the reasons for the decision (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). After a statement is reviewed, it is unclear who verifies its accuracy and what is done if the team has erred. There are plenty of cases that have been brought forward that have resulted in ways to help determine if a district is in compliance with IDEA when it comes to the LRE for a child, but if a district's compliance with LRE isn't questioned, they wouldn't be asked to prove that they are in compliance unless the aggregate data reported is suspect. It appears that nothing is done if the parent and district agree on a placement decision, even if it is more restrictive than necessary. Legally a member of the IEP team who believes there is an error can add a dissention to the IEP or file for an impartial due process hearing or a complaint (Office for Exceptional Children, 2010), but the reality is that very few people would do this.

Another change that needs to be made in many schools is the frequency of placement decisions. The IEP team is required to review the placement of the child every year at the IEP meeting (Daniel, 1997). However, for children with severe disabilities this is unlikely to happen. It seems that many districts place a child in a regular public school or a segregated school and then assume that this is the best placement for the rest of the child's education. This many not be the case. A child whose behaviors, medical needs, and/or educational needs change may need to

be placed in a more or less restrictive placement based on the change in needs. School officials may be taking a “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it” attitude. In many cases, this may prevent a child from taking advantage of more educational and social opportunities particularly into less restrictive environments.

The last issue that needs to be addressed is the presence of all members of an IEP team in the IEP meeting. In cases where a child’s placement is undecided, it would be beneficial to ensure that all parties who could possibly serve the child attend the IEP meeting where a child’s placement decision is going to be made. IDEA 2004 allows for exclusions from IEP meetings if the person is not seen as necessary by the parent or the local district representative (Etscheidt, 2007). In a situation where a parent is seeking a more restrictive placement for their child, having a general education teacher and a special education teacher from the regular public school attend the meeting would be beneficial and may help alleviate some of the negative perceptions that the parents may have about the local regular public school. In a situation where a parent is seeking a less restrictive placement for their child that may not meeting the child’s needs, having a special education teacher from a segregated public school attend the meeting would be beneficial. It also may be beneficial for parents to speak with other parents that have been through a similar placement decision. Sometimes parents don’t trust school officials, but they may trust other parents who are dealing with the same or similar issues (Hamre-Neitupski & Neitupski, 1981).

If strategies are incorporated in schools to ensure open lines of communication between school officials and parents, there may be greater assurance that students with moderate to severe disabilities are placed in the most appropriate and beneficial educational environment. The needs of the child must be considered first and foremost as the most important reason for a particular placement.

Parents and school officials should not let their agendas or attitudes interfere with the most appropriate educational placement for a child with a disability. Often there are personal interests involved in making decisions to move children to a more segregated environment or school.

After working in a segregated school, the researcher feels that many teachers at these schools feel that their programming is unmatched by anything a regular public school classroom can provide. This attitude often “sells” parents on their programs and curriculum and gives them the sense that their child is getting an individualized educational experience that cannot be provided in a more inclusive environment. It gives parents the sense that those teachers in segregated schools specialize in children with more severe disabilities and are more qualified to meet their needs than teachers in regular public school. This perception by parents, in many cases, may be inaccurate as the qualifications to be hired in a segregated school are the same as those needed to be hired in a regular public school special education classroom. Often, due to isolation, lack of socialization and networking opportunities with other professionals, a lack of extra-curricular opportunities, difficulty managing paraprofessionals, and classes with children with very difficult behaviors, it seems that segregated schools actually struggle to find and keep teachers and administrators that specialize in moderate to severe disabilities, and often have to settle for teachers and/or administrators that don’t specialize in this area or have been teaching so long that they aren’t concerned with networking or their isolation from more typical students. These teachers may lack current professional development and may not be updated on best teaching practices. After years of teaching in a segregated school, these teachers also may lack high expectations for students because they have lost touch with how other children with similar disabilities operate in regular public schools.

Teachers in segregated schools may not be the only ones attempting to “sell” parents on segregated schools. Administrators at segregated schools are interested in keeping their classes full so that schools that are segregated don’t close. Administrators in regular public schools often send children to segregated schools, because they have low expectations and/or fears about inappropriate behaviors and how regular parents and other children will react. They may feel that sending these children away will make their jobs easier, and that they will please more people by sending these children away than they would if they let them stay in the regular public school. Administrators at regular public schools may also fear that they need to hire more employees to manage a child’s behavior in the regular public school. If they send the child to a segregated school, they may not need to hire an educational aide to work with that child. Costs related to staffing may be a factor that influences these decisions.

Administrators and teachers may have personal agendas and attitudes, but parents are often may be the biggest obstacle to children getting to experience a regular public school. Without having a person from the school district to encourage inclusion for children with severe disabilities and a person to hold IEP teams accountable for placement decisions without having a personal bias, southeast Ohio and other Appalachian areas will lack inclusive opportunities for kids with disabilities. Who will be the gatekeepers in this process? If teachers and administrators in regular public schools, teachers and administrators in segregated schools, and parents all encourage more restrictive environments, and they are the ones making the decisions, how can a child truly achieve the least restrictive environment possible?

References

- Block, M. E. (1996). Implications of U.S. federal law and court cases for physical education placement of students with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 13*(2), 127-152. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Champagne, J.F. (1993). Decisions in sequence: How to make decisions in least restrictive environments. *EdLaw Briefing Paper, 9 & 10*, 1-16.
- Corporation on Rural and Appalachian Development. (2009). *Vital statistics for rural Appalachian school districts* [Data file]. Retrieved from F:\LRE\COALITION OF RURAL AND APPALACHIAN SCHOOLS.mht
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Etscheidt, S. (2006). Least restrictive and natural environments for young children with disabilities: a legal analysis of issues. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 26*(3), 167-178.
- Etscheidt, S. (2007). The excusal provision of the IDEA 2004: streamlining procedural compliance or prejudicing rights of students with disabilities?. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(4), 13-18. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Getty, L. A., & Summy, S. E. (2004). The course of due process. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 36*(3), 40-43. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Hamre-Nietupski, S., & Nietupski, J. (1981). Integral involvement of severely handicapped students within regular public schools. *Journal of the Association for Severely Handicapped, 6*(2), 30-39.
- Hosp, J., & Reschly, D. (2002). Predictors of restrictiveness of placement for African American and Caucasian students. *Exceptional Children, 68*(2), 225-238.
- Huefner, D. (2006). *Getting comfortable with special education law: A framework for*

working with children with disabilities. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004,

Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004).

Johnson, J. W., & McDonnell, J. (2004). An exploratory study of the implementation of embedded instruction by general educators with students with developmental disabilities. *Education & Treatment of Children, 27*(1), 46-63. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

Kauffman, J. (1996). Eight myths about special education. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 28*(5), 1-12.

Keyes, M. W., & Owens-Johnson, L. (2003). Developing person-centered IEPs. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 38*(3), 145. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

Latham, P., & Latham, P., Mandlawitz, M. (2008). *Special education law*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Leinhardt, G., & Pally, A. (1982). *Review of educational research, 52*(4), 557-578.

Lytle, R. K., & Bordin, J. (2001). Enhancing the IEP team. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(5), 40. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

Mason, C., Field, S., & Sawilowsky, S. (2004). Implementation of self-determination activities and student participation in IEPs. *Exceptional Children, 70*(4), 441-451. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

McDonnell, J., Mathot-Buckner, C., & Thorson, N. (2001). Supporting the inclusion of students with moderate and severe disabilities in junior high school general education classes: The effects of classwide peer tutoring, multi-element

curriculum, and accommodations. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 24(2), 141. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

McDonnell, J., Thorson, N., Disher, S., Mathot-Buckner, C., Mendel, J., & Ray, L. (2003). The achievement of students with developmental disabilities and their peers without disabilities in inclusive settings: an exploratory study. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 26(3), 224. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

McDonnell, J. (1987). The integration of students with severe handicaps into regular public schools: An analysis of parents perceptions of potential outcomes. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation*, 22(2), 98-111. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

Mei, T., & Russ, K. (2007). Understanding and facilitating career development of people of Appalachian culture: An integrated approach. *Career Development Quarterly*, 56(1), 34-46. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

National Education Association. (1995). Inclusion: What does the law require?.

Office for Exceptional Children. (2010). *Whose IDEA is this?* Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education

Ohio Department of Education. (2008-2009). *District-level performance data* [Data file].

Retrieved from

[http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&To picRelationID=1540&ContentID=35162&Content=86471)

[To picRelationID=1540&ContentID=35162&Content=86471](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&To picRelationID=1540&ContentID=35162&Content=86471)

Palley, E. (2006). Challenges of rights-based law: Implementing the least restrictive environment mandate. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 16(4), 229-235.

Palley, E. (2009). Civil rights for people with disabilities: Obstacles related to the least

restrictive environment mandate. *Journal of Social Work in Disability and Rehabilitation*, 8, 37-55.

Philip, D. (1997) Educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment: A slippery slope for educators. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 35(5), 397 - 410

Ryndak, D., & Ward, T., & Alper, S., & Storch, J., & Montgomery, J. (2010). Long-term outcomes of services in inclusive and self-contained settings for siblings with comparable significant disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(1), 38-53.

Snyder, R. F. (1999). Inclusion: A qualitative study of in-service general education teachers' attitudes and concerns. *Education*, 120(1), 173–182.

Turnbull, H., & Ellis, J., & Boggs, E., & Brooks, P., & Biklen, D. (1981). *The least restrictive alternative: principles and practices*. Washington D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

United States Census. (2000) *Quick facts* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>

United States Census. (2010) *Quick facts* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html>

US Office of Special Education Programs.(2009) *Number of students ages 6-21 served under IDEA Part B by disability category and state* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.ideadata.org/arc_toc10.asp#partbLRE

- U.S. Department of Education (2001). *OSERS 23rd annual report to Congress on the implementation of the IDEA*. Retrieved November 14, 2010 from www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/OSEP/2001
- Walsh, J., Kemerer, F., & Maniotis, L. (2010). *The educator's guide to Texas school law*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press
- Yell, M. (1998). *The law and special education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall.
- Yell, M. L., & Katsiyannis, A. (2004). Placing students with disabilities in inclusive settings: Legal guidelines and preferred practices. *Preventing School Failure*, 49(1), 28-35. Retrieved from EBSCOhost

Appendix A Ohio University IRB Approval



10E112

Office of Research Compliance
 RTEC 117
 Athens, OH 45701-2979

: 740.593.0664
 : 740.593.9838
 www.research.ohiou.edu

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

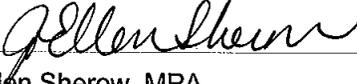
Project Title: Least Restrictive Environment: Influences on Placement Decisions in Rural Appalachian Ohio

Primary Investigator: Jaclyn Raike

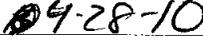
Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Marta Roth
 (if applicable)

Department: Teacher Education



 Jo Ellen Sherow, MPA
 Office of Research Compliance



 Date

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

Appendix B Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Parent Subjects

The semi-structured interview will include the following questions for the mothers:

1. Did you make the decision to place your child at _____ or did a school representative make the decision?
 - c. What were you told about your child's placement?
 - d. Were you informed of placement options available to your son?
2. What were your priorities when you made the placement decision?
 - a. Was socialization with peers important?
 - b. Did the idea of having a safer environment come into play?
 - c. Did you feel that certain professionals including related service providers such as speech and language pathologists or physical therapists in particular places were more competent than others? What/Who convinced you of this issue?
 - d. Were you more comfortable or familiar with people at one place?
3. Why do you feel that your child was placed in his current educational placement?
 - j. Was behavior a factor?
 - k. Was safety a factor?
 - l. Was academic ability a factor?
 - m. Were individual needs considered?
 - n. Was the need for related services (amount and quality) a factor?
 - o. Was convenience a factor? (was number of different teachers/administrators, bus drivers, etc. a factor?)
 - p. Was size of the school a factor?
 - q. Was comfort with personnel a factor?
 - r. Was continuity of programming a factor?
4. Do you feel this was the best placement for your child?

Appendix C Semi-structured Interview Question for Preschool Teacher

The semi-structured interview included the following questions for the preschool teacher:

1. Did you play a large part in the decision of where _____ was placed? Was his mother active in the decision-making process?
 - c. Did you inform the mother of her son's placement options?
 - d. Did you provide input on what you felt the best placement would be?
2. Why do you feel that _____ was placed in his current educational placement?
 - k. Was behavior a factor?
 - l. Was safety a factor?
 - m. Was academic ability a factor?
 - n. Were individual needs considered?
 - o. Was the need for related services (amount and quality) a factor?
 - p. Was convenience a factor? (was number of different teachers/administrators, bus drivers, etc. a factor?)
 - q. Was size of the school a factor?
 - r. Was comfort with personnel a factor?
 - s. Was continuity of programming a factor?
 - t. Do you feel this was the best placement for _____?
3. What do you feel the priorities of the mothers were when placement decisions were made?
 - a. Was socialization with peers important?
 - b. Did the idea of having a safer environment come into play?
 - c. Did you feel that certain professionals including related service providers such as speech and language pathologists or physical therapists in particular places were more competent than others? What/Who convinced you of this issue?
 - d. Were they more comfortable or familiar with people at one place?
4. Do you feel this was the best placement for each child?

Appendix D Ohio University Consent Form

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: **Least Restrictive Environment: Influences on Placement Decisions in Rural Appalachian Ohio**

Researchers: Jaclyn Raike

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The study you are being asked to participate in is a parent comparative interview process by an Ohio University graduate student in the Special Education program. For the study, you will be interviewed to find out what factors led you to decide to place your son with special needs in the least restrictive environment in which he is currently placed. You may choose to end the interview at any time. The final project will be completed within six months, but your full participation will not be required during the entire six months. At the conclusion of this study, you will be presented with a final written report that will compare and contrast the factors that led you to make your decision in comparison with the factors that influence parents in other parts of the country to make least restrictive environment decisions.

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated in this study. Your name or other identifiers will not be used at any point in the study or written report.

Benefits

This study will benefit current and future educators by providing a comparison of factors that influence parents to make least restrictive environment decisions in the Appalachian region to the factors that exist in other parts of the country. Talking about your decisions may also help you better understand the process.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by not using your name or other identifiers for any reason in this study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact

Researcher

Jaclyn Raike

jacilewou@gmail.com

(937)-876-9587

Research Advisor

Marta Roth

roth@ohio.edu

(740)-593-4436

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____

Version Date:

[04/18/2010]

Appendix E Consent for Release of Information

Consent for Release of Information

I authorize Jaclyn Raike to interview my son's preschool teacher and obtain information that pertains only to my son's educational placement. I understand that this information will only be used for the purpose of a research report on least restrictive environment placement decisions in Appalachia. This information will not be shared with others until the final written report is finished and no names will be identified in the final report. I understand that members of Ohio University will see the final written report.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____