

Family Members' Involvement in the Initial Individual Education Program (IEP) Meeting and the IEP Process: Perceptions and Reactions.

Helen Hammond

University of Texas
at El Paso ,
El Paso, Texas, USA

Lawrence Ingalls

University of Texas
at El Paso ,
El Paso, Texas, USA

Robert P. Trussell

University of Texas
at El Paso,
El Paso, Texas, USA

In view of the importance of family involvement in the process of developing a child's initial Individual Education Program (IEP) for special education services, it is imperative for educators to be aware of possible reactions family members may experience at the onset of the process. The purpose of this study was to determine the types of reactions family members had from their initial introduction to special education services. This study involved interviewing 212 family members over a span of four years regarding their reactions and experiences when their son or daughter was initially referred to special education services. The data collected from family members were analyzed and summarized. The results of the study indicated family members experienced a variety of both negative and positive reactions to the initial IEP meeting. Implications for educators and school personnel are discussed.

Legal and Legislative Imperatives

The original Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of the United States of American, Public Law 94-142, mandated that individuals with disabilities would receive an Individual Education Program (IEP) conceptualized by a committee including the family members/parents of children with disabilities. The IEP is a legal agreement between the school and the family detailing the educational services, goals and objectives, instructional modifications, and timelines for services for students identified as having an educational disability.

The IEP is a required document mandated by federal law that enhances or replaces the state directed curriculum for students without disabilities. This legislation was ground-breaking in that it laid a foundation for parents of students with disabilities to have an equal partnership with the education system in planning the most

appropriate program for their children (Friend, 2005; Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982; Martin, Marshall & Sale, 2004; Smith, Gartin, Murdick, & Hilton, 2006).

Although the laws have provided for equal partnerships between schools and families for several decades, parental participation in the IEP process has yet to be one of equality, and as such, relationships between parents and educators have been tenuous (Deslandes et al., 1999; Friend, 2005; Rock, 2000; Simpson, 1996). Research dating back to the 1970s (see McAleer, 1978) and extending to the present day (see Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Friend; 2005; Rock, 2000; Simpson, 1996) have consistently reported this disparity.

In order to create true equal partnerships, parents must be involved at each level of their child's educational program. Unfortunately, family members have voiced concerns that educational programs are determined in advance without parental input and that parental feedback is not sought or valued (Rock, 2000; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Helen Hammond, Department of Education Psychology and Special Service; e-mail: hhammond@utep.edu.

School districts put themselves in a precarious situation by not involving parents to the extent and intent of IDEA. In order to create educationally beneficial and legally valid IEPs, schools must be equal partners with families in identifying student needs and determining the array of educational options. By not doing so, schools have lost legal cases brought against them under IDEA (Drasgow et al, 2001; Yell & Drasgow 2000).

Parent Experiences in the IEP Process

Regrettably, past research has demonstrated that many families have had negative experiences with educational professionals during the implementations of the IEP. Past studies have indicated that parents have reported that IEP meetings focus exclusively on their child's weaknesses and shortcomings. As a result, parents have expressed an assortment of negative feelings experienced during IEP meetings, including guilt, embarrassment, intimidation, and alienation (Goldstein, 1993). Cantor and Cantor (1995) noted the IEP process can foster family anxiety as they are being faced with decisions that will impact their child's life. Some family members feel a great deal of pressure and discomfort having to accept responsibilities regarding the development of the IEP (Bateman & Linden, 1998). Smith (2001) and Flynn (2006) found family members felt intimidated by the IEP process. The parents commented they felt overwhelmed by the number of professionals at the meeting, experienced guilt regarding their child's disability, were confused by the jargon, and believed teachers lacked respect for them. Smith et al. (2006) reported parents may not only feel intimidated by the professionals at the meeting, they may also be distrustful of the school personnel and question why they are even involved.

Researchers over a substantial period of time (see Hardy, 1979 & Wright, Stegelin & Hartle, 2007) have reported there are a vast number of reasons parents are anxious to involve themselves with school personnel. They stated many challenges stem from the parental beliefs and values. Some parents have previously had negative school experiences, feel incompetent to work with teachers, may not feel valued by educators, and may believe teachers are the authority figure and consequently not open to parental ideas.

Soodak and Erwin (2000) had similar findings stating family members felt the professionals at the IEP meeting were the primary decision makers and family feedback was not valued. Hanson, Beckman, Horn, Marquart, Sandall, Greig and Brennan (2000) reported family members stated that they did not feel comfortable in sharing their ideas at the meeting. They believed if they did share their concerns and opinions, these contributions would not be valued.

One of the most problematic areas in the IEP process as noted by Turnbull et al. (2006) was when family's priorities for the IEP were neglected. They stated that many family members become disempowered during the IEP process. When family members feel devalued and their knowledge is not appreciated, their value of being involved diminishes. Families may believe the IEP meeting is a meaningless event with predetermined goals. As a result, family members may view their role as a mere technicality whereby their role is limited to solely providing a signature on the IEP document (Rock, 2000).

Although considered equal partners under the law, many parents are not prepared to function as equal partners due to a lack of understanding of special education terminology and procedures (Goldstein, 1993; Lytle & Bordin, 2001). This disadvantage makes family members hesitant to contribute to educational decision-making, as well as being vulnerable to becoming coerced by committee members representing the school about decisions for the child (Rock, 2000). Parents have also reported feeling as though educational professionals intentionally discourage parental participation in the IEP meetings. Educators tend to dominate the meetings creating an impression that parental input is not fostered (Dabkowski, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997).

Aside from the fact that public law requires it, communication between education professionals and parents is essential for developing the most effective educational programs for students (Rock, 2000; Smith et al., 2006; Turnbull et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2007). Factors that hinder communication between educational professionals and parents have been identified as: 1) parents having insufficient opportunities to contribute and respond to committee decisions and information, 2) parents and teachers approaching the child/student from different perspectives, and 3) poor teacher understanding of student needs (Munk, Bursuck, Epstein, Jayanthi, Nelson, & Polloway, 2001).

According to a recent study by Fish (2006), family members reported that their initial IEP experiences had been negative. Parents indicated that educators were inconsistent with the adoption and adaptation of parent suggestions and input that they believed to be best practice for their children. Another problem parents encountered resulted from disagreements between educators and parents on how to manage student problem behaviors (Fox, Vaughn, Wyatte, & Dunlap, 2002). Family members indicated that educators still tend to revert back to punitive measures to change student behavior, as opposed to interventions more suitable for students with disabilities. Additionally, parents expressed concerns about the unintelligibility of both special education law and the IEP process. Parents suggested that the IEP meetings should be re-conceptualized to provide parents better opportunities for meaningful participation. This should include providing family members more information prior to the meeting so that they will be aware of the agenda and come better prepared. Also, by involving parents prior to the meeting, parental input and concerns can be built in as part of the agenda items.

In a study completed by the U.S. Department of Education (2001), findings indicated family members' perceptions of the IEP process can vary amongst racial and ethnic groups. Although family members' attendance at the IEP meeting and their agreement on IEP goals and services were similar in percentages, their evaluation of their involvement in the IEP process varied greatly. Approximately 50% of parents from African American, Hispanic, and Asian backgrounds rated their involvement as less than desirable when compared to family members from a White background. Researchers speculate this variation may be the result of educators' preconceived notions regarding families from various ethnic backgrounds (Friend, 2005).

Promising Practices

Parents recommended that to become more active and involved in the IEP process, they must become more knowledgeable about special education law. Also, family members need to be unrelenting in demanding the appropriate services for their children (Fish, 2006). There is evidence that suggests that school and family collaborations can be productive and conflict free.

After interviewing 40 mothers with children with disabilities, Singh (2003) found that the majority of the families were content with the school-based services for their children. Results from this study also found that parents valued regular communication with teachers. Most parents indicated that they would like to communicate with their child's teacher on a daily basis. Parents also reported that the quality of communication was as important as regularly scheduled opportunities to communicate. Most of the parents stated they respected open and honest communication. Further, parents reported that they appreciated teachers taking the time to explain information to them.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of reactions family members had experienced from their initial introduction to special education services.

From the data collected in the study, researchers were able to:

- 1) substantiate previously identified family involvement issues,
- 2) further the literature by identifying additional issues impeding family participation prior to and during IEP meetings,
- 3) identify positive and negative parent patterns of perception surrounding the IEP process and
- 4) provide educators with recommendations regarding best practice during the initial IEP meeting.

Method

Participants and settings

This study examined the reactions of family members of students who had been referred for special education services, particularly their perceptions of attending the initial IEP meeting. The family members consisted of individuals who resided in a southwestern community in the United States. This region borders the United States and Mexico. The population of this region consists of approximately 85% of individuals coming from a Hispanic background. The family members interviewed in this study mirrored the population of this region with approximately 85% of respondents coming from a Hispanic background.

The family members came from six rural school districts and one urban school district within this border community.

Procedure

Data were collected over a 4 year time span (2004 – 2008) through a semi-structured interview process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). A criterion sampling technique was used to identify a sufficient number of participants (family members) for this study (Gay et al., 2006).

The sample size included 212 family members who met the following criteria: 1) family members of children in early childhood and elementary schools, 2) family members with children who had recently been referred for initial special education evaluations, 3) family members who had recently participated in the initial IEP meetings for their children, and 4) family members who attended the initial IEP meetings in order to discuss qualification and services for their children. By selecting families following these criteria, this study assures a strong representative sample of parents' perceptions and experiences who are involved in the initial referral and assessment stages of the special education process. Family members verbally responded to a set of questions addressing: 1) reactions to their child's referral for an initial special education evaluation, 2) reactions to their experiences at the initial IEP meeting, 3) reactions regarding their level of participation at the meeting, 4) degree of comfort during the meeting, and 5) other questions relating to their perceptions of the initial IEP experience. Please see Table 1 for a complete list of the interview questions (Appendix 1, Table 1). The protocol for completing the semi-structured interviews was predetermined by the researchers. The individuals who completed the interviews were graduate students in a master's program within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Services. These data collectors were seeking a Master's Degree in Special Education or Educational Diagnostician. The family members interviewed came from a variety of educational backgrounds ranging from less than a grade twelve education to a master's degree. A majority of the family members' knowledge of special education services at the time of their child's referral ranged from no knowledge to minimal knowledge.

Family members were selected based on the aforementioned sampling criteria. To minimize selection bias, data collectors identified family

members with whom they had limited professional or personal interactions. Data collectors were trained in using a semi-structured interview process which utilized both structured and unstructured questions.

This interviewing process enhances validity and reduces bias (Gay et al., 2006). In order to assure standardization across the interviews, data collectors received predetermined interview questions which consisted of a set of ten questions. Five questions were structured with closed-ended items and five questions entailed an unstructured item format with an open-ended design. The data collectors were trained in the administration of the instrument to ask the questions in both a particular sequence and wording. Each of the comments and responses from the family members were written verbatim.

From the written responses, the researchers analyzed the collection of responses by organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the data. Organization of data included tallying the data from closed-ended questions and assigning percentages of like responses. The data from open-ended questions were compiled according to verbal responses. The data from open-ended questions were categorized according to common themes. Initially, the data was organized and categorized by the researchers independently. This was accomplished by 3 researchers analyzing the data and identifying themes and categories. Through the process of review and revision, themes and categories of participant responses were agreed upon. Data were then interpreted to determine parental perceptions of the initial IEP meeting (see Figures 1 through 7 and Appendix 1, Tables 1 through 4 for results).

Results

Question one asked parents about their first reactions when notified that their child needed to be evaluated for the possibility of an educational disability. Two hundred and twelve parents responded to this question. Fifty percent indicated they were prepared for the news, 20% indicated that they were shocked by the news and/or felt a sense of disbelief, 13% indicated that they were frustrated and/or angry by the news, 12% stated that the news caused them concern and/or worry, 4% indicated the news made them sad, and 1% stated that they felt guilty (see Figure 1).

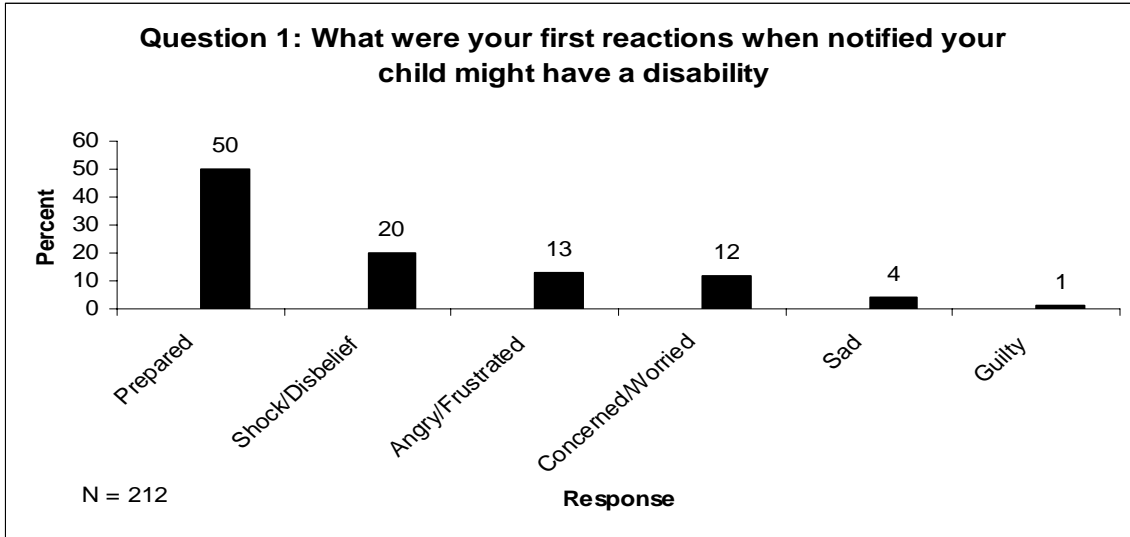


Figure 1. Responses to question 1

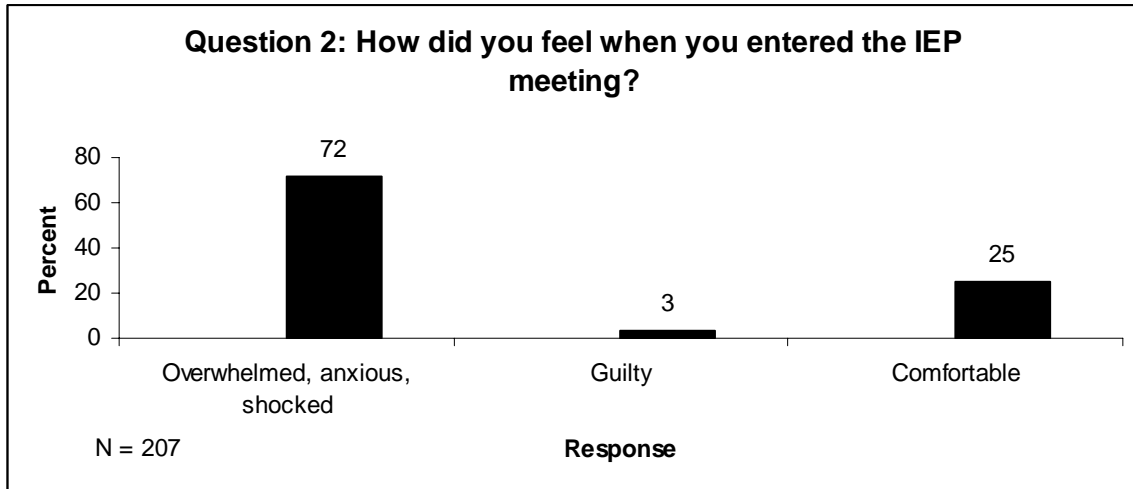


Figure 2. Responses to question 2

Question two asked parents about their initial feelings when entering the first IEP meeting for their child. 207 parents responded to this question. Results from parents indicated that 72% felt overwhelmed, anxious or shocked. 3% of the parents indicated that they felt guilty and 25% stated they felt comfortable (see Figure 2).

Question three asked parents if they felt that their child needed special education services. A total of 199 parents answered this question. 75% of the parents surveyed stated they did feel that their children needed special education services and 19% indicated that their children did

not need special education services. 6% of parents were unsure (see Figure 3).

Question four asked parents how well they understood the terms and issues presented at the IEP meeting. A total of 199 parents answered this question. Twenty-seven percent stated that they understood all of the terms and issues. Thirty-one percent stated they understood most of the terms and issues. Thirty-three percent stated they understood some and 9% indicated that they understood none of the terms or issues at the IEP meeting (see Figure 4).

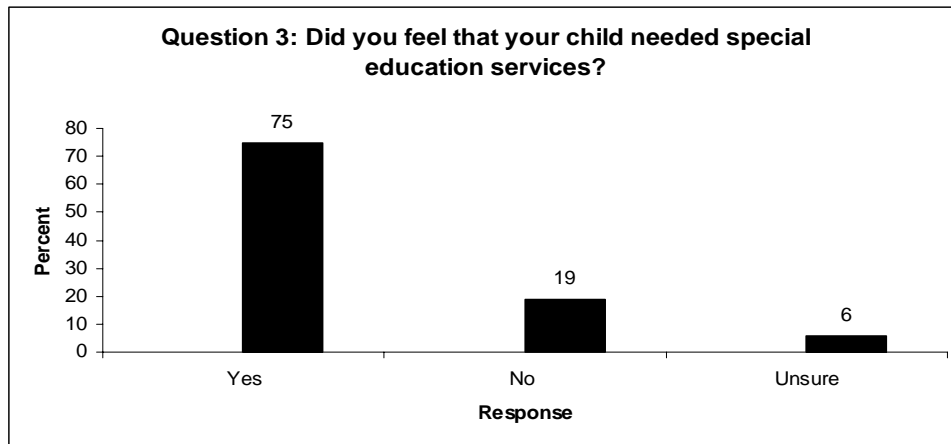


Figure 3. Responses to question 3

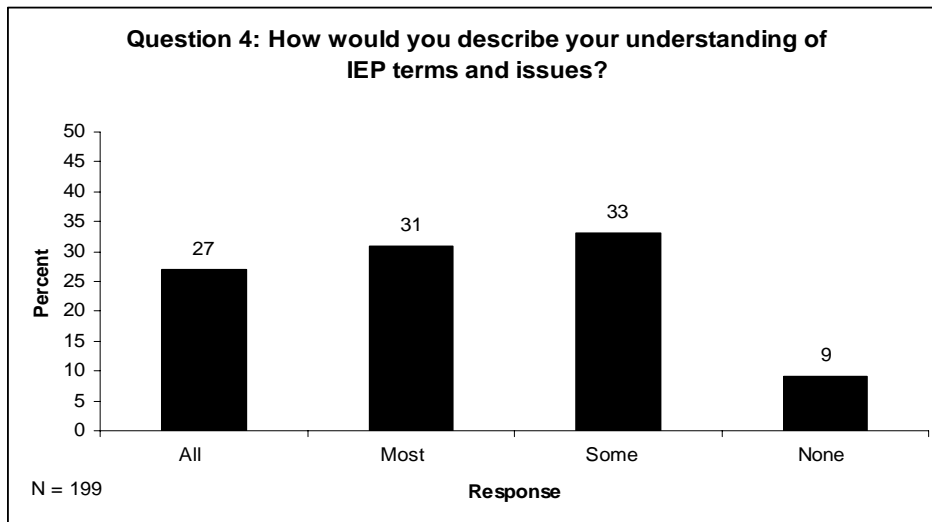


Figure 4. Responses to question 4

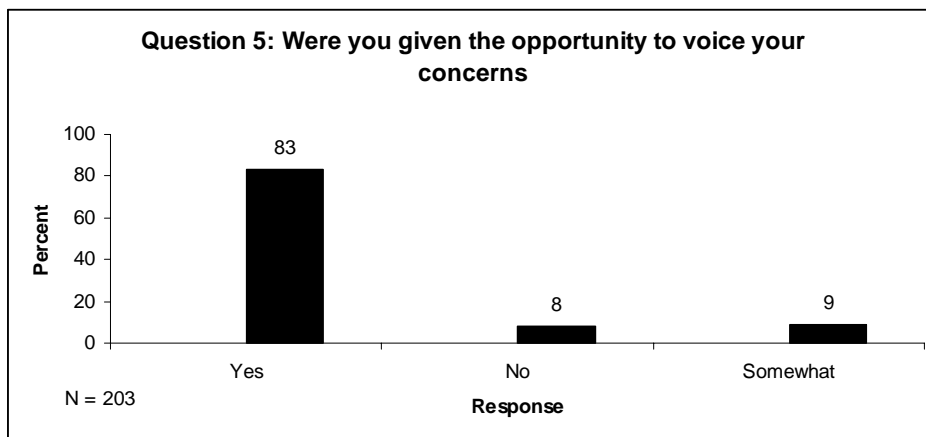


Figure 5. Responses to question 5

Question five asked parents if they were given the opportunity to voice their concerns at the initial IEP meeting. Two hundred and three parents responded to this question. Eighty-three percent of parents questioned stated that they were able to voice their concerns. Of those who indicated that they were able to voice their concerns, 3% (7/203) stated they felt scared to do so and 1 % (3/203) stated that no one listened to them. Eight percent of the parents stated they were not able to voice their concerns, while nine percent stated they were somewhat able to voice their concerns (see Figure 5).

Question six asked parents if they felt comfortable voicing their opinions at the IEP meetings. A total of 207 parents responded to the question. Sixty-five percent of the parents stated that they felt comfortable voicing their opinions. Twenty-eight percent of the parents stated they felt they had to agree with the decisions being made at the IEP meeting. Four percent did not feel comfortable voicing their opinions and three percent stated they were both uncomfortable and had to agree with the decisions being made (see Figure 6).

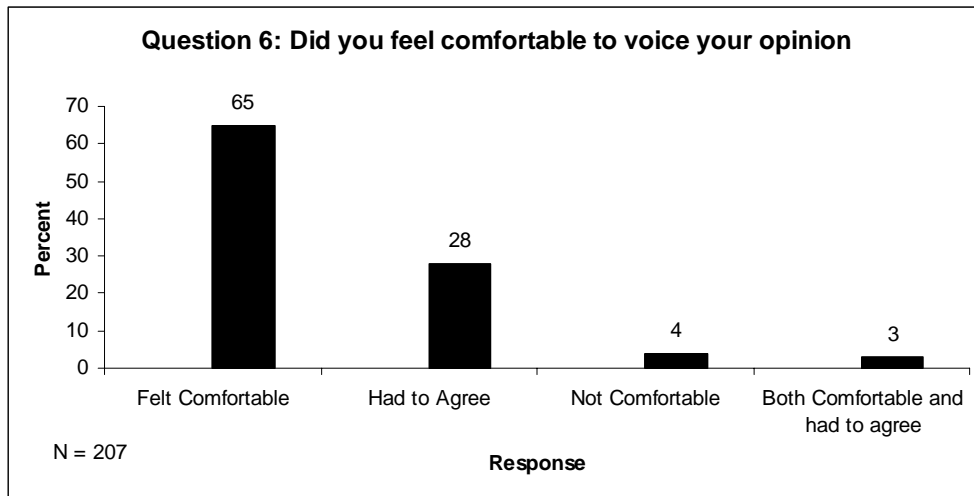


Figure 6. Responses to question 6

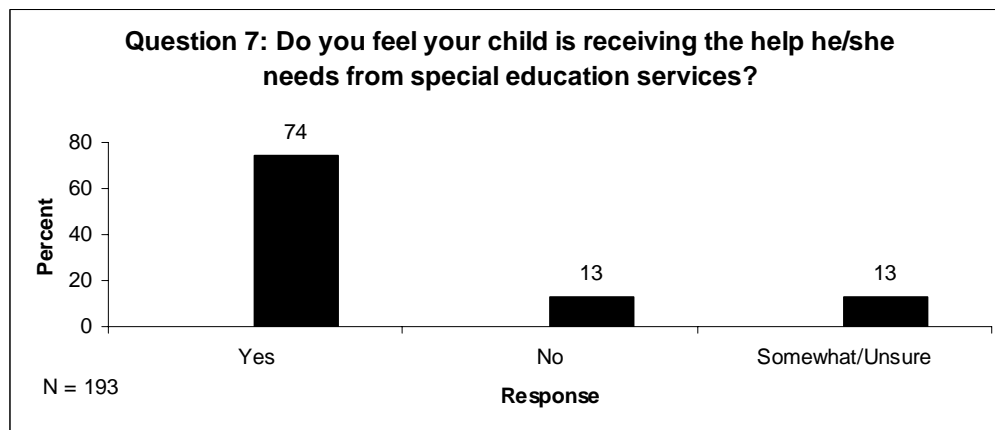


Figure 7. Responses to question 7

Question seven asked parents if they believed special education services determined at the IEP meeting were helpful for their child. One hundred and ninety three parents responded to this question. Seventy-five percent of the parents indicated their child was benefiting from the special education services.

Thirteen percent of the parents stated their child was not benefiting from the special education services, and another thirteen percent of the parents indicated their child was somewhat benefiting or they were unsure if their child was benefiting (see Figure 7).

Question eight asked parents to tell two things that were positive about their initial IEP meeting experience. There were 281 responses to this question. One hundred parents indicated that during the meeting they felt their child was going to get the help that he or she needed. Seventy seven parents indicated there were positive comments made about their child at the meeting. Seventy three parents indicated they felt supported and an important part of the meeting. Sixteen parents stated that the professionals at the meeting answered their questions and explained important terms. Fifteen parents indicated the meeting was structured and organized (see Appendix 1, Table 2).

Question nine asked parents to tell two things that were negative about their initial IEP meeting experience. There were 135 responses to these questions. Sixty six parents indicated there were some negative components of the meeting while 69 parents indicated that there was nothing negative about the meeting. Negative comments regarding the meeting were categorized into 3 primary themes, including poor meeting structure, negative interactions, and negative meeting outcomes (see Appendix 1, Table 3). Under the theme of poor meeting structure, parents indicated that there were no introductions (1 response), the meeting was too fast (6 responses), there was no administrator present (5 responses), there were too many people at the meeting (3 responses), the meeting place itself was uncomfortable (2 responses), the meeting did not start on time (3 responses), and the meeting was held at an inconvenient time for the parent (4 responses).

Under the second theme of negative interactions, there were 25 responses. Parents indicated that there was negative talk about their child and family (4 responses), the team focused on analyzing the family (2 responses), parents were unsure of terms (7 responses), parents felt intimidated (4 responses), parents felt the team was not interested in what they had to say (3 responses), parents did not feel supported by the team (3 responses), and that the team was giving the parents false information (2 responses).

Under the third theme of poor meeting outcomes, there were a total of 17 responses. Parents stated that the professionals at the meeting seemed to disagree with each other and were unhappy with the decisions (1 response), parents felt as though the plan was to get rid of their child in their child's current setting (2 responses), parents felt as though decisions were

made prior to the meeting (3 responses), parents felt that the overall decisions made at the meeting were poor (10 responses), and parents felt that the whole experience was negative (1 response).

Question ten asked parents to make recommendations to school personnel and other parents based on their experiences at the initial IEP meeting. There were a total of 82 responses to this question. Parents indicated that it was important for parents to get involved in the team process by asking questions and communicating with school personnel (23 responses), teachers and school personnel need to show support for parents (11 responses), school personnel need to prepare parents for the initial IEP meeting (21 responses), professionals' explanations need to be clearer (8 responses), professionals need to reduce the amount of disturbing interruptions (3 responses), meetings should not be rushed (5 responses), school personnel need to be friendlier to parents (3 responses), parents need to have an open mind to the information being presented (2 responses), school personnel need to have translators for parents with a primary language other than English (2 responses), the meeting should have less people in attendance (1 response), teachers need to explain the outcomes of the meeting to the child as opposed to providing services without explanations (1 response), parents should bring an additional person to the IEP meeting to help them to remember information (1 response), and the administrators need to look interested (1 response) (see Appendix 1, Table 4).

Discussion and Implications

The historical fact that parent involvement in the special education process has been problematic for decades and that this continues to be a concern at the current time is notable. As reported in the review of literature, research dating back to the 1970s (see McAleer, 1978) and extending to the present day has been consistent in reporting this concern. Although this study focused on parents from primarily Hispanic backgrounds, the results are similar to those findings involving other ethnic groups (see Deslandes et al., 1999; Friend; 2005; Rock, 2000; Simpson, 1996; Turnbull et al. 2006). Therefore, it can be assumed that the results from this study are relevant to other ethnic groups.

Legal mandates and professional ethical guidelines have not seemed to have had an effective impact on improving parental

involvement. Although for years the professional literature has validated the concerns of parental involvement in special education, little change has been noted in the practices of involving families into this system. The historical facts are noteworthy and the professional field needs to pay close attention to the issue of successfully involving families into the special education system.

Interviews analyzed in this study brought forth some continued concerns about the effectiveness of involvement of families in the special education system. The concerns from the families were based on the perceptions of the family members during an initial IEP meeting. The perceptions were gathered from families who were both aware and unaware that their child had a disability. Many of the findings from the analyses of the interviews suggested that professionals in the field of special education should focus on improving family involvement in order to improve the perceptions of the families.

The analysis of responses which focused on the family's reaction to the news their child was to be assessed to determine if an educational disability existed varied in response. The outcomes revealed approximately half of the families were comfortable hearing this news while half of the families experienced some level of distress. Further analysis suggested probable reasons for these results. Since approximately 50% of the families indicated they already knew or suspected their child had a disability prior to the initial referral, it should not come as a surprise that these families reported little upset from the news regarding the pending assessment. However, the remaining 50% of the families reported that they were not aware their child had a disability prior to the school system informing them of the initial assessment. All of the families from this group reported some level of emotional trauma resulting from the news of the initial assessment. It is significant to note that for those families who reported some level of distress, the special education system provided little or no assistance to help the families deal with this trauma.

Results from the analysis that queried the families about their level of comfort when first entering the initial IEP meeting had little variance. The analyzed responses suggested that the majority of the families experienced levels of emotional distress. These types of responses suggested that the initial meeting needed to have procedures in place to either assure that the

families were more comfortable with this meeting or that safeguards were in place to help prepare families to deal with the stress of the meeting.

A majority of the parents felt that their child needed the recommended special education services that were suggested in the initial IEP meeting. The results from this analysis revealed that a majority of the parents were confident with the assessment and the recommended individualized program. It is disconcerting that a majority of parents, who acknowledged that their children needed the services, described experiencing significant emotional distress during the course of the meeting.

Alarming, a majority of the families reported that they were not able to fully communicate during the initial IEP meeting. Analyzed comments from this probe during the interviews suggested that terminology used during the meeting was not clearly understood and that much of the vocabulary was not familiar to the families. Additional analysis suggested that the professionals at the initial IEP meeting did not provide clarification of the terms or advanced vocabulary. However, quite impressively, the majority of the families related that they were able to voice their concerns about their child's learning problems and that the professionals attending these initial IEP meetings appeared to have listened to these concerns.

A majority of the families interviewed revealed that they felt the designed special education programs would be helpful for their children and that they felt at the current time the program was helping their child. The analysis of the responses from the interview suggested that the families were pleased with the outcome of the initial IEP meeting. A majority of the positive comments about the meeting related to the benefits that the child of the family would receive from the special education services.

As part of the interview, family members provided the researchers with a variety of recommendations for professionals to consider for improving the involvement of families at this delicate and critical time of the initial IEP meeting. A majority of recommendations focused on the following for professionals to: 1) provide better communication during the meeting, 2) develop methods to improve the comfort level of the family, 3) implement strategies to help families deal with the stress and trauma they encounter during the initial referral and IEP meeting, 4) prepare family members for specific logistics of the upcoming meeting (meeting participants, roles

of individuals who attend the meeting, purpose of the meeting, possible outcomes of the meeting , etc.), 5) notify family members of assessment results so they have adequate time to formulate questions and discussion points, and lastly, but perhaps most importantly, 6) convey to family members they truly like their child and have the child's best interests in mind.

In summary, the results of this study reveal much needed recommendations for enhancing family involvement while also identifying some positive qualities of the current special education system. Based on the outcomes of this study, the following are recommendations for improving the quality of parental involvement in the initial stages of special education referral and assessment: a) acknowledge and assist families with the varying levels of emotional trauma endured during the initial IEP meeting process, b) improve the communication skills used by professionals during the meeting, and, c) assure greater comfort levels for the families before, during and after the initial IEP meeting. Overall, family members should be adequately prepared in all aspects of the meeting. This preparation would most likely not only reduce the stress levels of the family members, but increase their confidence in involving themselves in the discussions and decision-making process. Although family members in this study endured certain negative aspects of the initial IEP meeting and process, the special education systems appeared to have developed individual educational programs that were acceptable to the families. Families indicated that they had a level of confidence that their children would have the necessary educational support.

Implication for future research

One glaring weakness to this study, and to other research that has examined family involvement in the special education system through family perceptions, lies in the unknown knowledge level of the parents regarding "ideal" family involvement. If the parents were extremely knowledgeable about what the intended standard for "ideal" family involvement was through public laws and/or through professional standards, would results of their perceptions be consistent with the results of current perceptual analyses of parental involvement? Family members may not be able to give professionals an accurate interpretation of their level of involvement or understanding if they do not realize the standards required by law and/or professional guidelines. Therefore, future

studies may wish to focus on extensive training of parents on the minimum standard of parental involvement required by our laws and then gather their perceptions on how special education systems performance rates in comparison to these standards.

Limitation to the study

A limitation to this study involved the level of knowledge of the parents who responded to the interview. All of the parents who were interviewed had little or no knowledge about the IEP process and the legal guidelines regarding the development of the initial IEP. The legal guidelines that are in place in the United States through IDEA are very family focused and encourage to the maximum extent equal participation between professionals and families. Unfortunately, the application of these mandates are not always family focused and do not match the intent of IDEA regarding family involvement. This factor may have skewed the data since having more knowledge about these legal guidelines may have changed their responses. For example, if a parent was more knowledgeable about the legal guidelines for parent involvement when developing the IEP and they were not actively involved, their perceptions might have been more negative regarding this process.

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FAMILY MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE IEP MEETING

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1.

Interview Questions

<p><i>1. What was your first reaction when you were notified that your child was being referred to be assessed for special education services?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Preparedb) Shock/Disbeliefc) Unhappy/Sad <p><i>2. How did you feel when you entered the room for the IEP meeting and saw the group of people who would be attending the meeting?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Overwhelmed, anxious, shockedb) Guiltyc) Comfortable <p><i>3. Did you feel that your child needed special education services?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Yesb) Noc) Unsure <p><i>4. How would you describe your understanding of the terms and issues discussed at the IEP meeting?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) I understood all of the information;b) I understood most of the information;c) I understood some of the information;d) I didn't understand any of the information; <p><i>5. Were you given the opportunity to voice your concerns or opinions?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Yesb) Noc) Somewhat <p><i>6. Did you feel comfortable to voice your opinion or did you feel you had to agree with what was decided by the team?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Felt Comfortableb) Had to Agreec) Not Comfortabled) Both Comfortable and had to agree <p><i>7. Do you feel your child is receiving the help from the special education program that is needed?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Yesb) Noc) Somewhat/Unsure <p><i>8. Please tell me two things that happened to you in the meeting that were positive.</i></p> <p><i>9. Now please tell me two things that happened to you in the meeting that were negative.</i></p> <p><i>10. What would you recommend to the members of the IEP committee or recommend to other parents who attend the meetings to improve the quality of the meetings?</i></p>

APPENDIX 1.

Table 2.
Responses to Question 8

<i>Response</i>	<i>N</i>
Favorable comments about child	77
Feeling supported and part of the meeting	73
Answered questions and explain terms	16
My child is going to get the help needed	100
Meeting structure and organization	15
Total	281

Table 3.
Responses to Question 9

<i>Poor meeting structure</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Negative Interactions</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Negative Meeting Outcomes</i>	<i>N</i>
No Introductions	1	Negative talk about child family	4	People unhappy with decisions	1
Meeting too fast	6	Analyzing parent	2	Plan to get rid of my son	2
No administrator present	5	Unsure of terms	7	Decision made prior to meeting	3
Too many people	3	Intimidated	4	Poor program outcomes	1
Meeting place uncomfortable	2	Not interested in what I said	3	Meeting a negative experience	10
Did not start on time	3	Did not support the parent	3		
Difficult Meeting time	4	False information	2		
Total	24 Total		25 Total		17

Table 4.
Responses to Question 10

<i>Response</i>	<i>N</i>
Parents need to ask questions and communicate	23
Need to show support to parents	11
Prepare parents for the meeting	21
Slow down with explanations	8
Don't disturb meetings with interruptions	3
Don't rush the meeting	5
Be friendly to parents	3
Parents need to be open to what they hear	2
Good to have translators	2
Have less people in the meeting	1
Teachers should explain special education services to the child	1
Bring someone with parents to help remember information	1
Administrators need to look interested	1
Total	82