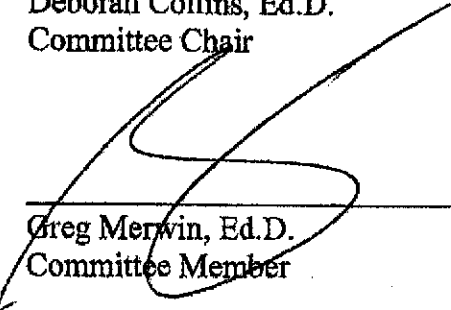


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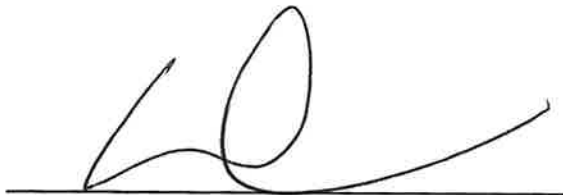
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THE IMPACT OF TRUST AND LEADERSHIP FOR IEP TEAM OUTCOMES: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS
AND SPECIAL EDUCATORS

by William Lynch

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the central vehicle for school teams and families to develop an individualized program of instruction for students with disabilities. When school teams and families disagree, it can lead to negative results, including due process and mediation (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2015; Mueller & Piantoni, 2013). This study sought to understand how to build successful IEP team meeting agreements. The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data from 125 families of students with special education through an online survey, that included Likert-style questions followed by three open-ended questions. The survey included demographic information and ratings of experiences, as well as questions related to trust (Lewicki, McAllister, and Biles, 1998), as well as questions related to servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008). Qualitative data was also collected through open-ended question interviews with six district-level leaders in special education, which was analyzed alongside the qualitative responses of the families with students in special education.

The analyzed data which was collected provided a deeper understanding for how special education leaders can guide school IEP teams to making appropriate IEP team agreements that benefit the student with families. The research validated the theoretical framework of previous studies related to trust (Lewicki, McAllister, and Biles, 1998). This study suggests that special education leaders who exhibit servant leadership tendencies (Saleem et al., 2020; Russell and Stone, 2002), which can include communication, seeking input, and most notably, empathy, are best able to navigate the diversity of parent feelings of trust and distrust, which can then lead to successful agreements between school teams and families.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Prior to the 1970's, students with disabilities were denied access to schools and education. Schools were simply able to tell parents that they could not serve their child, and parents had no input or legal recourse. As a result, millions of students were left at home while their peers attended school and were integrated into society. This changed in the 1970's when legislation was passed that was later known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed, one of the key pieces of the legislation included the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the central vehicle for school teams and families to develop an individualized program of instruction for students with disabilities. However, the law stops short of identifying strategies to engage families as IEP team members, thus requiring exploration through research. Making this even more urgent, disagreements between school staff and families lead to costly settlements and due process outcomes (Mueller et al., 2008). The problem this study sought to address is how to build successful IEP team meetings that inspire trust, input, and collaboration from families.

The IEP meeting determines the educational outcomes for students based on shared-decision making. An IEP meeting is comprised of parents, teachers, administrators, and other supporting personnel, and not necessarily facilitated by lawmakers and attorneys. In examining the complex world of special education, practitioners must be mindful of the legislative and legal constructs. Additionally, IEP meetings have inherent opportunities that may present emotional stalemates and conflict. Parents may feel the needs of their students are not being met. Educators may feel they are being asked to do more than they are capable of. Accordingly, IEP

practitioners must include strategies that foster effective communication and collaboration.

When high-functioning IEP teams meet to determine the most important strengths and challenges of a student and align goals and services to meet the needs of that student, it results in a positive IEP team experience and the student's needs are met. When families and school teams disagree on the goals and services for students it can lead to a costly and protracted resolution process. These potential disagreements are the central problem this study sought to address.

The literature very clearly identifies due process and mediation as financially burdensome, as well as causing other negative impacts for staff and families (Mueller & Piantoni, 2013). Much of the research demonstrating successful strategies supports the engagement and active inclusion of families in all steps of the process (Beck & DeSutter, 2020; Collier et al., 2015; Mueller, 2009; Rossetti et al., 2017; Stefanski et al., 2015). Additionally, there is an increasing number of research studies geared towards IEP family engagement for families of color and non-English speaking families (Harry & Allen, 1995; Lo, 2008; Miller et al., 2016; Salas, 2004).

Historically, special education issues have been litigated and there are many studies, including a national examination of special education case law, (Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014), and a study of due process hearings (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2015). Additionally, there are studies focused on the experiences of the families in an IEP, which includes those families from higher socio-economic demographics, (Esquivel et al., 2008), and families who speak English as a second language, (Larios & Zetlin, 2012). It is also important to understand the needs for families of color and those from a low socio-economic status, since they may be more likely to feel intimidated, distrustful, or unfamiliar with the legal structures of an IEP.

This study sought to bridge the gap between the worthy goals and principles of federal IDEA law, and the reality of meetings between school teams and families that may become emotional and adversarial. Determining the best practices for effective collaboration and partnership is needed in this arena. Ultimately, a thoughtfully-constructed IEP does more than spare the parties from emotionally and financially draining consequences: it supports student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological mixed-methods study is to examine the impact of parent trust and how parent trust is influenced by school district and team leadership. This study hopes to measure parent trust and distrust, as well as parent perceptions of school team leadership. Additionally, this study sought to understand district leadership practices, and how those practices impact IEP site teams and their relationships with parents. By identifying best leadership practices, IEP team members will be more likely to inspire trust and collaboration with families to create high-functioning IEP teams, and team outcomes that focus on student success. Special education leaders also provide a unique perspective on solving disagreements on IEP decisions before they lead to mediation or due process. This study will better understand how IEP team meetings can develop trust and collaboration, thus avoiding IEP team disagreements, which can lead to costly and time-consuming dispute resolutions (Mueller et al., 2008).

Research Questions

The primary questions of this study are:

1. How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?
2. What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?

The secondary questions are:

3. To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
4. To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
5. How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?

Theoretical Framework

Trust Theory

One of the components to successful IEPs is the impact of trust (Grocke, 2018; Wellner, 2012). As one can imagine, when families no longer trust the other members and school personnel of the IEP team, the opportunity to have a functioning meeting can potentially deteriorate. Past studies and theories on trust have been conducted and expounded upon, with a number of those studies collected by Dirks & Ferrin (2001). Trust has been studied in multiple academic fields, including “sociology, psychology, political science, economics, neuroscience, medicine, and management to explore the effects of legal policy on the nature of trust and interpersonal relationships” (Hill & O’Hara, 2006, p.1718). Such a wide-ranging field of studies are useful, as IEP team meetings encompass trust realms that extend outside of supervisor/employee and customer/service provider constructs.

Lewicki and Bunker (1996) identified three levels of trust. Calculus-based trust is the level of trust a consumer uses to purchase a product. Knowledge-based trust is aligned with the predictability of others, and essentially tied to having worked together. Identification-based trust exists once two parties are committed to the same values and goals, which would be the optimal stage of trust to reach in the case of an IEP meeting (Kramer & Tyler, 1996, pp. 121-122).

An important theoretical addition is the concept of distrust. Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) designed a model for interaction with high trust and low trust on one axis, alongside high distrust and low distrust on the other axis, discussed at greater length in Chapter 2. The resulting quadrants provide useful identifying characteristics to monitor how IEP team members feel about their IEP team.

Using this paradigm of trust relationships to understand the IEP team and parent relationship with the school and district, this study will attempt to design questions to families to determine if trust was a factor in their happiness with their IEP team, or a basis for their decision to file for due process.

Conceptual Framework

Team Theory

This study will include an analysis of the IEP team through the conceptual lens of various leadership theories, such as team leadership theory and servant leadership theory. IEP decisions are determined by IEP teams, which are a combination of school personnel and families. In studying this interaction of people, team leadership theory (Northouse 2019) specifically addresses how people interact in an organizational setting. In addition, team leadership includes an examination of team effectiveness (Zaccaro et al., 2001) that fosters a climate of emotional control by having clear goals, team roles, and clear performance strategies. Lastly, by utilizing the attributes of servant leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002) including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community, leaders can effectively work to improve connections with IEP team members. The connection between servant leadership is further explored by

Saleem et al. (2020) in their findings that establish the relationship between servant leadership and trust.

Significance of the Study

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) was passed, one key piece of the legislation included was the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is the central vehicle for school team members and families to develop an individualized program of instruction for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). However, the law stops short of identifying strategies to engage families as IEP team members, thus requiring exploration through research.

In examining the complex world of special education, one must be mindful of the legislative and legal constructs, in addition to including the human element of decision-making. The IEP meeting is a shared decision-making team that determines the educational outcomes for students. It is a team made of parents, teachers, and other supporting personnel, and not necessarily facilitated by lawmakers and attorneys. When families and schools disagree on the goals and services for students, it can lead to a costly process in both time and money.

Therefore, it is critical for school leaders to understand the laws and best practices to support productive, defensible IEP meetings that support student growth and achievement. Building a special education program seeking parent collaboration and student achievement needs research-driven leadership that incorporates all facets of special education laws, legal guidelines, and best practices. This study sought to compare and contrast the thoughts, feelings and actions of parents of special education and special education leaders, to identify best practices for effective collaboration and trust for IEP teams. It is the hope of the researcher that

the results will inform IEP teams in the effective use of research-based practices, which will lead to collaborative decisions.

Definition of Terms

Alternative Dispute Resolutions (ADR): School district-level supports to serve as alternatives to due process, which can include IEP pre-meetings, local mediation, local advocates, and facilitated IEPs.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Passed in 1990, the ADA protects the civil rights of people with disabilities. This legislation was updated from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): As defined by the National Institute of Mental Health (2022), “autism spectrum disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave” (p. 1).

Due process hearing: A formal hearing between the school district and the family, heard by an Administrative Hearing Officer, that concludes with a legally binding agreement.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA): Public Law 94-142 established in 1975 and the previously named iteration of the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

Free appropriate public education (FAPE): A legal recognition under federal law that ensures all students with disabilities are provided free access and related services in public schools.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Passed in 1975 and reauthorized in 1990, 1997, and 2004, IDEA is federal law governing all facets of rules and systems for special education students in the public schools.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An individualized family service plan that is agreed upon annually by the family and school with the goals and services required to meet the student's educational needs. For the purposes of this study, IEP may be used to refer to a meeting taking place with the IEP team and can be interpreted in context.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The maximum extent appropriate that students with disabilities can learn alongside their general education peers.

Local Education Agency (LEA): The agency responsible for individual schools; oftentimes the public school district that students attend.

Mediation: A voluntary process agreed to by both parties and led by a trained professional mediator.

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA): A consortium representing one or more school districts that provides special education direction, and oftentimes provides resources and services that a smaller school district would not be able to provide logistically or financially. For example, the SELPA may provide a single hearing specialist for multiple districts have few students requiring that specific need.

Delimitations

This mixed-method study was conducted between September 2022 and December 2022. The participants of the study were confined to parents and special education leaders. The parent survey was sent digitally through social media, so the sample of participants were only those families who voluntarily elected to take the survey. The participants of the open-ended interviews were special education leaders selected by convenience sampling and localized to southern California. The selected aspect of this study was the impact of trust and servant

leadership on IEP team outcomes from the viewpoints of parents/guardians and special education leaders, and therefore may not be generalized to other regions or special education programs.

Researcher's Perspective

It is important to recognize any aspect of researcher bias in this study. The researcher of this study regularly serves as a school administrator in IEP team meetings, and has been in IEP team meetings that have many times been collaborative and other times been contentious between school staff and families. The researcher has similarly served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal to IEP meetings that have represented the full continuum of services and placement. The researcher has also facilitated IEP meetings, participated in local mediation resolution efforts, and a participant in a formal mediation meeting. Alternatively, and just as importantly, the researcher has never been involved in an IEP meeting as a parent.

Despite the researcher's admitted alignment serving as a member of the school staff on IEP teams, the researcher sought to remain objective in the analysis of the data in this mixed methods study as delineated in Chapter 3, Ethics.

Summary

This study examined how IEP school team members and families manage federally-legislated conversations that have the potential to become adversarial and emotionally charged. This study sought to understand the impact that trust plays in those relationships, and if elements of servant leadership can serve to improve IEP team meeting agreements. The researcher hoped to understand how district leaders in Special Education view their roles and actions in preparing site teams to successfully navigate parent trust and relationships in IEP meetings as an outcome.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background and History in the United States

Until the 1970s, millions of students with disabilities were denied access to services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). There were many reasons for this, including the lack of local public-school resources and services, lack of proper diagnoses, or outright exclusion from public school. Since that time, a series of legal and legislative actions have brought about change that continues to this day.

Prior to the advent of federal legislation to support students with disabilities in schools, court cases in the early seventies paved the way for student rights in education. (Martin et al., 1996). Federal courts used the precedent set in *Brown vs the Board of Education* to argue that students are provided equal protection of the law without discrimination, in this case based on disability, rather than race. In a separate case, the courts cited the Fourteenth Amendment to provide parents with the right of due process, and that interpretation continued to ensure that parents should receive prior notice to changes in their child's education (Martin et al., 1996).

Legislation that guaranteed protection from discrimination was established in 1973 with the Rehabilitation Act, which in at Section 504 required the ending of discrimination for those agencies receiving federal dollars. A subsequent federal law attached funding to schools to support excess costs for services. Originally titled the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), the law ensured that schools provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students (20 U.S.C. § 1412 [a]), regardless of disability. Later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, this legislation established and organized the rights and procedures that had been generated from the preceding court cases.

Within IDEA, there are several educational requirements for public schools. The requirements are directed towards states as they govern the agency responsible for public schools under their authority. States in turn are provided funding from the federal government to support special education, under the guidance of IDEA. One of the most historically significant requirements of IDEA is *child find* (20 U.S.C. §1412 [a][3]), which requires the state to locate, identify, and evaluate all students in need of special education, regardless of the severity of their special education needs. In many respects, this piece of legislation addressed the failures of schools to serve students with disabilities prior to the 1970s.

IDEA established the concept of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a document that is reviewed annually by an IEP team (20 U.S.C. § 1414 [d]), which is composed of the parents of the child, at least one regular education teacher, at least one special education teacher, and a representative of the local education agency (LEA). Additionally, there needs to be a qualified member of the team who can interpret evaluation results, which could be a school psychologist or the special education teacher. IDEA also identifies other individuals able to be present, which can include providers of other related services, or those individuals present based on parent discretion, which could include advocates or attorneys for the parent. The child with the disability should also be in attendance, when appropriate. It is this team that is tasked with collaboratively making the decisions that support a student's educational needs.

The IEP document itself includes present levels of achievement and measurable annual goals, including a timeline of the periodic reports identifying the child's status on reaching those goals. The document must also include an explanation of the supports and services needed to reach those goals, and the identification of the extent that a student will be participating in

general classrooms, alongside non-special education peers or specialized classrooms, if applicable (20 U.S.C. § 1414 [d]).

Among the requirements under IDEA, in addition to FAPE, child find, and the IEP, schools need to evaluate students with disabilities, provide and monitor appropriate educational goals for students with disabilities, and place students in a least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE provides a standard for students to be placed in educational environments alongside their non-special education peers to the maximum extent possible, receiving the appropriate supports and services delineated in their IEP (U.S.C. 20 § 1412 [a]). This is an important legal distinction, since placement and services are oftentimes areas where schools and parents disagree, thus leading to disagreement and due process hearings.

IEP Disagreements

Lastly, IDEA established procedural safeguards to protect families. Among these procedural safeguards are requirements that parents receive written prior notice for any changes to a student's service, or refusal of change, and to provide parents the opportunity to request an independent educational evaluation (20 U.S.C. § 1415). The procedural safeguards also allow for either the parents or the school district to formally disagree and provide the necessary legal tools to act.

IDEA requires that parents be given the opportunity to present a written due process complaint notice, which would generate a response from the local education agency (LEA), or school district. Districts can also issue complaint notices when in disagreement. Additionally, the IDEA provides either party the ability to resolve disputes through mediation via a state appointed mediator at no cost to the family, as well as the opportunity for the two parties to resolve the disagreement. Should none of the above options solve the disagreement between the family and

the school district, IDEA establishes the right to an impartial due process hearing, presided over by a hearing officer. A party may still appeal a due process hearing decision. Following an appeal, a party has the right to bring a civil action lawsuit (20 U.S.C. § 1414 [i]).

Due process is by far the costliest process, both financially and emotionally. School districts incur significant legal costs during this process in their need to consult attorneys, and staff must dedicate a large amount of time preparing for the hearing and serving as witnesses. For the families, the costs can include time off work, childcare expenses, attorney fees, and witness fees if applicable. Worst of all, by this point in the process, it is likely that the relationship between the school and the family has been significantly damaged.

During the 2018-2019 school year in the United States, a total of 5,575 written complaints were received, 11,671 mediation requests were received, and 21,338 due process complaints were received. To underscore the burdensome costs of due process hearings, of those 21,338 due process complaints, 47% of the complaints were resolved prior to a hearing (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), likely the result of districts choosing to resolve disputes outside of due process hearings. While that total number may seem insignificant to the more than six million students in special education, there is reason to believe due process hearings are increasing. In California from 2006 to 2017, the number of filed disputes increased by 84% (Petek, 2019).

A study by Blackwell and Blackwell (2015) examined 258 due process hearings in Massachusetts from 2005 through 2013. They found that “the most frequently addressed issues in due process hearings were related to the development and content of IEPs (34.3% of all issues), and student placement (30.4%)” (p. 6). The development and content of IEPs, as well as placement, are the cornerstones of IEP team decision-making. Based on these findings, one can

clearly determine that those IEP teams lacked the ability to build trusting team-oriented relationships.

Litigation

The two primary categories that IEP disputes fall into are procedural disputes and substantive disputes (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021). Procedural disputes typically include, “allegations that the parents were not provided proper notice of meetings or not given a chance to participate in meetings or that the team did not properly consider the parents views in the team meeting process” (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021, p. 156). Procedural disputes can also include predetermination and not including all members of an IEP team (Couvillon et al., 2018), such as the general education teacher or a school administrator. Couvillon, Yell, and Katsiyannis (2018) write that the most damning procedural error for IEP teams is excluding the families from IEP team decision-making process (p. 293).

Conversely, substantive disputes involve the actual student needs, services or provisions in an IEP. Substantive disputes can also arise when parents question “whether the student is making sufficient progress under the IEP as written” (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021, p. 156). Other substantive disputes can include the monitoring of a student’s progress, and correct placement in the least restrictive environment (Couvillon et al., 2018). As families and school districts seek various ways to resolve their disputes, the overall “legal standard governing these substantive questions is whether the IEP is reasonably calculated to provide the student with FAPE” (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021, p. 156).

Following a due process hearing agreement, each party has the right to appeal. Following an appeal, the losing party has the legal right to bring a civil suit against the other party. These court cases have made it to the U.S. Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court as well. Recent

cases heard in the United States Supreme Court have influenced how both procedural and substantive disputes are viewed in the court system. Starting with *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982), and more recently continuing with *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), and *E.R. v. Spring Branch Independent School District* (2018), these decisions have given rulings that provide guidance to the lower courts, and by extension, school personnel and families in dispute.

In the *Rowley* case, the family of a student who was hearing-impaired and received accommodations within her IEP sought to additionally include a sign-language interpreter in her general education classes. The *Rowley* decision established a two-part test in determining FAPE. In the first part, “there are certain required procedures that school district personnel must adhere to when developing a student program of special education” (Couvillon et al., 2018, p. 291). In short, did the school procedurally comply with the law of the IDEA? The second part of the test asked if the IEP was “reasonably calculated to enable a student to receive educational benefit” (p. 291).

Ultimately, the Court ruled that *Rowley* did not need the addition of a sign-language interpreter, since she was “performing above-average in the regular classrooms of a public school system” (*Board of Education v. Rowley*, 1982, p. 202). In this way, subsequent court rulings interpreted *Rowley*, “to require only ‘some educational benefit’ or ‘more than minimal’ progress” (Rothstein & Johnson, p. 129). Couvillon et al., (2018) agree by pointing out that, “the High Court rejected *Rowley*’s assertion that a FAPE required that Amy receive an education that allowed her to reach her maximum potential” (Couvillon et al., 2018, p. 291).

This legal interpretation of meaningful benefit in the offer of FAPE continued until recently, with the ruling in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017). In his decision,

Chief Justice Roberts of the U.S. Supreme Court wrote that, “to meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances” (2017, p. 2). Chief Justice Roberts continued by saying that an educational program must:

be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom. The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.

(*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 3)

The *Endrew* decision changed the legal interpretation of *meaningful benefit* for FAPE.

There was criticism of the *Endrew* case following its decision, on behalf of both families and schools. In speaking for low-income families, Raj and Suski (2017) write, “without the means to front the high tuition costs at Endrew’s private school, Endrew's parents would not have been able to present the compelling evidence of Endrew’s progress when more appropriate educational supports were in place” (p. 502). They continue by arguing that the Court’s standard assumes, “the ability of parents to be equal partners in the IEP process but fails to consider that not all parents are equally suited to perform that role by privileging the input of teachers and other school staff and its dicta” (Raj & Suski, 2017, p. 514). They argue that the Court has issued standards that low-income families would not be able to compete with to demonstrate they were not being offered FAPE. Additionally, “elevating the expertise of school officials in the development of sufficient IEPs with an administrative process that places the burden of proof on parents’ further disadvantages parents attempting to enforce their child's right to FAPE” (p. 516).

From the perspective of school district interests, there was a fear in *Endrew* that creating a higher standard of FAPE would be a challenge for schools to match. This was dismissed by a

recent study that concluded that, “the lower courts in the circuits that used the meaningful-benefit standard saw *Endrew F.* as not changing their substantive standard, which was a high standard before the high court's ruling” (Yell et al., 2020, p. 288). The ruling did however seem to shift the burden of proof of FAPE from “the parents to school district officials in FAPE cases by requiring that school district officials may be held to a higher standard - a standard that forces them to fully explain how their IEPs will enable a student to make progress” (p. 289).

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling one year later in *E.R. v. Spring Branch Independent School District* (2018) that gave clarity to a district’s requirements in its offer of FAPE and validated the Rowley test in applying both procedural and substantive considerations. The case involved a student with challenging disabilities. The family sought to include challenging and ambitious IEP goals and services involving the Texas standards for all students.

The Court ruled for the school district, saying that E.R. was not denied a FAPE when “school officials, using their expertise, crafted an IEP designed for her unique needs. They did not give E.R. a goal in every.... [state educational] standard because there was a high likelihood, she would not be able to meet those goals” (*E.R. v. Spring Branch Independent School District*, 2018, p. 20). Furthermore, the Court commented that not including the standards “does not translate to a procedural due process violation when they [the family] had the opportunity to participate in crafting an individualized IEP” (*E.R. v. Spring Branch Independent School District*, 2018, p. 23).

School leaders in the field of special education should have an awareness of current laws and court decisions. In the cases discussed, school leaders must have a keen awareness of both the procedural and substantive components of IEP meetings. Not only does this awareness

spare school districts the costly impact of due process proceedings, but it also provides the knowledge needed to support families and positively impact student achievement.

In addition to understanding the legal background, it is also important to possess soft skills when working with families. Part of that is identifying the perceptions families develop in working with school staff, and then applying the necessary leadership skills to support those perceptions.

Parent Perceptions of IEP Conflict

To address the concerns of IEP disagreements, there have been previous studies seeking to understand parent perceptions and perspectives of the IEP process. A qualitative study of 20 parents (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014) found that many parents regard the IEP as “deficit focused, is hard to understand, and positions their children as objects of remediation” (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014, p. 373). Parents described feelings of having an “imbalance of knowledge, power, and authority” (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014, p. 379), which left many parents feeling their only option was to reach an advanced proficiency in all elements of special education to compete in IEP meetings. For more successful experiences, parents suggested increased “communication and collaboration” (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014, p. 383), and accommodating parents’ desire to have more personalized meetings to seek their knowledge and value their input (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014, p. 384).

Another study (Slade et al., 2018) sought to identify the degree of satisfaction of IEPs with parents of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The researchers solicited parents through social media and hard copy advertisements in parent conferences, school districts, and various clinics. The study was able to gather 142 participants from the Boston area and Southern California. Parent satisfaction was studied through written survey items and a

subsequent interview, and it was determined that while more than half of the families were satisfied with their student's services, over 60% of the families were dissatisfied with aspects of their IEP experience. Another ASD study done by Fish (2006) was designed to study parent perceptions of the IEP through semi-structured interviews in a qualitative format, which determined that all families had had negative experiences in the IEPs. Furthermore, parents felt they were perceived as being unreasonable when requesting services. Conversely, parents felt they were treated better by school staff members when an advocate was present.

Within the literature exists the experiences of mothers, and the feelings and experiences they harbor walking into IEP meetings. A qualitative study (Munsell & O'Malley, 2019) recorded the perspectives of parents of children in special education programs. The study revealed three specific themes: individuation, or hopes for independence; sensitivity, and a desire for the public and others to be understanding of the experiences of students and families managing their child's disability. In addition to the three themes, advocacy was also described as a "process that was often mentioned as both difficult and time-consuming" in order for the student's needs to be met (Munsell & O'Malley, 2019, p. 276). Interestingly, the study identified a limitation of only receiving input from mothers, and that "there was a distinct lack of support or interaction with father figures" (Munsell & O'Malley, 2019, p. 278). The researchers acknowledged that this condition "calls important attention to social issues such as single parent households, gender roles, maternal versus paternal levels of parental responsibility, and the risk of difficulties for children with disabilities during periods of family stress or change" (Munsell & O'Malley, 2019, p. 278).

Although not governed by IDEA federal policy or principles, a Canadian study (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013) on maternal involvement with special education identified various best

practices for schools. The study suggested that “school officials must recognize that there are multiple ways that parent involvement matters and counts in a child's education” (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013, p. 892). The researchers suggest that parent involvement can be quantified in capacities that go beyond metrics in the academic setting, such as levels of parent participation in school activities, the use of English in the household, or various rules followed or not followed in the home. The researchers also noted that, “there is a need for educators to take a step further to involve parents by informing them of their rights, seeking their input, and building trusting relationships” (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013, p. 892). Strategies included seeking a deeper understanding of family experiences and making meetings less formal.

A study by Zagona et al. (2019) examined the experiences and perspectives of special education parents about educational decisions made for their children. The study revealed both successful and concerning experiences for the parents. The findings identified varied experiences by parents who reached agreements with school personnel as well as those that did not. “Interestingly, when parents described reaching agreement with school teams on the provision of special education services for their child, this was often due to the persistence of the parents” (Zagona et al., 2019, pp. 120-121). There is useful information in the concerns brought by parents in the study, and a variety of comments made in the focus groups support a need for increased relationship-building between the school and the families. The authors write, “parents described difficulty contributing to the decision-making process regarding their child's educational placement” (Zagona et al., 2019, p. 114).

Building strong relationships with families is a vital component of every school district. While this is the case for all students and families, it is even more important to build strong relationships with the students and families receiving special education services. Since each

special education student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that needs to be agreed upon annually, disagreements can result in mediation, and due process hearings can be damaging emotionally and financially for all parties (Office for Administrative Hearings Special Education Task Force, 2022).

Todis et al. (2008) analyzing the perceptions of those participating in mediation, supports the work of earlier studies that opposing beliefs about the needs of the child impacted lasting disagreements between school IEP teams and families (p. 14). Even after going through mediation, the authors found:

in most of the cases, either or both of the parties expected to be back in mediation or due process at some point, and in all cases the parties expected to continue to disagree about the appropriate educational programs for the students. (p. 12)

This points to the result of soured relationships between the school teams and families. The authors also suggest a solution, stating, “if relationship issues were more explicitly addressed in the mediation, respondents would report higher levels of satisfaction or optimism with long-term improvements in the situation” (Todis et al., 2008, p. 12). This points to a greater need for special education leaders to focus efforts and training towards building collaborative relationships with families.

Contemporary Context of Cultural Awareness

Perhaps the most important role of educational leaders is to understand the research that defines how diverse families view the institutions that teach their children. As the theoretical framework of this study assumes, educational leaders that utilize elements of servant leadership, including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, and building community, (Russell & Stone,

2002), may be able to establish a stronger relationship with their families. Using that rationale, it is important to analyze contemporary contexts for cultural awareness.

In reviewing scholarly research and applying it for educational leadership purposes, it is helpful to use intersectionality as a theoretical lens to support students. As Perry (2020) writes, “intersectionality is a useful analytical and organizing tool for education practitioners working toward the aims of equity” (p. 1). The concept of intersectionality can be applied to students who are receiving special education services. Sometimes students receive support for deficits and fail to capture other challenges facing students. Intersectionality “helps explain how certain students encounter varying levels of exclusion in schools because of the ways in which schools address or failed to address the intersection of their identities and, instead, respond to only one aspect of students need (Bešić, 2020, p. 117).

Intersectionality also serves educators by “naming the systematic impact of racism, sexism, cissexism, classism, and ableism among many, allows for more students and school staff to be seen and heard. Teachers, students and researchers can then better address the experience of all students” (Perry, 2020, p. 3). This can be expanded to identify how student experiences can be varied, based not just on ethnicity, but also on class, language acquisition and on whether or not the student is coming from a single parent household.

Intersectionality also helps to expose the many differences among students, rather than simply referring to students as minorities or English learners. As the diversity of students is considered in American schools, the role of leaders increases to appropriately serve all populations. As an example, Patton et al. (2016) argues that “by taking up intersectional approaches, contributors more accurately reflect the educational experience of black women and

girls to expose how invisibility has influenced their scholarly and academic pursuits, opportunities, and pathways” (p. 195). In the case of students “research shows that school staff often perceive Latino families negatively, viewing Latino children as causing schools’ low performance and Latino parents as having low academic expectations, (Miller et al., 2016, p. 41)

The school-to-parent relationship is critical to students' academic and educational success. However, “when parents’ and teachers’ ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds differ, parent-teacher relationships may be negatively affected” (Miller et al., 2016, p. 56). Therefore, “understanding how race/ethnicity and language affect parent-teacher relationships is critical to improving outcomes for a group of students that is increasingly diverse” (Miller et al., 2016, p.156)

Schools indeed face justified scrutiny, due to the possibilities of opposite demographics between students’ and staff typically seen in schools. Racial mismatch, “describes the phenomenon of educators working in environments in which their race or ethnicity is inconsistent from the pupils they teach” (Morton et al., 2020, p. 115). Morton writes that this phenomenon results in differing expectations between students of color, and that teachers alter coursework for students of color to meet their lowered expectations (Morton et al., 2020, p. 115).

Cultural Awareness in the IEP Setting

Few aspects of educational relationships collide as significantly as the category of special education. This is an area where primarily White school personnel work with diverse families to make shared decisions for children. It is important for school leaders to know the feelings of distrust and confusion that may exist from families with diverse backgrounds and identities.

According to Hannon (2017), “symptoms of autism are assessed differently between children of different racial and ethnic groups, as well” (p. 155). Black children are less likely to be identified as having autism in early visits to specialists; however, they are more likely to be identified as having other eligibilities and given a secondary eligibility of being intellectual disabled.

Harry and Allen (1995) analyzed the relationship between schools and African-American families with students in special education. The study identified five deterrents to fostering healthy relationships between special educators and families, which include the late notice or inflexible scheduling of IEP meetings, limited time for conferences, an emphasis on documents rather than participation, the use of special education and legal jargon, and the structure of power. Regarding the structure of power, the study noted “conferences in which professionals report and parents listen, implies that initiative and authority are solely in the hands of professionals” (Harry & Allen, 1995, p. 372).

Challenges for school administrators were also noted in a study of Chinese parents (Lo, 2008), citing that “four out of the five mothers indicated that they did not understand the terms educators used and that the disability classification system used in the schools was complicated and confusing” (p. 22). Additionally, “four of the Chinese parents in the study were unable to communicate freely in meetings...[and] many of the interpreters who were hired by schools were not trained in special education and we're not familiar with many of the commonly used terms the professionals used” (Lo, 2008, p. 25). The study further concluded that parents did not feel their input was valued, and that they were not encouraged to offer any suggestions. In addition, all of the parents expected the professionals to be present for the entire meeting. When the professionals arrive late or left early, it made parents feel unimportant” (Lo, 2008, p. 26).

Building relationships with all families requires time and attention, but it can be even more challenging for educators with families who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). Harry (2008) writes that, “three decades of literature on the involvement of CLD families in the special education process underscores the continuing challenge of collaboration across perceived barriers of race, culture, language, and social class” (p. 385). This was similarly explored in a survey (Hernandez et al., 2008) of families of students in special education in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The survey revealed that, “Latino parents tended to be the least aware of special education rights and resources...they were also the least likely to have participated in due process proceedings” (p. 89). Additionally, “the responses of African-American families were notable in being the least likely to feel adequately involved while also wanting to be more so” (p. 89). This information provides valuable insights for school representatives wishing to build stronger relationships with diverse families.

According to Rossetti et al. (2017), the IEP setting presents, “several barriers to collaboration with CLD families, including a lack of cultural responsiveness, inappropriate accommodations related to language, insufficient information about team meetings, little respect for familial expertise and contributions, and deficit views of families and children” (p. 329). The authors provided research-based strategies to serve CLD families better in the special education setting. To develop strategies for building collaborative partnerships with families, the authors provided three guiding questions: How culturally responsive am I?, Who is this family?, and, Have we developed a collaborative partnership? (Rossetti et al., 2017).

The most useful components of the Rossetti et al., (2017) study are related to the collaboration strategies: communication, commitment, equality, professional competence, mutual trust, and mutual respect. One of the most salient points in the article is an

acknowledgement of the shortcoming of special education. The authors suggest that, “IDEA is implemented by a bureaucratic system that demands parents become advocates for their individual children through negotiations reliant upon social and cultural capital” (Rossetti et al., 2017, p. 337). By addressing the needs of all families, the IEP team can provide all families with the support they and their children need.

A more recent study by Rossetti et al., (2020), found that CLD parents had a strong desire to thoughtfully engage in IEP team meetings, however they leaned heavily on culturally similar members of their community to access special education knowledge and expertise. Furthermore, they identified various barriers in the IEP process, such as the timing and length of meetings and poor translation services for materials and communication (Rossetti et al., 2020, p. 254-255). The study by Larios and Zetlin (2012) was a purely comparative qualitative study that sought to understand parent involvement and participation for mono- and bilingual families during IEP meetings. A total of eight families participated in the study, and researchers found that administrators demonstrated a lack of consideration for monolingual families in their conversations regarding their students’ IEP needs.

In a study of Mexican American women's experience navigating special education with their children (Salas, 2004), the findings revealed an overall negative experience for families. The study reported that, “their voice is not heard and when it is, that voice is off and discounted and not respected” (Salas, 2004, p. 190). The women additionally felt that the special education process was something, “they have to tolerate for their children to receive services” (Salas, 2004, p. 190). Similar feelings were also identified in a study analyzing the perceptions of Hispanic mothers (Shogren, 2012). The author writes, “Even though the mothers were all actively engaged in their child's life and transition planning, all felt that they did not have true partnerships with

school personnel. They did not feel that they were able to communicate their perspectives and have them respected” (Shogren, 2012, p. 180).

More recently, Alba et al. (2022) explored the differences between English- and Spanish-speaking Special Education parent perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that language did impact the reported feelings of parents on whether their children were receiving appropriate services. There were no significant findings for families related to household income or parent levels of higher education. It was only Spanish-speaking families that felt poorly served in the study.

One of the reasons non-English-speaking parents may find challenges in IEP meetings is the seemingly simple task of translation. Hart et al., (2012) identified “four common language interpretation errors are of importance during IEP meetings: omission, addition, condensation, and substitution.” (p. 208). The error types of omission and addition are when there are elements of a translation or meaning that are either missing or added by the translator. Condensation is when a translator simplifies the message or communication. Lastly, substitution is when ideas and words are not only added to a translation but added inaccurately to the original meaning.

A qualitative study specifically aimed at identifying the impact of special education experiences and stress on Latina mothers (Rios et al., 2020). They reported that feelings of stress impacted Latina mothers “before, during, and after IEP meetings” (p. 10). The study also reported those same mothers feeling that they would feel less stress if they were provided or had more access to special education knowledge.

Luelmo & Kasari (2021) sought to empower Spanish-speaking parents by providing a parent-to-parent special education advocacy mentorship program. While the results of the study showed a significant increase of knowledge for the parents participating in the program, “parents

did not change in their feelings of empowerment in advocating for services” (p. 1813). The study speculated on the causes for this, however the results underscore the complexity in supporting Spanish-speaking parents in the IEP process.

Solutions and Best Practices

Considering the many challenges for school IEP teams and families building collaborative and successful IEPs, there has been useful research to provide solutions. There has been specific research seeking to improve relationships between school districts and families. Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) found that relationships, communication, and problem-solving were important in determining the experiences of special education meetings. The authors write that, “parents more often noted that it was the quality of the relationships between their children and professionals that affected their experiences” (Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner, 2008, p. 243). Additionally, “parents indicated that their experiences were more positive when their ideas and contributions were recognized and accepted...[and] responses indicated the parents desired a problem-solving quality to conversation” (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008, p. 243).

Another study (Mueller et al., 2008) identified the journey in two different school districts. Both districts chosen had decided to make significant changes to their special education programs, due to the impact from mediation and due process. This study sought to understand the process of how district special education leadership created changes within its system to reduce legal challenges of IEPs. The researchers noted the “pivotal role administration can play in systems change. The administrators in these districts were described as Leaders who had the necessary skills to interpret special education law, objectively evaluate the quality of their Educational Services, include parents, and provide professional development” (Mueller et al.,

2008, p. 222). It is critical for special education leaders to value and include the parents and families of students in special education programs and realize the positive impact this has on student achievement and collaboration.

Beck and DeSutter (2020) analyzed the challenges of managing successful IEP meetings, particularly since many meetings happen over the course of an academic year with a rotating number of members for each IEP team. Their findings “confirm that special education teams require leaders with sophisticated facilitation skills to navigate successfully” (Beck & DeSutter, 2020, p. 140). As a result, “teacher education should target programs that foster the development of group communication skills in IEP meetings” (Beck & DeSutter, 2020, p. 140).

Additionally, the study found the need for training for the team as a whole and not just the facilitator. Beck and DeSutter (2020) wrote, “professional training for all IEP team members may enhance their abilities to contribute meaningfully to meeting discussion. The training required for productive meetings is not isolated to facilitators, as all members need to learn not only their roles in relation to their professional identity but also as an effective team member” (pp. 140-141).

In an effort to understand parent perceptions in alternative dispute resolutions, a study by Scanlon et al. (2018) gave a 26-item online survey to 44 parents, advocates, and attorneys. The survey items included open, closed, and mixed format questions. Their findings suggested that alternative dispute resolution practices yielded improved results for school IEP teams and families, specifically when an independent mediator is involved to resolve rejected IEPs.

Mueller (2009) provides “seven essential components to a successful IEP facilitation” which include: a neutral facilitator, an agenda, goals created by each member of the team, ground rules, an environment that fosters collaboration, communication strategies to eliminate a

power imbalance, and the use of a parking lot (p. 63). By following these guidelines, Mueller argues, more IEP conflicts will be resolved without the costly procedures identified in the IDEA.

The key components of the study establish effective IEP facilitation, and include a description of the seven components, as well as a checklist for the IEP facilitator. However, Mueller acknowledges flexibility in this as she writes, “some districts may choose to train their administrators or teachers to be available for IEP facilitation” (p. 63). The author provides compelling reasons for facilitated IEPs.

Mueller and Piantoni (2013), identify conflict between special education families and school districts, and the negative impact it brings to time of staff and financial resources. Mueller and Piantoni (2013) conducted a qualitative study using the interviews of special education directors from a diverse group of districts. In the interviews, the authors sought to identify directors’ experiences with family conflict prevention and resolution. Through these interviews, the authors identified seven action-based strategies that districts can use to avoid parent conflict that leads to due process. Those strategies include, communication, parent support, leveling the playing field, intervening at the lowest level, keeping the focus on the child, finding middle group, and understanding perspectives (Mueller and Piantoni, 2013).

For districts seeking to quantify their capacity and ability to maintain strong partnerships with their families, they may be inclined to use the Family-Professional Partnership Scale (Summers et al., 2005) which is “the development of a measure of family-professional partnership based on families' perceptions of the skills and attitudes professionals need for them to achieve a positive partnership with families” (Summers et al., 2005, p. 68). This tool could be used for both in-service and pre-service training and as an observational checklist, among other purposes. According to Summers et al., “the Family-Professional Partnership Scale could be

useful for agency, school-wide, or district-wide program evaluation or needs assessments by allowing the consideration of both importance of and satisfaction with each item” (p. 79).

Understanding multiple groups and family dynamics can also include the impact fathers play in an IEP team. Mueller and Buckley (2014) found that their “study supports the notion that fathers do want to be involved with their child's education and have a good understanding of supportive and unsupportive areas within the system of special education” (p. 128). According to the study, fathers’ only interaction with the school came during the annual IEP meetings. Furthermore, the authors found that “the fathers in this study also referred to IEP meetings as paperwork driven, insufficient, and fast-paced” (p. 129).

However, there were some thoughtful solutions provided by the fathers. The authors write that, “one unique contribution that was different for the fathers than mothers was the discussion about restructuring or revising the IEP process. These fathers spoke about redesigning IEP paperwork and the meeting structure so that it is more solution-focused and easier to navigate” (p. 129). One father even suggesting the idea of having a pre-IEP meeting.

Expanding on the concerns of fathers, specifically that having the IEP as their only experience with the school, and treading into the territory of solutions, other researchers have also acknowledged additional opportunities for schools to build relationships with families. Rather than just having the annual IEP “educators would be wise to not just interview parents yearly but invite them to be a part of devising tiered supports” (Fenton et al., 2017, p. 221). The research suggested that those parents have unique experiences that would be valuable to the district areas of support.

In addition to building relationships with family members, school districts may also wish to increase supports for culturally diverse families. Mueller et al. (2009) identified the

importance of a school district providing a support group to Spanish-speaking mothers of students with special needs. “Overall, this study points to a need for more support groups that can be made available to minority groups and are essentially composed of families who are similar in nature” (p. 119). They elaborated that “in addition to the use of a support group for emotional support, it was evident in this study that the mothers valued receiving information and learning skills that are needed to navigate the educational system” (p. 120).

Salas et al. (2005) identifies multiple best practices for special educators to improve their parent-partnerships with the families of their students. Among those strategies are establishing trust, knowing the literacy proficiency of students’ families, and the variety of acculturation for each family. It is also critical for special educators to recognize that, “many parents may not believe that their participation is essential and that they should not interfere with professionals such as teachers, and as a result remove themselves from that process” (Salas et al., 2005, p. 54)

Ultimately, the above studies identify the needs of building successful and agreed-upon IEPs, and also provide strategies and solutions to improve the collaboration between school staff and families in developing those IEPs. A deeper understanding needs to be applied to the thematic components, which include relationship, trust building, and the leadership of team members. In this way, special education leaders can be better focused to guide school teams towards building successful IEP teams and decisions with their families.

Theoretical Framework

Trust Theory

There have been many studies that identify conditions, qualities, and traits that establish trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Hill & O'Hara, 2006, Northouse, 2021). Zeffane (2010) has incorporated the initial perspectives of subordinates when looking at the concept of trustworthiness, as it relates to being a precursor for trust. While organized more through the lens of leaders and followers, Zeffane (2010) argues that "trustworthiness governs trust in leaders and is a function of leaders character (traits)" (p. 253). Zeffane (2010) continues by saying that "trust formation takes place in a process involving an initial evaluation of trustworthiness, which leads to actions that either reinforce this impression or change it and result in a more stable level of trust between the two parties" (p. 253). Zeffane's (2010) review of the literature identified six characteristics of leadership that are most likely to establish trustworthiness. These characteristics include honesty, generosity, forgiveness, tolerance, wisdom, and compassion (Zeffane, 2010, p. 256).

Other studies have sought to define different forms of trust. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) identified three levels of trust "in a sequential iteration in which achievement of trust at one level enables the development of trust at the next level" (Lewicki & Bunker 1996, p. 119). The first of these three levels are calculus-based trust. This would be the first stage of trust for individuals or businesses entering a relationship. "Compliance with calculus-based trust is often insured both by the rewards of being trusting (and trustworthy) and by the 'threat' that if trust is violated, one's reputation can be hurt" (Lewicki & Bunker 1996, p. 120). Essentially, two parties enter a business relationship in which trust is extended for the purposes of seeking a return benefit.

The second stage of trust is knowledge-based trust, in which trust is "grounded in the others' predictability – knowing the other sufficiently well so that the others behavior is anticipatable" (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 121). This relates directly with IEP team

relationships, since important elements of knowledge-based trust are regular communication and courtship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Regular communication seeks to increase the ability to “exchanging information about wants, preferences, and approaches to problems” (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p.121). Courtship is aligned with *relationship development* and can include multiple interactions beyond the normal standard working relationship and can include social situations. This stage of trust is more aligned with IEP team trust development with parents and is conducive to the relationship between school personnel and families outside of the IEP process, such as school events.

In the third stage, identification-based trust suggests “trust exists because the parties effectively understand and appreciate the others’ wants” (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 122). Of notable interest in this stage is that trust is not threatened due to inconsistent behavior by either party. Identification-based trust can be realized through developing and committing to the same goals and commonly shared values. This stage of trust develops “as one both knows and predicts the other’s needs, choices, and preferences, and also shares some of those same needs, choices, and preferences as one’s own” (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 123).

In another study, Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) argued that the concept of trust and distrust are not linear and can exist in a relationship as separate entities. This concept is perfectly applicable to the IEP process, as family experiences with IEPs have complex factors and multiple teams and experiences over time. The authors continue their theoretical explanation for the interplay and relationship between trust and distrust by saying:

From the scheme of possible conduct, trust reduces social complexity and uncertainty by allowing specific undesirable conduct to be removed from consideration...and by allowing desirable conduct to be viewed as certain. Similarly, distrust functions to reduce

complexity by allowing undesirable conduct to be seen as likely – even certain. (Lewicki et al., p. 444)

Lewicki et al. (1998) establish a theoretical lens for the relationship between trust and distrust, and “the distinctness of trust and distrust as separate constructs is made clearer when we contrast low trust and high distrust” (p. 445). In this way there can be instances when an individual’s trust and distrust lack correlational significance, based on the situation or circumstance (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Integrating Trust and Distrust: Alternative Social Realities

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| High Trust Characterized by Hope Faith Confidence Assurance Initiative | High-value congruence Interdependence promoted Opportunities pursued New Initiatives | Trust but verify Relationships highly segmented and bounded Opportunities pursued and down-side risks/vulnerabilities continually monitored |
| | | <div>24</div> <div>13</div> |
| Low Trust Characterized by No hope No faith No confidence Passivity Hesitance | Casual acquaintances Limited interdependence Bounded arms-length transactions Professional courtesy | Undesirable eventualities expected and feared Harmful motives assumed Interdependence managed Preemption; best offense is a good defense Paranoia |
| | Low Distrust Characterized by No Fear Absence of skepticism Absence of cynicism Low monitoring Vigilance | High Distrust Characterized by Fear Skepticism Cynicism Wariness and watchfulness Vigilance |

In the conditions of low trust, low distrust (cell 1), an individual “has neither reason to be confident nor reason to be wary and watchful” (Lewicki et al., 1998, p. 446). This is the starting point for most interactions and relationships. In the conditions of high trust and low distrust (cell 2), an individual “likely is characterized by pooled interdependence, where interested parties are assured that partners are pursuing common objectives” (p. 446). This is the condition that would be most sought-after in an IEP team scenario, as “the trusting party is likely to identify with the trusted’s values, feel strong positive affect toward the trusted, and express these feelings through various verbalizations of appreciation, support, and encouragement” (p. 446).

Conversely, with the condition of low trust and high distrust, an individual “has no reason for confidence in another and ample reason for wariness and watchfulness” (p. 446). This set of conditions would be the result of a long series of negative experiences, and would likely be the scenario for IEPs that lead to due process. Also included in the Social Reality Theory is the condition of high trust and high distrust. In this set of conditions, an individual “has reason to be highly confident in another in certain respects, but also has reason to be strongly weary and suspicious in other respects” (Lewicki et al., 1998, p. 447).

Using this paradigm of trust relationships to understand the IEP team and parent relationship with the school and district, this study will attempt to design questions to families to determine if trust was a factor in their happiness with their IEP team, or a basis for their decision to file for due process.

Conceptual Framework

Team Leadership Theory

This study will include an analysis of the IEP team through the conceptual lens of team leadership theory. Northouse (2019) defines a team as being an “organizational group that is composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals, and who must coordinate their activities to accomplish these goals” (p. 371). The concept of teams and organized groups is receiving an increase in research as management teams become more global and virtual in nature.

However, much of the research on team leadership theory has been aligned with structures that are more hierarchical in nature and pertaining to supervisors and subordinates (Zaccaro et al., 2001). This presents a challenge for analyzing theories in relation to an IEP team

meeting, where there is no traditional supervisor. While some members of a school team may share the principal as a supervisor, that does not apply to the parent, as well as advocates, attorneys, or other service providers. Examining theories of team leadership provides a more accurate and appropriate exploration of the different models that contribute to team success, as it relates to the IEP team process.

Northouse (2019) presents the Hill Model for Team Leadership (Figure 2) that utilizes more actions on the part of the leader to generate team success. In this model, it is “the leader's job to monitor the team and then take whatever action is necessary to ensure team effectiveness” (p. 374).

Figure 2

The Hill Model for Team Leadership



In the Hill Model for Team Leadership “leadership behavior is seen as team-based problem solving” (Northouse, p. 375). The decisions a leader makes can be internal actions or external actions. In both of these instances, these actions can extend to other members of the team that exhibit team leadership. The external actions are categorized as environmental and include the elements of networking and negotiating support. These external actions typically relate to business team models.

In contrast, the internal leadership actions are perfectly applicable to the IEP team process. Internal leadership actions divide into two categories: task and relational. Task leadership actions include goal focusing, structuring for results, facilitating decisions, and maintaining standards. Relational leadership actions include coaching, managing conflict, building commitment, and satisfying needs.

Following the Hill Model for Team Leadership, the outcome leads to team effectiveness, which can be measured by both team performance and team development. According to Larson and LaFasto (1989) there are eight characteristics for team effectiveness. These are a clear, elevating goal, a results-driven structure, competent team members, unified commitment, a collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership. These characteristics will guide the research in this study as it relates to IEP team leadership.

In another study by Zaccaro et al. (2001), team effectiveness is also impacted by the climate and mood of the team. Especially under circumstances when teams endure stressful conditions, which can occur during IEP meetings. Zaccaro et al. (2001) write that when a team “succumbs to stress, member interactions become more narrowly focused [...] information becomes increasingly less shared among team members, decision alternatives are not fully explored, and decision-making accuracy declines” (p. 471). They argue that it is critical for team leaders to foster a climate of emotional control. This can be done with clear goals, identified team member roles, and clear performance strategies. Additionally, leaders can make teams effective by managing “the climate of the team so that cognitive conflict is supported but affective conflict is discouraged” (p. 472).

There are many leadership theories to address the emotional needs of teams. Few leadership attributes serve to heal and repair division better than Servant Leadership Theory. Russell and Stone (2002) organize ten characteristics that represent servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Key to understanding servant leadership versus other leadership theories, servant leadership “focuses on forming strong *long-term*

relationships” (Liden et al., 2008, p.162), which aligns with the need to nurture school relationships with families over the duration of a student's attendance.

Saleem et al. (2020) authored a study on the connection between servant leadership and trust. In their study analyzing the impact of servant leadership on affective and cognitive trust, their “findings suggest that servant leaders more effectively generate affective trust” (p. 12). While this study focused primarily on the impact on subordinates, it provides cause to examine the relationship further in the IEP team context.

Identifying the characteristics of servant leadership and how it impacts trust is useful for leaders’ efforts. However, there needs to be an additional resource to measure servant leadership. Liden et al. (2008) created a measurement tool to “explore the influence of servant leadership at the group-level” (p. 164). By doing so, this study organized and reworded five of the survey questions for parents to assess and measure evidence if they are being provided servant leadership from school staff. For example, Liden et al. created the question, *My manager wants to know about my career goals*. The corresponding question provided to special education families was, *The school IEP team is interested in the goals I have for my child*.

Summary

In examining the complex world of special education, one must be mindful of the legislative and legal constructs. However, one must also consider the human element. The IEP meeting is a shared decision-making team that determines the educational outcomes for students. It is a team made of parents, teachers, and other supporting personnel, and not necessarily facilitated by lawmakers and attorneys.

For that reason, any study focusing on special education needs to include all of these components. From the legislative and legal side, the above reviewed studies include a national examination of special education case law, (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014), and a study of due process hearings, (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2015). There is a study representing family requests for advocates, (Goldman et al., 2020), and studies focused on the experiences of the families in an IEP, which includes those families from higher socio-economic demographics, (Esquivel et al., 2008), and families who speak English as a second language, (Larios & Zetlin, 2012).

Additionally, any exploration of success in building relationships with families should include a theoretical analysis of trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 1998), and the interplay between trust and distrust. This is a critical understanding to provide special education team members. There is also an important need to provide the conceptual framework of leadership towards team building (Northouse, 2019; Zaccaro et al., 2001) and servant leadership (Northouse 2019) to manage relationships, particularly when team decisions can be impacted by stress. Building a special education program seeking parent collaboration and student achievement needs leadership that incorporates all facets of special education laws, legal guidelines, and best practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Rationale

This study sought to understand the impact of trust and leadership when school personnel meet with families in IEP meetings. This mixed-methods study focused on a quantitative-qualitative explanatory sequential design (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). This study first collected quantitative and qualitative data from families of students with special education through a survey that included Likert-style questions followed by three open-ended questions. Qualitative data was also collected through open-ended question interviews with district-level leaders in special education. The research hoped to gain a deeper understanding for how special education leaders can guide school IEP teams to making appropriate IEP team agreements with families which benefit the student.

The primary research questions of this study:

1. How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?
2. What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?

The secondary research questions are:

3. To what extent does trust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
4. To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
5. How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?

Much of special education is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), which lays out procedural protections such as eligibility, services, parent rights, and IEPs (Martin et al., 1996). In this regard, the worldview construct is positivism -post-positivism. The quantitative analysis is appropriate to understanding standards in people's lives,

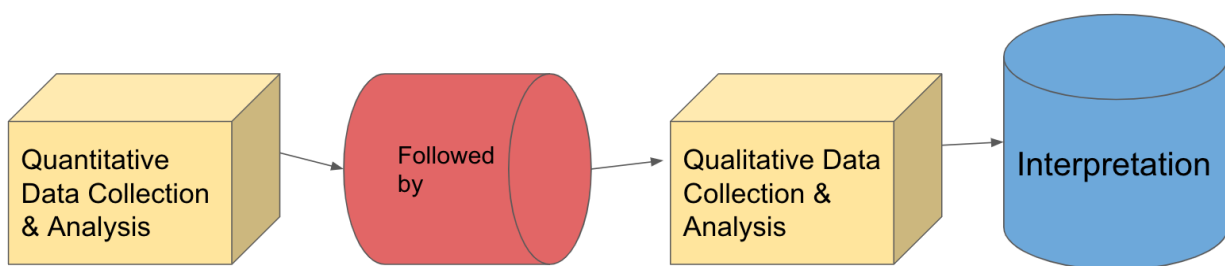
by “separating the social world into empirical components called variables which can be represented numerically as frequencies or rate” (Rahman, 2016, p. 105).

This study assumes the components of the IDEA lead to a great deal of litigation and dispute between school IEP teams and families (Mueller et al., 2008; Todis et al., 2008). This supports the constructivism - interpretivism worldview that “people's interpretations are based upon their own lived experiences which lead to multiple truths” (DeCuir-Gunby, 2017, p.22). By conducting qualitative data collection through interviews provides “human thought and behavior in a social context and covers a wide range of phenomena in order to understand and appreciate” the data completely (Eyisi, 2016, pp. 92-93).

The research focused on a quantitative explanatory sequential design (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Figure 3 demonstrates the sequential nature of the study. This study generated data quantitatively through a survey.

Figure 3

QUAN->QUAL Explanatory Sequential Design



Setting and Participants

The participants of the survey were parents of students receiving special education services. This study utilized a stratified sampling of the participants with the hope that this matched similar characteristics of families that have had both positive and negative experiences with the IEP development process.

The participants of the quantitative survey reside in Southern California. However, IDEA is a federal law, which allows the study to include a participant sampling from throughout the United States. Since the survey was distributed through social media, participants possibly could have been drawn from a larger geographical database.

The participants for the qualitative data collection phase of this mixed methods study included leaders in special education. The participants were selected based on purposeful and convenience sampling, criteria-based, and specifically those with experience in due process and settlements with families (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All of these special education leaders were from Southern California. The leaders included three Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) directors, who serve, advise, and provide additional resources and services to multiple districts. Additional participants included three school district directors in Los Angeles and Orange counties in Southern California.

Sampling Procedures

The Likert-style quantitative survey with open-ended qualitative questions was distributed to families through social media and focused on groups of participants linked through the experience of having a child in special education, for which there are many social media support groups. This included groups for parents seeking advocates, as well as groups that align with the eligibility of their students, including autism, dyslexia, and those families with children under the eligibility of intellectually disabled, such as down syndrome. Since participants were solicited from social media, the participants voluntary chose to participate. Three open-ended qualitative questions were at the conclusion of the parent survey, which provided a contrasting coding opportunity alongside the special education leaders qualitative responses.

Instrumentation and Measures

Quantitative and Qualitative Survey

The Likert-style quantitative survey with qualitative open-ended questions was broken into three sections. The first section is a participant demographics section, which sought to identify family profiles and characteristics and families' backgrounds in special education. The second section desired to understand parent feelings of trust and distrust, as well as questions determining if there is evidence of servant leadership from school leaders in their IEP experiences. The final section offers three open-ended questions seeking qualitative input, generally asking.

Qualitative Interviews

For the qualitative data, the researcher identified open-ended general questions for the interviews. The format followed that of a similar qualitative study done by Mueller et al. (2008), in which the "interviews were open-ended and participants were encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts beyond those of the interview protocol. The interviews were conducted much like a conversation between the interviewer and the participant" (p. 201).

Data Collection

The parent/guardian survey with quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a survey. The quantitative interview data was collected using Likert-style questions, followed by three open-ended questions. Both the quantitative and qualitative questions were on the same digital form that parents/guardians accessed online. A consent form at the start of the digital survey was presented to all participants prior to the start of the survey, and participants provided consent to continue in the study.

The parent survey link was posted on Facebook pages by a teacher colleague of the researcher. Those pages included *Special Needs Parents Support & Discussion Group*, *Moms of Orange County*, and *Special Education Self-Contained Setting*, among others. The original posts were made on August 29, 2022, using professional and somewhat formal language (Appendix D). Initial returns were sparse, generating roughly 30 survey submissions. A second posting was made on December 5, 2022 on those sites using less formal language (Appendix D) and gathered 90 more results over the course of 24 hours.

The data collection from the special education leaders was collected through open-ended qualitative interview data and recorded over Zoom interviews. The content of those interviews were converted into transcripts through a combination of speech-to-text applications, alongside quality control checks of the researcher to ensure fidelity of what was shared by the interviewer. Once the transcripts were completed, they were entered into the Delve web application for coding and analysis.

Reliability & Validity

There are many considerations and strategies to ensure a valid and reliable research study, specifically when the study is qualitative in nature. Thomson (2011) states, “qualitative research is based on subjective, interpretive, and contextual data” (p. 78). This is different from quantitative data, which can be controlled with strategies in advance (Maxwell, 2012).

In order to ensure validity in qualitative research, Maxwell (2012) developed five categories, including “descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity” (Thomson, 2011, p. 78). Descriptive validity maintains that data, observations or transcriptions “accurately reflect what the participant has said or done” (p. 78). Interpretive validity “Captures how well the researcher reports the participants’ meaning

of events, objects and/or behaviors” (p. 79). Theoretical validity requires that “The patterns, concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions must fit together to create the constructs, which must tell the story of the phenomena” (p. 79). Although contested academically, generalization refers to a universal application to a research theory. Lastly, evaluative validity “moves away from the data itself and tries to assess the evaluations drawn by the researchers” (Thomson, 2011, p. 79).

Maxwell (2012) provides a checklist of strategies to improve the possibility that a study can be determined reliable. Those strategies include, intensive, long-term involvement, rich data, respondent validation, intervention, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, triangulation, numbers, and comparison (Maxwell 2012).

Both the parent/guardian Likert-style quantitative survey with open-ended qualitative questions and the special education leader qualitative interview questions were piloted with a smaller sampling and participants not related or later used in the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using the StatPlus program. The data was reviewed using descriptive statistics, chi-square, correlation, and ANOVA statistical measures. The steps involved for coding the qualitative data include a spiraled analysis, that extends from data collection to the researchers account of the findings (Creswell & Pope, 2018). This included managing the data, reading and memo-ing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, developing and assessing interpretations, (Creswell & Pope, 2018, p. 186).

As the transcripts were entered into Delve, the researcher first read all transcripts in their entirety, seeking general themes. Following the first pass, the researcher used the Delve tool to

assign codes to specific responses from the interview transcripts. Those codes were then organized through Delve to reveal overarching themes within the interviews. Finally, those themes were used to assign interpretations of the data, both written and presented visually. When coding specifically for a phenomenological study, specific codes were placed for “the epoch or bracketing, significant statements, meaning units, and textual and structural descriptions” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 216).

Ethical Issues

There are many ethical considerations when conducting a study, including the “protection of participants, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, respect for the research site, writing, and disseminating the research” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 35). In designing this research, there were specific areas to which the researcher paid particular attention. Informed consent was required for all participants in the study; therefore, all participants were “fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research project before they take part” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 36). This study maintained confidentiality for the participants and ensured that they were informed “about what happens to the data collected from them or about them and be assured that all data will be held in confidence” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 38). As this study recorded participants during interviews, the researcher also explained “how the recordings will be used and how they will be stored and ultimately destroyed according to International Review Board policies” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 40).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological mixed-methods study is to examine the impact of parent trust and how parent trust is influenced by school district and team leadership. This mixed-methods study followed a quantitative-qualitative explanatory design. The data was

generated from the survey given to parents/guardians, and included Likert-style quantitative survey questions, followed by open-ended qualitative questions. This survey was distributed and collected online through social media. Additionally, the researcher conducted qualitative open-ended question interviews with special education leaders using convenience sampling. This data was collected over Zoom interviews and transcribed. The quantitative data was analyzed using the StatPlus data program, and the qualitative data was coded and analyzed through the Delve program. Steps were taken to ensure the consent of the participants and the data was collected ethically and confidentially.

The expected outcomes of this study were varied. It was the assumption of the researcher that trust between the IEP team members and the family is a critical indicator for successful IEPs. Similarly, it was an expected outcome that district leaders who seek training opportunities for their staff in alternative dispute resolution strategies, such as facilitated IEPs, see fewer incidences of IEPs moving to due process or settlements.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological mixed-methods study is to examine the impact of parent trust and how parent trust is influenced by school district and team leadership. This study sought to measure parent trust and distrust, as well as parent perceptions of school team leadership. Additionally, this study sought to understand district leadership practices, and how those practices impact IEP site teams and their relationships with parents.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

A 24-question survey was posted on multiple social media group sites. The survey generated 125 responses from families with children in special education. Of the responses, 117 identified themselves as mothers, four as fathers, two as aunts, and one grandmother.

The responders provided a more diverse picture of their students' eligibilities for special education (Table 1). The survey included a second eligibility field for those families with IEPs listing two eligibilities.

Table 1

Special Education Eligibilities Reported by Responders

| | Primary | Secondary |
|-------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Autism | 32 | 17 |
| Emotional Disturbance | 10 | 4 |
| Hard of Hearing | 1 | |
| Intellectual Disabilities | 11 | 7 |
| Orthopedic impairment | 1 | 1 |
| Other health impairment (OHI) | 30 | 16 |
| Specific learning disability (SLD) | 16 | 8 |
| Speech or language impairment (SLI) | 20 | 18 |
| Traumatic brain injury | 2 | 1 |

The survey responders also had diverse experiences in IEP meetings. The survey provided a list of check boxes for experiences families had in IEP meetings. Responders were able to click as many that applied (Table 2). In order to provide clarity for both the researcher and the readers of the study, the commonly selected items and those variations selected by only one responder were organized into three tiers. Tier I represents the experiences identified as most favorable and positive, while Tier II and Tier III are organized by the least favorable and negative experiences.

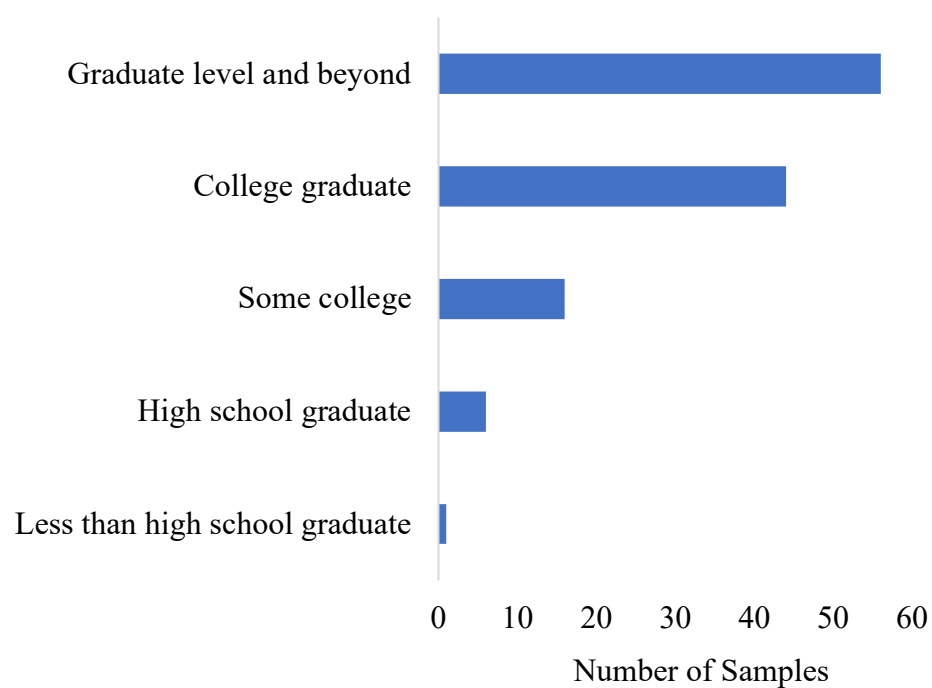
Table 2*List of IEP Experiences for Families*

| Tier | Experiences | N |
|----------|--|----|
| Tier I | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team | 62 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 12 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 14 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 7 |
| | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 4 |
| | IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 4 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 5 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 1 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 1 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 4 |
| Tier II | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 2 |
| | Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 1 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Mediation | 2 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement, Mediation | 1 |
| Tier III | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement, Due Process Hearing | 1 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, Due Process Hearing | 1 |
| | IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Due Process Hearing | 1 |

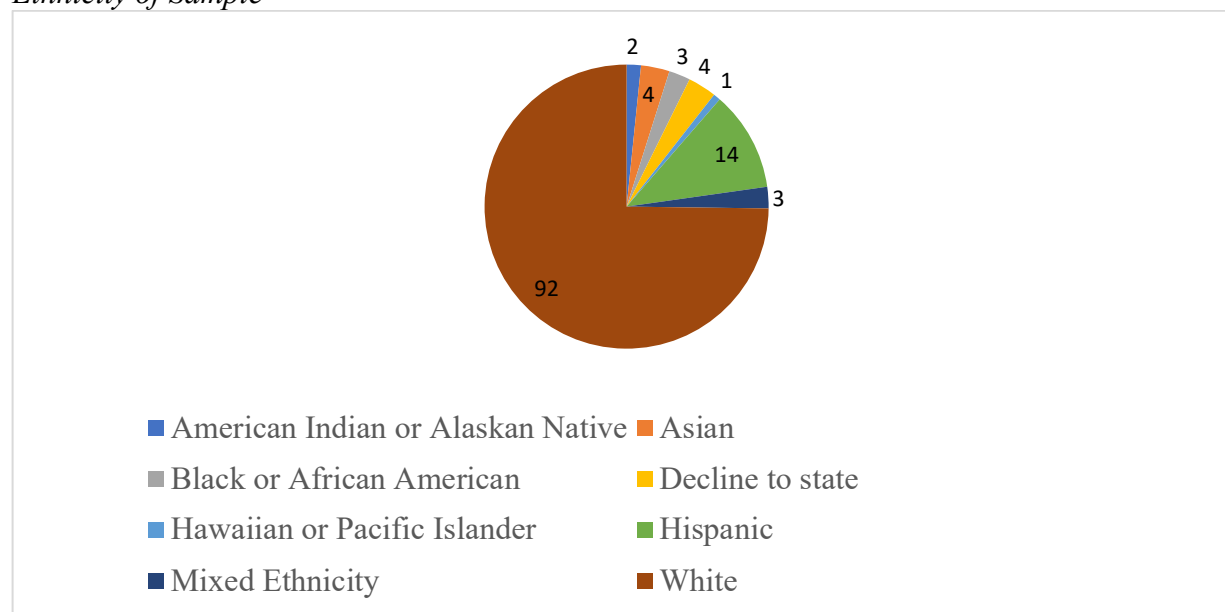
The sample self-identified as well-educated, with the majority selecting, *College Graduate* and *Graduate level and beyond* for level of education (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Education Level of Sample



The survey sample was also asked the ethnicity with which the respondents identify, and overwhelmingly they identified as white, with additional variation (Figure 5).

Figure 5*Ethnicity of Sample*

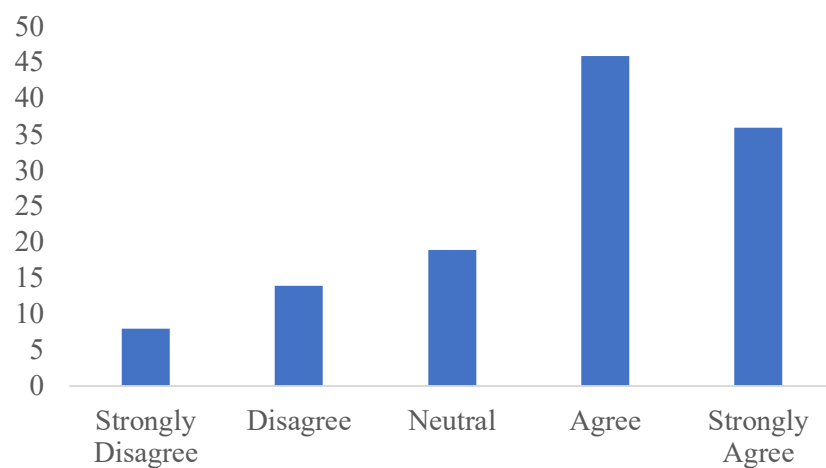
The survey sample also included general Likert-style statements connected to special education. Those statements included, “I consider myself familiar with special education law” (Figure 6); “Overall, I am satisfied with the goals and services currently outlined in my child’s IEP” (Figure 7); “In my experience, having an advocate in the IEP meeting is best for my child” (Figure 8), and “In my experience, having a lawyer in the IEP meeting is best for my child” (Figure 9). The mean, standard deviation and sample size of the four survey questions are listed in Table 3.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics for Variables*

| | M | SD | N |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Familiar with special education law | 3.7 | 1.2 | 123 |
| Satisfied with current IEP | 3.6 | 1.1 | 124 |
| Having an advocate in IEP | 3.6 | 0.9 | 123 |
| Having a lawyer in IEP | 2.7 | 0.9 | 121 |

Figure 6

Familiar with Special Education Law

**Figure 7**

Satisfied with Goals and Services of Current IEP.

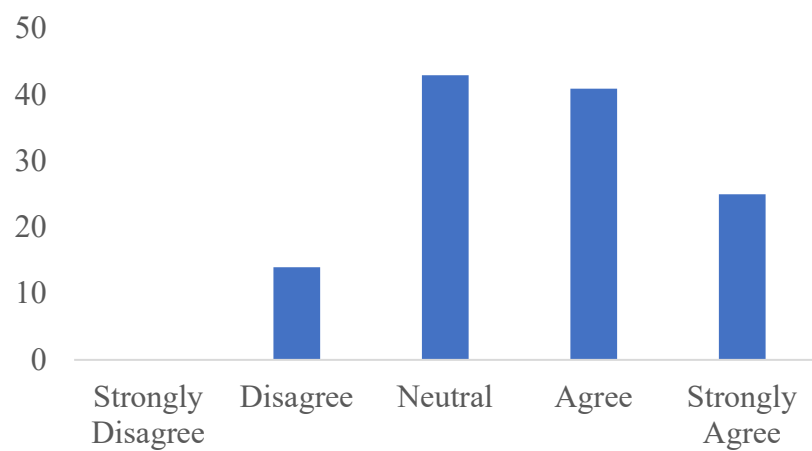
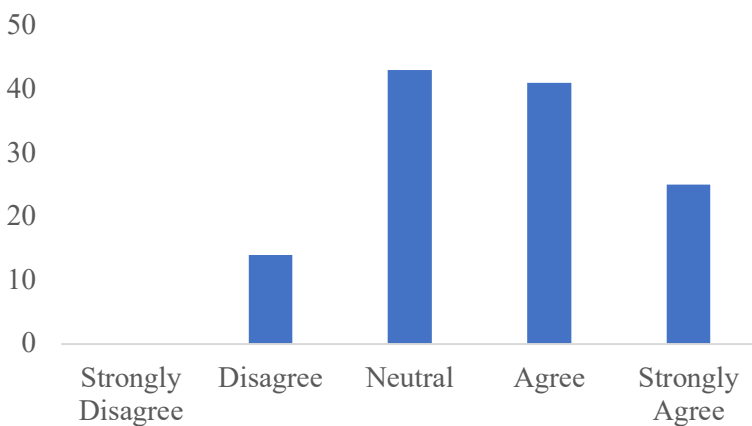
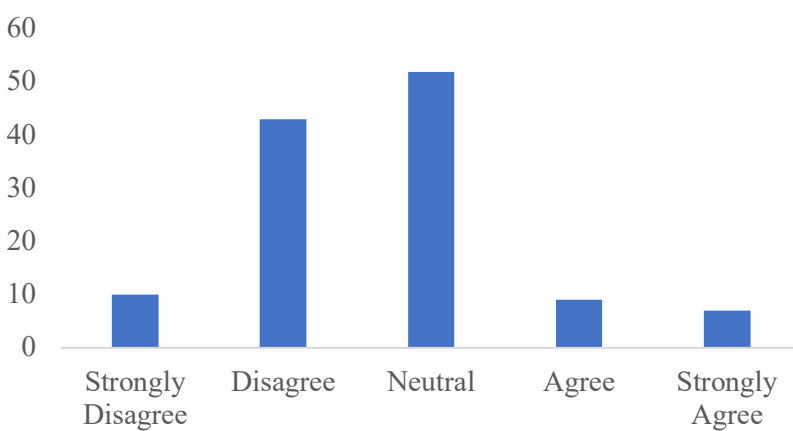


Figure 8

Having an Advocate in an IEP Is Best for My Child

**Figure 9**

Having a Lawyer in an IEP Is Best for My Child



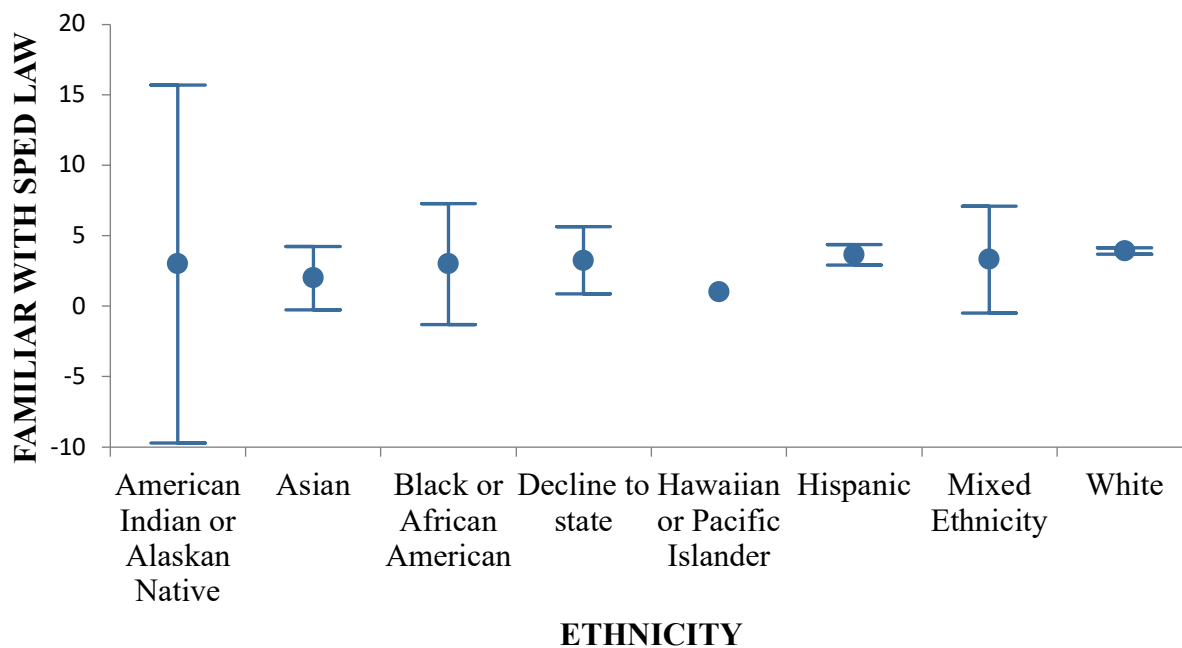
ANOVA T-test

An ANOVA t-test was used to determine the effect between various categorical and interval variables. There was an effect for ethnicity on being familiar with special education law, $F(7,14) = 2.97, p = 0.007$ (Figure 10). According to the data, parents who identified as white typically had a stronger and more cohesive understanding of special education law. While those

listed their ethnicity as Black or African American, Mixed Race, or American Indian or Alaskan Native had a more varied confidence in special education law.

Figure 10

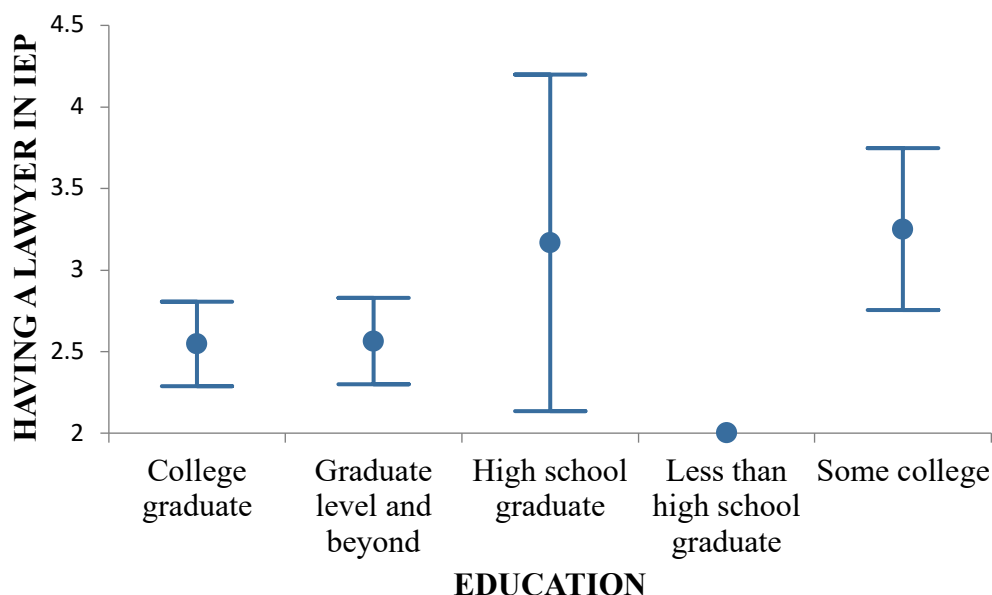
Correlation Between Ethnicity and Familiarity with Special Education Law



Additional ANOVA testing revealed that there was an effect for level of education and reported desire for having a lawyer in an IEP meeting, $F(4,115) = 2.51, p = 0.045$ (Figure 11). The data reveals that parents with increased levels of education typically have less of a desire to include a lawyer in their student's IEP meeting.

Figure 11

Correlation Between Education Level and Having a Lawyer in Child's IEP Meeting (N = 120)



Quantitative Data by Research Question

Research Question One and Two

The first research question, *How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students* was by far the most generalized question which included all components of the study. A more complete collection of the data for this question can be found in the qualitative portion of this chapter. This was also the case for the second research question, *What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?* While multiple data points in the quantitative data provided insights into these answers, the data generated by the survey answered the secondary questions directly.

Research Question Three

The third research question, *To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?*, provided data that was specific to the question.

Efforts to establish correlational significance to feelings of trust and distrust was limited. There was variation in the self-reporting scores representing trust and distrust (Table 4). While feelings of hope and fear, $r(124) = -0.29, p = 0.001$, and feelings of hope, $r(124) = -0.29, p = 0.00$, were slightly inversely correlated, no other trust and distrust indicators demonstrated statistically significant correlations.

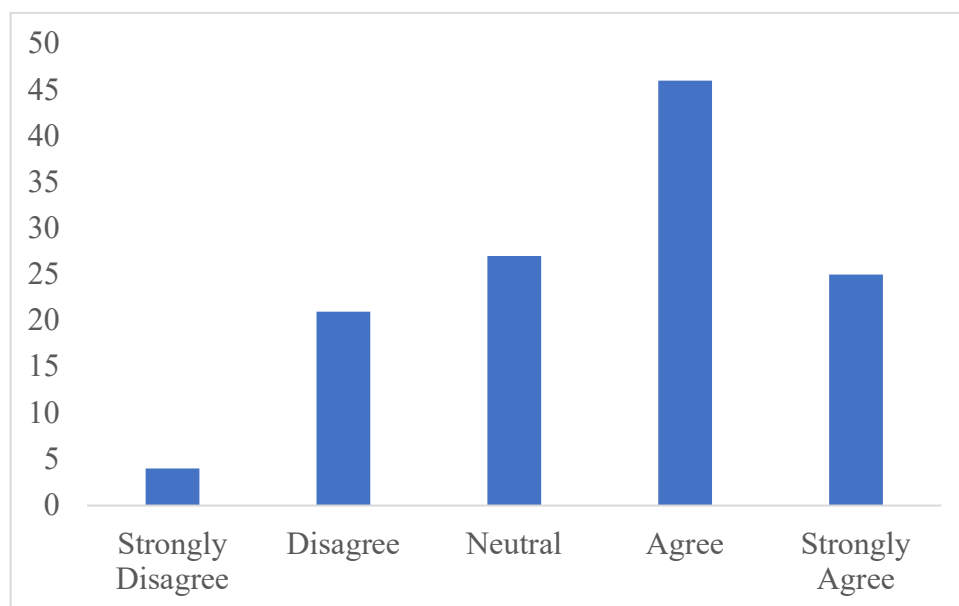
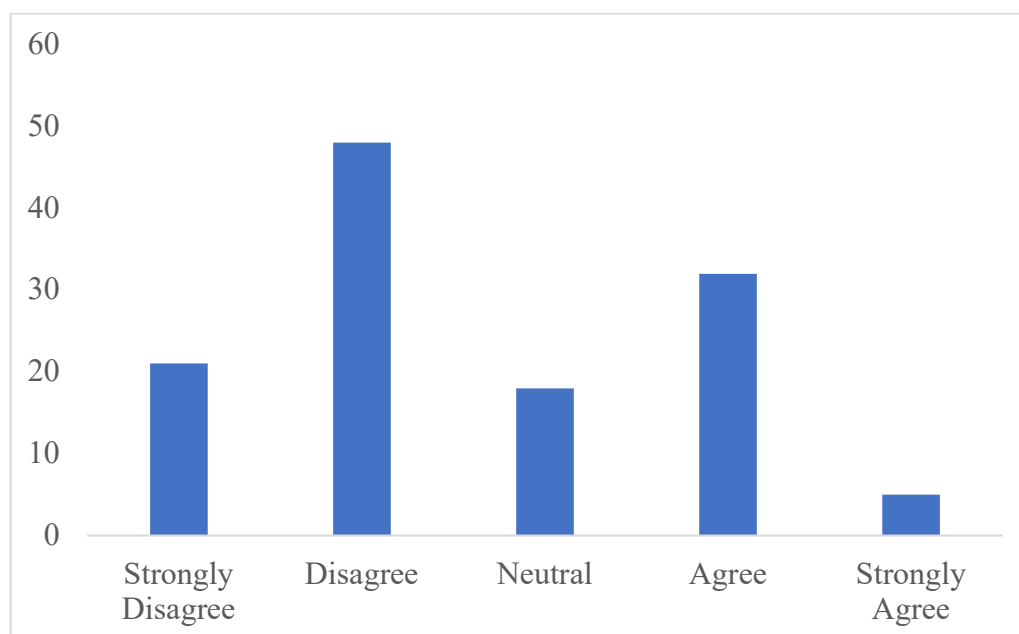
Table 4

Descriptive statistics of feelings of trust and distrust

| <i>Indicators of trust</i> | | | |
|----------------------------|------|------|-----|
| | M | SD | N |
| I have hope | 4.32 | 0.79 | 124 |
| I have faith | 3.65 | 1.05 | 124 |
| I have confidence | 3.54 | 1.1 | 123 |

| <i>Indicators of distrust</i> | | | |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-----|
| | M | SD | N |
| I am fearful | 2.46 | 1.16 | 124 |
| I am skeptical | 2.56 | 1.2 | 124 |
| I am wary | 2.61 | 1.16 | 124 |

The lack of correlational significance can also be visible in the graphs representing feelings of confidence (Figure 12) and feelings of wariness (Figure 13). The graphs demonstrate the lack of a visual inverse relationship.

Figure 12*Feelings of Confidence (Trust)***Figure 13***Feelings of Wariness (Distrust)*

ANOVA testing revealed correlational relationships between family past experiences and elements of trust and distrust. With 18 different permutations of parent experiences listed, ANOVA t-test data was only valid for those permutations that included more than one sample.

Overall, in the Likert-style question asking participants to what extent they exhibited *hope* when going into an IEP team meeting, those surveyed produced a relatively high mean ($M = 4.46$). However, there was an effect for hope based a varying experiences when going into an IEP, $F(17, 106) = 1.81, p = 0.03$. The self-reported experience of different participants generated varying levels of hope with varying standard deviations (Table 5).

Table 5

Correlation between Experience and Hope

| | | M | S.D. | N |
|--------------------|--|------|------|----|
| Tier I | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team | 4.53 | 0.56 | 62 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 4.33 | 0.89 | 12 |
| | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 4.25 | 0.96 | 4 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 4.21 | 1.05 | 14 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 3.71 | 1.25 | 7 |
| | IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 3.5 | 0.58 | 4 |
| | | M | S.D. | N |
| Tier II & Tier III | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 4.75 | 0.5 | 4 |

| | | | |
|---|-----|------|---|
| Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 4.5 | 0.71 | 2 |
| Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 4.2 | 0.84 | 5 |
| Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Mediation | 4 | 0 | 2 |

The same population was also asked whether they felt *skeptical* going into an IEP meeting. The ANOVA t-test indicated an effect between various experiences and feeling skeptical, $F(17, 106) = 3.77$, $p = 0.00001$. Those participants with the most skepticism, or lack of trust in IEP team meetings were those parents who selected *Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways* (Table 6).

Table 6

Correlation between IEP experience and feeling skeptical about IEP meetings

| | M | V | S.D. | N |
|--|------|------|------|----|
| Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 4 | 0.67 | 0.82 | 4 |
| IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 3.75 | 1.58 | 1.26 | 4 |
| Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 3.29 | 1.24 | 1.11 | 7 |
| Tier I Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 3.21 | 1.41 | 1.19 | 14 |
| Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 2.33 | 1.15 | 1.07 | 12 |
| Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team | 2 | 0.98 | 0.99 | 62 |

| | | M | V | S.D. | N |
|-----------------------------|--|-----|------|------|---|
| Tier II & Tier III | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 3.5 | 0.5 | 0.71 | 2 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 3.5 | 0.33 | 0.58 | 4 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Mediation | 3.5 | 0.5 | 0.71 | 2 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

A third series of ANOVA t-tests was conducted to identify levels of servant leadership in relation to IEP team experiences. Testing revealed there was an effect between various IEP meeting experiences and responses to the question, *The school IEP team talks to me on a personal level*, $F(17, 105) = 2.48, p = .003$. Testing also revealed that there was an effect between various IEP meeting experiences and responses to the question, *The school IEP team puts my child's best interests in front of their own*, $F(17, 106) = 3.48, p = .00004$. With the greatest statistical significance, testing indicated there was an effect between various IEP meeting experiences and responses to the question, *The school IEP team makes my student a priority*, $F(17, 105) = 3.54, p = .00003$. The groups with the lead agreement on that statement are those that have either submitted a written complaint or gone to mediation. Perhaps even more interesting, those 61 parents that simply reported as signing an agreed-upon IEP averaged between *neutral* and *agree* with that statement ($M = 3.66$).

Table 7*Correlation between IEP Experiences and IEP Team-Making Student a Priority*

| | | M | V | S.D. | N |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------|------|----|
| Tier I | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 3.75 | 1.48 | 1.22 | 12 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team | 3.66 | 0.9 | 0.95 | 61 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 2.93 | 1.15 | 1.07 | 14 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 2.29 | 0.9 | 0.95 | 7 |
| | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways | 2 | 2 | 1.41 | 4 |
| | IEP disagreement which required another meeting | 2 | 0.67 | 0.82 | 4 |
| | | M | V | S.D. | N |
| Tier II & Tier III | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 3.6 | 1.3 | 1.14 | 5 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 2 | 0.67 | 0.82 | 4 |
| | Disagreed with school team on IEP but signed IEP anyways, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Written Complaint for IEP disagreement | 1.5 | 0.5 | 0.71 | 2 |
| | Signed and agreed-upon IEP with school team, IEP disagreement which required another meeting, Mediation | 1.5 | 0.5 | 0.71 | 2 |

Correlation

The survey data was also used to establish correlations between various Likert-style questions seeking to identify self-reported feelings of trust, distrust, and IEP team servant leadership.

The impact of trust and parents' desire to have either a lawyer or attorney present in an IEP found low and moderate correlations.

Table 8

Correlations of Trust and Wanting an Advocate / Lawyer Present in IEP

| | <i>R</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>p-value</i> |
|--|----------|----------|----------------|
| I have faith vs. I want an advocate | -0.28283 | 123 | 0.00153 |
| I have confidence vs. I want an advocate | -0.22547 | 122 | 0.01253 |
| I have confidence vs. I want a lawyer | -0.38220 | 120 | 0.00002 |
| I have faith vs. I want a lawyer | -0.32224 | 121 | 0.00031 |

The impact of distrust and parents' desire to have either a lawyer or attorney present in an IEP found low and moderate correlations.

Table 9

Correlations of Distrust and Wanting an Advocate / Lawyer Present in IEP

| | <i>R</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>p-value</i> |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| I am fearful vs. Want an advocate | 0.26161 | 123 | 0.00347 |
| I am wary vs. Want an advocate | 0.30447 | 123 | 0.00062 |
| I am skeptical vs. Want an advocate | 0.38330 | 123 | 0.00001 |
| I am wary vs. Want a lawyer | 0.24743 | 121 | 0.00622 |
| I am fearful vs Want a lawyer | 0.25563 | 121 | 0.00466 |

Research Question Four

The fourth question, *To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families*, generated quantitative data through the survey responses.

Specifically, these measurements identified the impact of leadership strategies on trust and distrust, which this study hypothesizes is a precursor for successful IEP agreements. The impact of servant leadership and parent trust found a moderate correlation.

Table 10*Correlations of servant leadership and parent trust*

| | <i>R</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>p-value</i> |
|--|----------|----------|----------------|
| My student is a priority vs. I have hope | 0.31629 | 123 | 0.00037 |

The impact of servant leadership and parent feelings of distrust found moderate correlations.

Table 11*Correlations of Servant Leadership and Parent Distrust*

| | <i>R</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>p-value</i> |
|---|----------|----------|----------------|
| My student is a priority vs. I have fear | -0.38572 | 123 | 0.00001 |
| Interested in my goals vs. I have fear | -0.37304 | 124 | 0.00002 |
| My student's best interests vs. I have fear | -0.37147 | 124 | 0.00002 |
| Cares about my student vs. I have fear | -0.34970 | 124 | 0.00007 |

Findings of Qualitative Research

Qualitative Data from Special Education Leaders

Qualitative interviews were conducted with six special education leaders from different organizations. Three of the leaders were directors of special education programs from traditional school districts in southern California, and three were SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Areas) directors. Each of the SELPA directors was formerly a director of special education in traditional school districts.

Each interview was conducted on Zoom and the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and coded by question. The questions used were the same questions this study is seeking to answer.

1. How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?
2. What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?

3. To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
4. To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
5. How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?

Qualitative Data from Parents

Additionally, three qualitative open-ended questions were included in the parent survey.

Those questions were the following:

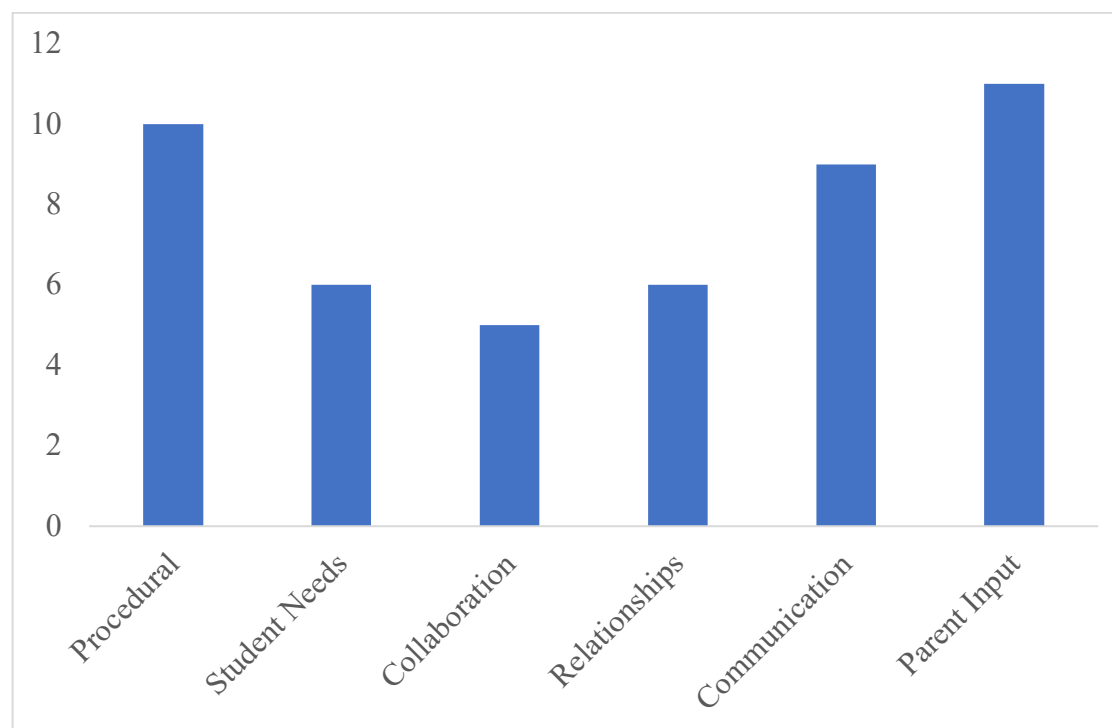
1. In your experience, what has made IEP meetings successful?
2. In your experience, what are the greatest challenges you face in IEP meetings?
3. What suggestions would you give to school staff when working with families of special education students?

While the three parent questions do not directly align to the questions given to the special education leaders, the data from the parent responses aligned with leader questions #1, #2, and #4.

Question One

Q1 – Leader Survey

The first question of the interview was, *How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?* By far the most open-ended question, the question generated a wide-range of IEP-related topics. The coded transcripts were organized thematically to fall into the following categories (Figure 14).

Figure 14*Question #1 Themes*

Many of the interview subjects referenced components of the IEP meeting itself, including the creation of the IEP document (Table 12), and running the IEP meeting. The element of running the meeting also incorporated elements of supporting staff as well.

Table 12*Procedural Responses from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| <p>I think in order for an IEP to be successful it has to build upon that assessment so what I like to often say is you know our assessments really drive a student's present levels.</p> <p>You know we moved to ensuring that based on our present levels we write goals that are, you know, appropriately ambitious to that student, and then based on those goals, we make a service offer or an offer of FAPE that really meets those goals.</p> <p>We've started implementing facilitated IEPs</p> <p>I would much rather go in and facilitate an IEP then have the district come to me three weeks from now and say you know we have a parent who's retained an attorney, or they've refused to sign the IEP, and then we're going at it from the back end.</p> |

The second theme was surrounding student needs. (Table 13). Specifically, the need for the school team to have a full understanding of the student beyond the data.

Table 13

Student Needs from Leaders

| Responses |
|--|
| I would say that when you think about an Individualized Education Program it is that idea that the students at the center of that document. |
| You need to know the kid. |
| So that's the piece on building successful IEPs but at IEP is just a portion of a child's education, not the whole education. |
| You're knowledgeable about the student and aware, and that the teams are working together to be able to utilize their areas of expertise to come together to better the whole child. |

The third theme in Question One was collaboration (14). There was a fair amount of overlap in the themes of collaboration, relationships, communication, and parent input. However, each interview gave such special attention to each that it generated separate themes.

Table 14

Responses for Collaboration from Leaders

| Responses |
|--|
| I would say that when you think about an Individualized Education Program it is that idea that the students at the center of that document. |
| You need to know the kid. |
| So that's the piece on building successful IEPs but at IEP is just a portion of a child's education, not the whole education. |
| You're knowledgeable about the student and aware, and that the teams are working together to be able to utilize their areas of expertise to come together to better the whole child. |

Relationships was the fourth theme, (15) and was the one of the first factors mentioned by many of the leaders.

Table 15*Responses for Relationships from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| I would say the first thing would be establishing positive relationships with parents. |
| It's building relationships and communicating effectively. |
| Well I think it begins with the relationship with the whole team in the family. |
| It starts with the relationship. |

The fifth theme for Question One was communication (Table 16). The responses extended past traditional concepts of communication and extended to sending information home before a meeting, as well as describing how the opposite can impact successful IEP meetings.

Table 16*Responses for Communication from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| It's important to make sure that you know we're sending home the goals ahead of time, we're sending those evaluations ahead of time, so parents feel that they have time to kind of digest all the information. |
| You need to make it, you know, not education isms and all the other acronyms and stuff that we do. |
| You need to communicate effectively and more importantly you have to listen. |
| So like factors that lead to disagreements could end up being things like you know parents not knowing stuff ahead of time, being surprised by information that they weren't aware of. |
| I've seen some do that very successfully with open communication, being transparent. |

The final theme was parent input (Table 17). There is much overlap between communication and collaboration themes. However, these responses included specific elements of listening, for the purpose of gaining information from parents.

Table 17*Responses for Parent Input from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| It's a lot of information for parents to go through, and then it helps with gathering their input, as we want them to have meaningful input. |
| So I think when teams want to build successful IEPs they need all of those, they need all that data, in terms of, you know, academics and social emotional and all that but they need to sit down with a parent before they ever go into an IEP, to be talking about 'what do you see as most important for your child in the upcoming year.' |
| I asked this Mom just a couple questions today and you know she got teary-eyed and said "well nobody's ever asked me that". |

Q1 – Parent Survey

The responses of the parents identified three primary themes, with secondary themes as well (Table 18). Parents rested the responsibility on themselves in their responses (48%), followed by the responsibility of school personnel (36%). 17% of the parent responses aimed responsibility of both the schools and themselves.

Table 18*What has made IEP meetings successful?*

| Responsible Party | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----|
| Parents and Schools (17) | Collaboration | 7 |
| | Preview / Pre Meeting | 10 |
| Parents (53) | Advocate / Lawyer | 15 |
| | Asking Questions | 6 |
| | Being Honest | 2 |
| | Preparation / Research | 23 |
| | Push / Assert | 7 |
| | Relationships | 2 |
| Schools (40) | Competent | 3 |
| | Knowing Rights | 1 |
| | Communication | 24 |
| | Being Prepared | 3 |
| | Knowing Students | 3 |
| | Empathetic | 4 |

With regard to the sharing of responsibility, parents identified opportunities for collaboration, as well as ensuring there are previews of IEPs and pre-meetings (Table 19). These responses indicated active participation on both parties.

Table 19*Samples of Parent and School strategies for successful IEP meetings*

| Responses |
|--|
| Being able to read the draft of the IEP prior to the meeting and being able to ask questions and participate in the meeting. |
| Reading the draft and then talking with the teacher ahead of time. |
| We discuss our thoughts and feelings prior to the meeting, and I get a draft ahead of time. |

The second theme parents identified emphasized the responsibility of the parents themselves to ensure successful IEPs. The majority of parent-identified responsibilities was their own efforts to research and prepare for IEPs, but also to secure an advocate or lawyer (Table 20).

Table 20

Samples of Parent Strategies for Successful IEP Meetings

| Responses |
|---|
| Having a general understanding of the IEP process and knowledge of my child's disabilities & appropriate/effective accommodations for those disabilities. |
| Going in with a plan and a list of my goals. |
| Coming in with a positive outlook and knowing that I have rights as a parent and my child has rights as a student |
| Know about your options, the technical names for your child's challenges and strengths, and have examples of successful strategies that are tried and proven. |
| Having someone there to support me during the process since I am unsure about what the IEP process is all about. |
| Having an advocate and keep fighting |
| My advocate makes sure they protect my child in areas where I'm not familiar (even though I'm a sped professional) |

A number of parent respondents also identified the responsibility for school staff to promote successful IEPs. There were several sub-themes, but the overwhelming majority of the parents suggestions centered on school staff communication, (Table 21).

Table 21

Samples of School Personnel Strategies for Successful IEP Meetings

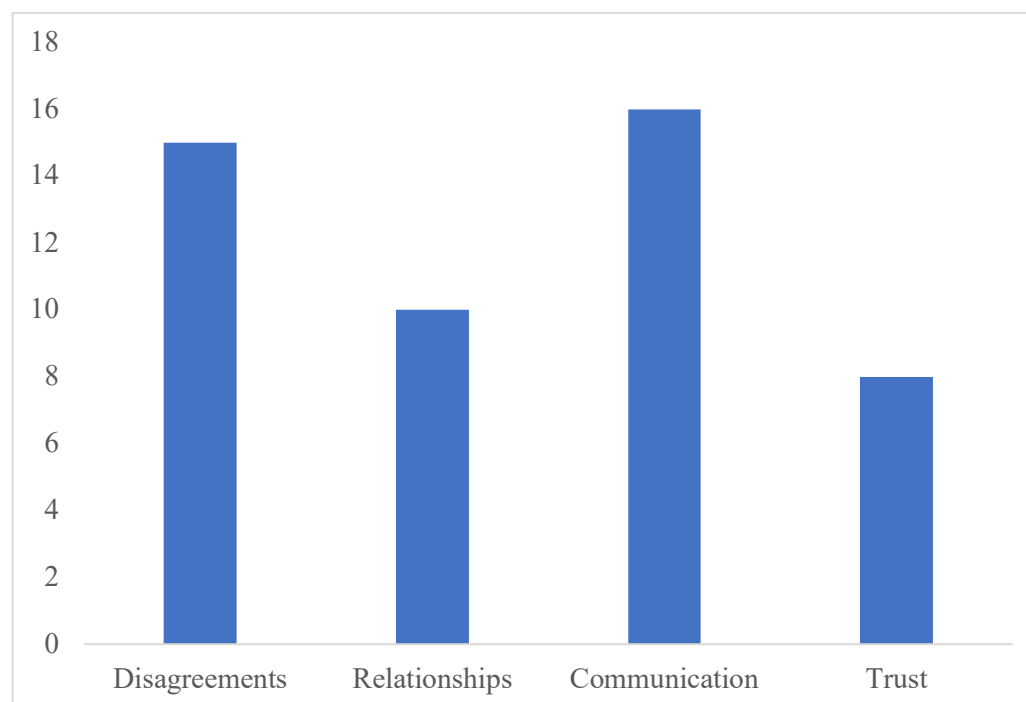
| Responses |
|---|
| Having conversations not just reading from the IEP |
| Teacher and parent input, open communication. |
| Meeting all together and discussing everything. |
| Good communication and never blaming. |
| Open communication; taking my input; explaining processes |
| You aren't asked to be best friends with the district staff, but communication should be open and safe. |

Question Two

Q2 – Leader Survey

The second question posed to the special education leaders was, *What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?* There was a similar overlap in responses as for Question One. As one of the subjects said after I asked the second question, “The complete opposite of what I just said,” referring to her answers to the first question.

Four general themes emerged for the second question, including general disagreements, relationships, communications, and trust (Figure 14).

Figure 14*Question Two Themes*

The theme of disagreements included many of the procedural concerns, such as goals, services and accommodations. Special education leaders all defined causes of disagreements in their answers, as depicted in several sample disagreements (Table 22).

Table 22*Responses for Disagreements from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| Parents wanting more restrictive supports and outside providers versus School Personnel providers. |
| So LRE is a big one for disagreements to occur and I could go both ways I've seen it happen. |
| A lot of parents want more services or less Services, depending on what it is they want. Another disagreement sometime is, a family will request something that's kind of beyond the IEP right like an IEE and speech, or they don't agree with this you know and disagreements coming to play when they get out the advocates and attorneys. |
| And more disagreements could be wanting more services and service time, |

In their positions, special education leaders oftentimes are left solving the problems created by IEP school teams. The theme of relationships is likely born out of that vantage point, (Table 23).

Table 23

Responses for Relationships from Leaders

| Responses |
|--|
| So, a big believer in the relational aspects in the communication piece as it relates to avoiding disagreement. |
| But, again, I think disagreements are just not really knowing the kids, not listening, not communicating. Don't have a relationship. |
| But I think when teams don't spend the time to build those relationships first. |

The theme of communication included traditional concepts of strong and poor communication (Table 24).

Table 24

Responses for Communication from Leaders

| Responses |
|---|
| I think those ways to keep that conversation on-going also opens the door for a parent that may be as reluctant to share some challenges that they're seen in the home. |
| Along with, if a teacher doesn't respond in a timely manner, or respond in a way that may not be as, kind of, graceful as we would like to see. |
| And I really feel like the disagreements occur because people have failed to communicate. |
| So, lack of communication or timely communication could be a factor for disagreements. |

The theme for trust was repeated throughout, and perhaps overlapped due to the responding subjects seeing the questions ahead of time. Many of the responses given are due to leader-experiences of seeing school teams damage the trust of families (Table 25).

Table 25*Responses for Trust from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| I think trust and distrust impact the IEP agreements. It's huge. So, I think that lack of trust is critical is for causing IP disagreements because I think school teams only get so many chances with a parent, I think if administrators are not necessarily kind of leading that as well as that can all lead to distrust and when somebody feels like there's distrust then they will carry that narrative. Other factors could be that people said that they were going to do something and then they didn't uphold it. |

Q2 – Parent Survey

In the quantitative survey, parents were asked, *What are the greatest challenges you face in IEP meetings?* Parents provided thematic responses that were evenly split between the challenges generated from the IEP process and procedures, versus the problems and challenges generated from staff (Table 26).

Table 26*Themes for Parent-identified Challenges for IEPs*

| Themes | | |
|--------------|---------------|----|
| Process (53) | Legal | 7 |
| | District | 15 |
| | Meetings | 10 |
| | Offer of FAPE | 19 |
| | Attendance | 2 |
| | General Ed | 11 |
| Staff (54) | Accountable / | |
| | Competent | 21 |
| | Communication | 6 |
| | Listening | 5 |
| | Compassion | 9 |

Among the challenges with the IEP process, parents shared concerns regarding the heavy legal structure of the IEP process, issues with district office staff and perceived limits of service, the drudgery of meetings, and short comings of the IEP teams' offer of FAPE. The following statements exemplify the types of challenges (Table 27).

Table 27

Parent Responses for Challenges Related to the IEP Process

| Responses |
|--|
| District making decisions about what's already offered at school or how they've always done things vs what my child needs. |
| The district representative has always been the most difficult part of the process. The process is way too slow for young minds while they're developing. Their hands are tied with protocol. |
| Rushed pace to complete meeting and finish at an unspecified but predetermined time. They talk too fast and everything goes over my head. Also, they have a secret code or language and I don't always understand what they mean by certain terms or phrases. |
| Timing of the meeting in that it's difficult to get all of the members in at one time. Zoom!!! |
| The school wanting to do the bare minimum and least restrictive for them is not what would help my child. |

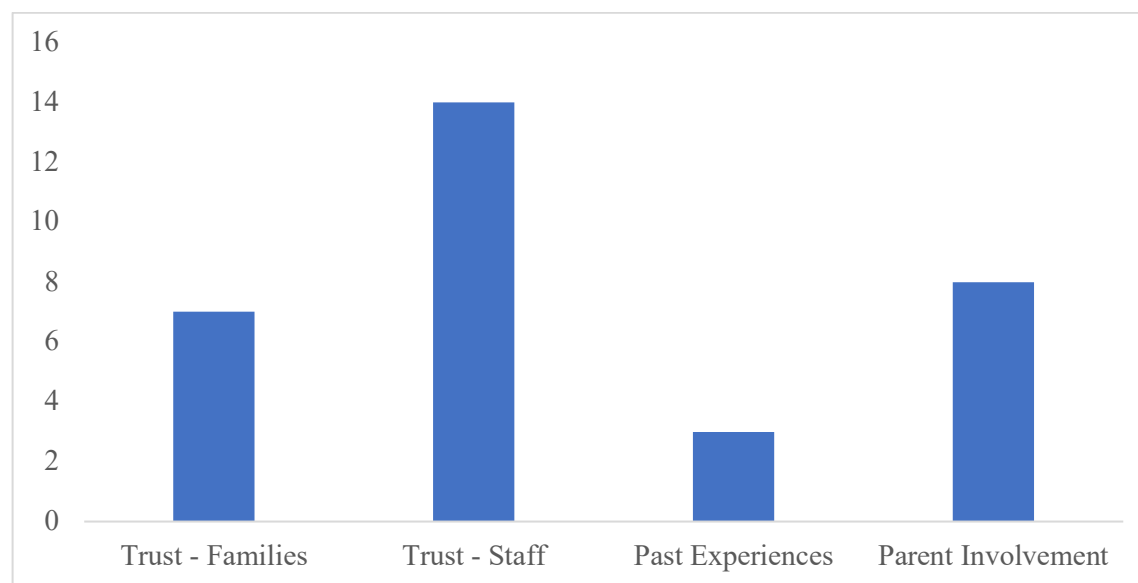
Parents also cited challenges related to the school staff they were working with. This manifested itself in multiple ways, including challenges related to attendance, general education teachers, staff accountability or incompetence, communication, listening, and compassion. Several responses exemplify these issues (Table 28).

Table 28*Parent-identified Challenges among School Staff*

| Responses |
|---|
| Making sure goals set for my child are actually read and acted on by all his teachers. |
| Feedback from the general education teacher seems to be the vaguest. |
| Educators are not on the same page, they are not prepared for the meetings, always late which is so disrespectful, they often repeat the exact same comments in the IEP |
| Cavalier attitude of team, lack of follow through |
| Case carriers not ever meeting my child, team meetings appearing as if they are going through the motions and not caring. |
| When my child's behavior is talked about so negatively instead of a difficulty he is having. |
| My child is more than a number. |

Question Three

The third question was, *To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?* The special education leader responses generally fell into four themes, (Figure 16), which were Trust (with families), Trust (with staff), Past Experiences, and Parent Involvement. Again, there were overlapping themes within various responses.

Figure 16*Question #3 Themes*

This question validated the study's interest in seeking the qualitative input from Special Education leaders. Leaders included staff needs and sensibilities in their answers, samples provided in Table 29.

Table 29*Reponses for Trust (staff) from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| I really try to empower that wherever possible there has to be trust from the top down within the organization to end if that trust is missing I'll tell you more times than not families are going to notice that right away. |
| Not only do we get parents to trust the professional judgment of the school-based IEP team members, but we also get the school-based IEP team members to trust...the parent |
| If there's not trust from the district level all the way down to the school sites that's going to impact IEP team agreements. |

Reponses to this question also generated a small but shared acknowledgement for past experiences for families, and the challenges they may or may not face outside of the IEP team meeting environment (Table 30).

Table 30*Responses of Past Experiences from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| That's hard to do, especially when a parent is waving a finger and you know it's hard to not get defensive but you know it's the more you practice I guess, the better you and of your skin gets a little bit thicker, or more like you just kind of understand like you know I don't know what their day was like I don't know what their week was like their year their whole life has been like, some kind of perspective to manage those difficult conversations with parents. |
| And then you know navigating some of the parents, like the trauma that they come with it. It could be from having a student with a disability it could be for other reasons, but not understanding that we don't know their whole story all the time. |
| What you walked through coming to the table which is going to shape your mind and your caveats going into the next so it may not have anything to do with the staff as much as it's about the trust of this process. |

Continuing in the thematic similarity of parent empathy, special education leaders providing many examples discussing trust on the parent side. Special education leaders discuss trust on behalf of families.

Table 31*Reponses of Trust (parents) from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| Once you lose the trust, It's really hard to get it back. |
| I think trust is the hardest thing to gain and the easiest thing to break. |
| If you have built that trust and maintain that trust with parents those conversations are so much easier. |
| If you develop trust with the family it goes a long way when things do go south and it's much easier to repair and parents are more open to your feedback. |

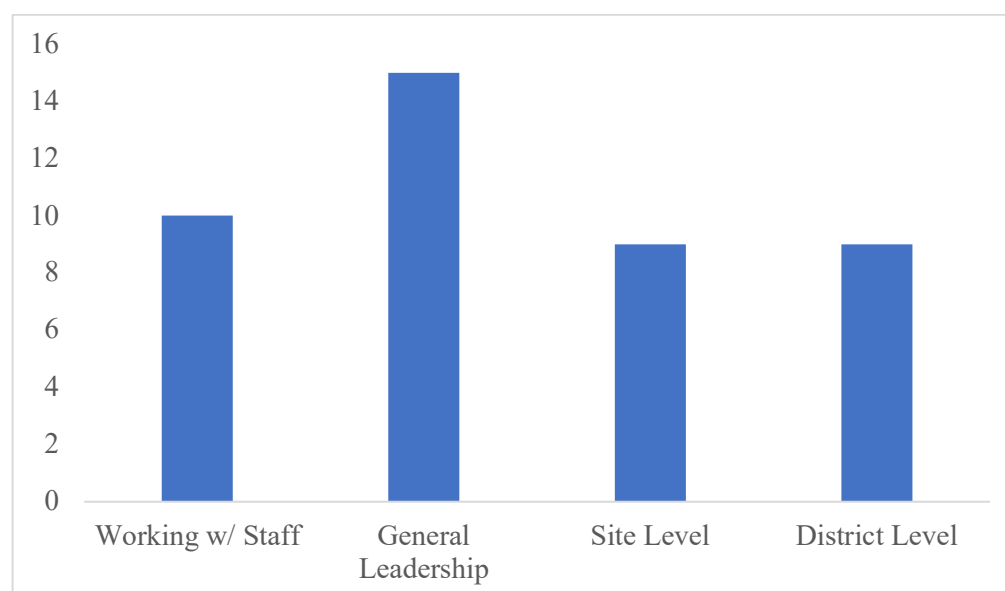
There was some degree of challenge in separating the previous theme from the next theme, i.e., parent involvement. However, as the samples indicate (Table 32), there was a definitive focus on the part of the special education leaders that parent trust is developed through parent involvement.

Table 32*Responses on Parent Involvement from Leaders*

| Responses |
|--|
| But in a classroom setting where it's very mixed or even someone who's coming as a volunteer you can certainly engage families into that school environment and build trust in a very non-threatening way. Then when you get to the table at an IEP, you already have an established relationship. |
| For their child's education you know as a former principal and it was really important that our parents were involved, and what was going on our schools and in multiple ways of working with families. |

Question Four**Q4 – Leader Survey**

The fourth question was, *To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between school and families?* The four themes developed by the answers of the special education leaders were, working with staff, general leadership, site level, and district level (Figure 17).

Figure 17*Question #4 Themes*

The first theme, working with staff, emerged as responders all acknowledged the challenges all staff face in special education. There was clear empathy for staff they all supervise (Table 33).

Table 33

Responses on Working with Staff from Leaders

| Responses |
|---|
| I think we have an obligation to train our case managers, to train our special education teachers. |
| Kind of trying to help build them up or help provide them with some of that confidence. |
| You've got to bring those leadership qualities and those philosophies that are going to lift people up in their areas of expertise, but also shape and frame, kind of grow our mindset. |
| Sometimes you need to be alongside some of these guys as a leader and you also need to let your teachers know that you understand the challenges that come with it. |

The second theme, general leadership, could have been applied to many educational leaders in various roles (Table 34).

Table 34

Responses on General Leadership from Leaders

| Responses |
|---|
| I think it goes a long way to developing culture that truly supports students, all students including those with disabilities at every facet of a school site |
| You know not all administrators are created equal. Some really like SpEd and some really don't like SpEd - let's just call it how it is. You've got to have some sort of expectation of what is acceptable and what's not |
| I do think transformational leadership plays a role because that's when you're able to shift the culture and approach so it's something different to enhance or to grow or two move in a different direction. |
| But as far as leadership in general is leadership has to hold people accountable to perform the role and in which we're asked to perform |

The leader responses acknowledged various arenas for leadership, and address both site level leadership (Table 35) and district level special education leadership (Table 36).

Table 35*Responses on Site-level Leadership from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| <p>If it's a leader or an administrator that really is just in there to take notes or just to facilitate the meeting, I think similarly, parents and others will pick up on that. And they realize that this isn't really focused on the student, this is just checking a box and getting through another meeting.</p> <p>I mean I think leadership is critical. I've been in if I had to guess thousands of IEPs up until this point, and I worked with, you know, site level administrators that have a close pulse so to speak on every special education program on their site. And I work with site level administrators that you know, to be honest, the least on their priority list is attending IEP team meetings.</p> <p>I think it reflects more than Principals might think. The one person that this mom reflected positively on today is the School site principal, who probably has the least to do with the implementation of the IEP. She is so appreciative of the fact that he is out at recess checking in on her son and that he's going into the classroom specifically to try to maintain a positive relationship with him. I could tell just by the way she was talking about him today and the things that she said that he does. I was like 'he's going to be a good one to have in that IEP next week' because I think he can lead Mom to see some things that maybe the team right now wouldn't be able to because she's lost trust with them. She still has immense respect and trust for that principal</p> |

Table 36*Responses on District-level Leadership from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| <p>So, when you're at a district-level, you're going to have a different view of someone coming and complaining about trying to reach out to that person and saying hey "I heard that things did not go well I want to talk to you about it". And then being honest and saying, you know, "we need to do better too, this is important for us".</p> <p>I think what we've tried to do from a district perspective is try to be really clear about what we want, what we expect, and give people permission to say I don't know, let me get back to you and then they'll come to the district.</p> <p>And then if it continues to you know escalate or there continues to be a disagreement then and maybe I'll come in and propose an ADR or I'll come to the IEP to help make it, kind of keeping those layers of support</p> <p>But by the time something gets to the district level, its usually at a level that the ship has sailed and now you're trying to kind of hoping that you can be another opportunity of a voice for someone to listen to, and for you to be able to say I'm sorry that that happened to you.</p> |

Q4 – Parent Survey

On their online survey, parents were asked, *What suggestions would you give to school staff when working with families of special education?* The provided responses were coded into two general themes, including leadership and process-related (Table 37). Over two-thirds of the responses identified leadership qualities, leading this study to conclude the responses are fitting for the fourth research question.

Table 37

Themes from Parent Responses for IEP Meeting Suggestions

| Themes | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|----|
| Leadership (93) | Honesty | 10 |
| | Empathy | 35 |
| | Ask for / Open to Input | 18 |
| | Listening | 24 |
| | Communication | 6 |
| | Mainstream | 4 |
| Process (39) | Staff | 7 |
| | Meetings / Language | 10 |
| | Provide Education | 9 |
| | Pre Meetings / Providing Information | 9 |

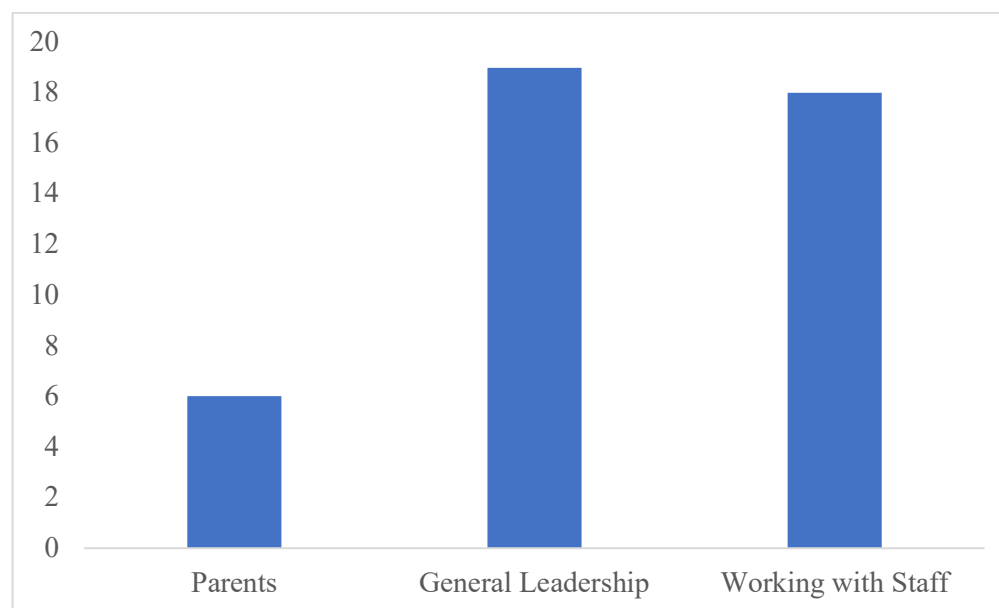
Of those leadership qualities, there was a particular increase for comments coded for asking and being open to input, listening, and having empathy. Comments from among the three themes exemplify this trend. (Table 38).

Table 38

| Responses |
|--|
| Ask the parents if you have questions about the disability and how it impacts the student. |
| You know a lot, but the parent knows their child, too. |
| Frequent communication, encourage questions, ask for their input/advice when facing challenges with the student |
| Ask parents their goals for their child and the things they enjoy about their child. |
| Provide time to truly listen to parent (and child if applicable). |
| To listen and allow their voices to be heard. |
| Listen to the parents sincerely. |
| Listen to the parents, they know their child the best. |
| We already know what struggles our child has because we have them at home too. |
| It is so important to come to an understanding that the parents are dealing with cards their child was dealt with and not focus on what parents should have or could have done to prevent behavior challenges. |
| Be aware that you are talking about someone's baby! |
| Act as if you're in their shoes. |
| Be empathetic that especially the first years, we are in grief. We are adjusting expectations, we are learning at the speed of light how to best help our child, we are giving up dreams and creating new ones to fit our child's needs. We are worried what will happen when we are no longer here. |

Question Five

The fifth question was, *How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between school and families?* Responses from the special education leaders generated three general themes, including parents, general leadership, and working with staff, (Figure 18)

Figure 18*Question #5 Themes*

The first theme, parents, focused on the need to provide a resource and guidance for parents (Table 39).

Table 39*Responses Regarding Parents from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| I feel like creating access from a district perspective in educating them on what is the IEP, what does it mean |
| Even having conversations - we would have conversations with parents about their academics that where they currently were, what the data was showing |
| I think we have to work on building those relationships, as well when there is a conflict. Having them feel like we are approachable and that they're willing to come to us and that we can resolve some conflicts. |

The theme for general leadership included various elements and included general flexibility as a variety of issues and challenges need dealing with (Table 40).

Table 40*Reponses on General Leadership from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| And you have to be willing and able to kind of meet those needs as they're thrown at you and you really have to build a team they can do that around you. |
| And then obviously as you work your kind of way up that could be where a district leader has a role to potentially you know doing alternative dispute resolution with a family, doing mediation and I maybe even file for due process if the condition you know really requires that. |
| So, I'd say you know in terms of when things aren't going well, District leaders, they do have a role to step in and provide more support. |
| But planning the training, providing what they need but also really needing to ensure that compliance piece of everything, because that could cause a lot of break down between the school and the family if the staff aren't following what's legally compliant. |
| Being able to celebrate, providing feedback when needed. |

Lastly, all of the district leaders provided a clear acknowledgement of the needs of staff, and the requirement to lead them (Table 41).

Table 41*Reponses on Working with Staff from Leaders*

| Responses |
|---|
| Really ensuring that everyone has the ability to meet the needs of the students and we work toward shared goals. |
| They're there in those conversations, are in those meetings, they're interviewing staff year-round trying to make sure that we have the best staff that we can have in classrooms. |
| And when I say the foundation, I mean, it goes down to the classroom facilities, they have the materials, they have the staffing, that they have you know the professional learning that they have. |
| So, you know it like I said I think trust in relationships let's not negate the like strong program like you need to have strong defensible programs and you've got to have good teachers. |
| high expectations training and support, and then an accountability with gentle nudges if you will because it's a learning curve and our stuff changes. |
| You could be take the role of a sounding board and provide support after IEPs which could help, you know, clarify some things that they may not feel comfortable, or they made me feel like there's asking stupid questions they don't feel comfortable doing it to the team that they work with. |

Summary

This mixed methods phenomenological study used quantitative and qualitative data to determine IEP and special education best practices. The quantitative study identified low and moderate correlations between how families trust and distrust IEP teams, and the impact servant leadership practices have on family trust. Qualitative data from special educator leaders gave expert-practitioner insights into the factors leading to IEP disagreements, the impact of trust and leadership on IEP agreements, and how they view their roles as district leaders in special education.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological mixed methods study was to examine the impact of parent trust and how parent trust is influenced by school district and team leadership. This study attempted to measure parent trust and distrust, as well as parent perceptions of school team leadership. Additionally, this study attempted to understand district leadership practices, and how those practices impact IEP site teams and their relationships with parents. This study focused on five research questions:

1. How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?
2. What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?
3. To what extent does trust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
4. To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
5. How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?

Discussions

Research Question One

The first research question, *How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?*, resulted in qualitative responses from special education leaders which were fairly wide-ranging. They included themes of procedural awareness, focusing on students' needs, team collaboration, building relationships, ongoing communication, and parent input, supporting past work (Todis et al., 2008; Zagona et al., 2019). The special education leaders collectively placed more coded responses within the categories of a need for parent input and communication (Figure 14). The leaders also drew attention to increased procedural fidelity to the IEP document and legal

requirements, which can significantly impact IEP agreements (Couvillion et al., 2018; Rothstein & Johnson 2021).

The research question provided additional answers from the parent survey, which asked the open-ended question, *What has made IEP meetings successful?* The coding of parent responses generated three major themes, the responsibilities of schools, the responsibilities of parents, and the shared responsibilities of schools and parents (Table 8).

Parent responses aligned with the special education leaders in recognizing the importance of communication and collaboration. However, parents collectively expressed an increased focus on pre-meetings and pre-meeting communication creating the conditions for successful IEPs, which was looked upon as a shared responsibility for staff and families (Table 19).

Interestingly, nearly half of the coded responses from the parents suggested that primary responsibility for successful IEPs rested with the parents themselves (Table 20). The responsibility fell into two primary categories, that is the securing of an advocate and to a lesser extent a lawyer, which concurs with findings from the literature (Fish, 2006). Parents responses advocated researching special education law and their students' needs and options, essentially performing the due diligence to arrive prepared for IEP team meetings (Munsell & O'Malley, 2019; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014).

Research Question Two

The second research question was: *What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families.* The answers from special education leaders to the second question, in which disagreements arise, were coded thematically to include disagreements in offers of FAPE, relationships, communication, and trust for a total of four themes (Figure 15). The theme of disagreements, which referenced differences in the IEP document, (i.e. goals, services,

placement, etc.) only accounted for roughly 30% of the comments shared by leaders. By contrast, leaders expressed more concerns directed towards the relational aspects of IEP teams and parents (Table 23), which were thematically identified as relationships, communication, and trust.

Parents were asked, *What are the greatest challenges you face in IEP meetings?* Among those concerns shared, 49.5% of the responses were coded as *process*, which included disagreements similar the those expressed by leaders (Table 26). The parents added additional concerns including frustrations with perceived district-level inflexibility (Table 27), and many of these concerns have been previously studied (Hart et al., 2012), which also addressed the IEP process itself, (i.e., inflexible meeting times, *secret language*).

Over 50% percent of the parent responses addressed similar relational concerns shared by special education leaders, including communication and listening, but also compassion and empathy which was not mentioned by leaders. Parents also expressed other frustrations with staff that included general concerns of competency, accountability, and follow-through with general education staff.

Research Question Three

The third research question was: *To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?*

Quantitative data in this survey did not definitely answer this research question, specifically in regard to trust and distrust being the control indicators for IEP agreements. However, the data did show other indicators and impacts of trust in the process of special education. The quantitative data indicated that past positive experiences in IEPs inversely effect feelings of distrust (Table 6). This suggests that IEP teams that inspire trust with families may positively impact the agreements for future IEP teams of the same family. The data also revealed

that parent perceptions of trust and distrust impacts the parent desire for advocates and attorneys (Tables 8 & 9).

Qualitative responses from special education leaders were coded into four themes, including two directed towards specific relationships of trust, and two which were specific to elements that impact trust (Figure 16). The two categories of trust were related to families and trust directed towards staff. Additionally, special education leaders identified elements that impact trust, including past experiences (Table 30), which supported the qualitative data and using parent involvement to build upon trust.

Research Question Four

The fourth research question was: *To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?*

The quantitative survey to parents failed to specifically answer whether leadership directly impacts the agreements for IEP meetings. Nevertheless, data from parent responses indicates that servant leadership correlates to parent trust and inversely correlates to parent distrust (Tables 10 & 11). Since additional quantitative data from this study supports a correlation that parent trust impacts the parent need for advocates and attorneys (Tables 8 & 9), it can be reasonably argued that trust improves chances for a resolved IEP meeting document.

The qualitative responses from special education leaders generated four themes, working with staff, general leadership, site level-leadership, and district-level leadership (Figure 17). The data suggested that education leaders generally speaking have a somewhat removed role from team IEP agreements and spend more time preparing and supporting staff and setting expectations, which does have a positive impact on special education programs (Mueller et al., 2008). Special education leaders also addressed building cultures for staff members that support

students and families. Lastly, special education leaders provided responses addressing last ditch efforts to heal relationships with families (Table 36).

The parent survey asked the question, *What suggestions would you give to school staff when working with families of special education?* Seventy percent of the responses focused on attributes of leadership (Table 37), including honesty, empathy, asking for and being open to input, listening, and communication, which supports previous studies (Beck & DeSutter 2020). The other 30% of the responses focused on IEP processes, including meeting logistics and limiting the use of complicated language, and providing additional opportunities for parent education and information specific to their child's needs. Based on the responses skewing significantly to leadership qualities, and specifically servant leadership qualities (Zeffane, 2010) it can be argued that servant leadership does impact IEP agreements between school teams and families.

Research Question Five

The fifth research question was: *How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?*

The fifth question asked the special education leaders how they viewed their roles. The leaders collectively identified three major themes on which they focus, namely meeting the needs of parents, providing general leadership, and working with staff (Figure 18). While much of the leadership-specific themes focused on staff trainings, compliance and dispute resolution, the overwhelming listing of themes they generated fell back on the focus of this study, which was emphasizing trust and servant leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002) to support IEP teams in reaching successful outcomes.

Theoretical Framework: Trust Theory

Based on the responses on the parent survey regarding feelings of trust and distrust, the data supports the work of Lewicki, McAllister, and Biles (1998) that trust and distrust can exist in non-correlational relationships (Figures 9 & 10). While there was a low correlational relationship between feelings of hope and fear and hope and wariness, correlational relationships did not exist in feelings of confidence or faith alongside feelings of fear, skepticism, or wariness. The data supports the uniqueness of individual experiences, and the variety and non-linear feelings of trust and distrust that families experience.

Implications for Practice

Based on the data generated through quantitative and qualitative data, there should be a focus on special education departments and leadership to provide additional opportunities and training for staff to engage parents positively (Collier et al., 2015). Specifically, in characteristics that are associated with servant leadership (Saleem et al., 2020; Russell and Stone, 2002), awareness and empathy was an important issue for the parents surveyed in this study. While there was a focus on the part of special education leaders to provide training for procedural updates and changes in laws, as well the development of best practices like facilitated IEPs (Mueller, 2009) that incorporate parent input and communication, the research suggests a need for increased empathy for IEP team members. All of the special education leaders referenced incidents with parents (Table 36) where this skill was put to use in their own practice solving parent concerns and holding alternative dispute resolutions; however, the study did not find IEP team professional development opportunities provided to IEP team members.

Recommendations for Further Research

One of the challenges in this study was the wide variation of reported experiences. This study confirmed that challenging past experiences did impact parent feelings of distrust. It would be the recommendation of this researcher to further explore longitudinal surveys that record parent feelings of trust, distrust, and servant leadership in an annual capacity, which would provide a deeper understanding of how parent self-reporting changes over time, and how that may be impacted by changes in IEP teams or transitions to different schools and grade levels.

One of the concerning pieces of correlational data generated by this study is the impact of ethnicity on IEP law familiarity. This would be a critically important piece of information for the public school system to ensure all of its families are served with equitable access to education policies and information.

This study should also extend to examining time constraints on school IEP teams. Restructuring IEP team members may have more time to engage families positively and encourage participation more regularly. This would also provide more time and opportunity for pre-meetings and opportunities for parents to provide input on goals (Collier et al., 2015).

Limitations

The first question, *How do IEP teams build successful IEP's for students?*, is a difficult question to answer effectively. While this study has provided indicators to explain suggested practices to improve team dynamics, determining the metrics for *successful* IEPs could be quite specific to intended outcomes, and of course always individualized. This could be analyzed by the ability for students to reach grade-level, or the demonstration of growth. It could also be organized by the analysis of various goals, placement and services for specific eligibilities.

The parent survey being distributed through social media found a highly educated, active, and overwhelmingly white population of mothers. Much of the research presented in this study (Hannon, 2017; Harry & Allan; Larios & Zetlin, 2012; Lo, 2008; Rossetti et al., 2020) focused on the needs for families of different cultures and ethnicities in special education. This study was unable to generate a significant amount of data to support additional phenomenological information. The quantitative survey sample was limited in its collection of data from families with diverse backgrounds.

An additional limitation to this study is the fact that quantitative data is collected in a single moment, which can change with a new experience. Parent feelings on trust, distrust, and team leadership are summarized in specifically tailored questions and Likert-style statements. The question identified those parents that have had multiple IEP experiences, and the study was unable to determine how many IEPs had occurred over how many years to characterize those experiences. The data reflects variation in family experiences; however, the data did not reflect the impact of single experiences impacting future experiences, or the difference changes in IEP teams impacted family experiences in special education.

Lastly, the quantitative survey was posted on social media. This provides a benefit to the responders, as it ensures anonymity. However, there could have been educational benefit to knowing the regions and states of responders, and if their experiences occurred in urban or rural environments, or public, private, or charter school experiences.

Delimitations

The decision to post the parent questionnaire on social media delivered a statistically significant number of responses in a relatively short period of time. The survey also included qualitative open-ended questions that provide a rich source of data, revealing important data.

This study also benefitted from using special education leaders as qualitative experts in the field. Special education serves a unique role in that they oftentimes find themselves as the *last stop* before disagreements go to mediation or due process. In this scenario, special education leaders can appreciate and determine from where the cause of disagreements derives, school teams or families. This vantage point and aerial view provided responses that may have differed from viewpoints from school site team members. While there were feelings from parent responses that painted a negative viewpoint for district staff members and their motivations, the responses of the leaders generated information indicative of empathy and support for families.

Conclusions

Special education presents a wide-ranging collection of legislative and legal constructs that were created for the purpose of supporting students with disabilities in education. The vehicle for this complicated assortment of laws and practice is an Individualized Education Program, crafted and approved by parents, teachers, a school psychologist, and a school administrator. The resulting efforts can produce partnership and an agreed-upon document of goals, services, and placements for a student's education. Alternatively, the IEP meeting can result in disagreements that lead to settlements and due process (Mueller & Piantoni, 2013), and many times, somewhere in between.

IEP teams can build successful IEPs for students in many ways (Beck and DeSutter, 2020; Mueller et al., 2008). First and foremost, all team members need to commit to ongoing communication (Esquivel et al., 2008; Fenton et al., 2017), with school teams soliciting and listening to parent input. Successful IEPs also require school staff members to understand the necessary procedural and legal information. Parent knowledge and ability to understand their students' rights, eligibility, and special education best practices also helps build successful IEPs.

This study found that factors leading to IEP disagreements between students and families include disagreements in the offer of FAPE, (i.e. services, placement, etc.), and breakdowns in the relationship between school teams and families. Based on the research in this study, breakdowns on the relationship can often be attributed to poor communication and lack of compassion for families, as well as perceived issues of staff competency and follow-through.

The extent to which trust and distrust impact IEP agreements ultimately eluded this study. While this study established that parent feelings of distrust can be inversely impacted by past positive experiences in IEPs, and parent feelings of trust and distrust correlate to parent desires for advocates and lawyers, this study was not able to prove elements of trust impacting IEP agreements specifically.

Leadership in special education can be viewed in many different scenarios. Parents that feel their IEP teams demonstrate servant leadership (Saleem et al., 2020; Russell and Stone, 2002), also express feelings of trust towards those teams. The opposite is true when parents feel teams provided servant leadership and express feelings of distrust. When asked for suggestions to improve IEP teams, parent data indicates that servant leadership tendencies, including open communication and compassion, are more important than other procedural or staff-oriented suggestions.

This research illuminated the contrast between special education leader responses and parent responses. While leader responses generally espoused similar concepts and themes, parents generated a greater diversity of themes, which speaks to variances of experience. Special education leaders have a shared experience of training, practical and professional experiences, and shared distribution and variety of successful and unsuccessful IEP team experiences. Parents,

on the other hand, have a far more varied and diverse set of experiences, and this was realized in their responses in both quantitative and qualitative data.

In seeking how trust impacts IEP agreements, this study gained clarity on the elements that create trust, such as honesty, communication, seeking input, and empathy. Trust, it would seem, is more of an output or result of these strategies. However, this study validated the theoretical framework of the study related to trust (Lewicki, McAllister, and Biles, 1998). Parents' feelings of trust and distrust are unique, non-linear, and unique to each family based on their backgrounds and experiences. The research presented suggests that special education leaders that exhibit servant leadership tendencies are best able to navigate the diversity of parent feelings of trust and distrust, which can then lead to successful agreements between school teams and families.

Summary

This study sought to understand the impact of trust and leadership when school personnel meet with families in IEP meetings. This mixed-methods study focused on a quantitative-qualitative explanatory sequential design (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). The research first collected quantitative and qualitative data from families of students with special education through a survey, that included Likert-style questions followed by three open-ended questions. Qualitative data was also collected through open-ended question interviews with district-level leaders in special education. The findings of this study provide a deeper understanding for how special education leaders can guide school IEP teams to making appropriate IEP team agreements with families which benefit the student.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Survey Link with Consent Form

<https://forms.gle/s7YjWZJgpEdtGttD7>

Appendix B: Consent Form for Special Education Leader Interviews

Interview Survey for Special Education Leaders

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the impact of trust and leadership on IEP team outcomes. This study is being conducted by William Lynch under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Collins, Dissertation Chair, in the School of Education. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, Concordia University Irvine, in Irvine, CA.

PURPOSE: This study seeks to understand how to build successful IEP team meetings that inspire trust, input, and collaboration from families. The purpose of this phenomenological mixed methods study is to examine the impact of parent trust on IEP meeting outcomes and if parent trust is influenced by IEP school team leadership.

DESCRIPTION: This interview will be organized by five open-ended interview questions. These questions are designed to inspire mutual dialogue, and this study will benefit from open discussion related to the topic.

PARTICIPATION: Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Please note that the research is confidential. Any document containing participant identity will be locked in a filing cabinet, and digital information will be stored in a password protected computer.

DURATION: The expected duration of the subjects' participation will be between 30 to 60 minutes.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort for the subject by participating in this interview.

BENEFITS: Participating in this survey may provide the subject with a deeper understanding or validation of their feelings regarding IEP team meetings.

VIDEO/AUDIO:

I understand that this interview will be Video Recorded Initials _____

I understand that this interview will be Audio Recorded Initials _____

CONTACT: If you have pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Dr. Deborah Collins, Dissertation Chair. Phone (949) 854-8002
Email: deborah.collins@cui.edu

RESULTS: The results of this study can be obtained after the study is completed and published from the Concordia University Irvine Library, in the CUI Digital Repository:
<https://cui.dsacedirect.org/>

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study

SIGNATURE:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

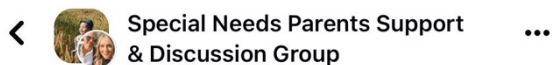
Printed Name: _____

The extra copy of this consent form is for your record.

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Special Education Leaders

- How do IEP teams build successful IEPs for students?
- What factors lead to IEP disagreements between schools and families?
- To what extent does trust and distrust impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
- To what extent does leadership impact IEP agreements between schools and families?
- How do district leaders view their roles for ensuring successful IEPs between schools and families?

Appendix D: Examples of Unsuccessful and Successful Posts for Surveys



26 m ·

ATTN: Parents of children receiving special education services! I need your help. We are seeking the opinions of parents to help me with my dissertation.

If you are the parent of a child in special education can you please complete the linked survey?

This study seeks to understand how to build successful IEP team meetings that inspire trust, input, and collaboration from families.

The purpose is to examine the impact of parent trust on IEP meeting outcomes and if parent trust is influenced by IEP school team leadership.

If you feel you can help- please complete the survey linked below!

Thank you so much! I am very grateful for your support.



Special Needs Parents Support & Discussion Group



5m ·

Hi everyone, I need some help with this dissertation. If your child has an IEP can you please fill out this questionnaire?? It would be SOOOOOO helpful!!

Special Education Parent Survey

Informed Consent

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the impact of trust and leadership on IEP team outcomes. This study is being conducted by William Lynch under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Collins, Dissertation Chair in the Concordia University Irvine School of Education. This study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (Concordia University)