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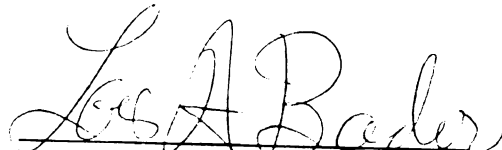
INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR
LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS: A COMPARISON
OF INTENT AND PRACTICE

presented by

Malcolm M. Morrison

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Teacher Education


Major professor

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INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR LEARNING DISABLED
STUDENTS: A COMPARISON OF INTENT AND PRACTICE

By

Malcolm M. Morrison

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS: A COMPARISON OF INTENT AND PRACTICE

By

Malcolm M. Morrison

Learning disability is considered a handicapping condition, and the United States Congress has enacted laws at the request of educators and the general public to alleviate such a condition. These laws were enacted to provide an appropriate education at public expense to all children with handicapping conditions. The United States Office of Education has implemented the law by establishing rules and regulations under which learning disabled students are identified and served by public educational agencies. State departments of education then establish their own guidelines within this framework to identify and educate these handicapped students, or adjust existing rules to fit federal guidelines.

This study was conducted to determine whether the individualized educational program (IEP) for learning disabled students was being designed and implemented as mandated by P.A. 94-142 and P.L. 154. The population comprised learning disabled students in seven public school districts in rural northeastern Michigan. The total enrollment of these districts was 9,042 pupils, of whom 293 or roughly 3.24% were

Malcolm M. Morrison

identified as learning disabled. Forty-four special education and 310 general education teachers from the constituent school districts were included in the study. Parents were included if they had attended at least one IEPC meeting. One hundred forty-four teachers and 154 parents responded to the survey. Pertinent student information was obtained from students' cumulative folders.

Questions posed in the study concerned the composition of the multidisciplinary evaluation team and the IEP committee, team decisions, and parental involvement. Large and small districts were compared to determine whether school district size affected the quality of educational program.

The districts examined were found to be in compliance with the law, with minimal requirements being met in some districts. The IEP committees were functioning as they should, but parents were not as involved or effective as they could be. Parents should become more assertive of their rights, more informed, and more responsible. Parental in-service could immeasurably improve the delivery system for learning disabled students.

Dedicated with my undying gratitude to Jessie, my wonderful
wife, companion, and helpmate, whose total support and
perseverance have carried me through.

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Sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Lois A. Bader, who served as my academic advisor and dissertation committee chairperson. Her guidance and encouragement contributed greatly throughout the doctoral program. I am also grateful to Drs. Lonnie D. McIntyre, Roy Wesselman, and Eugene Pernell for serving as members of my dissertation committee. Their support and thoughtful suggestions in the formulation and completion of this dissertation are much appreciated.

Gratitude is extended to the professionals who contributed data to this study and to my colleagues, who said, "Go for it!"

My thanks to Paul T. Perschbacher for his invaluable assistance with computer programming and data processing and to Susan Cooley for editing and preparing the manuscript.

Not to be overlooked are the moral support and encouragement of my family, especially my wife, Jessie.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Background

Since before formal education in America began, the issue of what to do with the student who does not or cannot measure up to accepted standards of achievement has been a dilemma. The burgeoning body of knowledge students are required to learn and the technological explosion have compounded the problem and in many instances have raised the level of acceptability for all students. One of the results of this phenomenon has been a widening of the range of abilities within a particular age group or grade level of students. The typical student fits somewhere on the continuum from "severely mentally impaired" to "gifted." Students at both ends of the continuum fall into the categories of "exceptional students" or "exceptional children."

One of the categories currently used for some exceptional children is learning disabled, which in lay terms denotes a student who does not succeed academically but has the ability, as assessed by accepted measuring devices, and seems to be trying but simply cannot attain acceptable performance. Children identified as learning disabled fit on the educational continuum just below the normally achieving child who seems to be succeeding in the regular classroom with little unusual stress. Often the learning disabled child is not

recognized as "different" until he/she needs to perform a specific academic task.

In America today, learning disability is considered a handicapping condition, and the United States Congress has enacted laws at the request of educators and the general public to alleviate such conditions. These laws were enacted to provide an appropriate education at public expense to all children with handicapping conditions.

At the United States Office of Education Hearings on February 4, 1977, MacGinitie delineated the core of the multidisciplinary team that is to make the preliminary decision regarding identification of the learning disabled child, according to guidelines established by Congress in PL 94-142 of 1975:

The local team that identified learning disabled children should bring to bear the combined judgment of several people and the professional knowledge of several specialists. The most important specialists for this team are evident in the definition, given by Congress, of children with specific learning disabilities as "those children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain disfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. . . ." Clearly, then, psychologists, language specialists, and reading specialists should be central members of the evaluating team.

Since 1975, when PL 94-142 was enacted, there have been countless interpretations of the law and a wide range of compliance with it. Interpretations have varied from state to state. When PL 94-142 was passed, most states already had mandates in place (i.e., Washington State had House Bill 90; Michigan had Public Law 198).

Hence it was logical for states to interpret PL 94-142 by comparing it with the state act that was already in use.

In the past decade, some changes have taken place in the procedures for placing learning disabled children, and screening materials purported to identify specific learning disabilities with little or no error have proliferated. The basic educational assessment instruments have survived this trend, however, and the WISC-R, Slosson, WRAT, and PIAT, among others, are still used in evaluations.

By law, professionals must produce, read, and verify both records and communications at every step of the educational plan in order to satisfy the legal mandates. The possibility that record keeping will become paramount, at the expense of quality education for the learning disabled student, is a concern of many professionals. Conversely, it is possible that inadequate records will be kept because record keeping may become burdensome and interfere with teaching.

In identifying and placing learning disabled students, the school psychologist usually begins the process, but a medical doctor, pediatrician, or ophthalmologist can also make this determination. The school psychologist is a mandated member of the evaluation team and usually is responsible for making the first determination of a student's qualification for the learning disabilities program. However, any of these professionals may certify the child for placement in such a program.

The present study concerns the learning disabled student and the definitions of learning disabilities as determined by various

Michigan school districts will help in understanding the process. Comparing actual practices with the intention of the law will either verify or refute the validity of the individualized education program (IEP) for each learning disabled student.

Importance of the Study

This study is important for a number of reasons. First, although much has been written about how to evaluate, plan, and implement IEPs, little has been said about how effective the IEP is. In addition, it is unclear how closely the IEP is followed. The State Department of Education monitors occasionally, but this monitoring is often performed in such a manner that the educational-goals attainment may actually reflect only recorded data. Therefore, it was deemed important in this study to answer the question, "In the rural Michigan school district, does the student get the service that has been planned for him/her?" It was also important to discover whether parents really do add to the validity of the IEP when they attend the meetings, and whether they do facilitate the education of their children when they become involved.

The information gleaned from this study can be used to improve the delivery system in the learning disabilities program and perhaps to improve the quality of the program. The findings can be applied to

both regular and learning disabled classrooms to help define teaching strategies and to improve school-parent relationships.

Purpose of the Study

Congress has specified that the IEP for the handicapped child is to be developed at a meeting attended by school personnel and the child's parent(s). Michigan mandates evaluation by a multidisciplinary evaluation team as defined in Rule 340.1701a (e) of Public Act 154.

The purpose of the present study was threefold. One purpose was to examine the composition of the multidisciplinary team for learning disabled students, to ascertain the identities of the persons who actively participate in the multidisciplinary team process. The investigator sought to determine how extensively various professionals are involved in the referral and certification of learning disabled students.

A second purpose of the study was to assess IEP committees' recommendations and to compare them with student placement and educational opportunities within the school setting. The primary intention of this assessment was to determine the number and kinds of responsibilities of the various individuals involved in the planning committee.

The study was also designed to ascertain whether the IEP was actively followed or whether it was filed for annual review. If the data verify conformance with the mandates of PL 94-142, one of the goals of that law will have been met in the northeastern area of Michigan under investigation.

The third purpose of the study was to discover the degree to which parents are involved in the IEP process--whether they actually participate in their children's placement in a particular program and the planning of that program. The researcher attempted to determine how involved parents were and how they felt about their involvement or lack of involvement.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the personnel involved in the IEP process and the usefulness of the IEP as an educational tool. Six major research questions were formulated to guide the data collection:

1. What is the composition and participation of the multi-disciplinary team involved in the referral of learning disabled students?
2. What is the composition of the IEP committee, and how do special and general education teachers participate on the committee?
3. Is IEP planning for learning disabled students a team decision?
4. Do the professionals involved in the education of learning disabled students follow the IEP?
5. Are parents of learning disabled students actively involved in the IEP process?

6. Do small and large districts differ with regard to how they carry out the IEP process?

Generalizability of the Study Findings

The findings of this project may have an effect that reaches beyond the limits of the study itself. Since the primary source of information for this study was school permanent cumulative record files, the researcher assumed that all statistics recorded therein were accurate and current. Thus the findings of the study can be generalized to other school systems with similar student enrollments, whose pupils are from similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The learning disabled students in this study were kindergartners through twelfth graders enrolled in seven public school districts with a total enrollment of 9,042 students, of whom 293 or roughly 3.24% were identified as learning disabled. The area selected for study is a rural area in northeastern Michigan; an Air Force base is located in one of the districts. The total population of the area included in the study was 44,947 in 1985.

Because the information used in this research is readily available and accessible to school personnel, the research approach and methodology may be applicable in further investigations. If this approach is successful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the IEP process, it can be used in replications with a variety of populations within the public school setting.

Limitations

This study has three limitations. First, because of the limited sample size, the findings are not necessarily widely generalizable; however, there is no proof that they should not be generalized. The population is not unusual or unique to the extent that the data would be invalid for similar samples.

Second, the writer did not attempt to determine individuals' reasons for participating or not participating in the IEP process. Rather, he sought to identify those who chose to participate, as well as the results of participation or nonparticipation.

Third, the writer does not indicate specific measures or programs of supportive assistance that should be undertaken in implementing the IEP process. However, in Chapter V, the findings are discussed in terms of conditions that appear to affect the IEP process so that educators may direct their attention to factors within their control.

Definition of Terms

The reader may better understand the study if certain terms are defined in the context of their use in this dissertation.

Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. A branch of the United States Department of Education, which has jurisdiction over education of both physically and educationally handicapped individuals.

Educators. All certified personnel and administrators who constitute the professional staff of a public school system.

General education teacher (regular teacher, classroom teacher). A teacher certified by the state to teach general education or regular

curriculum (i.e., language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, reading, and so on) to students under his/her jurisdiction.

Individualized education program (IEP). An educational program tailored to the needs of a particular student, to help him/her learn as much as possible as quickly as possible.

Individualized education program committee. The committee that plans the IEP for each student, comprising educational professionals, parents, and sometimes the student him/herself.

Learning disabled children. Children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, read, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. The term includes children with such conditions as perceptual handicaps, minimal brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Monitor. To check school records to determine whether certain conditions of the IEP are being met; or the person who does the monitoring.

Multidisciplinary evaluation team. A team comprising any combination of the following individuals: teachers, administrators, social workers, counselors, medical professionals, psychologists, parents, and students. The term is used to designate the group of people who make the recommendations for referral and/or placement of special education students.

Special education teacher. A teacher certified to instruct handicapped students in the areas of their disabilities.

Parent. The adult caretaker, whether the natural parent, step-parent, or legal guardian.

Overview

Chapter I included the background of the problem, the importance and purpose of the study, research questions, generalizability and limitations of the study, and definitions of terms used in the dissertation. Pertinent research and literature relating to the subject content of this study are reviewed in Chapter II. Chapter III contains a description of the study design and the methodology used in collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter IV is a discussion of the results of the data analysis. A summary of the study, appropriate conclusions, and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the IEP process for learning disabled students as mandated by PL 94-142 and its amendments, and to report the actual practices of professional educators as they attempt to fulfill these legal mandates. The review of the literature pertaining to learning disabilities and PL 94-142 is organized under three main headings: (a) historical review of learning disabilities, (b) rules and regulations relating to learning disabilities, and (c) recent studies pertaining to individual educational plans and their implementation.

Historical Review of Learning Disabilities

The study of what are today called learning disabilities began in the early 1800s. Dember (in Gearhart, 1976) provided an account of early nineteenth century investigations of visual perception. Gall, a Viennese physician, postulated an association between parts of the brain and various disorders of mental ability in an attempt to describe what would now be called aphasia (Gearhart, 1976). By the early 1900s, accounts of word blindness had been published by Kerr, Hinshelwood, and Morgan (Gearhart, 1973).

Wiederholt (in Gearhart, 1973) provided a more complete review of the history of learning disabilities. He called the years from 1800 to 1930 the foundation phase of the learning disabilities movement. Wiederholt viewed the period from 1930 to 1960 as a transitional phase, and from 1960 to the present as the integration phase.

Cruickshank (in Gearhart, 1976) referred to the "slow learner" as a child whose measured intelligence quotient is somewhere between 80 and 95. In referring to brain-injured children, Cruickshank first used the term "learning disability" to denote this "new group of exceptional children" who had come to the attention of educators. The literature abounds with a variety of terms referring to children with the same clinical problem, such as minimally brain-injured children, children with specific learning disabilities, and a variety of other terms.

Kirk introduced the term "learning disabilities" at an April 1963 conference sponsored by the Fund for Perceptually Handicapped Children. He used the term to describe children who had language, speech, reading, or associated communication problems but did not have sensory handicaps. Conference attendees accepted the term, and on April 7, 1963, they organized the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities. The field of learning disabilities was officially born on that date (Gearhart, 1976).

The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children provided the first "official" definition of learning disabilities:

Children with learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing,

spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage. (Kephart in Hewett, 1968, p. 69)

The definition has been revised several times, but still no consensus exists on an acceptable definition.

Hewett (1968) found that two neighboring California school districts used different definitions for learning disabled children.

He wrote:

The California Department of Public Education used the category "educationally handicapped" to describe both the emotionally disturbed child and the child with a learning disability. One district used the consultative services of a physician who was thoroughly convinced that most behavior and learning problems were neurologically based. This district reported that 85% of its educationally handicapped children's problems were organic in nature. In the other district in which the physician did not share this bias, only 10% of the educationally handicapped were estimated as suffering from neurological impairment. (p. 69)

Kirk and Bateman defined learning disability as follows:

A learning disability refers to a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subjects resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbance. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural or instructional factors. (in Hewett, 1968, p. 69)

This definition describes a child who is advancing toward educational goals at a slower rate than would be expected in terms of his ability, a child who may need specialized remedial help to overcome his difficulties.

In 1968, the Division for Children with Learning Disabilities was established within the Council for Exceptional Children, and the

first Journal for Learning Disabilities was published. The National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children made its first annual report on January 31, 1968. The Committee recommended that the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped give special consideration to learning disabilities. The Bureau followed these recommendations, and Congress added its support by passing a learning disabilities act. Thus, by the mid-1970s, learning disabilities had "arrived."

Summary

The historical review in this section delineated the concept of learning disabilities, starting with the severely handicapped who formerly were referred to as "brain damaged" and progressing to the "minimally educable impaired" and the "specific learning disabilities" of today. It must be noted that the designation "learning disabilities" does not mean the same thing to everyone. A working definition must be formulated, in order to enhance the educational milieu of the exceptional child.

Rules and Regulations Relating to Learning Disabilities

When Congress began funding learning disabilities programs, it also began to formulate rules and regulations regarding the expenditure of funds for these programs. Rules for identifying learning disabled children and planning their remediation were also forthcoming. In Michigan, PL 94-142 has been the guide since 1975. The present study deals with the mandates delineated in the Michigan Special Education

Rules, effective August 1983 (Handbook dated June 1984, pp. 3-13). The 1984 rules read:

R 340.1713 "Specific learning disability" defined: determination.

Rule 13. (1) "Specific learning disability" means a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain disfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, of autism, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

(2) The individualized educational planning committee may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if the child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age the ability levels in 1 or more of the areas listed in this subrule, when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels, and if the multidisciplinary evaluation team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) Oral expression.
- (b) Listening comprehension.
- (c) Written expression.
- (d) Basic reading skill.
- (e) Reading comprehension.
- (f) Mathematics calculation.
- (g) Mathematics reasoning.

(3) The individual educational planning committee shall not identify a child as having a specific learning disability if the severe discrepancy between ability and achievement is primarily the result of any of the following:

- (a) A visual, hearing, or motor handicap.
- (b) Mental retardation.
- (c) Emotional disturbance.
- (d) Autism.
- (e) Environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

(4) A determination of impairment shall be based upon a comprehensive evaluation by a multidisciplinary evaluation team, which shall include at least both of the following:

- (a) The child's regular teacher or, if the child does not have a regular teacher, a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of his or her age or, for a child of less

than school age, an individual qualified by the state educational agency to teach a child of his or her age.

- (b) At least 1 person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children, such as a school psychologist, a teacher of speech and language impaired, or a teacher consultant.

Rules for identifying special education students are included in Rule 340.1721a, which concerns the evaluation procedure:

Rule 21a. (1) Each student suspected of being handicapped shall be evaluated by a multidisciplinary evaluation team as defined in R 340.1701a (e). Members of the team may include other qualified personnel in areas related to the suspected disability, including, where appropriate, the following: health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor ability.

(2) The multidisciplinary team shall complete a diagnostic evaluation, including a recommendation of eligibility, and shall prepare a written report to be presented to the individualized educational planning committee by the appointed multidisciplinary team member. The report shall include, but is not limited to, information needed to determine eligibility and educational data which identifies the person's current level of educational performance. Information presented to the individualized educational planning committee shall be drawn from a variety of sources, including parent input, aptitude and achievement tests, teacher recommendations, physical condition, social or cultural background, adaptive behavior, and other pertinent information. No single procedure shall be used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a person.

(3) When evaluating a person suspected of being handicapped, the public agency shall assure that tests and other evaluation materials used by members of the multidisciplinary team comply with all of the following.

- (a) Are administered by trained personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by their producer.
- (b) Are validated for the specific purpose for which they are used.
- (c) Are designed to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely to provide a general intelligence quotient.
- (d) Are reflective of the person's aptitude or achievement or whatever other factors the test purports to measure rather than reflecting the person's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, unless this is what the test is intended to measure.

- (e) Are selected and administered so as not to be socially or culturally discriminatory.

(4) When evaluating a person suspected of having a specific learning disability, at least one team member other than the child's regular teacher shall observe the child's academic performance in the regular classroom setting. In the case of a child of less than school age or out of school, a team member shall observe the child in an environment appropriate for a child of that age.

(5) The multidisciplinary evaluation team evaluating a person suspected of having a specific learning disability shall complete a written report which shall include, at a minimum, all of the following:

- (a) A recommendation of eligibility and the basis for making this recommendation.
- (b) The relevant behavior noted during the observation of the child and the relationship of that behavior to the child's academic functioning.
- (c) The educationally relevant medical findings, if any.
- (d) Whether there is a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability which is not correctable without special education and related services.
- (e) The determination of the team concerning the effects of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
- (f) Each team member shall certify in writing whether the report reflects his or her conclusion. If it does not reflect his conclusion, the team member shall submit a separate statement presenting his or her conclusions.

(6) When evaluating a person suspected of being emotionally impaired, the multidisciplinary team report shall include documentation of all of the following:

- (a) The person's performance in the educational setting and in other settings, such as adaptive behavior within the broader community.
- (b) The systematic observation of the behaviors of primary concern which interfere with educational and social needs.
- (c) The intervention strategies used to improve these behaviors, and the length of time these strategies were utilized.
- (d) Relevant medical information, if any.

(7) For visually impaired students who have a visual acuity of 20/200 or less after routine refractive correction, or who have a peripheral field of vision restricted to not more than 20 degrees, an evaluation by an orientation and mobility specialist shall also include in the report a set of recommended procedures to be used by a mobility specialist or a teacher of the visually impaired in conducting orientation and mobility training activities.

(8) Tests and other evaluation materials shall be provided and shall be administered in the student's native language, unless it is clearly unnecessary to do so. When evaluation in English is not feasible, the public agency shall do all of the following:

- (a) Give first consideration to evaluative personnel who are competent in English and in the native language and culture of the student.
- (b) When needing an interpreter, contract with a bilingual/bicultural trainee, an intern currently enrolled in a professional training program, or a person who is competent in English and in the native language and culture of the student.
- (c) Provide interpreters for the deaf where appropriate.

The Michigan Special Education Rules of 1984 prescribe the composition of the educational planning committee for all special education students as follows:

R 340.1721b. Individualized educational planning committee participants.

Rule 21b. (1) The superintendent shall appoint participants to an individualized educational planning committee and shall invite the parents to be participants.

(2) Participants in an individualized educational planning committee meeting shall, at a minimum, include both of the following:

- (a) A representative of the public agency, other than the child's teacher, who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, special education.
- (b) The student's teacher or a teacher appropriate for the student's age and ability if the student is not previously enrolled by the public agency. If the child is enrolled in regular education, at least 1 of the participants shall be a regular full-time teacher to whom the child is assigned.

(3) At the initial individualized educational planning committee meeting and at the 3 year comprehensive evaluation review meeting, a member of the multidisciplinary team is required to be a participant and present the written team report. At subsequent individualized educational planning committee meetings, members of this team may participate at the request of the parent or public agency. However, 1 of the meeting participants shall present the handicapped person's current level of educational performance.

(4) In addition to the parent, other persons, at the discretion of the parent or public agency, may be invited to attend, including the handicapped person, if appropriate.

(5) In each case, the superintendent shall give consideration to the appropriateness of appointing professional ancillary and related personnel.

R 340.1721c. Scheduling individualized educational planning committee meeting; requesting parent participation.

Rule 21c. (1) The district of residence shall schedule the initial individualized educational planning committee meeting at a mutually agreed on time and place.

(2) The time from referral or from receipt of parental consent to an initial evaluation to the completion of the individualized educational program or the determination of ineligibility shall not exceed 30 school days. This timeline may be extended if agreed to by the parent and public agency.

(3) The parent shall be contacted by professional personnel from the school district to explain the purpose of the meeting and the roles and responsibilities of each participant.

(4) If neither parent can attend, the public agency shall use other methods to insure parent participation, including individual or conference telephone calls. A meeting may be conducted without a parent in attendance if the public agency is unable to convince the parents to attend. In this case, the public agency shall have a record of its attempts to arrange a mutually agreed on time and place, including all of the following:

- (a) Detailed records of telephone calls made or attempted and the results of these calls.
- (b) Copies of correspondence sent to the parents and any responses received.
- (c) Detailed records of visits made to the parent's home or place of employment and the results of those visits.

(5) The public agency shall take whatever action is necessary to insure that the parent understands the proceedings at the meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents who are deaf or whose native language is other than English.

R 340.1721d. Responsibilities of the individualized education planning committee.

Rule 21d. (1) Persons identified as being handicapped shall receive special education programs and services pursuant to the individualized educational planning committee program or pursuant to the final decision on an appeal.

(2) The individualized educational planning committee shall do all of the following:

- (a) Determine the eligibility of persons suspected of being handicapped or review eligibility after the 3 year evaluation. A person is eligible, as a statutory right, for special education programs and services if the person is identified as having 1 or more of the impairments defined in part 1 of these rules, is not more than 25 years of age as of September 1 of the school year of enrollment, has not completed a normal course of study, and has not graduated from high school. A person reaching the age of 26 years after September 1 is entitled to continue in a special education program or service until the end of that school year.
- (b) Consider the need for a change in the educational status for eligible handicapped persons.
- (c) Develop, review, or revise each handicapped person's individualized education program annually.

(3) The individualized educational planning committee shall submit its report to the superintendent immediately upon completing the individualized educational program. The individualized educational planning committee may, after considering the least restrictive environment, recommend where the program and services may most appropriately be provided and may identify for the superintendent the assignment options that were considered and the reasons why the recommended option was chosen. The report of the committee shall not be restricted to the programs and the services available. In addition, the individualized education program shall not determine how the programs and services shall be delivered, except where such is an integral part of the placement or service itself.

R 340.1721e. Individualized educational planning committee meeting: determination of eligibility for special education programs and services; individualized education program.

Rule 21e. (1) The superintendent shall convene an individualized educational planning committee meeting.

(2) The participants shall determine if the student is eligible for special education programs or services, or both. Eligibility shall be determined by the committee after receipt and review of the multidisciplinary team report and recommendation, and after consideration of any additional information presented by the participants. If a student is determined to be handicapped, the committee shall write an individualized education program or may reconvene for this purpose. In either event, the timeline specified in R 340.1721c (2) shall apply.

(3) An individualized education program shall be based on all diagnostic, medical, or other evaluative information requested by the committee or provided by the parent or handicapped person and shall include all of the following information in writing.

- (a) A statement of the person's present level of educational performance.
- (b) A statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives.
- (c) The projected dates for initiation of services and the anticipated duration of the services.
- (d) Appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining whether the instructional objectives are being achieved.
- (e) A statement of the specific special education and related services to be provided to the person, giving consideration to the accessibility of physical facilities; transportation, including the need, if any, for aids or restraints; and room and board.
- (f) The extent to which the person is able to participate in regular education programs.

(4) Any participant in the committee's deliberations who disagrees, in whole or in part, with the committee's determination may indicate the reasons therefor on the committee's individualized education program report or may submit a written statement to be attached to the report.

R 340.1722. Assignment to special education programs and services.

Rule 22. (1). The superintendent of the operating school district is responsible for assigning a handicapped person to the facility where the programs and services, as described by the individualized education program, or as directed by the hearing officer, are to be provided and shall adhere to the timelines outlined in R 304.1722a.

(2) In assigning the student, the superintendent shall assure all of the following:

- (a) That to the maximum extent appropriate, the handicapped person, including a person assigned to a public or private institution or other care facility, is educated with persons who are not handicapped.
- (b) That assignment to special classes, separate schools, or the removal of the handicapped person from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the handicap is such that education in a regular class with use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved.

- (c) That handicapped persons whose disability is such that they require assignment in special classes or facilities shall be assigned to programs or services as close as possible to their home.
 - (d) That in making the assignment, consideration shall be given to the accessibility of physical facilities, socially accepting environments, and to any potential harmful effects to the student or the quality of services which the student needs.
- (3) The superintendent shall assure that each qualified handicapped person shall be given the opportunity to participate with nonhandicapped persons in nonacademic and extracurricular activities and services. Nonacademic and extracurricular activities and services may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- (a) Meals, recess periods, counseling services, athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, and special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the public agency.
 - (b) Referrals to agencies that provide assistance to handicapped persons.
 - (c) Referrals to employment agencies.
 - (d) Referrals for employment within the local educational agency.
 - (e) Assistance in making outside employment available.
 - (f) Referrals to other agencies for services based on need.
- If a handicapped person is assigned to a facility that houses nonhandicapped persons, the involvement of the handicapped person in the above activities and services shall be to the maximum extent appropriate to the handicapped person's needs.
- (4) The superintendent shall appoint a staff person to be responsible for the implementation of the individualized education program. This person shall be either the principal of the building offering the handicapped person's primary educational program or other staff person who is generally accessible to the staff and who will be working with the handicapped person.
- (5) The superintendent of the operating district shall give the parent a copy of the individualized education program, and each participant on the committee and all administrative and professional staff who will be directly involved in implementing the program shall have access to a copy of the individualized education program.

R 340.1722a. Implementation of the individualized education program when the district of residence is the operating district.

Rule 22a. (1) The superintendent, upon receipt of the individualized educational planning committee's report, shall have 7 calendar days to either appeal the eligibility decision or the determination of special education programs and services as specified in the individualized education program, or both, or to provide to the parent programs and services as specified in the individualized education program, or both, or to provide to the parent written notification of the agency's intent to implement special education programs and services pursuant to R 340.1723a and R 340.1723b. This notice shall identify where the program and services are to be provided and when the individual program shall begin.

(2) The parent, upon receipt of notification from the superintendent shall have 7 calendar days to appeal the individualized educational planning committee's eligibility decision, the individualized education program, or the assignment decision of the superintendent pursuant to R 340.1724. If the parent does not appeal, the superintendent shall initiate the individualized education program within 15 school days after the parents have been notified. An initiation date may be later than 15 school days if clearly specified in the individualized education program; however, a projected initiation date may not be used to deny or delay programs or services because they are not available and may not be used for purposes of administrative convenience.

(3) If a handicapped person is being provided special education for the first time, the parent, within 7 calendar days of receipt of the notice from the superintendent, shall provide the public agency with written consent to provide special education programs and services. If the parent refuses consent or does not respond then the public agency has the right to request a hearing on this matter pursuant to R 340.1723a (3).

R 340.1722c. Reconvening individualized educational planning committee meetings; participant responsibilities.

Rule 22c. (1) An individualized educational program shall be reviewed at least once every 12 months.

(2) The operating district superintendent shall convene an individualized educational planning committee and shall appoint and invite participants pursuant to R 340.1721b to review a handicapped person's individualized education program. Participants at a meeting for this purpose shall do all of the following:

- (a) Review the person's level of educational performance.
- (b) Review the appropriateness of the individualized education program content and determine if the annual goals, the instructional objectives, and the performance objectives have been met.
- (c) Recommend 1 of the following:
 - (i) Revision of the current individualized education program. Participants shall develop an individualized education program for the handicapped person, the components of which are identified in R 340.1721e (3).
 - (ii) Continuation of the current individualized education program.
 - (iii) Graduation.
 - (iv) Additional diagnosis.

R 340.1722d. Three year evaluation of eligible handicapped persons.

Rule 22d. Each eligible handicapped person shall be provided with a comprehensive evaluation at least once every 36 months. This evaluation shall be completed by a multidisciplinary team and the results shall be presented at an individualized educational planning committee meeting pursuant to R 340.1721d(2)(a). Parental consent is not necessary for this comprehensive evaluation, unless medical or personality testing is required.

R 340.1722e. Previous enrollment in special education.

Rule 22e. A handicapped person enrolled in a special education program in another school district, upon transfer to a new intermediate school district, and upon written consent of the parent, and with evidence of previous special education eligibility and placement, may be placed immediately in an appropriate special education program or service for a period not to exceed 30 school days, during which time an individualized educational planning committee shall be convened by the district of residence to review and possibly revise the person's individualized education program. This case shall have precedence over all other cases, except previous cases also being expedited under this rule.

R 340.1722f. Time limitation.

Rule 22f. Any time limitation in this part shall be constructed and applied so as to do substantial justice and may be varied upon approval of the state board of education, or its designee, for good cause shown, in writing, by either the public agency or the parent. A copy of the request shall be sent by the superintendent or

parent, as the case may be, or to the other party, and the state board's response shall be directed to both the superintendent and the parent.

R 340.1723. Right to examine records.

Rule 23. (1) The parents of a handicapped or suspected handicapped person shall have the right to inspect and review all educational records with respect to both of the following:

- (a) The identification, evaluation, program, and educational placement of the person.
- (b) The provision of a free appropriate public education to the person.

(2) Parents have the right to request a copy of any or all contents of their child's educational records subject to R 340.1866.

Summary

This section quoted PL 94-142 rules to show what the mandates are and how the rules apply to specific disabilities and/or exceptionalities. The following section contains a review of literature and reports of studies pertaining to the problem of this study: the individualized educational plan and its implementation.

Recent Studies Pertaining to Individualized Education Programs and Their Implementation

Several studies have been conducted on the implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs). Findings of different studies have varied considerably, but consistencies have been found in some areas.

In a study for the state of Washington, Lewis (n.d.) noted that the reporting panel suggested:

Given present human and other resources, the time and effort required to develop the IEP will initially decrease the quality of education for the child; however, the concept of the IEP process

should in the long run increase the quality of education to the handicapped child if time problems can be eliminated and additional new sources be provided. We cannot legally request professionals to use their own time to develop or implement programs, nor should we morally expect it.

General education teachers as well as special education teachers must receive in-service training to be effective. Teachers who serve a large number of students, such as speech therapists and some resource room teachers, should not be required to participate in the IEP process in the same way that a special education teacher who serves only a few students is required to participate. If specialists are required to meet with parents and other professionals in developing an IEP for each child they teach, services to children will decrease. (p. 3)

Lewis also found that the special education teacher was responsible for writing the short-term objectives of the handicapped child once the child had been placed for instruction.

In the Alabama state report (1980), Penney's group noted feelings of apprehension among both special education teachers and general educators concerning the IEP process. Depending on how the act was implemented, teachers' responsibilities were likely to include:

- . increased clerical and administrative duties,
- . documentation of educational plans beyond their usefulness to the teacher as an instructional tool,
- . attendance at IEP planning meetings,
- . development of long- and short-range goals and objectives for handicapped children,
- . involvement in parental notification and consent procedures,
- . increased participation in a "paper process" rather than in actual instruction,
- . administering an increasing number of standardized tests, and
- . increased responsibility for coping with handicapped children placed in regular classes.

A majority of teachers surveyed felt they needed training for tasks associated with the individualized educational process.

Amner (1984) conducted a study of 90 New England elementary and secondary educators concerning their perceptions of their roles in the special education decision-making process. Despite the mandates, teachers indicated a low rate of participation in the IEP process. Seven percent reported some participation (Elem. 4-Sec. 1), whereas 6% reported regular attendance at meetings (Elem. 5-Sec. 1). Eleven percent of the teachers either did not respond to the item regarding participation in the IEP or identified it as not applicable to them (Elem. 1-Sec. 7). Twenty-seven percent of the teachers reported minimal participation in developing IEPs (Elem. 5-Sec. 4). Forty-seven percent of these teachers reported no participation in IEP development (Elem. 13-Sec. 21). Almost half (46%) of the teachers indicated a preference for increased participation in IEP meetings (Elem. 20-Sec. 12).

Constantly making members of the IEP team aware of students' specific problems in relation to curriculum demands was the role consistently identified by teachers in the study. Nineteen percent (13) of the teachers indicated a minimal role in developing the IEP (Elem. 5-Sec. 8); however, 8 of these 13 teachers (73%) wanted IEP team members' assistance in identifying and working toward objectives related to the unique needs of handicapped students in their classes. Thirty-one percent of the respondents provided no indication of a preferred role in the IEP meetings (Elem. 12-Sec. 10).

Sharing instructional responsibilities requires regular interaction between general and special educators. Twenty-four percent of the teachers in Amner's study indicated an absence of shared instructional responsibilities. Thirty percent reported minimal interaction among teachers, which usually occurred at grading time. Finally, one-third of the general education teachers reported effective communications and shared instructional responsibilities between themselves and special educators.

Dickson and Moore (in Amner, 1984) found that the parallel administrative structures existing in general education and special education tend to restrict teachers' participation in the IEP process because of confusion about who should manage special education processes and programs, and conflicting logistics caused by duplication of authority. Johnson and Johnson (in Amner, 1984), too, identified the necessity for general and special educators "to work together as a team to facilitate cooperative (social) interactions between handicapped and non-handicapped students" (p. 26).

Scanlon (1981) also documented the low participation rate at IEP meetings by both parents and teachers. Her study comprised 271 parents, of whom 168 (61%) returned completed questionnaires. Seventy-five percent of the responding parents had attended at least one IEP meeting. This low rate of attendance was a result of (a) poor coordination and communication of MDT members, (b) negative attitudes of professionals regarding the IEP process, (c) unavailability of professional staff for meetings, and (d) lack of knowledge of PL 94-142

mandates. Scanlon noted that parents attended IEP meetings more frequently as the age of their special education student increased.

When he analyzed the results of surveys conducted in 1978 and 1980, Morgan and Rhodes (1981) found that special education teachers had a moderately negative attitude toward IEPs, felt that IEPs took too much time, and thought that special education teachers received insufficient support from other school personnel. Teachers also indicated that they could teach just as effectively and students would learn at least as much without the use of the IEPs. However, Morgan did report some positive findings. Teachers said that the IEP process had done more good than harm, that the IEPs helped teachers organize their time, and that development and implementation of IEPs would result in greater job satisfaction for special education teachers.

Morgan stated that special education teachers apparently did not perceive a clear relationship between the IEP as a written document and the IEP as a determinant of what happened on a daily basis in the classroom. These findings were consistent with those of other researchers (Lewis, n.d.; Maver & David, 1978; Nadler & Shore, 1980) who had examined the perceptions of special education teachers about the IEP process.

A more positive attitude on the part of special education teachers was found by Panko (1984), who conducted a study regarding communication between special education teachers and general educators. He found that 96% of the special educators indicated they did communicate with general education teachers regarding the needs and progress

of mainstreamed special education students. Fifty-one percent of the general education teachers reported that they communicated regularly with special education teachers regarding their students. Panko noted an increase from 19% of the special education teachers sharing materials with general education teachers in 1980 to 52% in 1984.

The findings of Nevin's (1984) investigation, which supported those of Panko, related primarily to the IEP process and attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward that process. Nevin's study included 53 general education teachers identified in the IEPs as having one or more special education students in their classrooms. The results indicated that general classroom teachers were basically uninvolved in the aspects of IEP meetings, did not receive a copy of formal proceedings, and rarely referred to the IEP if they had access to a copy.

However, Nevin found that if teachers did have a copy of the IEP, they were more likely to refer to the document than were those teachers who merely had access to a copy. Further, teachers who attended the IEP meetings were more likely to refer to the document. Nevin also found that general educators who had more skills, training, and experience in special education, and those who had students from special education programs, were more apt to get involved in the formal IEP process.

An interesting positive finding of Nevin's study was that general education teachers were highly involved in the informal aspects of IEP implementation. Most teachers in the survey made a variety of modifications in the regular education program to meet the needs of the

exceptional students in their classrooms. An important finding was that relatively few of these modifications were included in the IEP document but were discussed and implemented informally and off the record. Apparently, unrecorded modifications are easier to adjust than those listed in the IEP.

Summary

The review of related literature in this section was concerned with the findings of studies regarding actual implementation of PL 94-142 and comparison with the mandates. The literature dealt with both general education and special education teachers' attitudes toward and perceptions of the IEP process. In most of the studies reviewed, teachers expressed generally negative feelings toward the IEP process. They evidenced great apprehension at the onset of PL 94-142 regarding additional work and responsibility, additional cost, and a possible loss of autonomy on the part of state and local education agencies. Both special education teachers and general educators expressed similar concerns. Whether or not these concerns resulted in less-than-enthusiastic implementation is a matter of conjecture.

The most recent studies included recommendations for additional training, better logistical management to facilitate IEP meetings, and in-service programs to prepare professionals and parents for management of the IEP process. The fact that the literature has shown a trend toward more positive attitudes on the part of educators is perhaps an indication that educational professionals are beginning to believe the

IEP process is a workable option for special education programs in the public schools.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature traced the beginnings of the learning disabilities concept and showed the evolution of the concept to its present state. It is important to remember that the term "learning disabilities" does not have a universally accepted definition.

The existing special education rules were delineated in this chapter, and recent studies pertaining to the IEP process were reviewed. There is a dearth of research on the IEP process. The studies discussed in this chapter showed a trend from negative to positive attitudes among professional educators concerning this process. Most researchers recommended more training and streamlining of management procedures to improve the IEP process.

In Chapter III, the methodology employed in the study is described. The population of interest is discussed, the sample is delineated, and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data are explained. Finally, the methods of reporting the data are defined.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology used in conducting the study is described in this chapter. The population and the sample are identified, and sample-selection techniques are explained. The data-gathering procedures are outlined, and the research instruments employed in the investigation are described. Finally, statistical treatment of the data and methods of reporting the results are explained.

Population of Interest

The population under investigation comprised learning disabled students in seven public school districts in northeastern Michigan. The total enrollment of these districts was 9,042. Of that number, 293 students or roughly 3.24% of the student enrollment were identified as learning disabled.

Schools chosen for the study were those in Iosco County and districts contiguous to Oscoda Area School District. These are rural districts, located in the Huron National Forest. The area has some light industry, but primarily agricultural, forest-products types of employment. In most districts, the school district itself is the largest employer in the community. Wurtsmith Air Force Base is the

major employer for some of the communities involved in the study, especially in the Oscoda Area Schools' situation.

Selection of the Sample

The student population were those 293 pupils identified as learning disabled by the multidisciplinary team in each participating district. They had been screened into the learning disabled program by the IEP committee, and their records were maintained in cumulative folders at the central file location as of November 24, 1985.

All 44 special education teachers in the participating districts were asked to take part in the study. Of that number, 31 (70%) returned completed questionnaires. A pool of general education teachers was composed by referring to learning disabled students' cumulative folders to ascertain the teachers to whom these students were assigned in general education. The 310 general education teachers selected for the sample were chosen at random from the pool of teachers from constituent school districts. Of that number, 144 (64%) returned completed questionnaires.

In addition, a random sample of 310 parents of learning disabled students was selected, based on their attendance at the IEP committee meeting(s). Information on parental attendance was found in the students' cumulative folders. One hundred fifty-four parents (49%) filled out and returned the questionnaires.

Procedures

The researcher asked each school superintendent for permission to conduct the study and to gather data in his respective district. The purpose of the study was explained, and all procedural questions were answered.

Because the primary source of data for this study was students' permanent cumulative record files, the researcher asked to examine the files and was given permission by the appropriate administrator. The intermediate school district granted access to the central special education file, and most student data were obtained from this central location.

A brief meeting was scheduled in each district to distribute the teacher questionnaires to participating teachers and to explain the research project to them. At these meetings, the researcher assured participants that their anonymity would be preserved, and he verified the accuracy of information derived from student records.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the collection of data in this study:

1. What is the composition and participation of the multi-disciplinary team involved in the referral of learning disabled students?
2. What is the composition of the IEP committee, and how do special and general education teachers participate on the committee?

3. Is IEP planning for learning disabled students a team decision?
4. Do the professionals involved in the education of learning disabled students follow the IEP?
5. Are parents of learning disabled students actively involved in the IEP process?
6. Do small and large districts differ with regard to how they carry out the IEP process?

Data-Gathering Instruments

Coded Checklist for Students

A coded checklist for students was developed to gather and record pertinent student data in an orderly and systematic manner (see Appendix A). No names were recorded on any checklist, thus insuring the anonymity of everyone involved.

The coded checklist for students contained the following major sections:

1. Personal characteristics, such as age, sex, grade-level placement (elementary, middle, secondary), and dual certification in other special education categories.
2. Person making referral, recorded by individual's position in the school setting (administrator, teacher, psychologist, parent).
3. Persons serving on multidisciplinary team (recorded by position).
4. Persons serving on IEP committee (recorded by position).

5. Whether the student is mainstreamed in general education and, if so, what percentage of the time.

6. Whether the student is placed in a purely learning disabled program or whether he/she is identified as learning disabled and placed in another categorical placement setting.

Teacher and Parent Questionnaires

A questionnaire was devised for administration to both special education and general education teachers (see Appendix B). The questionnaire had two parts:

1. The school district, level of training, and experience of teachers.

2. The referral, evaluation, and planning processes used in that particular school district, and the involvement of professional staff members in these processes.

To gather data from parents, a questionnaire was constructed and mailed to those selected for the sample. Respondents were asked to mail the completed questionnaires to the researcher. Using this instrument, the researcher sought to determine if the parents:

1. actively participated in the IEP committee.
2. felt the IEP committee was worth while or threatening.
3. desired more input into the educational process for their children.

Methods of Reporting Results

The information recorded on the coded checklists and obtained from the questionnaires was tabulated and transferred by keyboard to an Apple II-e computer. In Chapter IV, the data-analysis results are reported in the form of percentages, chi-square tables, and discriminant analyses.

Percentages were used to obtain a measure of the amount of involvement of professionals in the IEP process regarding the learning disabled child. These figures were used to compare obtained frequencies between sets of variables.

Chi-square tables were used to analyze relationships between two or more qualitative variables. Obtained frequencies on specific variables were compared with expected frequencies, thus providing an indication of the probability that statistically significant differences were actually found. The level of significance for all tests was set at $\alpha = .05$.

Summary

The methodology used in conducting the study was described in this chapter. The student population comprised learning disabled children attending public school in seven different rural districts in northeastern Michigan. All those students identified as learning disabled in their cumulative records were included in the study because the researcher was interested solely in the composition of the multidisciplinary team committee and the IEP committee. The subjects were all enrolled as learning disabled students as of November 24, 1985. In

addition, a random sample of parents and regular and special education teachers was selected to complete questionnaires for the study.

The research questions were stated, and the instruments used in collecting data for the study were described. Methods of analyzing the data and of reporting the results of data analyses were delineated. In Chapter IV, the results of the data analyses performed in the study are presented.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and compare data regarding the IEPs of special education students in northeastern Michigan to ascertain if the mandated procedures are indeed being carried out and to what extent the actual practices of professionals parallel the intent of the law. The study was designed (a) to examine the composition and participation of the multidisciplinary team for learning disabled students, (b) to assess the IEP committee recommendations and compare them with student placement and educational opportunities, and (c) to ascertain the degree to which parents are involved in the IEP process for their learning disabled children. The information gathered in these areas may help educators evaluate existing programs and improve the educational milieu for the learning disabled student.

In this chapter, results of the analysis of data related to the research questions are presented, using percentages of total responses on raw data. After the findings for the six research questions are discussed, additional findings not directly related to the research questions are presented.

Results of Data Analyses

Information elicited by the teacher questionnaires and obtained from students' cumulative files was compiled and analyzed with an Apple IIe computer, using Statistical Processing System, version 4.2. In the following pages, each research question is restated, followed by a discussion of the findings for that question.

Research Question 1: What is the composition and participation of the multidisciplinary team involved in the referral of learning disabled students?

As shown in Table 1, 63% of the teachers reported that multidisciplinary teams included at least the minimum number of professionals mandated by state codes (administrator, psychologist, regular education teacher, and special education teacher). On the remaining combinations of personnel comprising the multidisciplinary team, the two teacher groups evidenced a marked difference of opinion. Some of this difference might be explained by the fact that special education teachers are more knowledgeable about the procedures of the IEP process and were reporting on instances in which actions were more likely to be review cases (three-year review mandated by law) than new referrals. The questionnaire did not specify whether the multidisciplinary team was meeting in relation to a new referral or an annual three-year review.

Table 1.--Composition of the multidisciplinary team as reported by special and general education teachers.

Personnel on Team by Title	Percent Reported By:		
	Special Education Teachers	Regular Education Teachers	All Teachers Combined (Average)
Administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, special education teacher	61.5%	75.0%	63.3%
Administrator, classroom teacher, special education teacher	7.6%	25.0%	10.0%
Special education teacher, classroom teacher	3.8%	0.0%	3.3%
Individual appointed by superintendent processes written reports from participating individuals (no formal meeting)	23.0%	0.0%	20.0%
None of the above, or a combination of the above	3.8%	0.0%	3.3%
Total	99.7%	100.0%	99.9%

Table 2 shows the composition of the multidisciplinary team in all districts in the study. The data for this table were compiled by combining teachers' questionnaire responses and pertinent information from the students' cumulative folders for the total sample of 144 cases.

Table 2.--Composition of the multidisciplinary team, combining teachers' responses with information from students' cumulative folders.

Personnel on Multidisciplinary Team, by Title	Percentage Reported
Administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, special education teacher	59.0%
Administrator, classroom teacher, special education teacher	33.3%
Special education teacher, classroom teacher	2.7%
Individual appointed by superintendent processes written reports from participating individuals (no formal meeting)	4.1%
None of the above, or a combination of the above	.6%
Total	99.7%

The combined data demonstrated that the multidisciplinary team usually includes all or most of the recommended professionals. In the majority of cases included in this study, the multidisciplinary team was composed of those professionals mandated by PL 42-194 and the State Department of Education rules. The combined data reflected a uniformity of multidisciplinary team composition among the constituent school districts in this study. All of the teachers in the sample stated that the evaluation data gathered by the multidisciplinary evaluation team was accessible to them.

Research Question 2: What is the composition of the IEP committee, and how do special and general education teachers participate on the committee?

Table 3 shows teachers' responses concerning the composition of the IEP committee. The special and general education teachers appeared to agree that the IEP committee is usually organized according to the guidelines mandated by PL 42-194 and State Department of Education rules.

Table 3.--Composition of the IEP committee, as reported by special and general education teachers.

Personnel on Committee, by Title	Percent Reported By:		
	Special Education Teachers	Regular Education Teachers	All Teachers Combined (Average)
Administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, special education teacher, parents	77.7%	100.0%	80.6%
Administrator, classroom teacher, special education teacher, parents	11.1%	0.0%	9.6%
Administrator, special edu- cation teacher, classroom teacher	7.4%	0.0%	6.4%
Administrator, classroom teacher, psychologist	3.7%	0.0%	3.2%
Total	99.9%	100.0%	99.8%

Table 4 shows the composition of the IEP committee, combining teachers' questionnaire responses and pertinent information from the students' cumulative folders for the total sample of 144 cases.

Table 4.--Composition of the IEP committee, combining teachers' responses with information from students' cumulative folders.

Personnel on IEP Committee, by Title	Percentage Reported
Administrator, school psychologist, special education teacher, classroom teacher, parents	52.4%
Administrator, special education teacher, classroom teacher, parents	43.4%
Administrator, classroom teacher, special education teacher	3.4%
Administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist	0.6%
Total	99.8%

In comparing the composition of the IEP committee as reported by teachers alone with the composition derived by combining teachers' responses and student file data, it was noted that the percentage reporting the first category of personnel comprising the team decreased, but the total percentage for the first two categories actually increased. Therefore, the number of professionals involved on the committee did not seem to decline, overall, with the elimination of the psychologist from the committee.

Special education teachers' responses to various questionnaire items concerning their participation on the IEP are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.--Special education teachers' participation on the IEP committee.

	% Yes	% No
Have you participated as a member of an IEP committee for students placed in your program?	100%	0%
Do you have a copy of or access to your students' IEPs?	100%	0%
Are your students receiving all of the support services identified for them in their IEPs?	87%	13%
Do you write performance objectives in addition to the annual goals and objectives listed in the IEP?	100%	0%
Are your performance objectives developed cooperatively with regular education teachers when the student is assigned to general education curriculum?	60%	40%
Are copies of your performance objectives available to parents?	100%	0%

All of the special education teachers reported that they participated in all aspects of the IEP, and they fully complied with the legal mandates. The only category in which fewer than 85% of the teachers participated was development of performance objectives in cooperation with the general education teacher. Just 60% of the teachers reported participating in cooperative planning. The mandate

does not concern cooperative development of performance objectives, however, so there was no lack of compliance on that factor.

Table 6 shows the responses of general education teachers concerning various aspects of their participation on the IEP committee.

Table 6.--General education teachers' participation on the IEP committee.

	% Yes	% No
Have you ever referred a student to special education?	76%	24%
Have you had an active role in designing an IEP?	48%	52%
Have you had input into an IEP for a learning disabled student in your class?	86%	14%
Do you receive a copy of or have access to the Michigan Department of Education rules?	44%	56%
Do you have regular input or feedback with the special education teachers to whom your students are assigned?	60%	40%

Eighty-six percent of the general education teachers reported they had input into the IEP for learning disabled students in their classes, and 76% indicated they had referred students to special education. Forty-eight percent reported having taken an active role in planning an IEP, and 44% either had a copy of or access to a copy of the Michigan Department of Education rules. Sixty percent of the regular education teachers reported communicating regularly with

regular education teachers reported communicating regularly with special education teachers regarding learning disabled students assigned to their classes, but not according to a formal schedule. Some expressed a lack of time for such meetings.

Research Question 3: Is IEP planning for learning disabled students a team decision?

Teachers responses to the questionnaire item concerning personnel involved in the actual planning of the IEP are shown in Table 7. The data show that special education teachers were the primary participants in the actual planning stage of the IEP. However, the entire IEP committee participated to some extent; 32.2% of the teachers reported that the committee either approved the plan submitted by the special education teacher or helped in the planning at the time of the IEP meeting.

Table 7.--Personnel involved in the actual planning of the IEP.

IEP Personnel, by Title	Percent of Teachers Responding
Special education teacher (assigned to student) only	58.0%
Plan submitted by special education teacher and approved by committee at placement meeting	16.1%
Entire committee at placement meeting	16.1%
Classroom teacher and special education teacher	6.4%
Administrator	3.2%
Total	99.8%

Research Question 4: Do the professionals involved in the education of learning disabled students follow the IEP?

The teachers' responses concerning the frequency with which teachers followed the IEP in educating learning disabled students are shown in Table 8. Teachers indicated they used the IEP as a curriculum guide, but the pressures of everyday teaching precluded daily use for most teachers. About 29% of the teachers used the IEP weekly, and almost 42% consulted it monthly.

Table 8.--Frequency with which teachers followed the IEP.

IEP Is Used as Curriculum Guide and Is:	Percent of Teachers Responding
Consulted daily	3.3%
Consulted weekly	29.1%
Consulted monthly	41.6%
Consulted each marking period	22.0%
Consulted each semester	4.1%
Total	100.1%

Research Question 5: Are parents of learning disabled students actively involved in the IEP process?

Teachers indicated that parents do attend at least one IEP committee meeting during the course of the school year. The percentages of parents attending these meetings are shown in Table 9.

Table 9.--Teachers' responses concerning the percentage of parents attending at least one IEP committee meeting during the course of the school year.

Percent of Parents Attending at Least One IEP Committee Meeting	Percent of Teachers Responding
10%	22.0%
20%	16.1%
40%	12.9%
60%	29.0%
80%	19.3%
Total	99.3%

Percentages of parents attending IEP committee meetings, based on combined data from teacher questionnaires and students' cumulative folders, are reported in Table 10. It should be noted that cumulative folder data are probably misleading because although parents must sign the IEP form, some forms are simply sent home for parents' signatures. Therefore, parents' signatures on the forms may not indicate they actually attended the IEP committee meeting.

Table 10.--Percentages of parents attending at least one IEP committee meeting per year, based on combined teacher responses and cumulative folder data.

Percent of Parents Attending at Least One IEP Committee Meeting	Percent of Teachers and File Data Combined
10%	62.0%
20%	24.8%
40%	2.7%
60%	6.2%
80%	4.1%
Total	99.8%

Research Question 6: Do small and large districts differ with regard to how they carry out the IEP process?

According to the information gathered in this study, very little difference existed between small and large school districts in terms of how they carried out the IEP process. Small districts were defined as those with fewer than 75 students assigned to learning disabled programs; large districts were those with 75 or more students assigned to such programs. Table 11 shows the composition of the IEP committee, by school district size.

Table 11.--Composition of IEP committee, by size of district.

Personnel on Team, by Title	Large District	Small District	Difference
Administrator, psychologist, special education teacher, parents	55.9%	50.0%	5.9%
Administrator, classroom teacher, parents, special education teacher	44.0%	43.0%	1.0%
Administrator, special education teacher, classroom teacher	0.0%	5.8%	5.8%
Administrator, classroom teacher, parents	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%
Total	99.9%	99.9%	13.8%

A chi-square test was performed to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between small and large school districts in terms of composition of the IEP committee. The results indicated that no statistically significant difference existed between school

districts of varying sizes concerning the composition of the IEP committee. However, during discussions with professionals, it was pointed out to the examiner that the smaller districts often place learning disabled students in "resource rooms" with students who are identified in other special education categories. Only the districts with enough students identified learning disabled to constitute a teacher caseload use "pure" learning disabled rooms. It must be pointed out that all districts in the study had some learning disabled students placed in other categorical special education programs (see Table 12).

Table 12.--Special education placement as recorded in students' cumulative folders^a.

	# Identified Learning Disabled	# Placed in Learning Disabled Rooms	# Placed in Resource Rooms
Student placement	293	143 (49%)	148 (51%)

^aFor the purpose of this study, those students not placed in a learning disabled program were considered to be placed in resource rooms.

A variety of services is provided to learning disabled students, as compared to pupils identified in other categories. Since children in all categorical identities in special education must have an IEP, the logistics of placement are not easy, but two or more categories may be served in one location with effort and planning.

Additional Findings

A number of questions were posed in the teachers' and parents' questionnaires that were not directly related to the research questions addressed in the study. Because the responses to these questions have a bearing on the global topic of this investigation, they are discussed in this section.

On questions related specifically to the IEP process, 52% of the teachers said the IEP was used properly in their district, whereas 48% thought it was not being used correctly. Seventy-nine percent of the teachers reported the IEP committee mandate had improved special education programs in general, but 21% (all of them special education teachers) disagreed.

Eighty-three percent of the teachers said parental involvement improved the process or outcome of the IEP, whereas 17% said it did not. Seventy-seven percent of the teachers thought parent in-service sessions would benefit the special education programs in their districts; 23% saw no need for such sessions.

Teachers' responses to questions concerning their participation in the IEP process are discussed in the following paragraphs. All of the special education teachers surveyed had participated in an IEP committee meeting and had written performance objectives in addition to annual goals and short-term objectives. Sixty percent of them reported that performance objectives were developed cooperatively with classroom teachers. Eighty-two percent of the respondents reported that students

were placed in their programs according to need, not availability of space.

Of the 102 general education teachers who completed questionnaires, 46% said they had received special education inservice. From 60% to 65% of these teachers perceived a need for additional inservice and information regarding characteristics of students and modification of teaching materials/curriculum.

Concerning the need for other types of special education information or inservice, affirmative responses dropped to between 25% and 42%. This indicated to the researcher that general education teachers were most interested in subjects relating to students and other staff members, but were disinterested in inservice regarding special education rules and/or procedures.

Ninety-six percent of the general education teachers were aware of referral procedures, and 76% of them had referred a student to special education. Forty-six percent had served on a special education evaluation team, and 86% had provided input into an IEP for special education students in their classes.

Eighty percent of the general education teachers indicated they were aware of who had the primary responsibility for the special education student's instructional program, and 83% reported on-going communication between special education teachers and general education teachers to whom handicapped students were assigned. Yet only 55% of the general education teachers said they had sufficient time to confer

with special education staff regarding the handicapped students assigned to them.

Eighty percent of the general education teachers said the number of handicapped students assigned to them was appropriate in terms of how many they could adequately teach. Sixty-one percent of these teachers said they had materials available to meet the needs of the handicapped students assigned to them.

Ninety-two percent of the general education teachers reported that the general education students accepted the handicapped students. Eighty percent of the teachers felt the handicapped students assigned to them were making adequate progress, and 91% said they had a good idea of what special education is trying to accomplish.

One hundred forty-five parent surveys were completed and returned. Parents' responses are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Ninety-four percent of the parents responding to the survey reported that written consent was obtained before their child was tested in any way, and 87% said that the test scores had been explained to them. Seventy-seven percent of the parents reported that a member of the evaluation team had asked them for information about the student before the IEP committee met. Ninety-three percent said the time and date of the IEP committee meeting had been convenient for them, and an identical percentage reported that their ideas and suggestions had been given consideration. Sixty-nine percent of the parents had helped determine the goals and objectives for their child's IEP.

Eighty-six percent of the parents reported that the IEP committee discussed the amount of time the student would spend in regular education programs. Eighty-five percent of the parents were aware that they could disagree with the decision of the IEP committee if they chose to do so.

Eighty-six percent of the parents said they felt their child was receiving all the special education services he/she needed, and 81% were satisfied with their child's educational program. Ninety-five percent of the parents thought their child was receiving the program described in the IEP.

Ninety-nine percent of the responding parents reported being informed of their child's progress at least once a year, and 84% said that special education information was clear and easy to understand. Eighty-seven percent were aware that they could examine their child's records. Ninety-eight percent of the parents knew they could call or visit the school if they felt there was a problem.

Only 20% of the parents had attended meetings with other parents of handicapped children, but 50% said they would like to meet with other parents.

Summary

The data discussed in this chapter were gathered through teacher questionnaires, students' cumulative records, and parent surveys. The findings appeared to indicate that, in the part of northeastern Michigan under investigation, the public laws referring to special education students generally are being followed, specifically

the IEP committee rules. Statistically significant differences did not exist between small and large districts in terms of the composition of the IEP committee.

The major results of the investigation are discussed in Chapter V. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research are also presented.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and compare data regarding IEPs for learning disabled students in public school districts in a rural area of northeastern Michigan. The thrust of the study was to determine if the practices followed by educators in teaching learning disabled students matched the intent of the special education legislation in the United States and specifically in Michigan. A group of public school districts in rural northeastern Michigan afforded the student and teacher population necessary to answer the research questions. It was believed a study of this nature could identify any discrepancy in the educational process between intent and practice, if one existed.

In this chapter, the major results of the study, recommendations for further research, and reflections are presented. Within the limits of setting, sampling procedures, and methodology, the findings of this study are discussed.

Major Results and Discussion

In the following paragraphs, specific results are reported in response to each major research question posed in this study. The

level of significance for the chi-square test used in analyzing data for Research Question 6 was set at .05.

Research Question 1: What is the composition and participation of the multidisciplinary team involved in the referral of learning disabled students?

According to Public Law 94-142 and Act 451 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, rule 340.1702(e) (1976), as amended,

"multidisciplinary evaluation team" means a minimum of two persons who are responsible for evaluating students suspected of being handicapped or handicapped persons being reevaluated pursuant to rule 340.172d. The team shall include at least one special education approved teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability.

Seventy-three percent of the general and special education teachers in the study reported at least a minimum of personnel were represented on the multidisciplinary evaluation team (MET). Fifty-nine percent of the total sample, including teachers, parents, and student cumulative folder data, reported the composition of the MET to include at least one administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, and special education teacher. Further, 92.3% reported that the MET included at least two teachers, one of whom was special education certified, thus making it a fully legal MET meeting. Forty-six percent of the general education teachers reported having served on an MET. Regarding the composition of the MET, as reported in the present study, there seemed to be considerable support of the concept, as evidenced by the active participation of personnel in MET meetings.

Examination of the literature showed that very little research has been done regarding the composition of the MET and its process. One report was found that related to teachers' participation on the

MET. Amner (1984) reported that 50% of the general education teachers in his study were aware of the MET referral and review process. A majority of the elementary teachers reported some knowledge of the team assessment procedures (57%) and placement decisions (70%). The responses of both the elementary and secondary teachers indicated lack of awareness of how eligibility decisions (16%) and instructional decisions (11%) were made.

Amner reported that, for most teachers in his study, completing the written referral form signified termination of involvement in the special education referral, planning, and placement process. Attendance at and passive participation in MET meetings was reported by 14% of the teachers, whereas attendance and active participation was reported by 21% of the teachers. Elementary teachers (46%) participated in MET meetings more often than did their secondary counterparts (21%). Fifty-nine percent of the teachers reported that they did not attend MET meetings. No mention was made of other personnel involved on the MET.

Research Question 2: What is the composition of the IEP committee, and how do special and general education teachers participate on the committee?

The composition of the IEP committee is mandated by Public Law 94-192 and Act 451 of Michigan Compiled Laws to include, at a minimum, both of the following:

- a. A representative of the public agency, other than the child's teacher, who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, special education.

- b. The student's teacher or a teacher appropriate for the student's age and ability if the student is not previously enrolled by the public agency. If the child is enrolled in regular education, at least one of the participants shall be a regular full-time teacher to whom the child is assigned.

The preceding are minimum requirements for the composition of the IEP committee. The local agency superintendent invites the parents to attend the committee meeting, and other persons who are interested or involved in the student's educational program may be invited to attend. The parents are allowed to bring observers or advisors to the meeting.

According to the results of the present survey, the respondents indicated that the IEP committee in their district included the recommended personnel. A little more than 95% of the special education teachers reported the committee comprised the minimum recommended personnel, and classroom teachers fully agreed that the IEP committee in their district included the recommended personnel. These statistics were supported by the combined results of teacher questionnaires and student cumulative records, which showed a minimum compliance rate of 99.2%, and the optimum committee composition in 52.4% of the cases. It must be pointed out that the optimum committee composition is administrator, psychologist, classroom teacher, and parents. Most IEP committees seem to fit that criterion, but the minimum composition by mandate is classroom teacher and special education teacher.

All of the special education teachers reported participating on the IEP committee, showing full compliance with the IEP committee mandates. Eighty-six percent of the general education teachers

reported having input into the IEP committee, and 76% reported having referred students to special education. Forty-eight percent reported having played an active role in planning an IEP, and 44% either had a copy or had access to a copy of the Michigan Department of Education rules for special education of 1984.

These findings were in agreement with those of Scanlon (1981), who reported that teachers of the learning disabled attended IEP committee meetings 60% of the time and that other special education teachers (except those of the emotionally impaired) attended IEP committee meetings 80% of the time. However, Amner (1984) reported conflicting findings. Only 6% of the teachers in his study reported attending the IEP committee meetings, and 7% participated in IEP development.

Research Question 3: IS IEP planning for learning disabled students a team decision?

The study findings showed that the special education teacher to whom the student was assigned was the primary planner of the IEP, according to 58% of the teachers sampled. It must be noted that 16% of the teachers said the entire committee designed the plan, and another 16% said the committee approved the plan submitted to them.

When teachers were interviewed, a majority of them (72%) reported that they had interpreted the questionnaire to mean that the teacher did the actual planning, but that the plan would then be accepted, changed, and/or approved by the committee meeting in formal session. This is not a violation of the mandate as stated in the rules, so the researcher could not fault that concept or process.

Sixty percent of the special education teachers in the survey reported that the performance objectives of the IEP were developed cooperatively with classroom teachers. Eighty-six percent of the general education teachers reported having input into the IEP planning, and 46% reported having served on a multidisciplinary team.

Sixty-nine percent of the parents responding to the survey reported that they had helped determine the goals and objectives for their child's IEP. Moreover, 93% of the parents said that their ideas and suggestions had been given consideration.

The findings appeared to indicate that IEPs are a team decision in the public school districts of northeastern Michigan included in this study.

Burkholder (in Gearhart, 1974) reported team decisions on the IEP committee, as did Penney (1977) in the Alabama State report. Also, 84% of the respondents in Gold's (1981) study indicated a team decision had been made.

Research Question 4: Do the professionals involved in the education of learning disabled students follow the IEP?

Almost 42% of the teachers reported using the IEP as a curriculum guide and consulted it at least monthly. About 29% consulted it weekly, and 8% used it as a daily lesson plan. Thus the data showed that 79% of the teachers were using the IEP as a curriculum guide and were consulting it as frequently as they would a curriculum guide for general education students. This may be interpreted to mean that learning disabled students are receiving at least as much

attention as regular education students, in terms of curriculum management, as set forth in their IEP.

Fuchs reported similar findings in his 1982 study, in which 65.9% of the respondents said they reviewed their students' IEPs. Morgan's (1983) results did not corroborate these findings. He concluded that the special education teachers in his study "apparently do not perceive of a clear relationship between the individualized educational program as a written document and the individualized educational program as a determinant of what happens on a daily basis in the classroom."

Nevin (1984) found that most teachers in her study used the IEP document once or twice a year, whereas a few used it once or twice a month, usually to review their students' progress. The IEP was seldom used to prepare lesson plans. Twenty percent of the respondents in Nevin's study said the IEP was not at all helpful, but most said it was somewhat helpful. Those who had copies of the IEP document were the ones who reported the program was helpful.

Research Question 5: Are parents of learning disabled students actively involved in the IEP process?

Almost half (49%) of the teachers said that at least 40% of the parents of learning disabled students attended IEP committee meetings at least once during the course of the school year. About 90% of the combined teacher/cumulative folder data showed that 70% of the parents attended at least one IEP committee meeting during the school year, with 62% reporting 10% attendance, 24.8% reporting 20% attendance, and 2.7% reporting 40% attendance. It must be pointed out that the data

might have been skewed to some extent by the mandate calling for parents to sign IEP forms. Some districts send forms home for the parent to sign but do not document whether the parent actually attended the IEP committee meeting.

Ninety-three percent of the parents who attended reported that their ideas and suggestions had been given consideration by the IEP committee, 86% said they felt their child was receiving all of the special education services he/she needed, and 69% said they had helped determine the goals and objectives for their child's IEP.

Research Question 6: Do small and large districts differ with regard to how they carry out the IEP process?

The statistics showed no differences in management of the IEP committee recommendations between small and large districts included in this study. The data from small districts (fewer than 75 learning disabled students) were compared with those from large districts (75 or more learning disabled students) to determine whether these districts used different placement or management methods. All districts in the sample used "resource rooms," in which students of different special education categorical identities were housed and taught by one or more professionals.

The major differences between districts were that, in larger districts, IEP committees were usually attended by more staff people, and more students identified as learning disabled were placed in "pure" learning disabled settings. However, not all learning disabled

students were placed in pure learning disabled settings, even in the largest districts.

The results of the data analysis showed that no statistically significant difference existed between small and large school districts in terms of their management of IEPs.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. The present study should be replicated in other areas of Michigan and the United States to determine the generalizability of the findings identified in this investigation.

2. The rationale for the IEP needs to be investigated. Could the record keeping be streamlined? Could the time between referral and placement be reduced? Is the IEP a viable provision for all students, both special education and general education?

3. Research should be undertaken to investigate the effect on the student of placement in a special education program.

4. There is a need for research exploring the possibility that all educational staff members' perceptions and expectations may influence the individual student's educational plan and that unrealistic perceptions and expectations may adversely affect the final plan.

5. Research is needed concerning the development of programs to provide assistance for professional staff, to help them formulate and implement strategies to deal with learning disabled students in the general education classroom.

6. Research is needed to ascertain parents' needs and to inform them of their options regarding instruction of their children in a special education class setting.

7. Research is needed to determine whether there is a relationship between teachers' personal characteristics (e.g., age, sex, educational philosophy, style of teaching) and their ability to deal with special-education-identified students.

8. An investigation should be undertaken to determine whether a relationship exists between student attitudes toward school and placement in a learning disability program, as perceived by teachers.

9. Further research is needed to determine the long-range effects of learning disabled placement on the self-concepts and social adjustment of these students. For example, would high school students screened out of middle school learning disabled programs perceive their placement in those programs to have been traumatic?

10. There is a need to investigate the burnout rate among special educators and the possibility of "mainstreaming" them for short periods to prevent burnout.

11. Since the learning disabled student falls behind in the general education curriculum, research should be undertaken to identify and evaluate a quality learning disability curriculum that would parallel and/or supplement the general education curriculum.

12. Research should be conducted to determine whether uninformed and/or misinformed administrators have an influence on special education programs.

13. More research is needed on expediting communication among professionals, between professionals and parents, and between professionals and students.

14. In the course of interviewing professionals, various individuals confided some subterfuge in that students are misidentified learning disabled when, in fact, they appear to be emotionally impaired. Further research is necessary to investigate these intimations.

15. Parents who were interviewed did not appear to respond in the same way as parents who answered questionnaires. Investigation concerning whether parents really understand the IEP committee role should be done.

16. Research into parental attitudes and understanding of educational terms should be done to find ways of improving parental involvement in the educational process.

17. An investigation of the attitudes and needs of learning disabled students in the public schools should be conducted to aid in planning and delivering a quality education to these special students.

Reflections

At this point, the investigator will go beyond the data to share his reflections concerning this research. During the course of the study, teachers and parents made additional comments regarding the IEP process. The reasons professionals most frequently gave for not encouraging more participation by both educators and parents in the IEP conference were: (1) it does not really help in the educational

process, and (2) it is a waste of time. However, respondents gave no tangible evidence to support these statements. Conversely, the literature showed that professional educators believe the IEP has improved the educational climate for learning disabled students. The IEP points out a student's strengths and weaknesses more effectively than school records for a "normal" student do. In this regard, it has been suggested that every student (handicapped or not) have an IEP, that it be reviewed annually, and that all students be reevaluated periodically, as a legal mandate.

The special educators interviewed appeared to be supportive of the special education laws as written. However, they had a negative attitude about the amount of record keeping involved and the lack of communication among general education administrators, special education administrators, and special education teachers. They felt that rules and regulations are often cited by administrators, without documentation of their origin or actual existence. Some teachers felt they were in continual jeopardy of disfranchisement because they were unaware of particular rules.

Parents said that even though they were invited to attend IEP conferences, they often felt overwhelmed by jargon, unwanted by educators, and unwelcome on the IEP committee. Some parents reported that the program was predesigned and only awaited their approval and signature to meet the legal requirements. Scanlon (1981) supported this contention in her study, in which low attendance at IEPs was the rule, with the exception of the child's mother. She stated, "These low

attendance figures imply that the implementation of Public Law 94-142 is not in accordance with intended practice."

However, this negative attitude was not held by a majority of parents in the sample. Most of the parents felt they had contributed something and believed their child was benefiting from the special education experience. Gilliam and Coleman (1981), in their study of the perceived importance, contribution, and influence of participants in the IEP committee, found parents to be rated 6 in premeeting importance on a scale of 10, 1 being the highest. Parents were rated 10 in contribution and 8 in influence, as rated by all participants in the study. The researchers concluded that data sharing before the meeting would improve the decision making and efficiency of the meeting. They also recommended improving the IEP process by involving parents in the assessment and data-gathering phases. Parents should be asked to assess certain areas of their child's functioning outside the school and to help identify specific needs for their child. In addition, Gilliam and Coleman recommended that parents be given summaries of the data to be discussed before the meeting.

In the public school districts included in this study, this is not the case. The multidisciplinary team and the IEP committee were both composed of the personnel mandated by Public Law 94-192 and Michigan Act 451. The districts were found to be in compliance in the delivery of educational experiences to handicapped students in their care. In no instance did the researcher find a district that was not in compliance, but he did find some that met minimum requirements for

compliance, given the physical and financial conditions in each district.

According to the findings of this study, formulating the IEP for each learning disabled student was a team decision. The role of the parent in the planning was sometimes questionable because the records did not indicate whether the parent actually attended the IEP meeting, but only contained the parents' signatures, which were frequently obtained by sending them the forms. However, the rules do not mandate parents' physical presence, only their understanding and agreement as indicated by the signature.

The professionals in the study reported using the IEP in various ways, most often as a curriculum guide that they reviewed monthly. The guide was seldom reviewed more than weekly and was not used as a daily lesson plan.

No statistically significant differences existed between large and small districts in regard to the planning and placement procedures they used. All districts used "resource rooms," a term that, until March 1986, was not in the official vocabulary of the Michigan Department of Education. The Department's newly approved rules now recognize resource rooms and delineate their staffing and management.

The parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated an interest in the IEP concept and a strong desire to be informed. A review of the literature supported the notion that parents in general feel unwanted, uncomfortable, and often unprepared for the IEP meeting. Seventy-seven percent of the parents in this study said in-service of

parents would benefit the special education programs in their districts. Thus the researcher recommends that every effort be made to inform and educate parents about their responsibilities and their rights regarding the education of their children.

In the past year, the cost efficiency of programs seems to have become a primary concern of the State Department of Education, as well as of local school districts. The ISD psychologists have been instructed to use a slightly different formula for determining cutoff scores in evaluating potential learning disability students. The result is the screening out of "borderline" learning disabilities students, thus saving costs in special education budgets. The term "borderline" refers to those students who meet minimum criteria for learning disabilities certification under last year's guidelines but may not qualify under the adjusted rules of 1984.

The researcher believes that out-state Michigan parents of special education students must become more involved, more sophisticated, and more tenacious, or they will see the erosion of special education services in local school districts. Cost cutting in the educational support system and administrative decisions as a result of the Gramm-Rudman Act, loss of local millage, and rising cost of school system operations are all factors that can easily result in loss of services to students if parents and interested individuals do not insist on quality education for the handicapped.

APPENDIX

December 3, 1985

Dr. John Cook, Superintendent
Alcona Community Schools
330 East Traverse Bay
Lincoln, Michigan 48742

Dear Dr. Cook,

I am presently gathering data for my doctoral dissertation on the individualized educational programs for learning disabled students in our area. I wish to use data from Alcona Community Schools, Mio, Fairview and the schools in Iosco County for my research project.

The information I need will be gathered by asking selected teachers to fill out questionnaire, and taking information from cumulative folders. I will do all of the work, but of course, I need access to folders and teachers.

No student will be involved, and personal identification of all teachers will be deleted to ensure their anonymity.

Enclosed are copies of the Superintendent's permission form as you requested, along with draft copies of my letter to colleagues, and Dr. McIntyre's introductory letter.

I appreciate your consideration, and help in my research project.

Cordially,

Malcolm M. Morrison

November, 1985

I, Robert D. Hodges, Superintendent of Oscoda Area Schools, hereby give Malcolm M. Morrison permission to examine the cumulative folders of a random sampling of learning disabled students in our district for the purpose of gathering data for research in education.

The data gathered will be purged of any personal identification of students or staff to insure their privacy and anonymity. A copy of the results of the research will be available to us on request from Mr. Morrison.

 , Superintendent
Oscoda Area Schools

December 4, 1985

I, Richard LaPeer, Interim Special Education Director, of the Iosco Intermediate School District, hereby give Malcolm Morrison permission to examine the cumulative folders of learning disabled students in our district for the purpose of gathering data for research in education.

The data gathered will be purged of any personal identification of students or staff personnel to insure their privacy and anonymity.

A copy of the results of the research will be available from Mr. Morrison upon request.



Richard LaPeer, Interim Special Education Director

Dear Colleague,

I am pleased to introduce to you a fellow educator, Mr. Malcolm Morrison, of the Oscoda Area School System.

Mick has been in education for many years as school board member, custodian, classroom teacher, Title I director, principal, and presently special education teacher (L.D.). In these roles he has carried out many responsibilities relating to quality education.

He is now on sabbatical leave completing his field study and research for his doctoral dissertation. He will be soon contacting you, seeking your cooperation, and that of your teaching staff members in the research project he is doing for his dissertation. He has chosen the "individualized educational program" as his subject for study.

I believe that some very helpful data and information will evolve from Mick's study, data that may be helpful to your school and teachers. I support his research project and encourage your consideration of his request for your help in his effort to gather the needed data.

Cordially,


Dr. Lonnie McIntyre, Ph.D.
College of Education
Michigan State University

Dear Colleague,

I am presently on sabbatical leave from Oscoda Area Schools so that I may complete my field work and research in the area of educational procedures and mandates regarding special education.

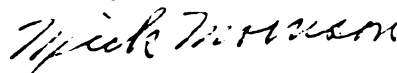
I have prepared a questionnaire for the purpose of gathering information from teachers in public schools. It should take less than fifteen minutes to complete and the answers will go on a card to be machine scored. The results of the study will be available to all the individuals and schools involved in the study.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and support in this project. I will be contacting you in the near future to give you more details. I assure you that this will take only the amount of time it takes you to fill out the questionnaire, unless you choose to discuss my project with me. I hope you will choose to participate.

The title of my dissertation is "Individualized Educational Programs for Learning Disabled Students: A Comparison of Intent and Practice." I believe the title is self explanatory. My survey will be restricted to teachers and parents only, in hope that participating individuals will be more candid if they feel that administrative influences will not affect the data.

This survey will not be an evaluation of any individual or school. All respondents will remain anonymous. Some demographics will be requested that may be pertinent to the study. I will attempt to deliver the questionnaires personally to each school to facilitate the gathering of data. The schools targeted for the study are those in Iosco County and some contiguous districts.

Cordially,



Malcolm M. Morrison

Note: If you are a general education teacher, please cross out the word "special", and answer questions as they apply to you.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

You are now ready to begin answering questions. The questions are posed in the multiple choice format for your convenience. Please circle the letter in front of the response which best fits your personal situation.

1. In my district, a student suspected of being handicapped is evaluated by:
 - a. the assigned classroom teacher and the principal.
 - b. the school psychologist and the person who made the referral.
 - c. a team composed of all educators involved with the student.
 - d. the intermediate district school psychologist.
 - e. the special education teacher in the area of suspected disability.
2. In my district the multidisciplinary evaluation team:
 - a. meets in a formal way to compile the data and information leading to a recommendation.
 - b. does not meet formally, but each participant presents data and recommendations to a person responsible for the evaluation.
 - c. does not function as an identifiable evaluation team.
 - d. simply follows the recommendation of the school psychologist.
 - e. to my knowledge does not exist.
3. Input from professionals in my district regarding evaluation of students suspected of being handicapped:
 - a. is usually minimal and not well documented.
 - b. usually consists of report card grades, and comments on behavior.
 - c. is usually well thought out, documented by samples of work or commentaries on performance of the student.

Page II

Questionnaire for Special Education Teachers (cont.)

4. The multidisciplinary evaluation team in my district usually includes:
 - a. the administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, and special education teacher, or more.
 - b. the administrator, classroom teacher and special education teacher.
 - c. the special education teacher, classroom teacher.
 - d. the individual appointed by the superintendent, who processes the reports handed in by the participating individuals. (no meeting per se is held),
5. In my district the Individualized Educational Plan Committee is usually composed of the following people:
 - a. administrator (or appointee), psychologist, classroom teacher(s), special education teacher(s), and parents.
 - b. administrator (or appointee), classroom teacher(s), special education teacher(s), parents
 - c. administrator (or appointee), classroom teacher(s), psychologist.
 - d. administrator (or appointee, special education teacher(s), classroom teacher(s).
 - e. administrator (or appointee), classroom teacher, psychologist.
6. In my district the parents attend the Individualized Educational Plan Committee meeting at least:
 - a. - 10 % of the time.
 - b. - 20 % of the time.
 - c. - 40 % of the time.
 - d. - 60 % of the time.
 - e. - 80 % of the time.
7. Students attend Individualized Educational Plan Committee meetings _____ of the time.

Page III

Questionnaire for Special Education Teachers (cont.)

8. In my district the individualized educational program for special education students is:
- planned by the special education teacher to whom the student is assigned.
 - planned by the classroom teacher and the special education teacher.
 - planned by the administrator or his/her designee who is in charge of the Individualized Educational Program Committee.
 - planned by the entire committee in attendance.
 - submitted by the special education teacher and approved by the committee.
 - planned by the school psychologist and approved by the committee.
9. In my district, the individualized educational plan designed for each learning disability student is:
- used as a daily lesson plan, and reviewed at least twice weekly.
 - used as a curriculum guide, and reviewed:

weekly	monthly	each marking period	each semester	annually
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The following questions regard parental involvement.

10. In my district all parents are invited to attend the Individual Educational Plan Committee meeting. Yes No.
11. What percent of parents attend at least one Individual Educational Plan Committee meeting per year?
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
12. What percent of parents attending your Individual Educational Plan get actively involved? (ask questions, offer information, etc.)
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|

Page IV

Questionnaire for Special Education Teachers

13. What percent of parents attending your Individualized Educational Committee meetings really understand, in your opinion?
10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
14. Do you feel parents are threatened by the Individualized Educational Program process? ☐ Yes ☐ No
15. Do you feel that getting parents more involved in the Individual Educational Program process would improve the I.E.P.?
☐ Yes ☐ No.
16. Do you feel that in-service for parents regarding the Individualized Educational Plan would benefit the special education programs?
☐ Yes ☐ No
17. Do you feel the Individualized Educational Program has improved the special educational programs?
☐ Yes ☐ No
18. Do you feel the Individualized Educational Plan is being used by professionals as the educational tool it was intended to be?
☐ Yes ☐ No

How would you change things?

December 1985

Dear Parents,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mick Morrison, and I'm a special education teacher. I'm working on a research paper concerning learning disabilities students and their individualized educational plan. I want to see if it is really working the way it was intended to work.

You can help me by filling out the enclosed questionnaire, and returning it to me in the self addressed envelope. You may keep the pencil for your trouble.

Please do not sign the papers, because I do not wish to know who filled out each questionnaire. No names will be linked to any of the information you give, and you may choose to fill it out and mail it, or trash it, as you see fit.

I do hope you will choose to help me in this project, as I feel that your answers may give some direction to the school system regarding parent involvement in school planning.

Will you please fill out the questionnaire and drop it in the mail today?

Cordially,



Malcolm M. Morrison

PARENT SURVEY

- 1) Did you give written consent for the school district to test your child? Yes No Not Sure
- 2) Were you invited to an IEP committee meetings regarding placement of your child in special education? Yes
 No Not Sure.
- 3) Were the test results explained to you? Yes
 No Not Sure.
- 4) Were they explained ina manner that you understood them?
 Yes No Not Sure.
- 5) Was the meeting scheduled at a time and place convenient to you? Yes No Not Sure.
- 6) Do you feel that you were able to make suggestions regarding your child's program in special educaiton? Yes
 No Not Sure.
- 7) Did the IEP committee discuss the amount of time your child would be spending in special education and regular education?
 Yes No Not Sure.
- 8) Does your child take part in gym, art, clubs, etc.? Yes
 No Not Sure.

- 9) Do you think your child is receiving the services described
in the IEP? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 10) Are you satisfied with your child's educational program?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 11) Do you feel that these committee meetings on program plans
have improved the special education program in your district?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 12) Would you be interested in attending such a meeting?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 13) Have you attended meetings with parents of other special
education students? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 14) Were you given a copy of the educational plan for your child?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure
- 15) Are you aware of any other programs available for your child
in your school district? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

CODED CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS

Case Number _____ Date of Birth _____
 (All cases identified learning disabled primarily)

Personal characteristics and educational level

Male _____ Female _____ Grade Level: Secondary () Elementary ()

Placement in other special education categories:

EMI EI Hearing Impaired Visually Impaired POHI Speech/Lang.

Dual certification: Yes _____ No _____ What Category: _____

Person making referral:

Administrator General Ed. Teacher School Psychologist Spec. Ed. Teacher
 Counselor Parents Self Others _____

Persons serving on Multidisciplinary team:

Administrator (or appointee) Classroom Teacher School Psychologist
 Special Education Teacher Counselor Parents Self
 Others _____

Persons serving on IEP committee:

Administrator (or appointee) Classroom Teacher School Psychologist
 Special Education Teacher Counselor Parents Self
 Others _____

Is the student mainstreamed into general education? Yes _____ No _____

Time allotment _____

How many general education teachers are assigned to this case?

Was there a dissenting opinion recorded on the IEPC report?

Yes _____ No _____

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