

**Improving Parent Collaboration at IEP Meetings:  
The Correlation to Various Subgroups**

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by

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Keywords: IEP meeting, collaboration, parent satisfaction, participation, intervention, IDEA

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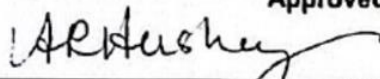
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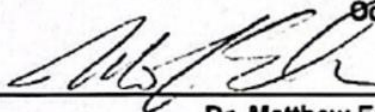
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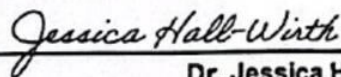
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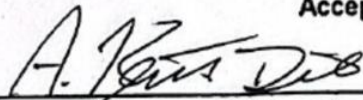
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## ABSTRACT

An Individual Education Program (IEP) is a critical document that drives decisions about educational support and services for students with a disability. It is imperative that parents have a role in the development of their child's IEP through a collaborative process. This study examines the correlations between various subgroups and the level of satisfaction of a collaborative IEP meeting. In this qualitative study, a digital survey is used to gain feedback from 29 parents of students from preschool through twelfth grade receiving special education services. Findings reveal that parents expressed overall satisfaction with the level of collaboration at IEP meetings with relatively positive satisfactory ratings consistent through each survey question. Survey data was then correlated with four subgroups; grade level, disability category, number of IEP meetings attended, and race/ethnicity. Themes emerged from synthesizing the data specific to four subgroups that included variations in the data. As part of the study, participants provided suggestions for improving collaboration at IEP meetings. Parents expressed a desire for improved communication, opportunity to provide feedback, and improved agenda for IEP meetings. In contrast, some challenges were noted by some parents that limit parental engagement. The importance of this data can potentially impact the effectiveness of IEP meetings and improve student outcomes. A consideration for future research could explore the impact of the recommended interventions, change of district policies, and generalization across other school districts.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to parents of students with disabilities. Your patience, courage, and perseverance are an inspiration. Please continue to advocate for your child and do not forget the importance of putting forth continuous effort to build positive relationships with all IEP team members. Also, please remember the significance of working collaboratively with a focus on positive outcomes for your child.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

When a student is identified as being eligible and entitled to special education services, an Individual Education Program (IEP) is written. The complex plan includes support and services designed to meet the individual needs of a student. Specific to legislation and as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), parents are mandated members of the IEP team. The language outlined in IDEA considers parent participation a key part of the IEP development process. As an essential and mandatory member of the IEP team, parents play a significant role in ensuring children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education, also known as FAPE (Wright, 2006). As a result, it is crucial parents participate in the process with a collaborative team. Thus, compliance is assured from school districts by withholding federal and state funding. Regardless of legal mandates and financial consequences, unfortunately, there is limited research on parent collaboration at IEP meetings (Martin et al., 2006). The rationale for this current survey is grounded in the diverse body of research. This is highlighted in a quote from Sanderson (2023) study, “A whole section of the federal law is devoted to parent participation in the IEP process. With the focus on parent participation, the IEP process is meant to be a collaborative endeavor.”

It is critical to understand the struggles and barriers to participation at IEP meetings to overcome limitations impacting the collaborative process. The ramifications of improving collaboration at meetings can be instrumental. Consequently, interventions must be considered to incorporate parents and provide opportunities for meaningful, active participation during IEP meetings. The study aims to analyze the correlation between various subgroups and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings. The optimal goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing parent collaboration to improve parental understanding of the IEP

process, and ultimately provide appropriate explicit and systematic support and services that students are entitled to. Another aspect of this study is to review past studies about interventions and the impact of collaboration at IEP meetings. While previous research has examined the perception of meeting participants, the implementation of various strategies and interventions, and an analysis of member participants' roles and responsibilities continues to be limited. Consequently, minimal research has been done to examine demographic information in relation to collaborative IEP meetings.

### **Rationale**

IEP meetings play a pivotal role in ensuring success for students with diverse learning needs. The effectiveness of the plans significantly depends on the collaborative efforts and communication among team members. The rationale for this study aims to address the relevant and practical application of the findings. By examining parents' experiences with collaborative IEP meetings and identifying interventions, there is potential to impact student outcomes and contribute to practical applications. The lack of awareness, language or cultural barriers, mistrust of the educational system, personal challenges, and past experiences can impact collaborative and inclusive practices during IEP meetings. Examining parents' experiences leads to identifying best practices for collaborative IEP meetings.

By addressing the identified research questions, the intent is to conclude meaningful contributions from this study. Furthermore, there is limited research about effective meetings that promote collaboration, but the current study expands past research. Ultimately, the research can enhance outcomes for students with disabilities and shape organizational structures, inclusive practices, and professional development initiatives.

In summary, parent input and collaboration during IEP meetings continues to be a federal mandate and is critical when making educational decisions that result in positive academic and functional outcomes for students. Findings can guide professional development opportunities for parents and staff, inform policy decisions, improve student achievement, and enhance best practices of quality IEP development.

Based on the analysis of this problem and the need to understand ways to improve collaboration and strengthen partnerships among stakeholders, the purpose and objectives of this study results in five research questions. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What is the correlation between specific subgroups and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1a. What is the correlation between the number of IEP meetings attended and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1b. What is the correlation between ethnicity and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1c. What is the correlation between the grade level of students and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1d. What correlation is the eligibility category and satisfaction level with collaborative IEP meetings?

2. What interventions were identified by parents for improved collaboration at IEP meetings?

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

There is acknowledgement of potential delimitations and limitations with the current study. The scope of the selected subgroups is intentionally narrowed to focus the research. The

specific topics lend themselves to developing meaningful insight. In addition, the study's geographic location may not be comparable to larger or more diverse school districts. Also, there could be limited depth or inaccurate answers that represent experiences and perspectives with survey responses since in-person interviews have been excluded from this study. The sample size of participants may be limited; however, it is not expected to affect how the findings are generalized to other school districts. While it could be intriguing to include other subgroups in the study, it is beyond the scope of the current study. Due to the nature of this study and the specific focus, the potential delimitations and limitations do not outweigh the ability to draw meaningful implications and relevant conclusions.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study's significance on collaborative IEP meetings is enhancing the effectiveness of a critical process in special education. (Yell Et Al., 2020). Participants in Mueller and Vick (2019) study described IEP meetings as "...significantly flawed, broken, and contentious." This study aims to contribute to the development of compliant, comprehensive IEPs that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

As in Choiseul-Praslin, Deardorff, and Yeager 2021 study, findings showed that the mother's perception of the IEP meeting can set the tone for future interactions and ultimately affect the students' progress. One purpose of Smith and Krieg (2022) study was to use the results to inform educators on how to help parents be involved in the IEP process. As with this study, the commonality of researchers is to improve student outcomes.

In addition, findings from the study can inform the development of policies and guidelines related to IEP meetings and collaborative practices in special education (Yell Et Al., 2020). Insights from the study can inform the design of professional development opportunities

for all members of an IEP team. By providing coaching, professional development opportunities, and fostering collaborative conversations, it can be used to craft quality IEPs (Jozwik Et Al. 2018). The study's potential impact also employs robust methods and techniques to generalize policies and practices throughout school districts.

While many previous studies provide valuable information on collaborative IEP meetings, limited research synthesizes data from multiple subgroups to allow for correlating themes. The commitment of the current study remains focused on supplementing the current research and integrating references from existing research to support and provide evidence in a broader context.

In summary, the study's significance is rooted in the potential to enhance the effectiveness of IEP meetings through improved collaboration among all stakeholders. The study can contribute to the efforts of improved outcomes and experiences that support the success of students with disabilities.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Disability-** A disability is a condition that significantly impacts a person's ability to function.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)-** IDEA is a federal law that ensures students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)-** All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**- Children with disabilities are provided the opportunity to be educated with peers in an educational setting with appropriate supports and accommodations.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)**- A document that outlines a plan of support and services based on the individual needs of a student that qualifies for special education services.

**Individualized Education Program Team**- A group of individuals that include; the parents of a child with a disability, the child, general education teacher, special education teacher, a member that interprets evaluation results, related service providers, and a representative of the educational agency.

**Parent**-The natural, adoptive, foster parent, or guardian of a child.

**Samegoal** – A documentation software used to generate educational forms and collect educational and identifiable information. <https://samegoal.com/sm/lp>

**Special Education**- Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

## **Summary**

The first chapter frames the problem addressed in this study, further provides a rationale, and articulates the purpose for conducting this research. In addition, the first chapter includes critical special education terms referred to in the following chapters. Furthermore, delimitations

and limitations of this qualitative study are mentioned. The intent of this current study is to provide evidence that could prompt a review of current protocols, promote the implementation of best practices at IEP meetings, create opportunities for parents and educators to reflect on their own actions, and inspire a deeper consideration of the intent behind IDEA law. In addition, the current study does not focus on proving or disproving current research but rather provides contributions to emerging trends and themes to collaboration at IEP meetings. The rigorous analysis yields implications that focus on positive outcomes for students.



## CHAPTER 2

Effective collaboration is critical to ensure the development of a comprehensive IEP to support student success. The purpose of highlighting current literature is to thoroughly assess the complexity of collaborative IEP meetings and determine actionable interventions for enhancing outcomes. Previous studies provide a foundation used to identify patterns and trends in the historical background, legalities of IEP meetings, and factors influencing effective collaboration. However, despite legal mandates and ethical standards in special education, there is limited research on this topic. The analysis intends to contribute to the direction of emerging research about collaboration during the IEP processes to ensure comprehensive outcomes for students with disabilities.

The literature review is organized into four subsections. The first subsection, legal requirements for collaboration with parents during IEP meetings, provides a brief overview of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). The second subsection, parent experiences at IEP meetings, addresses the literature that relates to the views and discernment of parents. The following section synthesizes current research on barriers that impact collaboration with parents. The concluding section summarizes the current data on interventions related to improving the level of parent collaboration at IEP meetings. By evaluating the existing literature, the intent is to contribute new research regarding the enhancement of collaboration with positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Legal Requirements for a Collaborative Partnership during IEP Meetings**

Special education is governed by legal requirements to ensure that students with disabilities are provided appropriate services. The legal mandates secure the rights of students

with disabilities and guarantee access to educational opportunities that result in positive outcomes for students. The understanding of legal implications, and the rights and responsibilities of parents and educators is critical for promoting meaningful collaboration at IEP meetings.

The evolution of special education is impacted by landmark cases that have led to current procedures and best practices. Early special education services began in the 19th century with programs especially for deafness, blindness, and mental retardation, (Wright 2006). Wright further explains that early special education programs were private or residential with variation in quality and availability. In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that all children had the right to an equal educational opportunity without segregation. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) addressed inequality of educational opportunity for underprivileged children to help ensure that disadvantaged students had access to quality education. Following in 1970, Congress enacted the Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 91-230) with the intent for states to develop educational programs and resources for students with disabilities. Wright explains that two cases were catalysts for change; *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* due to their focus on parent participation with educational placement decisions, means to resolve disputes, and disciplining students with a disability. In 1975, Congress enacted Public Law 94-142 with the intent that all children with disabilities had the right to an education and required states and local agencies to be accountable for providing the educational services. This led to the development of procedural safeguards designed to protect the rights of children and their parents. This law has been reauthorized several times, leading to the amended and renamed special education law.

The fundamental principles of special education are guided by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The cornerstone concepts include mandates that parents be included as members of the team that develops the evaluation plan, determines eligibility, and makes IEP decisions (Sec. 300.322). In addition, the findings of IDEA described problems with over identification of minority children, mislabeling, and high dropout rates. The most recent update was the attempt to align IDEA with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to encompass early intervention services, educator qualifications, private school, homeless, and highly mobile students to receive services, resolution and dispute options, and access to instructional materials.

The IEP is a legal document required by the federal government and is designed for driving educational decisions for students eligible for special education services. The defining document holds school districts accountable for the provision of special education services and supports (Ruppar, 2011). Parents must be included in the decision-making process throughout the IEP meeting and viewed as equal partners in the process (Wright, 2006). One primary intent of FAPE, a Free Appropriate Public Education for all children, is to ensure that students with disabilities are provided the same education as general education students in the least restrictive environment to the greatest extent possible. In addition, an IEP provides an eligible student FAPE through specially designed instruction, goals, objectives, progress monitoring data, supplementary aids and services, and accommodations. The IEP team must discuss all provisions of FAPE to ensure appropriate support and services. IDEA recognizes the importance of parent involvement and collaboration through the special education process and the requirement of shared decision making between parents and schools. In *Doug C. v. Hawaii*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (Pave, 2023) stated that the schools are required to accommodate parents to ensure their attendance and participation at meetings where services are discussed. As

part of the decision, the court stated, “Parental participation is key to the operation of the IDEA for two reasons; Parents not only represent the best interest of their child in the IEP development process; they also provided information about the child critical to developing a comprehensive IEP and which only they are in the position to know.”

In an article by Losinski, Katsiyannis, White, and Wiseman (2015), various court cases regarding disputes of parents were summarized with a conclusion that through legislative provision and related hearings, parents play a critical role in ensuring that a child with a disability is not denied FAPE. The review of the hearing decisions also highlighted the need for a careful examination of the provisions of IDEA. In a study about judicial vulnerability, Zirkel and Heetrick (2017) analyzed 132 judicial decisions concerning students with disabilities. Parent participation was the most frequent violation with the implications of the study for school districts to consider current policies and practices.

Countless research about IEP meetings and collaboration also includes relevance to federal laws governing special education. Understanding the intricate correlation between federal statutes and practical application within a collaborative IEP process leads to enhancing the relevance and impact of the research findings. In addition, understanding legal implications contributes to interpretation and implication of research within a broader scope.

In conclusion, the intent of FAPE and IDEA embodies the fundamental principles of special education. These mandates require parents to be involved in the IEP process to ensure collaboration and comprehensive planning. Collaboration at IEP meetings is guided by legal requirements that prioritize shared decision making to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. The research findings and implications are directly impacted by the relevant laws

and regulations that account for ensuring students with disabilities receive appropriate support, services, and accommodations.

### **Parent Experiences at IEP Meetings**

Experiences of parent involvement in the IEP development and decision-making process provides insights on the collaborative process. Recent studies have focused on perception of the participants at IEP meetings and the overall IEP experience. Research on parent perception of IEP meetings also includes a spectrum of factors. Parent participation appears to be a substantial portion of the studies with a focus on understanding perception of an effective IEP meeting and the value of a collaborative process.

Reiman, Beck, Coppola, and Egnile (2010) literature review includes the findings from ten studies on the experiences and perceptions of parents related to the IEP process. Of the ten studies, only one, Fish (2008) yielded positive outcomes with most of the participants reporting their overall IEP experience was positive and believed educators valued their input and treated them with respect. However, Fish did acknowledge that of fifty-one participants, most were middle to upper middle class and 80% were white. Fish (2006) shared that all participants stated that their initial IEP experience had been negative. Most indicated they had been treated badly, however, parents reported being treated more respectfully when an advocate attended the meeting. A comparable result was presented in Stoner et al. (2005) study with all participants describing the initial meetings as confusing. Another insight emerged from Lo (2008) when overall parents felt frustrated about staff arriving late and leaving early, the interpreters did not know common special education terms, and parents did not feel valued or welcomed.

A similar theme emerged from Salembier and Furney (2016) of thirty-six parents that attended an IEP meeting. During a phone interview, 50% of parents described their level of

participation as less than other team members. Using a Likert scale, 24% did not like their level of participation, with 6% really did not like their level. Participation and collaboration are interrelated concepts as participation is essential to improve collaboration.

In Sanderson and Rojas (2022) study, 646 survey responses of parents of students with disabilities were analyzed, resulting in emerging key themes relating to parent perception. First, parents believed that schools should promote an active role of students in a variety of ways throughout the IEP process. The second finding indicated parents feel critical changes are needed for students to actively participate in meetings. In addition, it was concluded that parents' own experiences with the IEP process can impact their views. Then in 2023 Sanderson examined parent experiences during IEP meetings and advised parents of other families participating in the IEP process. Of the 803 responses, 15% were categorized as positive with collaboration, participation, and positive experiences as key themes. Over half of the responses described negative IEP meeting experiences due to lack of collaboration, parents feeling disregarded, and predetermined plans, perception of low expectations by team members, no opportunities for inclusion, unprofessional behavior, uniformed school professionals, and the denial of services.

In a study by Zagona, Millerm, Kurth, and Love (2019) key themes emerged regarding parents' perspective on special education services. Eighteen parents of children with an intellectual or developmental disability had mixed experiences reaching agreement with school teams and described instances in which services were not implemented as agreed upon by the team. While some parents described instances in which they were able to reach an agreement with school, others described struggles with their desired outcomes. Some parents spoke highly of teachers, service, and support while other parents described negative experiences with the

implementation of special education services and lack of agreed upon implementation of documented supports.

The recommendations included in the literature review are consistent between numerous studies; training for educators and parents, improved communication, and explanation to parents, providing a more comfortable environment for meetings, and including administrators as meeting participants. Miles-Bonar (2002) also suggested administrators mandate that the appropriate personnel are present at IEP meetings, substitutes be provided so teachers can attend, professional development is offered, and the environment, both physically and emotionally, is comfortable and conducive to decision making.

Studies on parental experiences at IEP meetings reveal themes of mixed emotions, inconsistencies with feelings of empowerment, and active engagement. Conversely, challenges emerged with the lack of trust, poor communication of team members, and insufficient understanding. Overall, it can be suggested there is a need for further attention to the provision of IDEA for listening to parent input throughout the process.

### **Barriers or Limitations that Impact Collaboration with Parents**

Various barriers impede progress and efficacy at IEP meetings. The research review will touch on differing perspectives, misinterpretations, conflicting priorities, and lack of effective communication. Literature regarding limitations with parent participation during IEP meetings indicate converging themes which include difficulties with understanding and knowledge of education jargon, laws, and best practices and differences in perspective between parents and school staff. Overcoming the barriers among stakeholders involved in the IEP process will impact meaningful collaboration and positive student outcomes.

### **Cultural Factors**

Investigating the research on the impact of cultural factors at IEP meetings reveals negative outcomes, recommendations for fostering inclusive and equitable IEP meetings, and strategies to empower culturally diverse parents in the educational process. Recognizing and respecting cultural values, dynamics, and attitudes are key themes emerging from the studies on cultural factors.

Dabkiwski's research conducted in 2004 noted the importance of understanding cultural values as a determining factor in IEP effectiveness. His findings concluded that parents had not felt a part of the IEP process and suggested school teams not only focus on compliance but rather effectiveness of the meeting process. In addition, parents are unsure how they should be involved in the IEP process. Cho and Gannotti (2005) research reported that Korean American parents' felt marginalized with their concerns and comments discounted. In addition, the IEP meeting can often be filled with the use of acronyms and educational terminology research confirms that parents feel that decisions were made about their child before the meeting. This outcome is collaborated by Jung (2011). Gajar and Matuszny (2012) explained that a sizable percentage of Native American parents indicated more communication with school staff would increase their involvement and collaboration in the IEP process. Additionally, one- third of urban African Americans families in Zions, Zions, Harrison, and Bellinger (2003) study reported that they did not feel the school treated them as collaborators partners.

Lo concluded in a 2009 study that 41% of students receiving special education services are culturally diverse, yet only 14% of special education teachers are from diverse cultures. Subsequently, the lack of cultural diversity with special education teachers compared to parents also leads to a cultural barrier during IEP meetings. In Salas (2004) study, ten Mexican



American parents reported the language barrier was problematic, they felt isolated, and were often not heard by school staff. One parent shared her observation of the school staff being disrespectful and repeatedly looking at the clock.

Rossetti stated in his 2017 study, “To bring about change in culturally responsive collaboration, teachers should begin by examining their own cultural beliefs and experiences.” He explained key action steps for educators for improving culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families. It was concluded that families that had the means to hire an advocate typically see the desired outcome. Data also showed a need for teachers to analyze the quality and quantity of interactions with diverse families.

Tamzarian, Menzies, and Ricci (2012) made recommendations for school districts to consider an empathetic approach to improved communication in the IEP process for linguistically diverse parents. Recommendations include the need for a reflective tool to promote collaborative relationships, allowing opportunities for all team members to share concerns, an improved awareness of cultural elements that impede effective communication, and awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication styles. In 2009, Lo made additional recommendations for improving the IEP process, including giving parents information in their primary language, taking the time to determine the correct dialect, and locating a qualified interpreter.

In summary, there is no shortage of evidence of negative outcomes, derogatory feedback, and poor IEP experiences. However, research also includes intervention for improving the parent experiences at IEP meetings. There is also a need for widespread awareness for improved family engagement with culturally diverse families. Assorted studies have shown that developing culturally responsive partnerships with culturally diverse families helps to improve the effectiveness of the IEP process and supports positive outcomes for students.



### **Understanding Educational Processes and Jargon**

The use of educational jargon by educators during IEP meetings can further marginalize the collaborative process by creating an environment that limits contributions. The synthesizing of research on this topic presents evidence of negative impacts during IEP meetings, particularly for parents who may not be familiar with specialized education terminology.

The lack of parent understanding of the special education process and the lack of understanding due to the use of jargon impacted the perceived effectiveness of the process. Emerging themes included respect for parents, comfort, staff presence, parents feeling excluded or marginalized, and disempowered to unable to effectively advocate for their child's needs (Miles-Bonart, 2002). At the time, Miles-Bonart was the first to investigate multiple variables that relate to parent's satisfaction with IEP meetings. The recommendations included in the study are consistent with similar studies; training for educators and parents, improved communication, and explanation to parents, providing a more comfortable environment for meetings, and included administrators as meeting participants.

Parents are entitled to a copy of procedural safeguards that includes rights and protections that are designed so parents are fully informed and involved in the special education process. Burke explained in her 2013 research that the procedural safeguards reading level is remarkably high, causing the document to be inaccessible to many parents. "When reviewing procedural safeguard documents across the country, 6% scored at the high school reading level, 55% at the college reading level, and 39% at the graduate school reading level" (Burke 2013).

Deciphering educational jargon and understanding special education procedures and policies can be challenging enough to effectively collaborate and make informed decisions

during an IEP meeting. To foster a more inclusive meeting atmosphere, using clear, concise language that is easily understandable by all participants.

### **Struggles with Communication**

Communication struggles are another identified barrier that impacts the collaborative IEP process due to the complexity of topics, the dynamics of participants, difference in perspectives, and emotional responses. As explained in Burke (2014) study, parents felt unable to express their discontent with educational services at IEP meetings. As a result, the feeling of inadequacy causes parents difficulty with communicating their questions and needs at IEP meetings.

The purpose of the study by Kurth, McQuestion, Ruppard, Toews, Johnston, and McCabe (2019) was to analyze the correlation between IEPs written for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, concerns raised during IEP meetings, and the evidence that parent concerns and priorities are reflected in the goals and services. The study was designed to identify how much parent concerns were communicated and then translated into the content found on the IEPs. In another study, 137 participated in an interview, emphasizing the importance of communication to positive partnerships. In addition, emerging themes from the open-ended questions regarding collaboration included quality of communication, respectfulness of all team members, and quantity of communication among all members (Blue-Banning et al, 2004). A notable quote from the study, family members stressed, "Communication should be honest and open, with no hidden information and no candy-coating of bad news."

Another notable factor is the lack of training on various components and dynamics of communication and collaboration that may not be addressed in teacher education programs. Welch (1998) suggests the development of courses and field experiences that implicitly and explicitly support the understanding of collaboration and best practices. In addition,

administrators, parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, and related service providers must work together to develop organization structures that enhance collaborative interactions and practices. These steps are intended to foster improved communication and collaboration with parents.

Communication is the process of sharing information and feelings. “At IEP meetings, up to 80% of communication is nonverbal and includes such things as facial expressions, gestures, posture, or body position,” as documented in a 2001 article by Lytle and Bordan. Meeting climate and tone established by IEP team members influences the effectiveness of communication and parent participation (Dabkowski, 2004). The article, “Six Things to Never Say or Hear During an IEP Meeting,” provides evidence to support Dabkowski’s research. The article summarizes current research and details IDEA requirements in correlation to six case vignettes that include statements from parents and educators during IEP meetings. Authors include suggested responses should educators encounter similar situations. One vignette focused on the need for fruitful discussion with the recommendation of allowing enough time for meetings, refrain from completing forms before parent input, and provide parents a draft of goals and objectives before the meeting.

Communication challenges are of great significance and may result in an ineffective meeting. Acknowledging and addressing barriers with communication is pivotal for an effective IEP meeting. Recognizing the intricate communication obstacles empowers team members to navigate the complexities of developing a comprehensive IEP using a shared decision-making process.

**Parent Dissatisfaction**

Parent dissatisfaction at IEP meetings is a dynamic that burdens the education journey of children with disabilities. Such dissatisfaction emerges as tension, frustration, and differing expectations. Unfortunately, the outcome impacts the decision-making process of meeting the individual needs of students with learning differences.

In Fish's 2006 study, data was gathered from the perception of parents of children with autism on their experiences during IEP meetings and their input on measures that school districts can take to improve the level of collaboration and contributions. Fish's goal was to determine factors that contributed to the belief of parents that their children were not being properly serviced through the IEP process. Fish was also interested in gathering input regarding measures both parents and educators can take to improve IEP meetings. All the participants stated that the overall IEP experience had been negative, the views and implementation of best practices from the educators were contradictory, and they did not agree that their children were provided proper instruction and service. Five of the seven responses noted a disagreement between parents and educators regarding appropriate service, lack of transition and related service, and agreed that better instruction could be provided in the general education setting. In addition, parents reported, as part of Lo (2008) study, frustration with taking time off work to attend meetings, while some did not earn pay when they missed work.

Childre and Chamber (2005) investigated the perception of six families with experiences at IEP meetings, which included feedback as not being active participants but rather listening to the information being shared. The authors noted the problem of completing prepared forms and setting predetermined goals because of the impact on participation. Similar parental feedback was provided in Childre and Chamber's 2005 study. Parents' consensus viewed their

participation as more listening than contributions and indicated low collaboration and problem solving. During Fish's 2006 interviews to obtain information on parent perception, most of the participants experienced negative treatment and were accused by other team members of being unreasonable.

Fish (2006) concurred with Stoner et al with similar feedback from participants stating that the IEP experience was negative with most stating they had been treated badly by another member of the IEP team. The words unreasonable, intimidated, and disrespectful were included in the findings. Furthermore, participants had a different response when an advocate attended the IEP meeting. A positive outcome was noted that the relations between parents and other team members strengthened over time with a stronger awareness and understanding of the IEP process. An agreement presented in Goldstein's study was the need for systematic training for parents on how to fill their role and responsibilities associated with IEP involvement.

Dabkowski explained in her 2006 article, the meeting environment impacts effective contributions from parents, comfort levels, and is influenced by climate and tone. Recommendations include providing a formal, welcoming meeting environment, deliberate arrangement of seating to establish a sense of equity and collaboration, and school team members sitting beside the parent to remove both physical and psychological distance.

In closing, addressing parental dissatisfaction at IEP meetings requires the effort of all stakeholders. Recognizing the need for stronger partnerships, open communication, the willingness to implement meaningful procedural changes, and updates to the physical environment is needed to improve the IEP process. Creating a more inclusive and supportive environment will forge a stronger partnership resulting in positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Interventions to Support Collaboration during IEP Meetings**

Students identified as having a disability have an increased need for all members of their IEP team to work collaboratively for enhanced educational decision making. A school and family partnership are a critical component. A review of current literature shows limited studies on effective ways to improve parent participation at IEP meetings. Some of these interventions include premeeting, parent and staff training, strategies to improve teacher participation, establishing procedures for ensuring legal compliance, and reflection opportunities for team members. While various research suggests the benefit of multiple interventions, more research is needed to fully understand their effectiveness.

Sanderson and Goldman (2021) are the first to provide insight into IEP meeting involvement for students across all grade levels. The results helped to predict factors that impact participation. Recommendations from the study include increasing the attendance of younger students so they become familiar with the IEP process and can practice self-determination skills. Implications of the study suggest the importance of training, choosing a model for a more collaborative approach, and encouraging the partnership between parents and teachers.

Goldman and Burke (2017) explained that parents who attended IEP meetings with an advocate made significantly more contributions. The frequency of parent contributions did not increase when a conference or phone call took place prior to the IEP meeting. No significant differences were found when parents attended an hour of parent training prior to the IEP meeting. However, data showed a significantly higher level of parent participation when they attended a training session specific to joint decisions and instructional methods. Parents given an instructional packet with individual explanations of the information displayed higher



participation at IEP meetings. There were no significant outcomes for parents that were given access to an informational video.

It was recommended a checklist be used outlining seven steps to facilitate collaboration with parents and supporting actions (Friend, 2018). The purpose is to encourage collaboration before, during, and after the completion of parent coaching to improve relations and child outcomes (Avendano, 2020). While the article did not provide evidence of positive outcomes from the intervention, it did include numerous references to previous studies and suggestions on implementing parent coaching and applications of collaborative practices.

When synthesizing the data from studies from 1980-2010, the instruction provided to parents prior to the IEP, whether training, handouts, or videos showed some effect on the frequency and duration of parent comments at meetings. Goldman and Burke noted the outcomes were not significant. Survey results from Jones and Gansle (2010) indicated that parents, teachers, and administrators all felt the mini conference was helpful in preparing for an IEP meeting. Following a script and concise format helps to ensure relevant information is discussed and serves as a favorable response in building collaboration and improving communication with parents. Similar interventions are also included in a 2009 article by Mueller which include establishing ground rules to serve as reminders for expected participant behavior, identification of each team member's goal prior to the meeting, creating an agenda to create focus with allocated time for each item, and consideration for the meeting environment to reduce potential intimidation.

Mendez and Swick (2018) showed promising results for the implementation of online resources, community events, and a Parent Ambassador program. While the study was only conducted in Title 1 middle schools, the authors express a promise for generalization. Esquivel,

Ryan, and Bonner (2008), recommend professionals improve parents' experiences at IEP meetings by sharing knowledge of the child by including information about unique interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

In conclusion, there are important implications for research that promotes positive outcomes for students with disabilities, improves relationships between team members, supports effective collaboration, and determines areas for professional development for all team members. As a result, through this systematic literature review, key themes emerged. Research on collaborative IEP meetings that comply with legal requirements and result in meaningful IEPs that address unique, individual needs continues to be an essential area of study. Based on the culmination of information, there is justification to pursue additional research on the level of collaboration and IEP meetings and the correlation between various subgroups. As a result, limited research on the correlation to specific subgroups and a collaborative IEP process is justification for the current study. The following research questions will be addressed in this study.

1. What is the correlation between specific subgroups and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?
  - 1a. What is the correlation between the number of IEP meetings attended and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?
  - 1b. What is the correlation between ethnicity and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?
  - 1c. What is the correlation between the grade level of students and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings??

- 1d. What is the correlation between the eligibility category for special education and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?
2. What interventions were identified by parents for improved collaboration at IEP meetings?

In summary, the literature review presented in this chapter highlights the critical need for collaborative IEP meetings. In addition, studies are summarized to understand specific interventions that impact the level of collaboration and the level of satisfaction by parents of children eligible for special education services. However, the presented literature highlights gaps that justify the need for future research.

## CHAPTER 3

The qualitative study involves analyzing the data of various subgroups in correlation to the responses provided from a digital survey. Through the examination of participants' perspectives and diverse viewpoints, the research will seek to interpret trends and themes that contribute to the understanding of collaborative IEP meetings. The conclusions provide insights on the dynamics, processes, and outcomes associated with a collaborative IEP meeting. The chapter's intent is to outline the methodical steps, provide details of the participants, review of the data collection procedures, and examine and interpret the data.

**Methodology**

This qualitative study aims to synthesize data from parents' experiences and perceptions of collaborative IEP meetings and analyze broad patterns that relate to student outcomes. The data collection tool is an online survey sent to 187 parents of students from preschool aged through twelfth grade with an IEP. Survey responses were collected from May 1, 2024, to May 31, 2024.

Questions are designed to allow parents to reflect on their experiences with collaborative IEP meetings. The generated survey uses Google Forms platform containing twelve questions constructed to gather specific information to then be correlated with the various subgroups of ethnicity, number of IEP meetings attended, eligibility category, and grade level. Participants respond to nine questions with a Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Two items are ranking questions, asking participants to respond with their preferred responses. The last question is open-ended, requesting participants to respond without predetermined choices. Determining identification for the four subgroups is made using data from the

registration process and educational information from Samegoal, an online program which is only accessed with an assigned login and password.

### **Participants**

Data collection takes place at Ottawa Hills Local Schools. Ottawa Hills Local School district is in Ottawa Hills, Ohio, a village in northwest Ohio, bordering the University of Toledo. Approximately 1,100 students attend Ottawa Hills Local Schools. The district has been consistently rated one of the top districts in Ohio and the nation. Over the last few years, the district has experienced a 15 percent increase in enrollments and an increasingly diverse student body that has more nuanced educational needs.

The student population at Ottawa Hills Local Schools has growing diversity statistics with 33 parents that report African American as their ethnicity, 763 Caucasian, 40 Hispanic/Latino, 158 Asian, 2 American Indian, and 36 Multiracial. Furthermore, 94 of students qualify for special education services in ten eligibility categories as defined by the Ohio Department of Education. The range of disabilities included learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, emotional disturbance, Other Health Impairment, Multiple Disabilities, Speech and Language Disorder, Autism, and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Participants are recruited through an email invitation along with a link to an online survey. Surveys are sent to 183 parents of 98 students.

- 26 parents/guardians of 13 preschool aged students.
- 82 parents/guardians of 41 elementary aged students in grades K-6.
- 75 parents/guardians of 38 junior, senior high students in grades 7-12.

The participants requested to complete the digital survey received information about the study, indicating the study is voluntary in nature, and to be completed in the comfort of their

home or preferred location. Online surveys are emailed to parents of students from preschool through twelfth grade that have been identified as a student with a disability and eligible for special education services as defined by Child Find and IDEA.

Determining identification for the four subgroups was made using data from the registration process and educational information from Samegoal, an online program which is only accessed with an assigned login and password. Subgroups include ethnicity, number of IEP meetings attended, eligibility category, and grade level.

The research timeline details key stages from submissions to the closing date with intermediate dates throughout the period. The outline provides the roadmap for each stage of research to ensure optimal response rate within the designated end date.

1. Submission for IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval during April 2024.
2. Introduction, recruitment information, and online survey link emailed to potential participants by May 1, 2024.
3. Email recruitment reminders emailed at two and four weeks following the initial invitation: May 14 and 28, 2024.
4. Information and a link to the online survey will be included in the district's May newsletter.
5. A letter is mailed to participants that have yet to respond.
6. Final email reminder sent a week prior to closing the data collection window on May 31, 2024.

### **Data Sources**

The study includes primary and secondary sources to address the research questions. The online survey offers direct insight and original perspectives into the investigation. Secondary

data consist of official records from the enrollment process and data sets from Samegoal. Samegoal is a password protected software program designed to assist school districts with developing required and optional special education, Section 504, Gifted Education, English Learners, and Literacy Interventions forms published by each state department of education. Samegoal stores all documents from multiple school years and provides deadline tracking to assist with compliance. In addition, scholarly literature supplements the research with a review of broader trends and historical perspectives.

### **Data Analysis**

Description and thematic analysis are the qualitative approaches used to present, analyze, and critique the data. Using descriptive and thematic analysis, the goal is to identify patterns in the data that convey meaningful outcomes. Both approaches allow for a qualitative analysis of the data while at the same time quantifying the information (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Descriptive analysis compares data across time and with different identified subgroups. Also, the intent is to identify patterns in the data that have not previously emerged with the hope of identifying needs and solutions to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Thematic Analysis is used to summarize, identify, and interpret the qualitative data as guided by the research questions. The intent of the open-ended question is to allow parents to express their thoughts and insights not addressed in the survey. After the online survey is completed, the thematic analysis method is used to identify patterns and themes within the data collected. The method was chosen because of the valuable insight into participants' experiences and perspectives. Thematic analysis is a flexible method tailored to the specific research questions and objectives of the study (Guerrero et al., 2023). Xu and Zammit (2020) suggested a six-step process that was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach.

The six steps of thematic analyses transform raw data into central themes. The following steps are used to effectively analyze the qualitative data. In addition, the process provides concise identification of meaningful patterns.

1. Review responses and identify any potential errors.
2. Initial codes are generated from one data source.
3. Review of responses to search for themes. Themes are identified by sorting and collated to form the overarching themes.
4. Key phrases and themes are identified based on responses from participants. Then a systematic method is used to organize the responses into separate tables. Frequency of responses is also included on each table. Each question is analyzed, highlighting each response, and looking for redundancy, and frequency of themes from the extended responses. The identified themes are reviewed for meaningful patterns that relate to the research questions.
5. Each theme is defined and named. Interpretations and comparing of responses based on subgroups allows for identifying patterns and relationships.
6. A description of the analysis, themes, and supporting evidence included in Chapters 4 and 5.

In addition, the descriptive statistical method is used to summarize the key features of the datasets to provide a clear overview of the data. The method was chosen to make comparisons between distinct groups, identify patterns and trends, and provide thoughts on the distribution of data.

As described by Loeb et al., (2017) descriptive analysis is used to identify patterns in data to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent or facilitates answering



why and why not. In addition, Loeb recommended descriptive analysis to help with aspects of planning and targeting interventions. Measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode provide comprehensive statistical descriptions. The following steps are used to organize and present the data:

1. Participants' responses to questions 1-9 are entered into a spreadsheet.
2. Codes are collated based on similarities and are provided in Table 4.1.
3. The Likert scale is converted to numerical values.
  - a. strongly agree-1
  - b. agree-2
  - c. neutral-3
  - d. disagree-4
  - e. strongly disagree-5

Questions 10 and 11 do not use a Likert scale, but rather are ranking questions, asking participants to respond with their preferred responses. Numerical value is assigned to determine the frequency of the responses.

### **Limitations**

Studying collaboration at IEP meetings may encounter some limitations. A few parents completing the survey from one school district in a small geographic region are limited in demographics, geographic location, and sample size. Hence, the contextual factor and cultural differences can influence the dynamics of collaboration at IEP meetings. Overall, the limited variability in the subgroups should also be noted.

Another limitation is the time restraint to complete the digital survey. Six weeks could restrict the collected data process. The selection of participants only includes individuals willing

to participate. While obvious, selection bias could exist. Furthermore, some parents that participate in the survey may prefer the questions in their native language.

As with many studies, ethical considerations are made. There is a chance participants are not fully forthcoming when responding to the extended response questions of the Google survey. Since the survey is not confidential there could be a limit on the depth of information provided. This potentially could affect the quality of the data collected.

Since the researcher is an employee of the district, bias could unintentionally be present. Due to the researcher's own perspectives and interactions with the participants, an awareness of potential bias could potentially reduce the risk. More specifically, families who are already unhappy with their child's education or have unmet expectations can lead to preconceived native opinions or cause anchoring bias.

Recognizing these biases is important when analyzing the feedback from parents. Despite the limitations of research on collaboration, the current study shows promising results that could impact future research and relevant action steps. There is evidence to believe the results could provide valuable insight to the evolution of research on collaboration at IEP meetings.

### **Sharing Results with Stakeholders**

The goal of sharing the study's findings with stakeholders is to ensure effective dissemination of the results. A presentation will be prepared with an outline, key findings, and implications of the dissertation at an Ottawa Hills fall board meeting.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 details the qualitative study on the dynamics of collaboration within IEP meetings. Analyzing the relationship between different subgroups and levels of collaboration will hopefully reveal specific patterns and themes. It has become evident that equitable collaboration is essential for fostering supportive collaborative processes. Moving

forward, chapter 4 includes the results and findings of the study. In addition, the chapter also includes interpretations and implications derived from the investigation.

## CHAPTER 4

This qualitative study provides insight into the correlation between the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings and various subgroups. Through the detailed tables and data analysis of survey questions, the qualitative information is interpreted for themes, recurring patterns, and underlying meanings and relationships. The findings are organized with examination of each survey question separately with later emphasis on critical themes. The goal is to explicitly show the data collected and provide a comprehension view of the responses. Key findings from each question are listed and summarized with a focus on significant trends and patterns. In addition, findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. A summary of results and findings provides evidence, explanation of the findings, insight to the focused research questions, and an analysis of the responses from parents. Transitioning to Chapter 5, the goal is to provide detailed exploration of the research findings, uncover new insights, and provide contributions to the field of special education.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics are presented in percentages which are detailed below and later interpreted to understand the distribution of responses to the survey questions. The percentages correspond to the various categories of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Key words that relate to the research questions are assigned a code to organize the extended response. The goal is to encapsulate the various experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of each participant. The data is viewed in the following tables and correlated to each research question to ultimately lead to discovery of useful information and relevant conclusions that support decision making that results in positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Participants**

Twenty-nine parents of students that receive special education services volunteered to participate in the study. The inclusionary factors to participate in the survey is a child identified as having a disability as defined by IDEA, in preschool through twelve grades during the 2023-2024 school year and enrolled in the participating school district. No exclusionary criteria were noted. Out of the 29 participants, one couple with a high school student completed the survey. The imbalanced percent of surveys were completed by mothers (83%) with (17%) percents completed by fathers. Of the parents that responded, (7%) percent have multiple children receiving special education services. Geographically, all participants live in the same suburban community, with their children attending the same local school district. No additional characteristics of the participants are worth noting.

**Results and Findings**

Understanding parents' level of satisfaction of collaborative IEP meetings is critical before correlating the data to various subgroups. This ensures the analyses reflect the perceptions and experiences of participants. The grasp on the level of satisfaction consequently leads to identifying specific areas needing improvements, tailored interventions, and addressing trends among the various subgroups. By comprehending their satisfaction levels, it allows for addressing disparities and themes among the different subgroups. This critical interpretation of results and findings is found in Chapter 5.

To determine the level of satisfaction, survey questions were crafted to cover various aspects of IEP meeting experiences such as understanding of roles, communications, organization of the meeting, and meeting outcomes. The survey responses were presented with a Likert scale with answer choices; strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Strongly agree was chosen with the highest percentage of responses ranging from 55%-69% on questions one through nine while agree was chosen 24%-31%. Subsequently, the range for the selection of neutral and disagree is between zero and seven percent. Strongly disagree was chosen by one participant as an answer choice on the Google survey. Neutral or negative responses have a substantially lower rate of 14%. It can be concluded that the overall level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings is positive. However, it is important to highlight that while a high number of positive responses are noted, further analysis of the data may reveal specific areas of improvement.

The individual survey responses totaling 261 selections for questions 1-9 on the Google survey are included in Table 10. The majority of responses, 157 in total, choose strongly agree. Five participants did not choose strongly agree in response to any of the nine questions, while twenty-four participants choose it a minimum of once. In contrast, thirteen respondents selected strongly agree as an answer choice for all nine questions. This is followed by 86 respondents selecting agree for an answer choice. Ten participants did not select agree for any answer choice. A smaller portion opted for the answer choice of neutral twelve times. Disagree was chosen five times with strongly disagree chosen once. As a minority view, three individuals selected disagree or strongly disagree as an answer choice. It should be noted that of the three individuals, two were part of the same nuclear family. Through the aggregated data, a measure of parental satisfaction emerges.

Details of the survey questions are included below and accompanied by the distribution of responses and the frequency of each answer choice on the Likert scale. In addition, a correlating table is included below each narrative.

## Research Questions

### Question 1: I am a valued IEP team member during my child's IEP meeting.

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 59% with most parents (59%) strongly believing to be a valued member of their child's IEP team. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (34%) responded with agreement, and an even smaller group (7%) indicated a neutral response. There is an absence of any participants that disagree (0%) and strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question one.

**Table 1: Response Rate for Survey Question 1**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
I am a valued IEP team member during my child's IEP meeting.			
	Strongly Agree	17	59%
	Agree	10	34%
	Neutral	2	7%
	Disagree	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Question 2: I am encouraged to participate in my child's IEP meeting.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 62% with most parents (62%) that strongly agree to have been encouraged to participate in their child’s IEP meeting. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (38%) responded with agreement, and (0%) indicated a neutral response. There is an absence of any participants that disagree (0%) or strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question two.

**Table 2: Response Rate for Survey Question 2**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
I am encouraged to participate in my child's IEP meeting.			
	Strongly Agree	18	62%
	Agree	11	38%
	Neutral	0	0%
	Disagree	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%



**Question 3: My child's school district makes sure I understand each section of the IEP document.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 69% with most parents (69%) that strongly agree that the district makes sure the parent understands each section of the IEP document. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (31%) responded with agreement. There is an absence of any participants that are neutral (0%), disagree (0%), and strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question three.

**Table 3: Response Rate for Survey Question 3**

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Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
<hr/>		
My child's school district makes sure I understand each section of the IEP document.		
Strongly Agree	20	69%
Agree	9	31%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Question 4: Overall, I am satisfied with the extent to which teachers and other professionals explain each section of the IEP.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 62% with most parents (62%) strongly agreeing with the level of satisfaction to the extent to which teachers and other professionals explain each section of the IEP. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (34%) responded with agreement, and (3%) indicated a neutral response. There is an absence of any participants that disagree (0%) or strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question four.

**Table 4: Response Rate for Survey Question 4**

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Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	18	62%
Agree	10	34%
Neutral	1	3%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

---

Overall, I am satisfied with the extent to which teachers and other professionals explain each section of the IEP.

**Question 5: As a parent, I have a clear understanding of everyone's role at my child's IEP meeting.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 55% with most parents (55%) that strongly agree they have a clear understanding of everyone's role at my child's IEP meeting. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (31%) responded with agreement and (7%) indicated a neutral response. In addition, (7%) selected disagree. There is an absence of any participants that strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question five.

**Table 5: Response Rate for Survey Question 5**

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	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
As a parent, I have a clear understanding of everyone's role at my child's IEP meeting.			
	Strongly Agree	16	55%
	Agree	9	31%
	Neutral	2	7%
	Disagree	2	7%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Question 6: I feel comfortable asking questions at my child's IEP meeting.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 66% with most parents (66%) that strongly agree with being comfortable asking questions at IEP meetings. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (31%) responded with agreement, and (3%) indicated a neutral response. There is an absence of any participants that disagree (0%) or strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question six.

**Table 6: Response Rate for Survey Question 6**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
I feel comfortable asking questions at my child's IEP meeting.			
	Strongly Agree	19	66%
	Agree	9	31%
	Neutral	1	3%
	Disagree	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Question 7: I am treated as an important member of the IEP team.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 55% with most parents (55%) that strongly agree with being treated as an important member of the IEP team. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (34%) responded with agreement, and (7%) indicated a neutral response. In addition, (3%) selected disagree. There is an absence of any participants that strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question seven.

**Table 7: Response Rate for Survey Question 7**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
I am treated as an important member of the IEP team.			
	Strongly Agree	16	55%
	Agree	10	34%
	Neutral	2	7%
	Disagree	1	3%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Question 8: During IEP meetings, information is shared and written in an understandable way.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 59% with most parents (59%) that strongly agree that during IEP meetings, information is shared and written in an understandable way. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (34%) responded with agreement, and (3%) indicated a neutral response. In addition, (3%) selected disagree. There is an absence of any participants that strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question eight.

**Table 8: Response Rate for Survey Question 8**

Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	17	59%
Agree	10	34%
Neutral	1	3%
Disagree	1	3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

During IEP meetings, information is shared and written in an understandable way.

**Question 9: My child's general education teacher and Intervention Specialist regularly communicate about my child's progress.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 0% to 66% with most parents (66%) that strongly agree with regular communication from the general education teacher and Intervention Specialist. This distribution shows a substantial majority of responses. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (24%) responded with agreement, and (7%) indicated a neutral response. In addition, (3%) selected disagree. There is an absence of any participants that strongly disagree (0%). Overall, this data shows the distribution of response for question nine.

**Table 9: Response Rate for Survey Question 9**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
My child's general education teacher and Intervention Specialist regularly communicate about my child's progress.	Strongly Agree	19	66%
	Agree	7	24%
	Neutral	2	7%
	Disagree	1	3%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Individual survey responses are included in Table 10 for the 261 selections from questions 1-9 on the virtual survey. The majority of responses, 157 in total, choose strongly agree. Five participants did not choose strongly agree in response to any of the nine questions, while twenty-four participants choose it a minimum of once. In contrast, thirteen respondents selected strongly agree as an answer choice for all nine questions. This is followed by agree being selected 86 times. Ten participants did not select agree for any answer choice. A smaller portion opted for the answer choice of neutral twelve times. Disagree was chosen five times with strongly disagree chosen once. As a minority view, three individuals selected disagree or strongly disagree as an answer choice. It should be noted that of the three individuals, two were part of the same nuclear family.



**Table 10: Response rate for each category on questions 1-9 for each participant**

Participant	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	5	2	0	0
2	9	0	0	0	0
3	9	0	0	0	0
4	7	2	0	0	0
5	9	0	0	0	0
6	9	0	0	0	0
7	0	9	0	0	0
8	4	5	0	0	0
9	3	6	0	0	0
10	9	0	0	0	0
11	4	5	0	0	0
12	0	5	3	1	0
13	9	0	0	0	0
14	9	0	0	0	0
15	1	7	1	0	0
16	9	0	0	0	0
17	8	1	0	0	0
18	9	0	0	0	0
19	0	8	1	0	0
20	5	4	0	0	0
21	0	2	4	3	1
22	1	6	1	1	0
23	9	0	0	0	0
24	1	8	0	0	0
25	9	0	0	0	0
26	5	4	0	0	0
27	0	9	0	0	0
28	9	0	0	0	0
29	9	0	0	0	0

The next three survey questions are designed to address research question two:

What interventions were identified by parents for improved collaborative IEP meetings?

The questions aim to gather insight on parents' perspective regarding current practices and identify new interventions for improved collaborative IEP meetings. By analyzing the responses in Chapter 5, the goal is to better understand parents' perspective, improve current practices, and pinpoint interventions.

Parents articulated strategies or solutions for IEP meetings to be more collaborative, resulting in six themes. Five interventions were linked to the theme of communication (28%). While seven (39%) of responses correlate to an intervention that can be implemented during the IEP meeting. One response (6%) detailed gaining a better understanding of the process with another (6%) suggesting the ability to submit anonymous survey responses. In addition, two suggestions (11%) related to the subject of staff, specifically administration and teachers. Finally, it should be noted that two comments (11%) submitted were unrelated to the question but rather broader issues relating to the school district.

**Question 10: To improve parent collaboration at IEP meetings, please indicate which opportunities you are interested in participating in.**

The distribution of responses ranged from 15% to 35% with some participants selecting multiple responses. 40 responses were selected. The larger number of parents (35%) indicated an interest in completing a parent questionnaire prior to the IEP meeting. Meanwhile, a slightly smaller portion (28%) responded with an interest in a phone call with an Intervention Specialist prior to the IEP meeting. In addition (23%) selected a meeting with an administrator before their child’s IEP meeting. The lowest value (15%) see merit in attending a professional development opportunity to learn more about IEPs.

**Table 11: Response Rate for Survey Question 10**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
Attending a professional development opportunity to learn more about IEPs.		6	15%
Phone call with an Intervention Specialist prior to my child's IEP meeting.		11	28%
Completing a parent questionnaire to share my thoughts prior to the IEP meeting		14	35%
Meeting with an administrator prior to my child's IEP meeting.		9	23%

**Question 11: I am interested in learning more about...**

The distribution of responses ranged from 14% to 36% with some participants selecting multiple responses. In total, 42 responses were selected. The larger number of parents (36%) indicated they had no interest at this time in learning more about the evaluation process, special education laws and procedures, parental rights under federal and state guidelines, or community resources. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (19%) responded with an interest in learning about special education laws and procedures. In addition, (17%) would like to learn more about community resources. The lowest value (14%) selected an interest in learning more about the evaluation process and parental rights under state and federal guidelines.

**Table 12: Response Rate for Survey Question 11**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
I am interested in learning more about			
The evaluation process		6	14%
Special Education laws and procedures		8	19%
Parental Rights under State and Federal Guidelines		6	14%
Community Resources		7	17%
None at this time		15	36%

**Question 12: What suggestions do you have to increase parent participation for more collaborative IEP meetings?**

The distribution of responses ranges from 15% to 55% with all participants acknowledging the open-ended question. The larger number of parents (55%) articulated a recommendation for increased participation for more collaborative IEP meetings. Meanwhile, a smaller portion (30%) responded with no recommendations but rather messaging that implies an optimistic tone with favorable feedback. The following responses are summarized from the detailed comments submitted on the survey, capturing the key points and common themes expressed by participants. Comments include; “All is good” (20%), “Excellent communication” (20%), “IEP team is fantastic” (20%), “Always satisfied” (20%), and “Fantastic Job” (20%).

The largest value (55%) indicated a specific intervention with the goal of providing a recommendation for more collaborative IEP meetings. The following themes are summarized from the detailed comments submitted on the survey while capturing the key points expressed by participants. The specific organization of data is to provide structured themes through organized analysis of the responses to the open-ended question. Suggestions for interventions varied with eighteen recommendations. One parent made three recommendations while another parent made two suggestions. However, the remaining participants made one comment.

**Table 13: Response Rate for Survey Question 12**

	Rating	Response Rate n	Percentage %
<b>What suggestions do you have to increase parent participation for more collaborative IEP meetings?</b>			
Data Source Online Survey			
Codes	Response Rate		
None	10	30%	
Positive Comment	5	15%	
	All is good		1
	Excellent communication		1
	IEP team is fantastic		1
	Always satisfied		1
	Fantastic job		1
Themes from Recommendations	18	55%	
	Communication		5
	Procedures at IEP Meetings		7
	Enhanced Understanding		1
	Role of Administration and Teachers		2
	Anonymous Survey Responses		1
	Unrelated Comments		2
	Responses		
	Work Samples Shared During Meetings		1
	Access to Regular Updates Using a Portal		1
	Follow-Up Meetings		1
	Briefing Notes		1
	Understanding of the Curriculum		1
	Prepared Solutions before the IEP meeting		1
	Improved Administrative Support		1
	Experience of Intervention Specialist		1
	A draft a few days before IEP Meeting		1
	Anonymous Survey Responses		1
	Trauma-Informed IEP Meetings		1

Students attend IEP Meeting	1
Access to Parent Mentor	2
Questionnaires for Parent Feedback	2
Unrelated Comments	2

In conclusion, the narrative description of the survey responses provides a perspective on the overall experiences of all the participants. The data presented in each table emphasize responses of each participant and overall themes. By analyzing the data in Chapter 5, the intention is to understand collaborative IEP meetings to make changes that result in positive impacts for students with disabilities.

The four distinct subgroups refer to the population of parents that participated in the study and characteristics or attributes of their child/children. The shared segments are relevant to the research questions and objectives. These subgroups are based on race/ethnicity, number of IEP meetings attended, grade level, and disability category. The correlation to the survey responses and specific subgroups allows for the identification of themes, patterns, and dependencies. Ultimately, the goal is to share a robust amount of data in a clear presentation to allow for deeper insights and supported conclusions in Chapter 5.



**Race/Ethnicity**

The distribution of ethnicity among survey participants is a demographic detail used to answer one of the research questions; What is the correlation between race/ethnicity and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings? By examining the race/ethnicity of respondents, the findings can be interpreted to draw conclusions about each group and within the larger population.

The demographic distribution of various ethnicities of participants shows uneven disparities with a range from 0% to 86%. Many respondents (86%) were the most homogeneous group that identified as white. The second largest group (13%), with a substantial gap identified as Asian. Furthermore, multiracial (3%), with a small minority of responses. Two ethnicities, Native American and Hispanic/Latino were entirely absent with (0%) representation.

The district’s distribution of ethnicity rates for students include; (74%) white, (15%) Asian, (4%) multiracial, (3%) black, (3%) Hispanic, and less than one percent American Indian/Alaskan. The district's profile shows a similar distribution rate to the survey responders.

**Table 14: Demographics for race/ethnicity of 31 students**

Characteristics	n	percent	
Ethnicity	Caucasian	26	86%
	Asian	4	13%
	Multiracial	1	3%
	African American	0	0%
	Native American	0	0%
	Hispanic/Latino	0	0%

**IEP Meetings Attended**

Below is a narrative and table presenting the distribution of the number of IEP meetings attended by survey participants. The findings relate to a research question; What is the correlation between the number of IEP meetings attended and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings? By analyzing the distribution, the information is used to understand the pattern of participation in correlation to a collaborative IEP meeting. The distribution of IEP meetings attended ranges from 0% to 23%. Of the participants, (10%) attended one IEP meeting, while more than double (23%) attended two. Another (19%) participated in three IEP meetings with (13%) attending four. Consistently (13%) attended five. Meanwhile, three attendees (10%) joined six meetings with (3%) contributing to seven, eight, nine, and ten meetings. Notably, there is an absence of parents with attendance at eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen or sixteen meetings. All participants were in attendance for their child's IEP meetings, and as a result, the calculations reflect the number of IEP meetings required by the school district to ensure compliance. The distribution among participants shows a variation in attendance rates.

**Table 15: The number of IEP meetings attended for 31 students of 29 parents**

Characteristics		n	percent
Number of IEP Meetings	1	4	13%
	2	6	19%
	3	5	16%
	4	4	13%
	5	4	13%
	6	3	10%
	7	2	6%
	8	1	3%
	9	2	6%
	10	1	3%
	11	0	0%
	12	0	0%
	13	0	0%
	14	0	0%
	15	0	0%
	16	0	0%

**Grade Level**

The grade level demographics reveal the educational stages of the children whose parent/parents completed the survey. The information is essential to understand the diversity of experiences of each survey participant and allows for the understanding of potential trends in Chapter 5. The findings below relate to the research question; What is the correlation to the grade level of students and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings? Students in the sample ranged in grade from preschool to grade 12 with the distribution of grade levels of the child/children of participants ranging from 0% to 13%. Parents of preschoolers had the highest response rate (19%) with (10%) of kindergarten parents participating. Parents of first graders follow with (3%) with an increase for second (6%) and third (6%) grade parents. There is an absence of participation (0%) from parents of fourth graders. There is a slight increase in responses from fifth (10%) and sixth (10%) grade parents. The percentage of parents of seventh graders (13%) slightly increased before a slight dip to (6%) for parents of eighth graders. In addition, (3%) of ninth grade participants completed the survey with an absence of tenth grade parents. A slight rise (10%) in eleventh grade parents with (3%) of parents of twelve graders completed the survey. The distribution shows relatively balanced levels of participants with children in various grade levels.

**Table 16: Grade Level Distribution for 31 students of 29 parents**

Characteristics		n	percent
Grade Level	Preschool	6	19%
	Kindergarten	3	10%
	First	1	3%
	Second	2	6%
	Third	2	6%
	Fourth	1	3%
	Fifth	2	6%
	Sixth	3	10%
	Seventh	4	13%
	Eight	2	6%
	Ninth	1	3%
	Tenth	0	0%
	Eleventh	3	10%
Twelve	1	3%	

**Disability Category**

For a student suspected of having a disability, under federal law, a school district is required to evaluate to determine if the student meets the criteria of one of the eligibility categories. Fourteen disability categories have been identified under IDEA. Findings relate to the research question; What correlation is the eligibility category and satisfaction level with collaborative IEP meetings? The distribution of information details the representation of the disability categories with the demographic information.

The distribution of categories for students of parents that participated in the survey ranged from 0 to 25%. The largest majority (25%) of respondents have a child/children identified under the categories of Other Health Impairment (OHI). With a slight decline, (23%) of respondents have a child/children with the category of Autism or Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Another (13%) has a child/children that receives service under the category of Speech and Language Impairment or Developmental Delay (DD). In addition, (3%) of parents have a child identified with a Traumatic Brain Injury. Notably, there is an absence of parents that have a child/children identified under one of the eight remaining categories; Deafness, Orthopedic Impairment, Emotional Disturbance, Deaf Blindness, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, and Intellectual Disability. The students' primary disability categories include Speech or Language Impairment (n=4), Autism (n=7), Specific Learning Disability (n=7), Other Health Impairment (n=8), Orthopedic Impairment (n=0), Emotional Disturbance (n=0), Developmental Delay (n=4), Deaf Blindness (n=0), Traumatic Brain Injury (n=1), Visual Impairment (n=0), Hearing Impairment (n=0), Intellectual Disability (n=0), and Multiple Disabilities (n=0). The eligibility category provides insight on potentially unique experiences and perspectives.

**Table 17: Demographics for Eligibility Categories for Special Education**

Characteristics	n	percent
Eligibility Category		
Other Health Impairment	8	25%
Autism	7	23%
Specific Learning Disability	7	23%
Speech or Language Impairment	4	13%
Developmental Delay	4	13%
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	3%
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0%
Emotional Disturbance	0	0%
Deaf Blindness	0	0%
Visual Impairment	0	0%
Hearing Impairment	0	0%
Intellectual Disability	0	0%
Multiple Disabilities	0	0%

The data in Table 18 provides columns for the children of each participant that include; ethnicity, grade level, number of meetings attended, and disability category. However, due to two parents having two students receiving special education services, grade levels are not always listed in sequential order. Participants identified as number 21 and 22 are from the same nuclear family with one child receiving special education services. Participant four has two children receiving special education services with participant seven having two children receiving special education services. The distribution of information in the four subgroups is collectively presented in various tables while Table 18 focuses on individual responses. In Chapter 5 a more elaborate analysis about the subgroups will be examined.



**Table 18: Subgroup classifications for each participant and their child/children.**

Participant	Ethnicity	Grade Level	IEP Meetings	Disability Category
1	White	1	5	Autism
2	White	1	2	SLD
3	White	2	5	Speech/Language
4	Asian	3	4	OHI
4	Asian	Preschool	2	DD
4	Asian	Preschool	2	DD
5	White	3	3	SLD
6	White	5	7	SLD
7	White	4	5	SLD
7	White	Preschool	1	Speech/Language
8	White	5	4	SLD
9	White	5	3	SLD
10	White	5	4	OHI
11	Asian	6	7	Autism
12	Asian	6	1	Traumatic Brain
13	White	7	6	Autism
14	White	7	6	OHI
15	White	7	6	OHI
16	White	7	9	Speech/Language
17	White	8	4	Autism
18	White	8	9	SLD
19	White	9	8	OHI
20	White	11	10	OHI
21	White	11	2	OHI
22	White	11	2	OHI
23	White	12	5	OHI
24	White	Kindergarten	3	Autism
25	White	Kindergarten	3	Autism
26	White	Kindergarten	3	Autism
27	White	Preschool	2	DD
28	White	Preschool	1	DD
29	White	Preschool	1	Speech/Language

In summary, presentation of the data from the twenty-nine participants, thirty-one students, 348 surveys responses, and review of student records, the study revealed multiple themes. It was revealed when interpreting the results of this study, several important considerations emerged regarding parent perceptions and the correlation to various subgroups. Determining how to cultivate a collaborative IEP meeting requires an analysis of practices, examination of challenges, and reflection on required policy changes.

In conclusion, Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive presentation of the research findings with the goal of illustrating patterns to discover new insights. The presentation of data leads to interpretation and comprehensive discussion that follows in the subsequent chapter. The findings will be interpreted, implications will be explored and connected to broader impacts, recommendations made for future research, and practical applications will be addressed.

## CHAPTER 5

The main purpose of this study is to determine the correlation between four subgroups to level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings. Data is collected by parents of children receiving special education services. The success of an IEP meeting is influenced by the collaboration of all stakeholders and parental satisfaction. In addition, the study examines specific interventions to improve the level of satisfaction. Data is collected through a virtual survey with data presented in a narrative and corresponding tables. Chapter 5 is the culmination of the study with a presentation of the conclusions drawn from the findings in Chapter 4. Also presented are research findings, recommendations, subsequent implications and actions, potential impact on future studies, and practical applications to address the research problem. Furthermore, the research questions are addressed in addition to a reflection by the researcher. Interestingly, highlights from past research are included throughout Chapter 5.

It is worth noting that through the synthesis of data from various studies noted in Chapter 2, overall, parents express negative or neutral feelings that include frustration, being overwhelmed, indifferent, or confused. This is confirmed in Choiseul-Praslin, Deardorff, and Yeager's 2021 study of 929 mothers with a high percentage of mothers reported experiencing bullying, coercion, and shame. In contrast, this study presents data indicating that parents were overall satisfied with the level of collaboration at IEP meetings. This discovery is further dissected throughout Chapter 5.

As stressed in previous chapters, there is a need for collaborative IEP meetings. All stakeholders have a vested interest in positive outcomes for students. The significance is noted with the explicit attention to meaningful participation and collaboration explained in IDEA. A procedural error may constitute a violation of a student's right to FAPE if parents do not have

meaningful participation in decision-making (Yell et al, 2020). It is impossible to follow the guidelines of legislation while not building a partnership with families and supporting an effective, collaborative IEP process.

The five research questions were created to guide the data collection process to determine the correlation of various subgroups to the level of collaboration of parents at IEP meetings. The data provided evidence to support a response to the following research questions.

1. What is the correlation between specific subgroups and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1a. What is the correlation between the number of IEP meetings attended and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1b. What is the correlation between ethnicity and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1c. What is the correlation between the grade level of students and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?

1d. What correlation is the eligibility category and satisfaction level with collaborative IEP meetings?

2. What interventions were identified by parents for improved collaboration at IEP meetings?

These discoveries found in the data provide information to support the relationship between subgroups and potential predictors of parental satisfaction. Analyzing the results provides several interesting findings, with the data revealing variables that are worth future investigation.

## **Findings and Interpretations**

The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions and existing literature, then followed by interpretation of the results. The data is analyzed to determine patterns, themes, and insights relating to collaborative IEP meetings. The findings are organized by research questions with each section also detailing interpretations, trends, meanings, insights, and critical analysis. Moving forward, the information interpretation considers both expected and unexpected outcomes.

Before moving into Chapter 5, it is important to address a few key details that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the findings. While limitations are examined later in the chapter, there are two unpredictable factors encountered during the research process that influence the results. By thoroughly exploring these variables, it allows for deeper understanding of the context in which the conclusions are drawn.

To determine a relative level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings, an examination of survey questions 1-9 is imperative. The survey responses are presented with a Likert scale with answer choices; strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Strongly agree was chosen with the highest percentage of responses ranging from 55%-69% on questions one through nine. While agree was chosen 24%-31%. Subsequently, for the nine questions the range for the selection of neutral and disagree is between zero and seven percent. Strongly disagree was chosen by one participant as an answer choice on the Google survey. It can be concluded that strongly agree and agree were chosen most often while a neutral or negative response has a substantially lower rate of 14%. Furthermore, it appears there was a high level of intentionality in the extended responses, providing a brief glimpse into the viewpoint of the participants. This information provides evidence there is limited variability in the level of

satisfaction from participants. This aligns to Fish's 2008 study of 51 parents of students receiving special education who were middle-to upper-class and were 80% white. Findings showed most parents reported positive IEP experiences.

These results present the inability to use a range of satisfaction in correlation to the various subgroups. This is contradictory to the distribution range present in Sanderson and Goldman's 2023 study which allowed for attention to be targeted on relationship between the highest and lowest levels of satisfaction to age and diagnosis.

The lowest level, strongly disagree, was chosen once as answer choice by one participant. However, an analysis of the answers to questions 10, 11, and 12 provides insight to the answer choices in questions 1-9 with details that directly relate to recommended interventions. The discussion will also connect the narrative responses to the participants' experiences.

There is speculation as to the reasoning for the high level of satisfactory ratings. Consequently, part of the district's strategic plan includes a goal that focuses on building meaningful relationships with all stakeholders. As a result, each department generated action steps to move the district forward in meeting the goal. The steps include establishing a welcoming meeting environment, providing ongoing communication with parents, and implementing new ways to gather feedback from team members. It is worth noting that the researcher participated in the majoring of IEP meetings with the survey participants.

In addition, two participants have multiple children that qualify for special education services. One with three children and the other with two. The survey did not allow for reporting different experiences for each child. It can be assumed that the survey responses might be motivated by aggregated experiences for all their children. Survey responses are correlated to

each child which may add a level of complexity to analyzing the data. In the future researchers should consider participants responding separately for each child.

The following paragraphs will delve into the research questions outlined earlier. Through the analysis of the data, the goal is to provide comprehensive answers to the questions and contribute to the understanding of collaborative IEP meetings.

### **Research Question 1a.**

#### **IEP Meetings**

##### **1a. What is the correlation between the number of IEP meetings attended and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?**

The study examines the relationship between the number of IEP meetings attended by parents and their level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings. There was a higher response rate from participants that attended 3 or fewer IEP meetings. In addition, none of the participants attended more than ten meetings. Specifically, parents who attended one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, nine, ten IEP meetings responded with only strongly agree or agree to the survey questions. Some may consider that parents who attend more IEP meetings may feel more informed, but the results of this study conflict with that sentiment. It could be concluded that the more IEP meetings a parent attends, the more familiar they become with the process. In addition, more opportunities exist to build relationships with school staff. Due to the sampling issue of limited responses, it results in insufficient scope to draw definitive conclusions. This is a less explored research area; however, larger sampling is required for future research. The analysis revealed the inability to correlate the number of IEP meetings attended to the level of satisfaction with collaborate IEP meetings.

### **Research Question 1b.**

**Race/Ethnicity****1b. What is the correlation between ethnicity and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?**

Parents with various ethnicities may have a unique perspective on the role of educators and families, potential language barriers, diverse cultural considerations, and differences in experiences in educational systems. With an increase of families with diverse cultural backgrounds, it is essential to foster a collaborative meeting environment. Three parents that participated in the study identified as an ethnicity other than white. Of the three participants, one responded with agree five times, neutral three times, and disagree once. Also, the participant requested future anonymous survey responses. The other two only responded with strongly agree or agree with extended responses that can be considered positive and complementary of the district. The small sample size limits the ability to determine the true relationship between ethnicity and level of satisfaction. Accurate conclusions from the data cannot be drawn, however, parental recommendations should be considered.

In Sanderson and Goldman's 2023 research found that white parents had a greater satisfaction with their child's IEP however, the response rate for various ethnicities was also limited. This finding aligns to Zagona et al (2019) study of 18 parents of children with autism or intellectual disabilities. Seventeen of the eighteen parents were white; however, outcomes were not correlated to ethnicity or disability category. This appears to be a common issue in survey research.

Lo's 2012 article provides recommendations for best practices to be used by educational professionals with diverse parents of children with disabilities. Prior to a meeting, parents benefit from learning about the meeting agenda and meeting procedures. Also, ensure a skilled and



experienced interpreter attends the meeting. In addition, Lo stresses that welcoming parents to school is one of the crucial factors in developing an effective partnership. Finally, provide parents with a copy of detailed meeting notes. This is due to potential barriers with communication, higher level of stress, and the large amount of information shared at IEP meetings.

The unrepresentative sampling of nonwhite parents presents a circumstance of limited data. The data collected is too narrow and does not provide enough variation. As a result, it is difficult to document meaningful conclusions and generalize the results to the broader population. Due to the inadequate data available, the answer to research question 1a. cannot be answered.

### **Research Question 1c.**

#### **Grade Level**

#### **1c. What is the correlation between the grade level of students and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?**

Understanding the unique concerns of parents at different stages of their child's education provides information to guide effective collaboration and productive IEP meetings. It should be noted that the participating district has one 7-12 building, one K-6 building, and one preschool building shared with a neighboring district.

Comparing satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings reveals several key trends. The study showed the three participants that shared disgruntled comments were parents of high school students. Two of the three parents are from the same nuclear family. Of all the survey responses, six have preschool aged children. Interestingly, while parents of younger children tend to be more involved in IEP and are often concerned about future potential, this study did not

show evidence to support or deny the research question. It should also be noted that all participants in the study routinely attended all IEP meetings for their child/children. It is extremely rare for any parent in the represented district to not participate in an IEP meeting.

Interesting data is provided in question twelve responses that relate to this research question. Based on the narrative responses it can be concluded there is a need for variations in meeting agendas based on grade level bands. A sampling of parent responses for question 12 is included to support the recommendation for varying meeting agendas during IEP meetings.

“An in-person progress review during the year would be beneficial.”

“Would love to see some work samples or passages to see how the progress is measured.”

“A portion of the IEP that was new to us this year (due to our son’s age and grade level) was the questionnaire regarding chores at home. The intent, as it was explained to us, was to highlight responsibility and ownership of task completion. I think having more questionnaires for parents that align with what the state and school are looking for in their students is helpful.”

“A briefing note which describes what will be discussed in the IEP meeting.”

“In areas where the student is behind, I think it would be helpful for the IEP team to come to the meeting prepared with pre-determined solutions and a step-by-step plan on how the student, parent and teachers can work together to help the child.”

“While it is great to meet and hear from the various specialists (OT, Speech, etc.) at the IEP meetings, it would be great to get more frequent updates and communications from those specialists as to NAME progress towards his IEP goals and strategies for us to implement at home.”

The survey responses from parents provide valuable insight into their experiences and perspectives. It is important to recognize the recommended interventions to improve collaborative IEP meetings by parents.

As students progress through preschool, elementary, middle, and high school, there is a need to evolve the meeting agenda and structure for IEP meetings. The tailored agendas allow for deliberate highlighting of specific developmental needs, assessments, transition planning, career and college readiness, and social emotional development. A clear agenda that recognizes and addresses concerns by educators and parents supports a collaborative IEP meeting.

The difficulty with answering research question 1c. is problematic, however, recognizing and addressing the challenge led to a recommended intervention to support parent and teacher collaboration. Consideration should be made for implementing a developmentally appropriate, grade band meeting agenda that highlights current supports, student progress, areas of need, parental concerns, and future goals.

#### **Research Question 1d.**

##### **1d. What is the correlation between the eligibility category for special education and the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings?**

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) outlines specific eligibility categories under which students qualify for special education services. Six disability categories are represented by the parents' child/children that completed the survey, including Specific Learning Disability, Developmental Disability, Autism, Speech and Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, and Traumatic Brain Injury. The distribution of eligibility categories closely aligns to both the district and state rates of enrollment for students with a disability. In the state of Ohio, the

category of Developmental Disability can only be considered for children less than 10 years of age.

Each parent engages in a unique IEP meeting experience. The findings in this study cannot differentiate between parents of children with a specific eligibility category and the level of satisfaction of collaborative IEP meetings. It cannot be determined if certain disability categories are associated with a higher parent satisfaction rate. Although the child/children of the participants do not represent all the disability categories recognized in Ohio, some conclusions can still be drawn.

A closer look at the data shows two parents with negative feedback noted in question 12 both have children in high school with the eligibility category of Other Health Impairment. The five parents that responded to question 12 with purely positive comments and no recommendations have children in preschool, elementary, and middle school with the eligibility categories of Speech and Language, Developmental Disabilities, Specific Learning Disability, and Other Health Impairment. While no conclusions can be drawn for such few data points, the information is worth noting.

While the findings from this study cannot conclude the level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings based on eligibility category, there is opportunity to reflect on interventions that can enhance all meetings. Since each eligibility category encompasses unique characteristics and implications, school districts may find value in tailoring their meeting approach to the specific needs of each student with the hopes of fostering a higher level of collaboration. Recommendations include presenting work samples and copies of all standardized and curriculum-based progress monitoring and diagnostic data at IEP meetings. In addition, it is recommended to help parents understand the uniqueness of their child's strengths in addition to

areas of need. Provide parents with resources to help them with the complexity of their child's needs.

Future research with more representation of all disability categories, a higher survey response rate, and varying levels of satisfactions is needed to truly understand the implications on collaborative IEP meetings. A conclusive question 1d. is unable to be provided.

## **Research Question 2**

### **Interventions**

#### **2. What interventions were identified by parents for improved collaboration at IEP meetings.**

The last three questions of the survey present an opportunity for participants to indicate areas of interest to build competency and provide suggestions to increase parent participation and to improve collaboration at IEP meetings. These questions are intended to provide a platform for potentially sensitive topics, which might deter participants unwilling to provide critical feedback. Eighteen participants made suggestions for more collaborative IEP meetings with twelve participants indicating an interest in learning more about the evaluation process, community resources, and educational policy and laws.

Twelve participants indicated an interest in better understanding the IEP process, roles and responsibilities, and special education laws and regulations. The lack of knowledge and awareness regarding the special education process and purpose of meetings can result in limited engagement. In response, suggestions include offering training sessions for parents, providing resources and tutorials, and scheduling professional development opportunities.

In addition, five comments made by parents relate to communication, focused on follow-up meetings and regular updates. With an increase in reciprocal communication there is an

increase in engagement. One parent requested more frequent communication with updates on progress with another parent suggesting briefing notes be provided after each meeting. Regular communication between IEP members, including follow-up meetings and progress reports, could help to ensure concerns are addressed promptly. Regular emails and scheduled check-ins can assist with fostering strong collaboration. Also, one parent noted an interest in wanting to have a better understanding of the curriculum chosen by the district, with another requesting prepared solutions prior to the IEP meeting.

Of the eighteen suggestions two were unrelated comments that are worth disregarding. However, one participant requested anonymous survey responses. Another suggestion includes the use of a Parent Mentor at IEP meetings. Currently, Parent Mentors are employed by local school districts or Educational Service Centers throughout Ohio. Due to the culmination of subjective experiences and professional development, Parent Mentors can provide support to families by attending meetings, provide training, increase knowledge of special education processes, and share community resources. A recommended outcome is to provide information about the capacity of support provided by Parent Mentors when sending the IEP meeting invitation. This theme also emerged in Fish's 2006 that parents were treated more positively in the presence of an advocate. Increasing collaboration with community agencies, organizations, other and other parents are critical to school improvement and shared decision making at IEP meetings.

Two parents from the same nuclear family made the comment that the lack of experience of an Intervention Specialist and lack of administrative support impacts collaboration. A face-to-face interview or follow-up phone call could provide a more in-depth exploration of the parents'

thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It would also allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions, make a person connection, and clarify any misunderstandings.

Various studies have explored researched based interventions designed to improve collaboration at IEP meetings. Mueller and Vick's 2019 study conveyed five key procedural practices linked to a collaborative meeting process, (a) premeeting with families, (b) establishing and following a meeting agenda, (c) using meeting norms, (d) utilizing a parking lot for off topic issues, and (e) visual charting for graphic support during team discussion and problem solving.

The purpose of a collaborative IEP meeting is for all team members to determine the most appropriate supports and services for a child. In comparison with Garbacz, Godfrey, Rowe, and Kittelman (2022), study revealed one strategy to promote parent collaboration is centering on the child's strengths which was suggested by an eleventh-grade parent.

In summary, pre-meeting preparation, professional development and training, facilitated meetings with clear agendas, parental advocacy supports and programs, and regular communication can be effective practices to improve collaboration at IEP meetings. By implementing targeted interventions schools can elevate the level of collaboration at IEP meetings. While challenges exist, addressing them through intentional actions, thoughtful planning, and explicit interventions helps to ensure a positive IEP process. A commitment to collaborative IEP meetings benefits the needs of students with disabilities.

### **Limitations**

While the study provides plausible information, it is evident that limitations should be acknowledged. Due to the small sample size, noteworthy results should be interpreted with some caution. Considerations should be made on whether results can be generalized to a larger or more diverse population. In addition, the study relied on self-reporting data which presents opportunity

for partiality and influences both the extended responses and multiple-choice answers. However, the study can be conducted in any school district if the intent is to use the data to refine policies and implement interventions that support more collaborative IEP meetings. Results in other school districts may show more variability with the various subgroups.

Since there are insufficient responses to represent various subgroups, the sample does not reflect diverse groups needed to adequately answer the research questions. Unanswered research questions result in challenges that include limitations with conceptual themes, unpredictable outcomes, and unanswered questions.

The data in this study was only collected in a small, suburban school district that resulted in representation of a confined sample. Ideally, future studies will have a larger representation for the various subgroups. Note that the data collection was not time-consuming, but consideration should be made for future in-person interviews. Unfortunately, there may be limitations with the number of participants that are not fluent in English. Misunderstanding could affect the accuracy of the data collection. Providing the survey in home languages could result in more participation. This issue should be considered. Understanding these limitations provides context for the presentation of results and potential interest for future research.

### **Implications**

The study examines the correlation between various subgroups and the level of satisfaction with a collaborative IEP meeting. The study met its intended purpose and offers insight into recommended interventions to improve the level of collaboration. Implications of this study include school district procedures, educational policies, and future research. These implications also lead to advancement and understanding of improved educational practices for students being served with IEPs.



The findings have important implications for changes in district policies and procedures. Systematic changes are needed to foster a collaborative meeting environment, improve parent perceptions of the IEP process, and implementation of research-based communication strategies to change the procedural structure of IEP meetings. Additionally, the study highlights intervention strategies that can easily be implemented at any IEP meeting, in any school district. Findings from this study are relevant to all district stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administrators, and board members. Furthermore, the results from this study can be used by district administrators for policy reform. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding federal and state laws and regulations for special education, provides insight to the perspective of parents of neurodivergent children, and promotes the need for inclusive school environments for collaborative IEP meetings. Implications of this study include procedures, educational policies, and future research that led to advancement and understanding of improved educational practices. In closing, Dabkowski's 2004 article states, "Along with professional team members, parents, and administrators will require knowledge of new practices and opportunities to employ them in an environment supported by all team members."

### **Recommendation on Further Research**

Results from this study contribute to the current research on collaborative IEP meetings. More emphasis needs to be on parental involvement and collective partnership between educators and partners. Building strong partnership will foster a more inclusive meeting environment. Analyzing the communication among team members to determine the influence of the decision-making process will impact the level of collaboration at IEP meetings.

The interpretation of the findings provides implications for future research and improved educational practices and procedures. Future research should include the perspective of a larger

group of stakeholders to develop a more comprehensive look at specific predictors. Moving forward, more emphasis is also needed to understand how specific disability categories relate to collaborative IEP meetings. Expanding the number of participants will allow for an increase in generalizability. In addition, a broader group improves reliability, strengthens the depth of data, and allows for more complex analyses. Furthermore, a recommendation is to expand the study to include a more diverse population from different geographic regions. It would be interesting to replicate this study with different contents, with a larger school district in urban and rural areas. Socioeconomic status, level of education, linguistic diversity, and academic outcomes could be added variables or subgroups. Another potential direction for future research includes a comparative study between the findings of similar studies following a longitudinal timeline.

Empowerment of students and families at IEP meetings is also an interesting area of research worth exploring. Student voice as an active member of an IEP meeting leads to consideration of the importance of fostering self-advocacy skills. Also, it is worth exploring if a sense of ownership is achieved when students are encouraged to share their thoughts and perspectives on their own goals. By being involved in the decision-making process, will districts see students be more involved in the decision-making process, take responsibility for their own success, and have an increased level of motivation, persistence, confidence, and empowerment?

Several areas have been highlighted for future research. Understanding the complexities of collaboration within IEP meetings and actionable interventions for improvement will result in positive outcomes for neurodivergent students.

### **Reflection by the Researcher**

Throughout my career, I have participated in thousands of IEP meetings, as a general education teacher, Intervention Specialist, and district administrator. The interest in this

qualitative study grew from the goal of improving parents' level of satisfaction of collaborative IEP meetings. While I found that many IEP teams I work with are well versed in federal and state special laws and policies, my interest focuses on research to improve collaborations that result in positive outcomes for students. As the research process continued, my elated interest in the topic continues to be driven by the successful IEP process and beneficial results for students with disabilities.

One unexpected outcome of the study was the amount data that supported an elevated level of satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings. A broader frequency of answer choices was expected. Also, I did prepare that the survey would be completed by both parents of a nuclear family. The two parent responses teetered between agree, neutral, and disagree which substantially impacted the overall data. The other survey participants represented one family. If the data only represented one parent per child, the level of satisfaction would be even greater. Disagree was chosen five times, strongly disagree chosen once with three individuals selecting disagree or strongly disagree as an answer choice. If the data represented one parent's response, disagree would be chosen four times, strongly disagree not chosen with two individuals selected disagree as an answer choice.

My expectations from this study were to provide evidence of interventions that can improve collaborative IEP meetings. Furthermore, I am interested in analyzing the data to determine the pattern of responses from different subgroups that would allow for tailored interventions to be implemented at IEP meetings. It should also be noted that the process provided significant professional and personal growth. In summary, my feelings can be conveyed from a quote in (Vacc et al 1985) study, "The primary reason for holding IEP meetings to parents and professionals work cooperatively to develop comprehension educational plans for children."

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study contributes to the current research as it provides insight into parental satisfaction with collaborative IEP meetings and the need for successful implementation of interventions. The findings include practical interventions to foster improved collaboration, contributing to the overall success of students with disabilities. The insights highlight the importance of continuous improvement in the IEP processes and potential actionable strategies for school districts and educators to implement. The significance of the study is the valuable implications for policy changes, district guidelines, and future research.

Ultimately the study affirms the critical importance of strengthening collaborative IEP meetings for improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Since the primary purpose of an IEP is to ensure that students identified with a disability receive the supports and services, they need to succeed, collaboration leads to better outcomes for students through a stronger partnership between school districts and families.

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APPENDIX A: TITLE OF APPENDIX A

Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

## Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

Ottawa Hills Local Schools is committed to building a strong partnership with parents and in an effort to improve outcomes for students with disabilities your feedback is critical. The purpose of this survey is to gather information on experiences and involvement during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Please provide your feedback by completing this brief survey to help determine best practices for collaborative IEP meetings. All questions require a response with space for your constructive feedback.

Thank you!

\* Indicates required question

1. Email \*

---

2. I understand what the survey is about and agree to participate. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Yes  
 No

Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

3. I am a valued team member during my child's IEP meeting. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. I am encouraged to participate during my child's IEP meeting. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. My child's school district makes sure I understand each section of the IEP document. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

6. Overall, I am satisfied with the extent to which teachers and other professionals explain each section of the IEP. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. As a parent, I have a clear understanding of everyone's role at my child's IEP meeting? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. I feel comfortable asking questions at my child's IEP meeting. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

9. I am treated as an important member of the IEP team. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. During IEP meetings, information is shared and written in an understandable way. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. My child's general education teacher and Intervention Specialist regularly communicate about my child's progress. \*

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Parent Collaboration Feedback Form: Your Experience and Involvement at IEP Meetings.

12. With the intent to improve parent collaboration at IEP meetings, please indicate which opportunities you are interested in participating. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- I am interested in attending a professional development opportunity to learn more about IEPs.
- I am interested in a phone call with an Intervention Specialist prior to my child's IEP meeting.
- I am interested in completing a parent questionnaire to share my thoughts prior to the IEP meeting.
- I am interested in a meeting with an administrator prior to my child's IEP meeting.

13. I am interested in learning more about \*

*Check all that apply.*

- The Evaluation Process
- Special Education Laws and Procedures
- Parental Rights under State and Federal Guidelines
- Community Resources
- None at this time.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What suggestions do you have to increase parent participation and to improve collaboration at IEP meetings? \*

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APPENDIX B: TITLE OF APPENDIX B



# Ottawa Hills

## Local Schools

Dear Parents,

May 1, 2024

Ottawa Hills Local Schools values your involvement at your child's IEP meetings and would like to hear about your experiences. Your willingness to complete this survey will help Ottawa Hills Local Schools improve parental collaboration. The continued goal is to increase positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

The Parent Collaboration Survey is a brief survey that will take less than 10 minutes to complete. The link to the survey is included below and can also be found on the district's website. Please complete the survey by May 30, 2024.

[SURVEY LINK](#)

Please let me know if you have any questions about the survey. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Jill Michaelson  
Director of Student Services  
jmichaelson@ohschools.org