An Examination of the Special Education Cyclical Monitoring Process through a Socio-Technical System's Lens: A Case Study of a Suburban Pittsburgh School District

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Abstract

The current study used a socio-technical system's (STS) lens to examine how a suburban Pittsburgh school district applies the cyclical monitoring process. The use of a qualitative research method to examined how school districts and how school administrators use the cyclical monitoring process in special education to provide a foundation for developing appropriate regulations that guide in ensuring students with special needs receive adequate formal education. The researcher collected and discussed information about the participation of school administrators in using a cyclical monitoring process for decision-making at the district and building level through interviewing. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. All of the participants in this study demonstrated basic knowledge of the CMCI process and the impacts this process has on special education policies, procedures, and practices within the district. While each participant demonstrated a different level of understanding of how compliance monitoring enhances the services and programs offered in the district, all five participants recognized the benefits and needs for the CMCI process. All administrators interviewed described the CMCI process as a positive process to evaluate the district's programming and reflect upon areas that need improvement. Common themes identified in this study included: resources/programming, interventions, and parent engagement. Based on this study, it can be concluded that the increase of administrators' knowledge and participation in the CMCI process will improve compliance with special education regulations as well as improve education for all students with disabilities.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Educational compliance laws are changing at both the state and federal levels and learning institutions for special education must comply with such legislation. The most common education legislation for special education is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). IDEA mandates the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) to monitor school compliance (Osborne & Russo, 2014). The legislation requires that before a student with a disability enrolls for a special education program or any other relevant services under IDEA, the schools should identify the disability and ensure an appropriate individualized education program (IEP) is created and implemented. This can assist in ensuring that all students with special needs receive a quality education (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014).

In Pennsylvania, special education was enacted to improve the learning of students with disabilities. According to Kerr and St. Hill (2012), IDEA was enforced in Pennsylvania school districts to assist in providing unique education and ensure that the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities were met. Historically, there has been frustration in school districts due to the lack of special education and learning resources for students with disabilities. This led to the enforcement of IDEA to assist in ensuring that special education resources are available to help students with special needs access a quality education (Kerr & St. Hill, 2012). Among the special education resources created by IDEA were IEPs, which assisted in ensuring that students with disabilities received free and suitable public education (Kerr & St. Hill, 2012).

Following the need for students with special needs to receive a quality education, a cyclical monitoring process has been established as an essential approach in special education. Cyclical monitoring process helps in ensuring that school districts comply with education regulations, especially for all students in special education programs (Rothstein & Johnson,

2014). Compliance monitoring enables educators to adopt effective instructional and behavioral interventions to support teaching and learning for all students in their class. The cyclical monitoring process is conducted by each states' Bureau of Special Education (BSE). The representatives of BSE monitor compliance with regulation of all school districts to assess the inclusion process for students with special needs (Osborne & Russo, 2014). The monitoring process also helps in ensuring the adoption of IDEA and other applicable state and federal laws of special education is achieved (Osborne & Russo, 2014).

With a focus on special education law and the use of cyclical monitoring process in special education, the current study will use a socio-technical system's (STS) lens to examine how a suburban Pittsburgh school district applies the cyclical monitoring process and what changes, if any, are realized through the cyclical monitoring process. STS is a theory that technology constitutes both social and technical values, both of which work in tandem to find solutions to problems (Appelbaum, 1997; Mumford, 2006; Coiera, 2007). "This framework [STS] views schools as open systems that contain a structural, task, human, and technical subsystem" (Isherwood, Barger-Anderson, & Erikson, 2013, p. 1).

STS will be used throughout this study to assist in determining how these two key values can be applied to a situation to bring about change in the field of education.

Problem Statement

Students with special needs such as those with physical and mental disabilities face isolation from the community and in educational settings. Such students are denied educational opportunities and are forced to attend different learning institutions where they receive a sub-standard education (Brizuela, 2011). The main cause of poor education for students with special needs is the lack of enough exposure and training of school officials on the laws and policies of

special education. According to Sumbera, Pazey, and Lashley (2014), the majority of school principals lack enough training and have less exposure to educational regulations of special education. Consequently, they may lack better insights regarding the processes and strategies to support the introduction of comprehensive special education (Sumbera et al.). Also, school principals may fail or are less prepared to take part in adopting Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for all students including students with disabilities (Sumbera et al.). Building administrators and educators in the suburban Pittsburgh school district, as in others, have experienced a bombardment of educational policies that sometimes change in an untimely manner, and have experienced the ever-changing needs of the students themselves. These situations compounded by scarcities of human resources and teaching resources contribute to the necessity and fidelity of cyclical compliance monitoring in this suburban Pittsburgh school district.

In addition, students with special needs in the U.S. experience isolation due to racial disparities. Brizuela (2011) mentioned that racial inequality in the U.S. public schools segregates students with disabilities. Following such discrimination, the Supreme Court ruled that parents with students with disabilities should challenge the school districts' segregation. In Pennsylvania, the federal court established that there was unconstitutional discrimination against students with disabilities in school districts (Brizuela, 2011). This led to the enactment of FAPE and LRE. FAPE is a key component of the cyclical monitoring process, which is essential in assessing the ability of school districts to deliver educational support for students with disabilities. The implementation of FAPE helps parents, practitioners, and school administrators to ensure that the requirements of students with special needs, in the context of school responsibilities and school system resources, are met through the introduction of an IEP (Zirkel,

2013). FAPE facilitates the introduction of an IEP that fosters the inclusion of students with special needs in the regular learning environment and caters to all the needs of students with disabilities in the special education program (Brizuela, 2011).

The provision of FAPE in public schools is a key concern of federal and state regulations for special education. FAPE adoption is an important IDEA requirement, which is helpful in monitoring compliance with educational laws (Zirkel, 2013). Despite the significance of state and federal regulations, there is limited research that addresses compliance monitoring and how school districts use the cyclical monitoring process for creating changes in the special education setting. There is a lack of evidence to explain the application of the cyclical monitoring process in regard to current practices, procedures, and policies in association with compliance in the special education program. There is inadequate evidence on the use of the cyclical monitoring process because the process differs across individual states (Zirkel, 2013). Since cyclical monitoring is mandatory, with the aim of including students with special needs, this study will examine the specific challenges iterated above that a suburban Pittsburgh school district encountered while developing and implementing special education programing. The study will examine and report the techniques and strategies used by teachers and school administrators to ensure successful inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools. The cyclical monitoring process for special education and inclusion of students with disabilities will be examined using the Socio-Technical System's Lens theory with a focus on the four main subsystems of task, structural, human, and technical subsystems.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the application of the cyclical monitoring process in a suburban Pittsburgh school district. As society, which consists of tasks (goals), structure

(organization, institutional arrangements), humanity (users, managers, and designers), and technical subsystems (development tools and platforms) primarily drives technological change, technological change also in turn shapes society; therefore, the specific use of the socio-technical system's lens to study the application of cyclical monitoring process in the suburban Pittsburgh school district, where the task, structural, human, and technical subsystems within the school environment are examined to understand the current practices, education policies, and procedures in association with liability and compliance in special education, was the appropriate theory to use.

The researcher will collect and discuss information about the participation of school administrators in using a cyclical monitoring process for decision-making at the district and building level, guided by the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What impact does the cyclical monitoring process have on the school districts' current practices, education policies, and procedures in association with liability and compliance in special education?
2. How does the cyclical monitoring process influence the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems in schools?

Definition of Terms

Compliance monitoring: Compliance monitoring is the practice of examining the ability to provide sufficient support in special education (Sumbera et al., 2014)

Cyclical Compliance Monitoring: The Bureau of Special Education (BSE) monitors all school districts and charter schools in the state to ensure that they are complying with federal and state special education regulations and are improving performance outcomes of students with

disabilities. All programs are monitored at least once over a six-year cycle. Monitoring is conducted onsite by a team of trained personnel. Following the onsite monitoring, the BSE sends a report of findings to the school district or charter school. If noncompliance has been found, it must be corrected as soon as possible but no later than one year from the report. School districts and charter schools may also be required to engage in improvement planning to address substantive changes over time, e.g. improvement in graduation rates. Improvement plans may require more than one year from initiation to completion. The BSE works with the local program to ensure that resources are in place to assist the local education agency and verifies completion of all corrective action and improvement plans (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2020).

Free Appropriate Public Education: Free appropriate public education (FAPE) is a right-to-education for all students in the U.S. and is guaranteed for students with special needs (Zirkel, 2013).

Individualized Education Program: An individualized education program (IEP) is an education plan through which parents of students with disabilities discuss and examine the academic and functional performances of their students. This program is highly focused on evaluating and designing appropriate teaching and learning strategies that support and guide in achieving educational needs of students with special needs (Kerr & St. Hill, 2011).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is an educational legislation developed with the aim of ensuring all students with special needs receive free appropriate public education. It is a legislation which ensures that the unique needs of disabled students are met in the least restrictive learning environment (Osborne & Russo, 2014).

Least Restrictive Environment: The least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to the practice of providing students with disabilities the opportunity to receive education or learn with non-disabled students within the same education settings or classroom. It is the key principle of ensuring students with intellectual disabilities receives an equal education like students without special needs (Sumbera et al., 2014).

Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Students: Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Students (PARC) refers to educational legislation that guarantees students with disabilities the right to education. It is a Pennsylvania law that enjoins all district schools from denying formal education to the intellectually disabled students (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014).

Special education: Special education is a formal education program available in learning institutions to assist students with special needs. This education is provided once a student is already suspected or has been identified to have a disability (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014).

Significance of the Problem

This study could help in the understanding the application of the cyclical monitoring process and its influence on special education in similar school districts. An investigation of how school districts and how school administrators use the cyclical monitoring process in special education should provide a foundation for developing appropriate regulations that guide in ensuring students with special needs receive adequate formal education. The results that will be obtained in the study could assist the policymakers in special education in creating policies to ensure that each school district has cyclical compliance monitoring to improve education for all students with disabilities. Also, the results of this study should be beneficial in understanding the application of monitoring tools in special education and how this monitoring process is applicable in the current practices of special education. This study should also provide a better

understanding of how cyclical compliance monitoring influences the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems in schools. The results can provide understandings on the challenges that school districts encounter in the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems, while creating a more compliant school environment for students with special needs. Understanding such encounters will help in examining appropriate components that schools can adopt for successful inclusion of students with disabilities in school districts.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of any research study are the weaknesses in the research that can affect the external and internal validity of the study results. They are specific characteristics of methodology which influence the interpretation of the research findings (Bui, 2014). The first limitation of the research is that the chosen school district for the case study might be contextually different from other school districts in Pennsylvania. Thus, the findings that could be obtained in this study may not be applicable to other school districts. Also, the findings of a case study cannot be generalized (Yin, 2013). The respondents may also provide bias views rather than genuine perceptions to look competent to the investigator. The problem will be overcome by informing the study participants the aim of collecting their views and that there will be no wrong answers to the questions. Conversely, the participants are from the same school district, hence, there is a possibility that they may discuss the study prior to the study. As such, the responses provided may be similar and biased.

Summary

The introduction of special education has been established as a key aspect of improving educational achievement among students with disabilities. The special education program assists students with disabilities to access free and appropriate education like students without

disabilities. The implementation of educational regulation for special education helps students with special needs to get free and suitable education like other students. In Pennsylvania, the enactment of educational regulations like IDEA and PARC allows school districts to ensure students with special needs are provided with formal education. The introduction of instructional teaching strategies for students with special needs guarantees that the special needs of those students are met. Chapter 1 covered educational regulations for special education and outlined the relevance of IDEA and significant contributions in enhancing compliance monitoring process. The roles of building administrators with regards to the introduction of special education programs were also briefly discussed. Chapter 1 also outlined the study problem, purpose, basic assumptions, and limitations. A definition of key terms was also provided.

Chapter 2 presents the review of related literature in the domain of special education. The chapter reviews the special education cyclical monitoring process considering the research questions to identify the gap in the literature, which will provide a framework for carrying out the study. The chapter thus outlines the theoretical framework that will guide the study and the current literature that best explains the questions developed for the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Historical Background

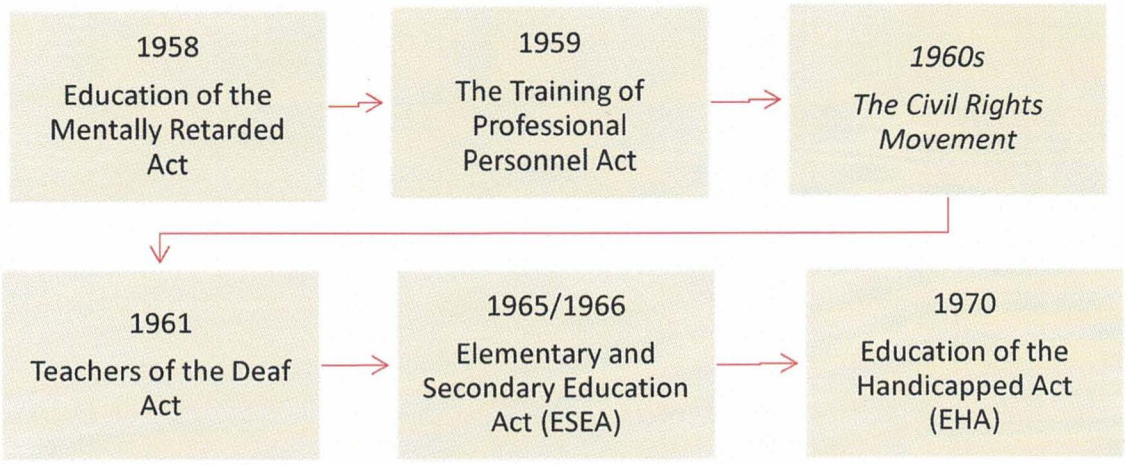
Historically, students with special needs were excluded in most schools. Schools that included them provided learning in separate settings in which the quality of education services and the expectations were low (Weber, 2014). As students were admitted to learning institutions, the norm in such settings was segregation, where access to basic education curriculum was restricted. This segregation as well as the undesirable locations of learning settings for students with disabilities contributed to the establishment and social engagement of advocacy groups which were significant in the development of special education for students with special needs (e.g., Robinson, 2018). Through such isolation, political actions led to the statutory changes through which the majority of students with disabilities were required to be included in educational settings and received basic educational services (Weber, 2014). The disability advocacy and the introduction of the special education program took place where the reformers of educational curriculum engaged in transforming the plight of disabled people in the U.S. (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015, abstract). The reformers engaged in improving the educational backgrounds of students with disabilities by changing the societal attitudes, developing legal rights for individuals with disabilities, and ensuring that training and proper education were provided to the disabled people (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015, abstract). During the 19th Century, the societal attitudes shifted and focused on the requirement that institutions train personnel and provide special education to students with disabilities. This led to the establishment of education policies with the aim of safeguarding the educational rights of people needing special education.

The establishment of special education programs was more focused on providing formal education that met the special needs of students with disabilities. The development of special education, in the early 20th Century, was created through the establishment of education legislation. Many scholars indicated that the legislation for special education began in 1960s (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). However, the first legislation to be enacted in the U.S. for students with disabilities was in 1958, through the establishment of Education of the Mentally Retarded Students Act. The legislation required all school districts that were provided with federal funding to deliver equal access to education for handicapped students. The law also mandated that students with disabilities be educated in the LRE. Also, the Act (1958) allowed the provision of funds for teachers to be trained on how to work with students with mental retardation. In addition, training programs in mental retardation were introduced to assist teachers on how to educate handicapped students (Barnow, Trutko, & Piatak, 2013), The training also provided better skills to teachers to use specific instructional strategies to improve the learning achievement of students with disabilities (Barnow et al.). After the establishment of the Education of the Mentally Retarded Students Act of 1958, the Training of Professional Personnel Act of 1959 was developed with the aim of supporting the training programs for teachers working with handicapped students (Cook, 2014). The Act (1959) was developed to assist the training of leaders in teaching mentally challenged students. In addition, the Teachers of the Deaf Act was developed in 1961 and was focused on training teachers on instructional personnel to assist students who had hearing difficulties or were deaf (Barnow et al.).

Another education legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was developed in 1965 and amended in 1966 to support the funding of students with special needs. ESEA (1965) provided support in raising funds for the development of special education services to assist students with disabilities. ESEA (1965) was later changed to Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), in 1970, to help in elevating the federal subsidies, which supported the provision of special education across various public school districts). The Civil Rights Movement was established in the 1960s with an aim of providing momentum to the societal attitude towards students who were handicapped (Ostendorf, 2011). The law was a Supreme Court landmark in the U.S. that was set up to overturn the decisions made by *Plessy v. Fergusson* (163U.S.537 1896), a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws for public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality – a doctrine that came to be known as "separate but equal" (Jager, n.d., p. 1). In Pennsylvania, the Board of Education used this law to declare the development of public schools for all students. The law ensured that there were unconditional conditions for students to benefit from educational services. These schools were authorized to deliver equal education to all students including the handicapped. Ostendorf (2011) explained that the development of the Civil Rights Movement responded to the barriers of special education hence setting precedence for disabled students not to be segregated but to be included in the general education programs.

The following illustration Timeline depicts the landmark dates and acts/movements in special education.

Timeline of Landmark Special Education Acts



In 1971, PARC sued the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (*PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* 334 F. Supp. 1257 1972) regarding the state law which authorized the public schools to deny specific students access to educational services (Null & Null, 2014). Students with disabilities who had reached age five were denied the right for education because they were considered burdensome to incorporate into the classroom and school environment. PARC served as the landmark against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for failing to deliver a proper education to the handicapped students. The establishment of PARC led to the provision of consent through which all students including students with disabilities received education. The decision made by PARC motivated other parties such as *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (348 F. Supp. 866 1972) to act against the segregation of students with mental challenges. In addition, the ruling made by PARC led to the adoption of education practice in which students were not excluded from the school environment based on their disabilities (Bakken & Obiakor, 2015). According to Robinson (2018), PARC had significant evidence regarding education in public schools. The law led to the rejection of former laws that were

considered unconstitutional and all schools in the state were required to deliver free public education to each student between ages six and 21. In addition, the state was requested to provide enough education and training service to the handicapped students on a level equal to those provided to their nondisabled peers. With these new requirements, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was required to provide access to free public education programs and training for any disabled student.

After *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (334 F. Supp. 1257 1972), the family and friends of Peter Mills and more students brought the case before the United States Court of the District of Columbia in 1972 (Null & Null, 2014). The case involved a student who was excluded from the school district because of behavioral problems. As such, providing education was found costly and was seen to present undue hardships. The court ruled that no students eligible for the free public education could be rejected from any educational services without providing alternative methods to meet the needs of every student. Additionally, Robinson (2018) noted that following the case set by the *Mills v. District of Columbia* (348 F. Supp. 866 1972), the court judge ordered school districts to provide free education which was suitable for all school-aged students regardless of their disabilities. The judge also ordered the school districts to desist from appending a student for over two days without a hearing and to provide supported educational services that are tailored to meet the needs of all students (Null & Null, 2014).

In relation to *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (334 F. Supp. 1257 1972), the Rehabilitation Act was also enacted in 1973 as a way of protecting all people with disabilities. The law prevented any form of discrimination against such individuals (Null & Null, 2014). The law required the school districts to deliver FAPE to all the qualified students in the jurisdiction who were identified to be mentally retarded and limited to one or more life activities (Robinson,

2018). Following the Section 504 of the Act (1973), FAPE was more focused on ensuring that all students with mental impairment receive special or regular education and other related services which were designed to meet the individual needs for the students with disabilities (e.g., Robinson, 2018).

The Education for All Handicapped Students Act (EHA) was established in 1975, which mandated the provision of FAPE in the United States. EHA (1975), also termed as the PL-94-142, was established by the United States Congress for all students including the handicapped to ensure all public schools provide free education (Bakken, Obiakor, & Rotatori, 2013). EHA (1975) mandated all public school districts to accept federal funds so that all students, especially the handicapped students, find easy access to equal and quality education. EHA (1975) was developed to provide assurance of the availability and accessibility to FAPE, which emphasized special education programs that meet the unique needs of those students (Parry, 2008). Also, EHA (1975) was developed to assure that the protection of rights of students with special needs and their parents, to help the states as well as localities in delivering free special education of all handicapped students, and to evaluate and assure the adoption of effective efforts to educate students with disabilities (Bakken et al.).

The Education Amendments of the Public Law 93-380 were also endorsed so that all states that are provided with funds deliver full educational chances for the handicapped students and talented or gifted students. The Amendment was the first initiative to be established nationally to ensure the rights and the special needs of students with disabilities were addressed. Public Law 93-380 mandated that the education for students with disabilities was provided in the LRE. However, the law was not adequately enforced. Subsequently, another legislation for special education was developed since most of the students with disabilities were still not

receiving the required educational services. The Education Advocates Coalition on Federal Compliance Activities to Implement the Education for All Handicapped Students Act (EAHCA) recognized that many students with disabilities were not getting the required educational services, and most were also segregated without providing any extra education services (Robinson, 2018), thus, the lives of these students remained unchanged. In 1984, the U.S. Department of Education found that very few students with disabilities were receiving education inside public schools and were not being educated in general classrooms. This led to the development of IDEA in 1990 (Robinson, 2018).

IDEA was enacted in 1990 to protect the educational rights for students with autism and traumatic brain injury. The law led to the establishment of teaching instructions where the needs for transition plans were established as part of students learning by age four. IDEA was federally funded in public schools and was mandated to ensure students with disabilities had access to free special education. The federal funds helped teachers and school administrators with limited knowledge about special education to acquire additional training (Null & Null, 2014). IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 to ensure disabled students were included in the district-wide and state-wide assessments. This reauthorization of IDEA for special education was signed and included new requirements and several clarifications such as the development of coordinated early intervening services (CEIS), ensuring state performance plans and annual performance reports (SPP/APR), the provision of summary of performance (SOP), providing resolution services to dispute rulings, and transforming secondary transition services for students ages 14 to 16 (Kauffman, Hallahan, & Cullen Pullen, 2017). The reauthorization took place in 2004 and the EAHCA was used as the key foundation of IDEA legislation. In 2008, IDEA 2004 was implemented by the ED as a non-regulatory guideline which strengthened the Code of Federal

Regulations 34 CRF. This ensured that special education and related programs were continued following the adoption of parental revocation. The regulation also aimed to provide supplemental regulations where parents and school districts aimed at promoting parental revocation (Robinson, 2018). IDEA was released in 2016 to the public for final regulations and is still the key regulation for special education today. The final regulation of IDEA was procured in 2016 in order to promote equity by considering the prevalent disparities faced by students with special needs. Following this final regulation, special education for students with disabilities in the U.S. was created more effectively by ensuring that all students with disabilities had access to special education curriculum and the parental roles and families were strengthened so that students obtained meaningful opportunity to be included. In addition, the regulation led to the establishment of special education in a way that students with special needs received enough support in regular classrooms. Also, the education was designed to ensure students with disabilities find high-quality education and intensive pre-service programs for professional development among teachers working with students with disabilities. The special education program was developed to ensure that teachers use appropriate teaching and learning resources that support the achievement of special needs for students who have disabilities. In relation to the application of IDEA in special education, the state and local school districts are mandated to exercise authority over special education by setting up school regulations and monitoring compliance which are governed by the federal government (Kauffman et al.). Besides, Javier (2005) mentioned that the regulation of IDEA in the FAPE is more focused on compliance monitoring through which the state performance goals and the participation of students with special needs are considered to ensure these students find free special education. The strict requirements for compliance regulation are set by the federal statutes which mandate the delivery

of special needs. Most states are required to be contented with their obligations in ensuring that they achieve the needs of students with disabilities. Similarly, Kauffman et al. pointed out that with the adoption of compliance monitoring following the regulation of IDEA and FAPE for students with special needs, the success of special education is reviewed based on the satisfaction of procedural safeguards and the correct steps are undertaken for educational services.

Theoretical Framework

The socio-technical theory was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The theory was developed in 1946 by the Tavistock Institute and was used in the1950s to balance between social and technical systems in the organizations in order to achieve the desired innovation goals (Ghaffarian, 2011). The socio-technical theory provides a general analysis of organizational structure by considering the interaction between organizational infrastructure and human behavior (Ghaffarian, 2011). The theory comprises six constructs:

- compatibility;
- minimal critical specification;
- boundary location;
- support congruence;
- multifunctionality principle; and
- variances principle or socio-technical criterion (Lapke, 2010)

Figure 1 illustrates and simplifies the Socio-technical Theory.

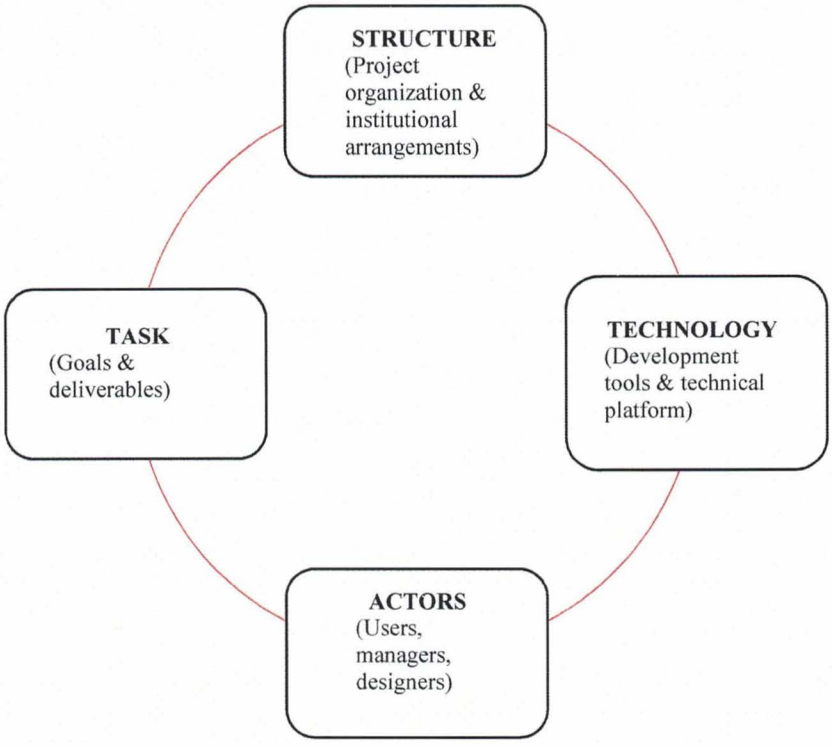


Figure 1. A Socio-techinical Model of Systems Development Structure (Lapke, 2010)

The principle of compatibility emphasizes that the system-design process should align with the goals of the problem under study. The building administrators and teachers in the suburban Pittsburgh school district, must determine the desired goal(s) first, which is the assurance and feasibility that all special needs students will be delivered a FAPE in the LRE, and, in spite of human and teaching scarcities, barrages of new policies and changes, and lack of building administrators' experiences in special education, will meet the needs and meet PDE audit requirements.

The design process involves the participation of stakeholders (actors) in planning and designing the system. The design process is mainly concerned with the alignment of the adopted system and the prevailing organizational culture, which includes this suburban Pittsburgh school district's administrators, board of education, and those human entities of grants, funding, etc.

The minimal critical specification holds that, in the designing process, the system designers should ensure flexibility and feasibility of the system so that the users (teachers) can be able to match them with work duties (Ghaffarian, 2011). The specification provides the opportunity to configure the systems to meet the special needs of the users, which are ever-changing due to the constant evolving of the students' needs. Suburban Pittsburgh regular education teachers, in this study, must work with both disabled and non-disabled students on a daily basis without the support of an instructional aid. They experience, daily, the populated classroom of special-needs students and regular education students with no assistants and one special education teacher in the study's school district.

The principle of boundary location or support involves power and authority. It insists that the organizations should provide easier access to the resources and authority that is necessary for implementing responsibilities. Organizations providing funds, resources, or grants, should be frequently and flexibly accessible to faculty and administration, to meet needs/goals of special needs students and lessen voids of human/teaching resources. The principle of boundary location suggests that school leaders should practice fidelity and good stewardship with all school and human resources.

Support congruence emphasizes the need to align the support systems with subsystems. The organizations are required to ensure that behavioral aspects are consistent with the organizational goals. Parent participation, planning, support in IEPs, and continuing progress of their students with special needs are an important part of the support team, and support of the district as well as their students.

The multifunctionality principle emphasizes that for groups to adjust to the changes in the organization, they should be provided with different skills that go beyond their daily activities'

needs. Even with IEPs, regular classroom teachers, along with the teaching requirements for typical students (without special needs) are not instructed in special education teaching methods in undergraduate school settings. Skill sets differ profusely. With provision of co-teaching, mandatory workshop-type offerings, etc., skills must be explained and taught in order for classroom teachers to ensure and comply with FAPE for all students, especially those with special needs.

The principle of socio-technical criterion accentuates that the variances should be controlled at the beginning. This entails the devising of a solution to the problem directly to the groups experiencing the problem and not to the supervisory groups.

The socio-technical system theory was used in this study because it is appropriate in advancing the adoption of educational regulations that meet the special needs of students with disabilities. The framework will help in determining how public schools ensure the alignment between the students with and without disabilities based on the adoption of educational regulations. In addition, the framework will help in establishing how the flexibility of regulation compliance and accountability influences public schools with respect to students with special needs. The study will use the socio-technical theory to advance power and authority by determining how school districts in Pennsylvania can strike a balance between the needs of students with and without disabilities in the management of school resources.

Current Literature Relevant to Research Questions

A literature search with academic libraries was conducted to find the current studies related to the research questions. The EBSCOhost library database was used to find relevant articles. Additional academic libraries such as ProQuest and Emerald, and the review of the reference lists of relevant articles were used to find pertinent literature to discuss the research

topic. Keywords were developed to assist in the search process. These key phrases included special education, compliance monitoring, IDEA and compliance monitoring, cyclical monitoring process and special education, and cyclical monitoring for continuous improvement of special education. The search was limited to academic articles published between 2008 and 2018, and to full-text, peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports published in the English language. The abstracts of the identified articles were reviewed to screen the sources relevant to the study. The eligible articles deemed suitable in addressing the research questions were used for final review. The articles were considered relevant to the study if they clearly addressed special education, monitoring, compliance, monitoring, and accountability.

Educational Legislation and Regulations for Special Education

No Student Left Behind Law. The U.S. Department of Education focused on the utilization of No Student Left Behind (NCLB) law to ensure the accountability of free education to all students including students with disabilities (Wrabel, Saultz, Polikoff, McEachin, & Duque, 2018). In the suburban Pittsburgh school district of this study, NCLB provided for inclusion, once known as mainstreaming, and co-teaching, with special education teachers, in regular classrooms. NCLB also created successful ways for inclusion of students with disabilities back into general education setting. In doing so, PDE requirements were met in the research site. However, as the inclusion to general education was accomplished and PDE requirements were met, there were no guarantees that those students who experienced inclusion retained or enhanced any of the knowledge they acquired.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and NCLB. The federal government depends on the cooperation between the states' departments of education to adopt the NCLB as the policy initiative for constitutional authority to provide equal education to all

students including those with disabilities (Wrabel et al.). The NCLB is the reauthorization of ESEA that mandated all states to develop educational standards that support all students (McGuinn, 2016). The NCLB law requires that students with disabilities are not segregated regardless of their ethnicity and disadvantaged status for equal academic performances (McGuinn, 2016).

Based on the NCLB regulation, the accountability requirements for special education requires the federal and state government to ensure a greater flexibility by introducing important ways in accountability systems. The schools, under the ESSA regulation, are needed to adopt the accountability provision for students with disabilities by ensuring teachers' effectiveness and the development of statewide plans are achieved for equitable distribution of special education programs in public schools (Saultz et al., 2017).

The NCLB and ESEA allowed school districts in local areas to establish funds and academic policy to enhance equity for minority groups, including students with special needs (Saultz, Fusarelli, & McEachin, 2017). Following the enactment of ESEA, supplemental funds were provided by the federal government to assist education accessibility for at-risk students. The funding was provided to support the accountability and control of education for students who require special education (Saultz et al.). Similarly, the NCLB regulation required that all teachers in educational settings were proficient and had subject-specific knowledge in order to provide quality education that meets the needs of the disadvantaged students.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The procedural protection of education for students with disabilities under IDEA focuses on monitoring compliance with educational procedures to measure student performance (Hunt, 2010). This procedural protection makes accountability and compliance in measuring student performance more perfunctory for all

special education teachers under IDEA. Teaching staff and administrators in the suburban Pennsylvania school district are held accountable and do measure (AYP, standardized testing, etc.) with fidelity through cyclical monitoring compliance thus providing a high-quality education for students with disabilities.

Inclusion. The inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities in American schools is a fundamental aspect of supporting accountability-based assessments for educational achievement. To raise the academic achievements of students with disabilities, the NCLB regulatory framework requires schools to use accountability requirements to close the achievement gaps of those students (Fitzgerald, 2012).Through the reauthorization of IDEA, the decisions to include disabled students in state-wide school practices and other forms of accountability indicated a shared responsibility of special education teachers in enhancing students' performances (Smith & Douglas, 2014). Student participation in the LRE environment is an area of compliance in the cyclical monitoring. Educational laws in public school districts guaranteed that students with special needs received education in regular classrooms, were provided support from highly qualified teachers, and ensured that teachers provided education based on the individual needs of students with disabilities. According to Russak (2016), the inclusion of educational laws in local schools facilitated the provision of adequate education to students with special needs. The efforts from federal regulations mainly focused on delivering equal educational resources and protection for all students including those with special needs (Wrabel et al., 2018). Co-teaching is in effect inclusion practice which provides students with disabilities the necessary support in the general education classroom. This model allows the general education teacher to function as the academic content expert while the special education teacher functions as the special education expert. This type of co-teaching model allows for

differentiated instruction to offer in the general education classroom. Additionally, the special education teacher is able to ensure that the specially designed instruction is appropriately implemented to support students with disabilities.

Inequity in special education. Despite the significance of IDEA ensuring NCLB was developed for all students, including the disabled, there was and is inequity in special education. Wakelin (2008) mentioned that the special education services varied due to the inequality in the adoption of IDEA, which required that the policies of distributing federal funds were developed by all states and delivered to the local school districts. Schools had to utilize the funds in designing and providing compliant special education services (Robinson, 2018). Since these school districts governed the special education programs, the breadth of adopting the services was reflected on the school community demographics. Subsequently, there was and is an egregious deficiency (inequity) of special education in school districts with high poverty levels where the students with disabilities were widely distributed (Wakelin, 2008). In addition, the inequity of implementing IDEA for federal legislation and regulation in special education was associated with the discrepancies in structuring IDEA and disagreement on parental participation in IEPs. Mueller (2015) asserted that while laws and regulations encouraged the participation of parents in IEP meetings, the inflexible scheduling in IEPs resulted in many parents being overwhelmed by their participation in designing special education programs and feeling unequal to the teaching professionals. As a result, the power imbalance hindered the adoption of successful IDEA programing that promoted special education programs. Similarly, the inequality hindered the enforcement of IDEA in some school districts. The cyclical monitoring process used by the suburban Pennsylvania school district of this study provides equal opportunity for students with disabilities to have the opportunities to participate in the same courses as their

peers. Wakelin (2008) explained that due to inherent problems, the enforcement of IDEA by federal statutes for many students with disabilities failed since IDEA was not used with fidelity. The enforcement of IDEA by the state government was also ineffective and parental participation was weak since many parents lacked an adequate knowledge about their procedural safeguards. Parents felt incompetent and felt unequal in bringing up due process claims for their students with disabilities. These factors hindered parents from getting legal assistance hence limiting access to free and appropriate special education programs for their students (Wakelin, 2008).

Federal Legislation and Regulations about Accountability in Special Education

The key focus of implementing NCLB was to ensure that states developed the accountability systems which ensured student testing per year and the achievement of education standards by students with disabilities. IDEA and NCLB regulatory frameworks put emphasis on accountability in general education curriculum with a focus on accountability for disabled students. The implementation of IDEA and the ESEA had significant roles in educational accountability of special education. IDEA ensured legislation alignment with transition services, post-secondary goal achievement, and the achievement of overall legislation purposes in special education. IDEA provided alignment with NCLB in terms of compliance and challenges associated with the adoption and maintenance of education compliance that is based on state and federal regulations. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 did not provide substantive changes but ensured the alignment of special education programs with the NCLB (Robinson, 2018).

The adoption of the statewide assessment provided student performance measurement in every school district (Jewell, 2008). The special education teachers perform an annual assessment of students using the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to determine the yearly gains

for school districts. The NCLB aim for students with disabilities is important in improving the proficiency in different subjects like math and reading (Fitzgerald, 2012). Following the amendment of IDEA, the participation rates of students with disabilities in the statewide assessment increased. In school districts that do not meet AYP, some consequences are stipulated which lead to the improvement of special education curriculum such as provision of student performance through public reporting, development of a corrective plan of action, and facing sanctions such as the dismissal or reassignment of staff, loss of school accreditation, and closure (McGuinn, 2016).

The NCLB ensures that schools adopt an assessment strategy that assists in not only testing students without disabilities but also test the students with disabilities. This helps in establishing the proficiency goals of disabled students and their level of education achievement (Fitzgerald, 2012). These frameworks require that all school students, including students with disabilities, take part in yearly testing for academic assessment. This helps in allowing the schools to put emphasis on federal policy that promotes the inclusion of students with mental impairment (Bouck, 2009). The accountability policies in special education show significant support for students with disabilities. According to Smith and Douglas (2014), the ability of schools to be accountable for the academic progress of students with special education needs and disability had indicated a positive influence in enhancing a positive change in the educational curriculum.

In relation to the federal accountability in special education, all school administrators including school leaders are required to comply with the requirements of the regulatory framework (Lock & Lummis, 2014). Schools are required to meet compliance requirements as stated in the regulation and legislation landmarks of special education (Lock & Lummis, 2014).

NCLB is among the regulatory framework that guarantees accountability in special education and the reauthorization of ESEA as the NCLB in special education requires more accountability in order to promote equity among the disadvantaged students including those with special needs (Saultz et al., 2017). The regularity framework also guaranteed that students with special educational needs and disability should find a balance in accountability measures. This standards'-driven accountability for students with special needs promoted the inclusion of students in free special education (Smith & Douglas, 2014).

The accountability systems for special education have thus evolved placing a greater emphasis on compliance monitoring. Jacob (2017) mentioned that with respect to the NCLB accountability strategy, students are reclassified into educational programs such as special education where students are not subjected to accountability provisions. Therefore, accountability in the general education should be the main concern to ensure compliance with legal procedures and the maintenance of individualized accountability that is associated with the performance of students and the achievement of IEP goals in special education programs (Jacob, 2017).

McGuinn (2016) explained that the reauthorization of ESEA-NCLB by President Barack Obama was an important step towards enhancing accountability systems in special education. It led to the establishment of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This is the new law that was developed under the Obama administration to expand career-readiness of all students including students with special needs (Saultz et al., 2017). The law ensures the achievement of state-driven performance for students, school ratings, the achievement of equal dedicated funding for the schools that are performing poorly, and the adoption of innovative systems and supportive mechanism in special education programs (Saultz et al.). Following the NCLB accountability

system, the school districts are mandated to provide standardized tests in reading and math for improved proficiency of all students (Jacob, 2017). The legislation requires that all states report the performance of all students yearly to assist in estimating the number of students that meet the proficiency standards. The mandated groups for this NCLB-accountability system are students with special needs and other students with learning disabilities (Jacob, 2017).

Tables 1, 2, and 3 reflect the state of Pennsylvania's Districts' assessment data obtained from the PA Future Ready Index for school year 2018-2019 in the site district (PDE, 2018b). These data serve as an example of what Pennsylvania's accountability system examines and monitors when determining proficiency. These data are a substantiation of the three research site districts' progress as assessed using the Keystone Exams and the PSSAs. Proficiency is evaluated at the district level, building level, and subgroup level. These particular data reflect the site District's performance on state assessment measures for the mandated subgroup: students with disabilities. Data are used to evaluate if students performance status is proficient or advanced on PSSAs in areas of English language arts/literature, mathematics/algebra, science/biology, and college/career readiness.

Table 1

District I Scores on PSSAs from 2018-2019

	State Average	SWD Average	Advanced on PSSAs	Increase from previous year	Decrease from previous year
Eng./Lit.	62.1%	17.3%			X
Math/Alg.	45.2%	12.0%			(State goal not met)
Sci./Bio.	66.0%	24.1%	3.4% (Increase/decrease from previous year not available)		X
College/Career Measure	89.8%	100.0%		X	

Note. SWD = Students With Disabilities; IS = Insufficient Sample. Retrieved from https://futurereadypa.org/

Table 2

District II Scores on PSSAs from 2018-2019

	State Average	**SWD Average**	**Advanced on PSSAs**	**Increase from previous year**	**Decrease from previous year**
Eng./Lit.	62.1%	45.7%	8.7% (Increase/Decrease from previous year not available)	X	
Math/Alg.	45.2%	32.6%	10.9% (Increase/Decrease from previous year not available)	X	
Sci./Bio.	(IS)				
College/Career Measure	(IS)				

Note. SWD = Students With Disabilities; IS = Insufficient Sample. Retrieved from https://futurereadypa.org/

Table 3

District III Scores on PSSAs from 2018-2019

	State Average	**SWD Average**	**Advanced on PSSAs**	**Increase from previous year**	**Decrease from previous year**
Eng./Lit.	62.1%	35.5%	9.7% (Increase/Decrease from previous year not available)	X	
Math/Alg.	45.2%	22.6%	0.0% (Increase/Decrease from previous year not available)	X	
Sci./Bio.	(IS)				
College/Career Measure	(IS)				

Note. SWD = Students With Disabilities; IS = Insufficient Sample. Retrieved from https://futurereadypa.org/

These data displayed in Tables 1, 2, and 3, enforced by the NCLB accountability system, Cyclical Monitoring Process, hold the site Districts accountable in meeting annual academic growth expectations and actual measured growth in these subject areas. The mandated groups for this NCLB-accountability system are students with special needs and other students with learning disabilities as stated by Jacob (2017). This mandated group must receive equal, high-quality educational opportunities and manifestation of those opportunities in every classroom.

Although the law, whether original, or re-authorized establishes the *right* (emphasis mine), determines mandates, ensures performance achievement, school ratings, and a litany of other supportive systems, there are no insurances of any of these without cyclical compliance monitoring to hold accountable the "actors" (see Figure 1) in special education.

Compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Compliance monitoring is achieved by using appropriate measurable indicators to reflect the provision of FAPE, the application of process systems, and unequal representation of minority students within the special education due to an improper identification (Wakelin, 2008). Compliance with IDEA legislation, which provided for FAPE, requires that educational institutions provide suitable support and learning services to students with disabilities through the establishment of IEPs. IDEA regulations aim at ensuring the students with disabilities are granted the civil rights law in special education program (Robinson, 2018). According to Wakelin (2008), all states are authorized by IDEA to examine the local compliance of school districts through the local educational agency (LEA) and are mandated to monitor the compliance in all schools to ensure that students with disabilities receive maximum education in the LRE and that all students with special needs are provided with FAPE. Contemporary education for students with disabilities has changed from the administration of basic services to improving the educational performance

and documenting educational outcomes. To ensure compliance monitoring in special education, IDEA requires teachers and school administrators in special education settings to focus on achieving procedural requirements of FAPE to disability students and to aid the parents of respective students to find meaningful participation in the process of special education programs (Yell, Katsiyannis, Ryan, McDuffie, & Mattocks, 2008). Achieving IDEA procedural requirements thus promotes the ability of state and federal educational agencies to remain focused on compliance monitoring for the success of student with disabilities (Gaumer Erickson, Noonan, Brussow, & Gilpin, 2014).

With the reauthorization of ESEA into NCLB, the majority of state educational agencies are using the common core state standards in conjunction with corresponding annual assessment to further the focus on compliance for students with special needs (Gaumer Erickson et al., 2014). Following these procedural requirements by IDEA, special education teachers and administrators are mandated to adhere to the procedures so that the violation of procedural rights for students with special needs are eliminated and the parents get the opportunity to be involved in the special education procedures (Yell et al., 2008). For successful monitoring of special education for students with disabilities, IDEA suggested that state education agencies should participate in monitoring local educational agencies (Wakelin, 2008).

Compliance with IDEA for mandated monitoring in special education is comprised of four different parts. Table 1 provides a visual of those four parts.

Table 4

Four Parts of IDEA Compliance

Part A	Defines terms used within the Act as well as providing for the creation of the Office of Special Education Programs, which is responsible for the administering and carrying out the terms of IDEA (IDEA, 1997)
Part B	Lays out the educational guidelines for school students 3-21 years old. By law, states are required to educate students with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). IDEA provides financial support for state/local school districts. Compliance must be with 6 main IDEA principles: • FAPE • When a school profession believes a student may have a disability that has substantial impact on the student's learning or behavior, the student is entitled to an evaluation in all areas related to the suspected disability. • IEPs • LRE • Input of student and parents must be taken into account in the educational process. • Parental ability to challenge their student's treatment (due process) if they feel IEP is inappropriate or their student is not receiving needed services. (Jacob, Decker, & Hartshorne, 2011; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015)
Part C	• Recognizes early identification and reaching very young students with disabilities. Provides funding guidelines and services provided to students from birth through age 2. Families are entitled to several services through Part C. • Appropriate, timely and multidisciplinary identification and intervention services for their very young students, made available to all families with infants and toddlers • Requirement of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) which explains priorities, resources and concerns of the student and steps for eventual transitioning to formal education • Family right to participate in the IFSP creation and consent prior to initiation of intervention services • Timely resolution of all conflicts or complaints regarding evaluation or services provided to their student
Part D	Describes national activities undertaken to improve education of students with disabilities including grants to improve the education and transitional services for students with disabilities as well as providing resources to support programs, projects and activities which contribute positive results for students with disabilities (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Jacob et al.)

Note. Paraphrased from American Psychological Association. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/advocacy/education/idea/

The authorized compliance-monitoring, based on the implementation process within the federal government, the state government, and the judicial system is included in part B of IDEA provisions and was meant to respond to individual and systemic issues linked to compliance (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). This section of IDEA entails the protection of procedural rights of students with disabilities and these protection practices were established with an aim to making sure the rights of all students with disabilities were safeguarded (Yell et al., 2008).

The constituents of compliance monitoring under part B of IDEA provisions were projected to facilitate the adoption of program requirements and compliance with the provisions of IDEA regulations. Both the federal and state governments provided the compliance indicators through which accountability to educational regulations can be measured (Gaumer Erickson et al., 2014). This ensures the achievement of system and student accountability. The system accountability assesses and holds the system responsible for adequately servicing students with disabilities (Gordon, 2013). The student accountability addresses the performance of every student based on the implementation of IDEA compliance under part B (Gordon, 2013).

Pennsylvania Education Regulations and Compliance Monitoring Process

The Pennsylvania law and regulations are the administrative regulatory policies for school education in the commonwealth. The laws and regulations of special education in Pennsylvania are provided in Chapter 14 of 22 PA code for school districts and in Chapter 711 of the charter schools (PDE, 2018a). The key aim of introducing educational laws and regulations in Pennsylvania is to ensure all school districts in the state identify and include students with learning disabilities in the school systems (Goldberg, 2012). Under Pennsylvania regulation, all students who are disabled are entitled to special education programs and school districts should concede that students with disabilities benefit from the general education (Goldberg, 2012).

Under IDEA regulatory framework, public schools in Pennsylvania adopt the educational regulations as the basis of special education. Rothstein and Johnson (2014) asserted that IDEA is the federal statute which is currently applicable in public schools as the regulatory framework for equal protection and distribution of special education under PARC rule.

In relation to the monitoring process, a strategic plan has been developed for school districts so that all students with special needs are involved in the special education monitoring. The Pennsylvania laws with a focus on PARC and IDEA have integrated a review process where all staff members in the school take part in the compliance-monitoring process. The monitoring tool used in Pennsylvania is the Compliance Monitoring for Continuous Improvement ([CMCI], PaTTAN, 2018). The CMCI is used by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education in accordance with IDEA to provide a wide-ranging supervision to all public schools, school districts, and other related education agencies (Bollmer et al., 2010). Monitoring is essential in making sure that every student with special needs receives a FAPE and that every family of the disabled student benefits from the procedural safeguards (Kauffman et al., 2017).

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education engages in monitoring, or auditing, charter schools and school districts across Pennsylvania using the CMCI process to guarantee that there is compliance with federal, state, and local regulations of special education (Henderson-Black, 2009). In addition, the auditing process is highly focused on ensuring students with special needs achieve a high improvement in their performances. This process, in Pennsylvania, is performed every six years and ensures that all students enrolled in special education receive a FAPE in the LRE (Fertig, 2018).

The CMCI process is conducted by a team composed of a Special Education Advisor from the Department of Education and Training as well as three peers. These peers are typically

retired or current special education directors, as well as one parent of a student with a disability. This process entails an onsite visit to review and evaluate special education programming and effectiveness. The CMCI process has two components: completion of a Facilitated Self-Assessment (FSA) and an on-site visit.

Figure 2 presents the FSA outline.

School District Facilitated Self-Assessment (FSA)

Compliance Monitoring for Continuous Improvement (CMCI)

Date(s) of Onsite Review:

LEA Contact Person's Name: _Job Title: Address: Telephone: FAX: Email Address:

BSE Chairperson's Name: _Job Title: Address: Telephone: FAX: Email Address:

Directions for the Facilitated Self-Assessment (FSA)

The Facilitated Self-Assessment (FSA) procedure, presented in the text for each topical area, shows what the Local Education Agencies (LEA) needs to do to complete the FSA. Information that the state is responsible for providing to help the LEA complete the FSA is prepopulated. In addition, the FSA details the procedures that will be followed by the BSE in completing the FSA review.

The FSA must be completed no later than 30 days prior to the onsite visit. NOTE: Some items require the LEA to provide student files. Files are to be available onsite at the LEA. DO NOT FORWARD ANY CONFIDENTIAL STUDENT EDUCATIONAL FILES.

FSA Procedure for LEA:

Each LEA will establish a team to review and complete the required FSA.

Procedure for completion of the FSA:

1. Review the required standard and regulatory basis for each topic.
2. Follow the procedure titled LEA Procedure for each topic, gathering the required data.
3. Conduct the team discussion review using the LEA Team Discussion Points provided.
4. Complete the written Data Collection Summary in the format provided.
5. Where specified in the FSA, please forward policies, procedures, and reports to Chairperson at the BSE address or have them available onsite for verification, as directed by the Chairperson.

Chairperson will review the FSA in preparation for the onsite review. Should there be any questions or concerns regarding the completion of the FSA, please direct them to the Chairperson, Special Education Advisor PA Department of Education, 333 Market Street, 7th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333 @pa.gov 3

The FSA must be completed no later than 30 days prior to the onsite visit as designated in Figure 2. This consists of an internal evaluation of the school district or charter school's compliance with required policies and procedures. Some items included in the FSA require the LEA to provide student files as evidence of completion of these areas of compliance. Files are to be available onsite at the LEA for review during the onsite visit.

The FSA focuses on the following areas:

- Assistive Technology and Services;
- Hearing Aids and External Components of Surgically Implanted Medical Devices;
- Graduation Rates;
- Exclusions: Suspensions and Expulsions;
- Facilities Used for Special Education;
- Independent Educational Evaluation; Least Restrictive Environment (LRE);
- Extended School Year Services;
- Related Service Including Psychological Counseling;
- Caseload and Age Range Requirements;
- Parent Training;
- Participation in State and Local Assessments;
- Public School Enrollment;
- Surrogate Parents (Students Requiring);

- Personnel Training;
- Intensive Interagency Approach;
- Summary of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance;
- Procedural Safeguard Requirements for Graduation;
- SPP/APR Indicator 13 (Transition); and
- Disproportionate Representation that is the Result of Inappropriate Identification (PDE, 2019)

Included in the FSA is the requirement for districts and charter schools to review four district policies: the Positive Behavior Support Policy; Student Find (Annual Public Notice and General Dissemination Materials), the Confidentiality policy and the district's policy addressing Dispute Resolution (PDE, 2019)

The final component of the FSA is an Educational Benefit Review (EBR). The BSE provides the LEA with a selected sample of students and the district evaluates the students' special education documents for the last 3 years using the following questions:

- Are the assessments complete and do they identify all of the student's needs, including postsecondary outcomes and/or career assessment/functional vocational evaluation for secondary students?
- In Year 3, does the IEP, through the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) statement or other IEP information, identify all of the student's significant needs?
- In Year 3, are all of the student's needs addressed by goals and objectives, transition services, and/or supplementary aids and services, including, for secondary students, postsecondary outcomes, preferences, and interests?

- In Year 3, are there programs and services to support all of the student's goals and objectives?
- Do the transition services provided for the student over the three-year period of review represent a coordinated set of activities related to the student's vision for adult life?
- In reviewing the comparison of the PLAAFP from Year 1 to Year 2 and from Year 2 to Year 3, if the student did not make progress, were the goals and objectives, transition activities, or programs and services in Year 3 changed in the IEP to facilitate the student's future progress?
- In reviewing the comparison of the PLAAFP from Year 1 to Year 2 and from Year 2 to Year 3, if the student did make progress, were the goals and objectives, transition activities, or programs and services in Year 3 changed in the IEP to facilitate the student's future progress, including participation in general education?
- Were sufficient services provided to ensure that the student would make progress?
- Is this student provided with supplementary aids and services to support participation in extracurricular and non-academic activities if determined to be needed by the IEP team? (PDE, 2019)

Based upon the review of Worksheets' years 1, 2, and 3, and questions 1-9 above, the LEA has determined that the student has received educational benefits.

The second component of the CMCI process is the on-site monitoring. This process includes interviewing parents, general education teachers, and special education teachers. The interviews focus on parent involvement and teacher engagement in the special education process. Classroom observations are also completed as part of the on-site visit. The committee conducts observations in various classroom settings to evaluate implementation of programs and services.

Surveys provided by PDE are disseminated to students, parents, and teachers via the district. The purpose of these surveys is to gather feedback to inform the monitoring team and the LEA of perceived strengths and improvement needs. An Administrative Interview is conducted by the committee in which the LEA provides an overview of the special education programing and operations.

The final component of the on-site visit includes a review of student files. Prior to the onsite visit, the BSE provides the LEA with a list of randomly selected students whose special education documents will be reviewed to ensure compliance with requirements (PDE, 2018a). After completing the audit of school districts based on compliance monitoring, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education provides a public report to the local educational agency to examine any non-compliance in schools that needed corrective action (McGuinn, 2016). Non-compliance includes, but is not limited to, failure with LRE, FAPE, parental involvement, communication with parents, meeting notification, monitoring reports, acquisition of reports, quality of reports, refusing to serve students with learning disabilities, racial discrimination, tension between federal law and state autonomy, under representative picture of compliance in rural and larger states, and parental advocacy perspectives (Wrightslaw, n.d.)

The LEA has one year to correct areas of noncompliance. Additionally, if necessary, the LEA must also be required to engage in improvement planning to address substantive changes over time. The BSE ensures that resources are in place to assist the LEA, and verifies completion of all corrective action and improvement plans (PDE, 2018b)

Summary

Chapter 2 described the historical background of hallmark legislation and court decisions of both special education in the U.S. and extant research about CMCI, the tool Pennsylvania Board of Special Education uses in alignment with compliance monitoring of the educational

regulations in special education. Compliance monitoring is an important requirement across and within public schools for students with disabilities to monitor ensuring students with disabilities equality in education. In the suburban Pennsylvania school district of this study, compliance monitoring follows IDEA requirements where public schools are required to implement educational regulation that maintains the rights of students with disabilities. Under PARC rule, all school administrators are required to engage in compliance monitoring so that a FAPE is provided to all students in the LRE (ensured by educational agencies), especially those with special needs (Bollmer et al., 2010); cyclical auditing of the compliance of special education laws by school districts such as the suburban Pennsylvania district of this study promotes that provision (Wakelin, 2008).

Compliance with IDEA requirements also aims at promoting educational performances and outcomes of students with special needs through significant roles regarding parental involvement in special education programs allowing parents to work with teachers in making decisions that enhance the success of their students (Yell et al., 2008).

Chapter 3 describes the proposed research methodology and provide detailed information about the methodological process that will be used in the study, including a description of the research design, participants, instrumentation, and data collection, and analysis procedures.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The district in this study utilized the cyclical monitoring tool as a continuous improvement tool of transforming the current practices, education policies, and procedures in association with liability and compliance in special education. The use of a qualitative research method aided in examining the perceptions of five school administrators of a suburban Pittsburgh school district, which could provide an understanding of the application of the cyclical compliance monitoring tool in special education for students with disabilities. The qualitative study was carried out to ascertain better insights into monitoring the state and federal regulations of Pennsylvania special education in assessing special needs for students with disabilities. The participation and perceptions of district and building-level administrators in using the cyclical monitoring process for decision-making at the district and building levels were the focus of the study and guided this study along with the following research questions.

1. What impact does the cyclical monitoring process have on school districts' current practices, education policies, and procedures in association with liability and compliance in special education?
2. How does the cyclical monitoring process influence the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems in schools?

Detailed descriptions of the research method, participants, research design, data collection process and procedures, data analysis method, and procedures for analyzing the collected data will be provided in this chapter.

The study collected answers to the interview guide (see Appendix A) which were transcribed, and those answers will be discussed through the actual narrative transcriptions in

Chapter 4 reflecting the perceptions of school administrators in using a cyclical monitoring process for decision-making at the district and building level.

Research Site

Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the school district population of this study with special services offered and race/ethnicity numbers.

Special Education Data Report		
School Year 2018-2019		
Enrollment (School Age)		
Source: December 1, 2018 Student Count		
	LEA	**STATE**
Total Enrollment	1,060	1,723,405
Total Special Education Enrollment	217	297,644
Percent Special Education	20.5%	17.3%
Percent of Special Education Enrollment by Disability		
Autism	9.2%	11.3%
Deaf-Blindness	---	0%
Emotional Disturbance	7.4%	8.5%
Hearing Impairment Including Deafness	---	0.9%
Intellectual Disability (Mental Retardation)	---	6.3%
Multiple Disabilities	---	1.0%
Orthopedic Impairment	---	0.2%
Other Health Impairment	13.8%	16.4%
Specific Learning Disability	43.3%	40.6%
Speech or Language Impairment	20.3%	14.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	---	0.2%
Visual Impairment Including Blindness	---	0.4%
Race/Ethnicity (School Age)		
	Spec ED	**LEA**

American Indian/Alaska Native	---	---
Asian	---	2.6%
Black or African American	16.6%	13.8%
Hispanic	---	2.9%
Multiracial	6.9%	10.7%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	---	---
White	70.5%	68.9%
Educational Environments (Ages 6-21)		
	LEA	**State**
SE Inside Regular Class 80% or More	76.3%	61.5%
SE Inside Regular Class < 40%	---	9.4%
SE In Other Settings	7.7%	4.8%

Figure 3. Special Education Data Report 2018-2019
Note. Where this symbol appears (---) the PDE is not displaying these data on this report to guard against improper statistical comparisons due to small group sizes (n=10 or less) and to protect the confidentiality of those students with disabilities who comprise this category. (Posted June 2019 by the Pennsylvania Data Center).

Participants

The targeted population or participants in the current study was school administrators from a suburban Pittsburgh school district. The case study school district is located in Southwestern Pennsylvania and is a comprehensive public school system with two elementary schools (K-6) and a middle - high school (7-12). The population selected for the study was the most appropriate for responding to the study questions and was likely to address the goals of the study. The school administrators were recruited from the school district and included staff members with administrative positions either at the district or building level. The district-level administrators were selected because they were likely to provide potential information regarding the application of CMCI in special education in relation to compliance and accountability and

because the application of compliance monitoring process was included in their work profession. The study targeted three building administrators, two male and one female principals, and one central office administration female and male, who had two to 30 years' experience. All five were White and included Irish, Italian, and Polish ethnicities with age ranges from 40-60 years old; all had at least master's degrees, two have doctorate degrees. Experienced school administrators were selected because they were likely to have observed the use of cyclical compliance monitoring process in special education and, as such, adopted, planned, or had been involved in compliance monitoring to enhance the performance of students with special needs in public schools. Therefore, the school administrators were likely to be better informed about the CMCI process.

Table 5 demonstrates the population of the school district.

Table 5

Population of Suburban Pittsburgh School District in which Schools Are Serviced in Special Education

2 Elementary (K-6)	7973*
1 middle-high (7-12)	4586**
Total	12,559

Note. *Population statistics from 2010 census
**Population statistics from 2017 census

The eligible participants were hand delivered informed consent forms. Consent forms are a legal requirement for any research that involves the participation of humans. Informed consent is the practice of informing human participants about the research aspects which are useful in

allowing the participants to make their decisions and to voluntary confirm their willingness to be part of the research (Nijhawan et al., 2013). In the current study, informed consent forms were hand delivered to all eligible participants and only those who signed and returned the forms participated. An approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University (SRU), which allowed the researcher to begin the study within the timeframe of June 2021 to September 2021.

Sampling and Sample Size

The study sample was selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random selection technique which does not need many participants. The technique allows the selection of the participants based upon the decisions of the researcher (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In the current study, purposeful sampling was used to select specific numbers of participants based on the decisions of the researcher regarding eligible school administrators. The participants who met the researcher's requirements and inclusion criteria were recruited. In purposeful sampling, the main principles regarding the selection of study participants are:

- knowledge and experience of the participants with regard to the study problem,
- their availability and willingness to engage, and
- the ability of the participants to share their experiences and perceptions in an expressive manner (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Subsequently, the selection of the participants in the current study was facilitated by the use of employment records to determine the level of experience and ability of the participants to communicate their perceptions. The participants, two male and one female principals, and one male and one female central office administrators, who had worked for two to 30 years as school administrators were considered eligible for inclusion in the study. This is because these school

administrators were likely to have engaged in the formulation, development, and adoption of the CMCI process to ensure compliance and accountability of involving students with special needs in public schools. They might also have used the process and experienced its effectiveness when implemented in public schools to enhance learning for students with disabilities.

Since the current study was qualitative in nature, a small sample size was required. Qualitative studies require a small sample size to reach saturation. This means that, as the study progresses, the collection of additional data does not lead to more information, as a piece of data or code is adequate to be analyzed and frequency is not important (Mason, 2010). Therefore, the sample size for this study was five building administrators, two male and one female principals, and one male and one female central office administrators. Large samples are used in quantitative research and larger amounts of data are produced that may be repetitive. Conversely, qualitative study is time-consuming and analyzing large amounts of data is difficult; hence, a smaller size is required (Mason, 2010). In the current study, three male principals and one central office female and one male were recruited from a suburban Pittsburgh school district's schools. Since participants were recruited from the same field of building administration, the sample was homogenous and the collection of data from five participants was sufficient.

Instrumentation

The interview guide, in Appendix A, was used as the instrument for the collection of data. An interview guide comprises a list of questions developed to assist when interviewing the participants and none of the questions are answerable with "yes" or "no." The guide helps in exploring the responses from the participants comprehensively in order to keep the interview focused on the research purpose (Jamshed, 2014). The interview guide was developed in a way that the researcher was able to diverge from the defined questions or probe the interview

questions based on the responses from the participants. The development of the guide was based on the research purpose and the research questions guiding this study. Jamshed (2014) asserted that an interview guide is mainly used with semi-structured interviews, where open-ended questions are explored to extensively collect in-depth information from the interviews. In the current study, a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was used. The questions in the interview guide were developed in a succinct and straightforward way to make it easy for the participants to understand.

The development of the interview guide involves four steps. The first step is the development of questions that align with the questions guiding the research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). In the current study, the questions in the guide revolved around the educational regulations for special education in school districts and the application of the cyclical-monitoring process for compliance and accountability for students with special needs. The second step of development of questions involves inquiry-based observations where interview questions in the guide are presented differently from the research questions. The questions in the guide were developed in a way that allow the researcher to follow-up and probe the questions during the interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). In the current study, the questions in the guide were developed and written in a different format that allowed probing and enabled the researcher to develop prompt questions. In the third step, the interview guide is evaluated by expert administrators in the field of special education to determine the capacity of the respondents to understand and communicate their perceptions about the set questions. Here, the expert administrators give their feedback whether the questions in the guide are easy or not for the respondents and if the questions meet the researcher's expectations (Patton, 2015). In the current study, expert administrators were requested to go through the guide and comment on the

questions in the guide and whether the participants were able to address them. The fourth step entails testing the interview guide for validation. The validation of the interview protocol was done to measure how the interview questions addressed the questions of the research. Pilot testing was done during the validation. Castillo-Montoya (2016) asserted that pilot testing of the interview guide is done by giving a panel of experts the interview questions to review and determine whether the questions are understandable to the participants. Also, the experts determine if the respondents are able to provide accurate responses (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). For this study, three panel experts, composed of coordinators of special service and/or pupil services in a Pennsylvania county, with research experience and background knowledge in the subject under investigation, reviewed the interview guide and provided their feedback on appropriateness of the questions in the guide and whether they captured important data relevant to the research purpose and research questions.

Research Method and Design

A qualitative research approach was utilized in the current study since the study is explorative and aimed to explore the use of the cyclical monitoring process for compliance and accountability for special education in a suburban Pittsburgh school district. According to Yilmaz (2013), a qualitative research is mainly applicable when exploring a social phenomenon as opposed to the quantitative method that seeks to test the hypotheses of the phenomenon. Also, qualitative research is applicable when collecting in-depth information about the issue under investigation. Therefore, a qualitative research method was appropriate in the current study as it helped in collecting deeper information regarding the application of the cyclical compliance monitoring process in special education. In addition, a qualitative research method is more concerned about the issues of reality which cannot be quantified. Instead, it focuses on

understanding and providing a deeper explanation of the social phenomenon in order to provide better insights about the various dimensions of the issue under analysis (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). Thus, a qualitative research method best suited the current study since it helped in gaining deeper and illustrative information that described the cyclical monitoring process for compliance and accountability in special education using real-life experiences of school administrators from a suburban Pittsburgh school district. Also, qualitative methodology is preferred over quantitative methodology, which seeks to explore the social phenomenon using numerical data and that was not the focus of this study (Queirós et al.). A qualitative approach assisted in describing the phenomenon using meaningful information based on the beliefs, aspirations, and perceptions of school administrators who had experiences in special education and the use of the CMCI process.

The research design employed in the current study was a case study design. A case study research design is an empirical inquiry that seeks to explore the real problem within its natural setting, especially when the boundaries in the research context and the phenomenon do not provide clear evidence (Yin, 2013). For example, one case study presented recent findings from several long-term qualitative investigations of co-teaching in science and social studies content-area classes, in which collaborating teachers and students with and without disabilities were observed and interviewed regarding effective practices and challenges associated with inclusion. In some sites, collaborating teachers were provided with research-based effective strategies and materials for including students with disabilities in specific activities. Results were equivocal in that in some cases, collaboration was extremely effective and conducive for promoting success for students with disabilities in inclusive classes (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 1). Thus, a case study design suited this study because it accommodated understanding the contemporary

phenomenon of application of the cyclical monitoring process from the context of experiences. A multi-sensory case study of *Teaching Music to Students with Special Needs. A Label Free Approach* addressed special needs in the broadest possible sense to equip teachers with proven, research-based curricular strategies that are grounded in both best practice and current special education law (Hammel & Hourigan, n.d). A case study assists in collecting real-life context from the participants or school administrators with experiences on the use of the cyclical monitoring tool in special education. A case study design is also suitable when addressing the "what", "why", and "how" questions that are posed from the contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2013) as in *Real-life Stories of Four Students with Challenging Behaviors,* a case study describing the struggles of diverse behaviors (Cedar Center, n.d.). Thus, this research design facilitated the exploration of the research questions developed for this study. A case study design allowed for the exploration of research questions based on the social phenomenon where a suburban Pittsburg school district will be the case study.

Description of Procedures

The data collection was done by use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The building-level administrators were present for the two interview sessions of this study. The first interview was conducted with district-level administrators. The second interview session was conducted with the building-level administrators at the central administrative office. For each interview, the semi-structured interview guide or script was used to ensure similar questions were posed to the participants. The interview questions were developed using the "funnel approach" (Roller, 2009) in which questions start out broad and continuously get more specific. Figure 4 is a visual of the "funnel approach" contained in Margaret Roller's 2009 work.

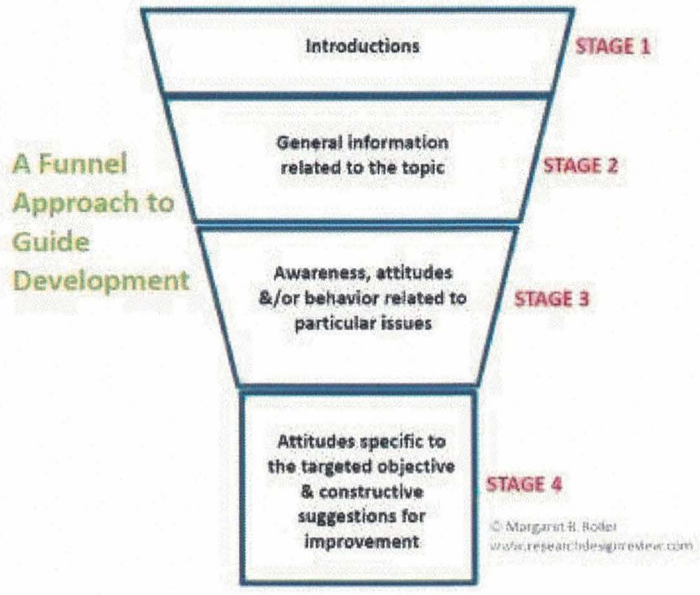


Figure 4. Margaret Roller's Research Design Review (2009)

The interview questions consisted of 10 open-ended questions and all the building- and district-level administrators were encouraged to give their responses according to their perceptions. The questions in the script focused on the CMCI process and its impacts on district-level decisions regarding the inclusion of students with special needs in public schools. The building administrators gave their perceptions on the current use of the cyclical compliance monitoring process and how the practice impacts changes and procedures in special education. The interviews were conducted at the central administrative office and were performed individually with each of the building administrators. Each interview took approximately 30-45 minutes and the responses were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis.

Due to the small sample, participants' data were coded to protect their identity. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis method. This analysis of organizational structure examined the interaction between organizational infrastructure and the human behavior in the areas of

compatibility, minimal critical specification, boundary location, support congruence, multifunctionality principle, and variances principle or socio-technical criterion.
All information remained anonymous and will remain confidential.

Participants met with the primary investigator, individually, to increase confidentiality. Notes were taken using a personal laptop which was password protected. Identifiable data including the participants' names and school district were collected for sampling purposes only. All identifiable data linked to the participants' pseudonyms were stored electronically on the primary investigator's and/or co-investigator's password-protected, personal laptop computer. Consent and assent forms were stored in the primary investigator's and/or co-investigator's locked file cabinet in a locked office. Identifiable data were available only to the primary investigator, co-investigator and the participants. Electronic files will be deleted from the primary investigator's and/or co-investigator's computer hard drive and paper consents/assents will be shredded.

Data Analysis and Display Procedure

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. Thematic analysis involves theme development using the collected data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). During the analysis, the first step is to interpret the data to get the actual meaning and gain familiarity with the data. The researcher interpreted the participants' responses to get a better understanding and get familiar with the information. The narrative information from the participants was recorded using audio tapes for transcription in the second step. Transcription process is where the audio-recorded responses are converted into written format for analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The responses from the school administrators were transcribed and presented on paper. The next step entails checking for errors in the written format by reading between the lines (Vaismoradi, Turunen, &

Bondas, 2013). The researcher read line-by-line to establish if there were any mistakes in the transcribed data.

A coding process was then utilized to group and code similar patterns. In coding, the similarities and differences between the responses are identified and coded for theme development (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The common themes or phrases were grouped and coded in accordance with the research questions. The codes were completed by organizing the patterns that formed themes in different groups based on the research questions. Similar codes were narrowed down to develop common themes that described the research questions. NVivo software was used to enhance data analysis. NVivo organizes and manages the collected data when the transcripts are loaded (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo is a software program, produced by QSR International, used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. Specifically, it is used for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, including (but not limited to) interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles. Coding is the analytical process of categorizing data. In NVivo, coding is the process of gathering related material into a container called a Node. When a node is opened, all the references in the project coded to the node are visible.

Summary

This qualitative study utilized a case study design. A suburban Pittsburgh school district located in the Southwestern Pennsylvania was used and the population/participants included building- and district-level administrators. The sample consisted of five building- and district-level administrators with two to 30 years of experience. The building-level participants, one female and two males, and district-level participants, one male and one female, were selected with the purposeful sampling process to ensure the inclusion criteria were met. Permission to

conduct this study was obtained with an IRB from Slippery Rock University (SRU). An interview guide was developed by the researcher as the data collection instrument in this study. A guide with semi-structured interviews was used to collect the data on the perceptions of all participants based on the research questions developed for the study. Thematic analysis was adopted as the technique for data analysis. In this method of analysis, the collected data are coded based on the participants' responses and are combined to develop the main themes. The perceptions from all participants were then compared and used to address the research questions.

Chapter 4 will present the findings obtained from the data analysis of data collected from the participants. The chapter will outline the findings based on the research questions guiding the study. The presentation of the results is based on the information acquired from the participants.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the special education cyclical monitoring process through the use of semi-structured interviews to identify the impact of this process on districts' practices, procedures, and policies, as well as explore how this process impacts decision-making and influences task, structure, and technical, and human subsystems in schools. There were two research questions in this study:

1. What impact does the cyclical monitoring process have on the school district's current practices, education policies, and procedures in association with liability and compliance in special education?

2. How does the cyclical monitoring process influence the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems in schools?

The first research question focused on the impact the CMCI process has on districts' practices, policies, and procedures in terms of compliance. The second research question focused on how the process influences tasks (goals), structure (organization and institutional arrangements), and technical and human subsystems (development, tools, and platforms) in schools. The research questions were used to develop a framework for data collection and thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data.

Table 6 demonstrates the demographic of supervisory roles in the district and how tenure may have influenced the answering of the research questions.

Table 6

Role of District Administrators in Regard to Research Question Answers

Current Role in District	**Years of Experience**	**Reported Familiarity with CMCI Regarding Special Education Auditing**
Building Administrator 1	2	100%
Building Administrator 2	15	100%
Building Administrator 3	13	100%
Central Office Administrator 1	30	100%
Central Office Administrator 2	18	100%

Note. Source: Personal interviews

Table 7 displays the reported administrative perceived impact of the CMCI process on building and district-level decisions.

Table 7

Described Administrative Perceptions of CMCI Process Impact on Building and District-level Decisions

	Areas of Improvement	**Needs in Special Education**	**Strength-based**	**Identify Target Areas**
Building Administrator 1	Inclusion	Resources/Programing (School Psych) Parent Engagement	MTSS	Interventions
Building Administrator 2	Inclusion Increase in Special education staff Alignment of Resources	Resources/Programing (School Psych) Parent Engagement	MTSS	Interventions (Math) LRE
Building Administrator 3	Inclusion Increase in Special education staff Alignment of Resources	Resources/Programing (School Psych) Parent Engagement	MTSS	Interventions (Math) LRE
Central Office Administrator 1	Inclusion Alignment of Resources	Resources/Programing (School Psych)	MTSS	
Central Office Administrator 2	Inclusion Increase in Special education staff	Parent Engagement	MTSS	LRE

Note. Source: Personal interviews

Table 8 provides observations of administrators of district special education program strengths.

Table 8

Administrative Observations of Strengths of District Special Education Program

	Identification of Students with Special Needs	**Administrative Support**
Building Administrator 1	MTSS Increase in staffing for interventions	
Building Administrator 2	MTSS Increase in staffing for interventions	Increase in Special Education Staff Parent Engagement
Building Administrator 3	MTSS Increase in staffing for interventions	Increase in Special Education Staff
Central Office Administrator 1	MTSS Increase in staffing for interventions	
Central Office Administrator 2	MTSS Increase in staffing for interventions	Increase in Special Education Staff

Note. Source: Personal interviews

Table 9 reveals perceived administrative needs in the district special education program.

Table 9

Perceived Administrative Needs in the District Special Education Program

	Resources	**Programming**	**Interventions**	**Parental Engagement**
Building Administrator 1		X	X	X
Building Administrator 2	X	X	X	X
Building Administrator 3	X	X	X	X
Central Office Administrator 1	X	X	X	
Central Office Administrator 2		X	X	X

Note. Source: Personal interviews

Table 10 informs of perceived administrative challenges in LRE settings.

Table 10

Perceived Administrative Challenges in LRE Settings

	Targeted Intervention Times **Please Explain**	**Resources** **Please Explain**	**Student/Teacher Ratio** **Please Explain**	**Progress-monitoring Difficulties** **Please Explain**
Building Administrator 1				Professional development
Building Administrator 2	Increase in staff	Alignment of Resources	Increase in staff	
Building Administrator 3	Increase in staff	Alignment of Resources	Increase in staff	Time constraints
Central Office Administrator 1		Alignment of Resources		Time constraints
Central Office Administrator 2	Increase in staff		Increase in staff	

Note. Source: Personal Interviews

Table 11explains steps taken by the district to overcome challenges expressed in Table 10.

Table 11

Prescribed Administrative Steps Taken to Alleviate Challenges

	District Efforts to Overcome Challenges	**District Efforts for Inclusive School for Special Needs Students**	**Your Administrative Strategies in Meeting Student Needs**	**Additional Comments/Efforts/ Strategies**
Bldg. Adm. 1	MTSS Data Driven Interventions	Co-Teaching Interventions	Inclusion Professional Development on MTSS	
Bldg. Adm. 2	MTSS Alignment of Resources Increase in Sped Staff Data Driven Interventions	Interventions	Inclusion Professional Development on MTSS	Parents as Allies Project (Parent Engagement)
Bldg. Adm. 3	Increase in Sped Staff MTSS Alignment of Resources Data Driven Interventions	Co-Teaching Interventions	Inclusion	
Central Office Adm. 1	MTSS Alignment of Resources Data Driven Interventions		Inclusion	

Central Office Adm. 2	Increase in Sped Staff MTSS		Inclusion Professional Development on MTSS	

Note. Source: Personal interviews

Interview Data

Once IRB approval was obtained, participants were selected based on their employment status as an administrator in the district. Selected participants had to have previously or currently participated in special education compliance monitoring. Participants who met this criteria were contacted regarding their availability and willingness to participate in this study via face-to-face conversation. The participants who elected to take part in this study were provided a copy of the consent from.

Approximately one week after mailing the consent form, the researcher held individual meetings with all participants to discuss the study and obtained their signed consents. During this meeting, the researcher discussed the purpose and the completion timeline of the study. This initial meeting took approximately 10 minutes for each participant. At this time, the researcher scheduled individual interviews with administrators who consented to participate. Interviews were held during the month of June in the administrative center in the district. Interviews that took approximately 30-45 minutes per participant were recorded and transcribed.

After interviews were conducted, the transcribed data were analyzed and coded. A coding process was used to group and code similar patterns. After anaylsis of the interview responses, themes were identified based on the research questions. Those themes included resources/programming, interventions, and parent engagement.

Overall, 100% of the participants demonstrated basic knowledge of the CMCI process and the impacts this process has on special education policies, procedures, and practices within

the district. While each participant demonstrated a different level of understanding of how compliance monitoring enhances the services and programs offered in the district, all five participants recognized the benefits and needs for the CMCI process. All administrators interviewed described the CMCI process as a positive process to evalaute the district's programming and reflect upon areas that need improvement.

Table 12 identifies the three main themes that emerged from this research and participants' opinions of those themes.

Table 12

Participants' Identification and Opinions of Themes

Participants	**Resource/Programming**	**Interventions**	**Parental Engagement**
Bldg. Adm. 1	School Psychologist LRE	Need for additional staff Area of need Data-driven instruction Ongoing progress-monitoring MTSS - Strength	Area of need
Bldg. Adm. 2	School Psychologist Increase in Sped Staff LRE Alignment of Resources	Need for additional staff Area of need – Math intervention Data-driven instruction Ongoing progress-monitoring MTSS - Strength	Area of need

Bldg. Adm. 3	School Psychologist Increase in Sped Staff LRE Alignment of Resources	Need for additional staff Area of need – Math intervention Data-driven instruction Ongoing progress-monitoring MTSS - Strength	Area of need
Central Office Adm. 1	Alignment of Resources	Need for additional staff Data-driven instruction Ongoing progress-monitoring Area of need MTSS - Strength	
Central Office Adm. 2	School Psychologist Increase in Sped Staff	Need for additional staff Area of need MTSS - Strength	Area of need

Themes

The first theme identified was resource/programming. The addition of a school psychologist was viewed as a resource that has had the most profound impact on special education programming provision for the district by four of the administrators who participated in this study. The role of the school psychologist benefits all students in the district. She has an intricate role in the MTSS process and works with educators to develop individualized interventions to support students. The school psychologist's knowledge and expertise in the area

of intervention is something the participants identified as a strength and an area of improved change influenced by the CMCI process.

An increase in special education staff was also identified as an organizational improvement by three of the participants in this study. Based on the last CMCI process, the district hired an additional special education teacher. The addition of a special education teacher at the elementary level reduced class size and provided more co-teaching opportunities. Supporting students in the LRE was an area of need identified by three of the administrators. Additionally, 100 percent of administrators identified a need for additional staff to provide targeted interventions for students. While the district currently provides targeted small group and individual support in the area of reading at the elementary level, the participants in this study discussed a need for additional staff to support students in the area of math.

The push for inclusion of students with disabilities in the LRE made significant programming changes to the district. This changed the district's instructional model from a pull-out special education program to a co-teaching/inclusion model in which students are educated primarily in the general education classroom. The last compliance monitoring in May 2021 highlighted the inclusion of students with non-disabled peers as an area of need. Based on that monitoring, the district implemented a co-teaching initiative. This entailed targeted training for special education and general education teachers on inclusion and co-teaching models. This provided opportunity for professional development over a two year span.

Alignment of resources was a challenge identified by three administrators when examining the district's ability to educate students in the LRE. Both elementary principals identified allignment of resources as a need. This included professional development, curriculum changes, and providing teachers with common planning time.

The second theme identified in this study was interventions. When examining the district's ability to provide interventions, the administrators evalauted the effectivness of current interventions. All administrators who participated in the study discussed interventions as an area of need. The district currently employs four reading specialists who service students at the elementary level with a focus on reading. High school administration identified an area of need for interventions at the secondary level. Additionally, elementary administration identified math interventions as an area of need for their students. The need for data-driven instruction, and ongoing progress-monitoring was identified as a targeted area for professional development by all three building level administrators and one central office administrator. Professional development in all of these areas would be beneficial to school staff.

Administrators' perceptions of how the CMCI process impacts building and district level decisions included how this process helps support students. One specific topic discovered was the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process. MTSS was viewed as an area of strength and need based on the interviews conducted by 100 percent of administrators in this study. In terms of strength, administrators recognize that the MTSS process assists the district in putting supports in place to meet students needs. The MTSS process is viewed as a process that assists the district in identifying student needs and implementing targeted interventions to support students. The MTSS process is also viewed as a tool for the district to identify struggling students and provide them with inverventions to foster growth. MTSS was also identified by three participants in this study as an area where professional development is needed.

The final theme identified in this study was parent engagement. Four of the five administrators discussed parent engagement as a need of the district. Administrators viewed the CMCI process as a tool to examine special education programming and reflect upon current

practices, especially with parent engagement. While considering the effectiveness of this process, the need for parent engagement was a common theme. Participants in this study discussed a lack of parent engagement at both the elemenary and secondary level. While the district has strived to engage stakeholders at all levels, meaningful parent engagement is not occuring. In order for effective change to happen, stakeholders must play a role in this process. Parents are an important stakeholder who can assist the district in evalauting the quality of our programs. Parent resources and engagement need to be seen as a priority.

While none of the administrators who participated in this study could recall how the district preformed in the last compliance monitoring process, in May 2021, all five administrators identified inclusion as the organizational area of improvement. One of the elementary principals demonstrated knowledge of an improvement plan that focused on inclusion of students with disabilities in the LRE. Two other building level adminstrators expressed knowledge of inclusion as an organizational area of improvement based on the professional development provided by the district in the area of co-teaching.

It can be concluded that the increase of administrators' knowledge and participation in the CMCI process will improve compliance with special education regulations as well as improve education for all students with disabilities.

Chapter 5

This qualitative research study used interviews to examine the special education cyclical monitoring process through a socio-technical system's lens. A socio-technical system's lens is a theory that technology constitutes both social and technical values, both of which work in tandem to find solutions to problems (Appelbaum, 1997; Mumford, 2006; Coiera, 2007). "This framework [STS] views schools as open systems that contain a structural, task, human, and technical subsystem" (Isherwood et al.; Martin et al., 2013, p. 1). STS was used throughout this study to assist in determining how these two key values can be applied to a situation to bring about change in the field of education. The results provide understandings on the challenges that school districts encounter in the task, structural, technical, and human subsystems, while creating a more compliant school environment for students with special needs.

This case study of a suburban Pittsburgh School District focused on the use of the CMCI process in special education and how districts apply this process and what changes, if any, are realized through the CMCI process. The cyclical monitoring process helps in ensuring that school districts comply with education regulations, especially for all students in special education programs (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Data collected through interviews conducted with three building level administrators and two central office administrators regarding how the CMCI process was used for decision-making yielded the following results. The major findings included a strength of resources/programming, a need for interventions, and an increase in parent engagement.

Emergent Themes

There were two research questions in this study. The first research question focused on the impact the CMCI process has on districts' practices, policies, and procedures in terms of

compliance. The interview data suggested resources/programming, interventions, and parent engagement as emergent themes.

Throughout the course of the interview process, administrators described how the CMCI process impacts current practices and policies such as the need for interventions and a need for an increase in resources/programing. In order to appropriately meet the needs of students with disabilities in the LRE, administrators identified a need for individualized and small group interventions. The district met this need by implementing an MTSS model and increasing staff. The implementation of the MTSS model assists staff in identying areas of need and implement time-tested interventions. The district increased staff to include two math intervention coaches at the elementary level. Administrators viewed this change as a positive outcome of the CMCI process.

Additionally, administrators noted co-teaching as a procedural outcome of the CMCI process. After the last CMCI monitoring, the district provided staff with professional development in the area of co-teaching in order to meet the need of increasing student's with disabilities involvement in the general education curriculum. This change shifted the district's instructional model to push special education staff into the general education classroom to support students rather than the exsisting pull-out model where students were instructed in the learning support classroom. This process allowed for the general education teacher to serve as the content area expert, while the special education teacher provided the appopriate modifications and instructional support.

When examining the CMCI process, administrators indicated parent engagement as an area of need. The district is currently working to enhance parent engagement through a

collaboration with Kidsburgh and the Parents as Allies Project. One building administrator at the elementary level discussed this work as a strength.

The second research question focused on how the process influences task (goals), structure (organization and institutional arrangements), technical and human subsystems (development, tools, and platforms) in schools. The results of the interviews suggested that administrators viewed the CMCI process as a tool to create systemic change in the district. They viewed this process as an avenue to examine what is working and what needs changed. They recognized the needs from a district, building, and individual basis.

The task or goal of the CMCI process is viewed as a method of evaluating assurances and feasibility to provide FAPE in the least restrictive environment, as well as meet PDE's audit requirements. Actors (stakeholders) including central office administration, building level administration, teachers and school board members plan a significant role in the planning and design of the technical and human subsystems. In this study, administrators identifies this as the alignment of an adopted system and organizational culture.

Limitations

This study is a qualitative research study of only one district and a small sample of administrators' perceptions of the CMCI process and its influence on special education and district policy, procedures, and practices through their personal experiences. While administrators selected to participate in this study had experience with the use of the CMCI process, results should not be generalized across all school administrators.

Research was limited to administrators' perceptions of the CMCI process and how school administrators use the CMCI process in special education to provide a foundation for developing appropriate services and programing for students with disabilities.

Coercion could be viewed as a limitation of this study due to the researcher and administrators interviewed being employed by the district. Years of services with the district and years of service in administration could also be viewed as a limitation of this study. While all administrators who participated in this study were employed by the district during the time of the last cyclical monitoring, one of the building level administrators worked as a teacher during that time. Her experience with the monitoring process firsthand could be a limitation of this study.

Recommendations

Administrative training. The findings of this qualitative research study suggest that administrators, both at the district and building level, would benefit from additional training on the CMCI process and how the outcomes of the CMCI process can be used to enhance special education programming and impact district-level decisions in public schools.

District administration participation. All district administrators should be required to participate in the review of findings provided by PDE following the CMCI process. This review of findings includes a review of professional development available to the district, provided my PaTTAN. For the most recent compliance monitoring, professional development was offered in the area of inclusion and Indicator 13 transition planning. A more detailed reporting of the CMCI findings by the Coordinator of Special Services could assist administrators in implementing the recommendations made by the Bureau of Special Education (BSE).

Professional development. In order to assist policy makers in special education to create policies that ensure each school's compliance and to provide a better understanding of the application of this monitoring process, all school administrators should be required to participate in training related to this topic. Training should consist of the CMCI process, report of findings, school improvement plans, and how to stay in compliance.

The Department of Education. This governmental branch mandates professional development and training for special education administration on the compliance monitoring process but it would be highly beneficial for school administrators to participate in similar training.

PaTTAN. Pennsylvania offers training through PaTTAN called the Principals' Understanding how to Lead Special Education (PULSE) series that would be a beneficial professional development opportunity for all school administrators. The goal of this training is to increase principals' knowledge of special education, including reviewing IDEA and Chapter 14 regulations, identifying the roles and responsibilities of the LEA, the use of assessment data in decision making, analysis of patterns of behavior, suspension and expulsion rules. This is a four day program focused on instructional leadership, inclusion, and effective behavioral systems.

Implications for Practice

The goal of this study was to assist policymakers in special education to create policies that ensure districts' comply and create special education programming to improve education for all students with disabilities. The results of this study should be beneficial to and potentially inform building-level administrators in understanding application of monitoring tools in special

education, applying results to revise current practices, procedures, and operations effectively and usage of these tools with accountability and compliance

Implications for Research

Special education compliance montioring is not an area that has been highly researched. This study was confined to one district in Pennsylvania, future research could be expanded to include an entire intermediate unit. Future research should further compare the impacts the CMCI process has on structural change in a district, including school policies and procedures. All stakeholders should be a part of future studies to examine their knowledge of this process.

The CMCI process is a tool for school district to evaluate the success and impact of special education programming. This research study examined administrators' knowledge of the compliance monitoring process and the impacts they have observed. Themes identified by administators interviewed in this study included reources/programing, interventions and parent engagement. While all administrators who participated in this study demonstrated knowlesge of the CMCI process and the impacts this monitoring tool has on district's policy and programming, the level of farmiliarity with the process was dependent on their years of experience as administrators. Building level administration had a stronger level of knowledge regarding the process than district level administration. Further training for administration on the CMCI process and the impacts it has would be benefical for compliance with special education regulations, as well as enhace their ability to effectivly impement programing aimed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Kindly provide answers to the following questions. Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be used for any other purpose apart from research. The purpose of the interview is to get insights about your opinions on the application of cyclical monitoring process through a socio-technical system's lens with a focus on task, structural, human, and technical subsystems within the school environment.

1. What is your current role in the district?
2. How many years of experience have you had as an administrator?
3. Are you familiar with the Cyclical Monitoring for Continuous Improvement (CMCI) process, in regard to special education auditing?
4. Please describe your perception of how the CMCI process impacts building and district-level decisions.
5. Please describe what you observe as strengths of the special education program in the district.
6. What do you perceive as needs' areas of the special education program in the district?
7. As an administrator, have you witnessed any challenges in educating students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)? If yes, please explain those challenges.
8. What steps have been taken by school district to overcome these challenges?

9. Has the district taken any steps to establish an inclusive school for students with special needs? If so, explain what steps have been taken.
10. As a school administrator, explain the strategies you have undertaken to ensure the needs of students needs are met?
11. Based on the strategies you have mentioned, which of these strategies should the district adopt as policy (or outline in procedures) that will ensure a successful inclusion of students with disabilities?
12. What organizational improvements do you feel need to be made within the district to improve special education programing.
13. Are you aware of how the district performed in its last compliance monitoring process, during the 2015-16 school year?
14. From the results of the last CMCI, are there any organizational areas that should be revised?
15. As an administrator, do you believe that school district would be able to sustain compliance with local, state, and federal regulations, if there was not a mandated monitoring process?
16. Do you feel that the CMCI process has enhanced special education services and programs within our district? If so, explain how.
17. Do you feel that the CMCI process has hindered the special education services and programs within our district? If so, in what ways.
18. What changes are you aware of that came as a result of this process in regard to policies and programing?
19. Does the CMCI process assist districts in overcoming any of the barriers just mentioned?

20. How does the CMCI process assist districts in overcoming these barriers?

21. What does this district need in order to be compliant with its next monitoring?

APPENDIX B

NORTHGATE SCHOOL DISTRIC

ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER • 591 UNION AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15202-2958
PHONE: (412) 732-3300, ext. 2110 • FAX: (412) 734-8008 • EMAIL: cjohns@northgate.k12.pa.us

DR. CAROLINE JOHNS SUPERINTENDENT

April 27, 2021

To Whom It May Concern;

Christina Garczewski, a doctoral student at Slippery Rock University requested permission to conduct a research study at Northgate School district. It is my understanding that interviews will be conducted with administrators who consent to participate in the study. It is my understanding that interviews will be completed on a voluntary basis and all participants' responses will be collected anonymously.

As superintendent of Northgate School District, I grant permission for this study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Johns

Superintendent, Northgate School District

APPENDIX C

April 26, 2021

Dr. Caroline Johns,

I am reaching out to inquire about conducting a research study at Northgate School District for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to explore the application of the cyclical monitoring process in a suburban Pittsburgh school district. This study will examine the understanding the application of the cyclical monitoring process and its influence on special education in similar school districts.

The use of a qualitative research method will be used to examine the perceptions of school administrators of a suburban Pittsburgh school district, which could provide an understanding of the application of the cyclical compliance monitoring tool in special education for students with disabilities.

Interviews will be conducted with administrators who consent to participate in the study. Interviews will be completed on a voluntary basis and all participants' responses will be collected anonymously.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina Garczewski

APPENDIX D

April 26, 2021

Administrative staff,

I am reaching out to inquire about your interest in participating in a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to explore the application of the cyclical monitoring process in a suburban Pittsburgh school district. This study will examine the understanding the application of the cyclical monitoring process and its influence on special education in similar school districts. The use of a qualitative research method will be used to examine the perceptions of school administrators, which could provide an understanding of the application of the cyclical compliance monitoring tool in special education for students with disabilities.

Interviews will be conducted with administrators who consent to participate in the study. Interviews will be completed on a voluntary basis and all participants' responses will be collected anonymously. Interviews will be held during the month of June. Interviews will be held in the administrative center in the district. Throughout the interview, data will be collected through note taking by the researcher and will be audio recorded for transcription. This will take approximately 30-45 minutes per participant.

Participants have the potential to benefit from participation in this study because it will increase their familiarity with the special education compliance monitoring process. Increased knowledge of this process will increase awareness of special education requirements and best practices.

Attached you will find a consent form, as well as an audio-tape consent form. If you wish to participate in this research study, please complete the consent forms and an interview will be scheduled.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX E

SlipperyRock University of Pennsylvania

AUDIOTAPE RELEASE CONSENT

An Examination of the Special Education Cyclical Monitoring Process through a Socio-Technical System's Lens: A Case Study of a Suburban Pittsburgh School District

Christina A. Garczewski

Participants will be interviewed using the interview guide developed by the researcher. The interview questions were developed using the "funnel shaped" approach in which questions start out broad and continuously get more specific. Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the collected data. During the analysis, the researcher will interpret the data to get the actual meaning and gain familiarity with the data.

Narrative information from the participant interviews will be recorded using audio tapes for transcription in the second step. All recorded data will be kept confidential and will be coded with a pseudonym. This information will be kept confidential in locked offices with passcodes. Audiotapes will be destroyed after the data analysis is completed.

I give permission for my responses to be autotaped. I have been made aware that all information will be kept confidential

Initials: _____

SlipperyRock University of Pennsylvania

APPENDIX F

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may contribute to the field of educational research.

1. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study is considered minimal. The only risk would be possible breach of confidentiality.

2. HOW WILL YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Information submitted in this study will not be identifiable. All submitted information will be secured and maintained by the researcher using password protected web based services. Only the researcher will have access to the information.

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your responses. All submission of files will be managed through a web based program accessible only by password. The principal research will only have access to the password. Further, any extraneous documentation will keep all study records, including any codes to your data in a secure location only accessible to the principal researcher.

All electronic files containing identifiable information will be on a password protected desktop computer in researchers locked office. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users.

Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

If study data is to be released, describe the person(s) or agency to whom information will be furnished, the nature of the information to be furnished, the purpose of the disclosure and whether the participant's name will be used. This is particularly important for certain vulnerable populations including employees.

3. WILL YOUR RECEIVE ANY INCENTIVE OR COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

4. WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related

problem, you may contact the researcher, Christina Garczewski (724-971.4592). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board of Slippery Rock University at (724) 738-4846 or via email at irb@sru.edu.

Initials: _____

5. CAN YOU STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

6. WHAT IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS RELATED TO BEING A RESEARCH SUBJECT?

Slippery Rock University does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

7. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE STUDY TEAM AND QUESTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH

If you have questions about this research, you may contact:

Mrs. Christina Garczewski

Phone: (724)971-4592

Email: Christina.garczewski@northgatesd.net

9. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 008

Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Initials: _____

CONSENT

I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

_____ _____ _____

Participant Signature Print Name Date

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Print Name Date