

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROCESS: CURRENT PRACTICES

by

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TO
Buz and Derek

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Chapter 1

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Special education is viewed as a process with the primary components being referral, assessment, planning, placement, and evaluation of programming. The majority of research in special education has centered on one of these components rather than the process as a whole. In the present study the author focuses on the components of assessment and instructional planning with an emphasis on the development and flow of information necessary to the overall process.

Until the late 1960's and early 1970's when courts became involved in the placement of students in programs for exceptional children (Smuck v. Hobson, 1969; Covarrubias v. San Diego Unified School District, 1971; Larry P. v. Riles, 1972; Diana v. State Board of Education, 1973), it was widely held that "schools operated in a very autonomous manner when it came to the placement process for exceptional children" (Silliman & Alexander, 1976, p. 4). Court involvement since that time has included litigation on the issue of discrimination in which intelligence or aptitude tests were used for placement. The use of such tests resulted in a disproportionate number of minority pupils who were either placed in special classes for the educable mentally retarded

or they were denied access to a free public education (Jones, 1976; Ross, DeYoung & Cohen, 1977; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1978). These discriminatory practices led in part, to the establishment of federal mandates to protect handicapped individuals in the evaluation, program planning, and placement process for special education. Three key legislative documents are Public Law (P. L.) 93-380, Assistance to States for Education of Handicapped Children, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and P. L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Briefly, P. L. 93-380 required the guarantee of procedural safeguards in decisions regarding identification, evaluation, and educational placement of handicapped children. P.L. 94-142 and Section 504 both became effective in 1977 and extended the provisions of P. L. 93-380.

Section 504 provides that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Federal Register, 1977a, p. 22676). Subpart D of Sec. 504 deals with preschool, elementary, and secondary education. It has been closely coordinated with the provisions of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Because of significant overlap in the two acts, succeeding references

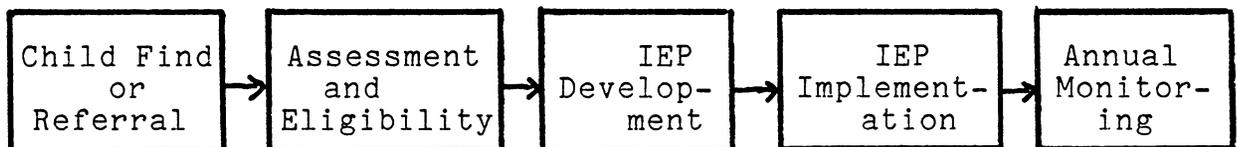
to specific sections of the rules and regulations refer to those implementing P.L. 94-142 (Federal Register, 1977b).

In addition to governing the provision of formula grant funds to assist state and local educational agencies in the education of handicapped children, the rules and regulations of 94-142 seek to guarantee: (1) that all handicapped children have the availability of a free, appropriate public education, (2) that the rights of handicapped children and their parents are protected, and (3) that education agencies are accountable for their efforts to educate such children (Federal Register, 1977b).

The above guarantees reflect the concerns expressed by many members of the U.S. Congress relating to misplacement in special education or exclusion from the educational process altogether. In Senate Report No. 94-168 (1975), the Labor and Public Welfare Committee noted three major concerns regarding practices and procedures of classifying children with handicaps:

1. the misuse of appropriate identification and classification data within the educational process itself;
2. discriminatory treatment as the result of the identification of a handicapping condition; and
3. misuse of identification procedures or methods which results in erroneous classification of a child as having a handicapping condition (p. 26-27).

P.L. 94-142 rules and regulations attempt to ameliorate the situation by: (1) establishing multi-disciplinary evaluation and placement procedures (Mercer, 1979); (2) requiring the employment of trained assessment personnel for test administration (Sec. 121a.532 (a) (3)); and (3) emphasizing educational planning in which the development of an individualized education program (IEP) is mandated for students determined eligible for special education services. Turnbull and Turnbull (1978) note that this approach to special education refutes the traditional use of assessment as a tool for placement as an end in itself. The present approach as mandated by federal and state regulation implies that assessment data serve as the primary information base for developing the learner's educational plan, the IEP. The general schema of the overall special education process is depicted in the five stage process which appears below.



The process is designed to facilitate the development of exemplary educational plans for handicapped children (Walker, 1979) by ensuring a logical transition through the overall process from a multifaceted assessment to an ongoing review of the IEP on an annual basis.

Prior to the passage of 94-142, evaluation efforts centered on identifying, classifying, and placing children in special classes with little emphasis on intervention strategies (i.e. planning and delivery of services) (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1979; Wallace & Larsen, 1978). As a result of 94-142, educational agencies must assure that:

1. all handicapped children are identified (Sec. 121a.220);
2. parental consent is obtained for a pre-placement evaluation (Sec. 121a.504);
3. a full and individual evaluation is conducted (Sec. 121a.531) using multiple data sources (Sec. 121a.532);
4. a multidisciplinary team considers the evaluation information and determines if a child is handicapped and in need of special education (Sec. 121a.533);
5. an IEP is developed if the child needs special education (Sec. 121a.533);
6. placement is based on the IEP (Sec. 121a.552); and
7. parental consent is obtained for placement in the special program (Sec. 121a.504).

Review of these assurances reveals that present evaluation procedures are to be comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and include the following three stages:

1. a multifaceted assessment often consisting of educational, medical, psychological, and sociocultural data, including observational data for children suspected of having specific learning disabilities,

2. a review of the assessment data by a multidisciplinary team of individuals, who determine if the child is handicapped and eligible for special education placement, and
3. the incorporation of the assessment data into the development of an individualized education program (IEP) appropriate to the needs of the child.

Although the legislative mandates require the completion of all of the above stages, education agencies are allowed considerable flexibility in the organizational structure employed to translate the regulations into practice (Morra, 1979). To date, the manner in which the procedures are implemented in local school districts has not been characterized in the literature.

The requirement to develop the IEP has had the most direct impact on special education teachers at the classroom level. Although individual programming is not a new concept to special education (Hayes & Higgins, 1978; Hawkins-Sheppard, 1978; Schipper & Wilson, 1978), the requirement of a written document formalizes the process (Safer, Kaufman, Morrisey & Lewis, 1979). Moreover, the legislation provides for the involvement of the parent in planning the child's program, and requires an evaluation of the program's effectiveness on an annual basis. In effect, the IEP has become the management tool (Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH), 1980) and cornerstone of P.L. 94-142 (Hayes & Higgins, 1978).

The IEP is developed within thirty days of the eligibility decision through a group process. At least three people are involved: (1) a representative of the local educational agency who can supervise the provision of special education, (2) the child's teacher, and (3) one or both parents. The child, where appropriate, may be included as well as others who might have input to the plan (Sec. 121a.344).

It must include:

- (a) a statement of the child's present levels of educational performance,
- (b) a statement of annual goals, including short term instructional objectives,
- (c) a statement of the specific special education and related services to be provided to the child, and the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular educational programs,
- (d) the projected dates for initiation of services and the anticipated duration of the services, and
- (e) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether the short term objectives are being achieved (Sec. 121a.346).

Although the task of actually writing the IEP itself was not legislated (Hayes & Higgins, 1978), several researchers submit that the special education teacher has been delegated this responsibility (Schipper & Wilson, 1978; Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull & Curry, 1980).

Inherent in the development of effective IEP's is knowledge of a student's levels of performance and

instructional needs as determined through a comprehensive evaluation. However, there is evidence that the special education teacher is frequently not present for meetings in which evaluation procedures are discussed (Poland, Ysseldyke, Thurlow & Mirkin, 1979). It would seem that teachers who are charged with the responsibility for actually writing the IEP and who are not attending the eligibility meetings, must have access to and an understanding of adequately documented assessment information in order to develop an appropriate IEP.

This study is concerned with instructional planning for handicapped children. Pertinent to the investigation is the transition from assessment to the development of individualized education programs for handicapped children.

Statement of the Problem

Within the conceptual framework of P. L. 94-142 is the belief "that the greatest possible care must be taken to assure that the identification and classification process is utilized solely for designing an individually tailored educational program for each handicapped child" (Senate Report No. 94-168, 1975, p. 27). This belief clearly projects a strong relationship between evaluation procedures and the development of individualized education programs (IEP's) in the special education process. Additionally, literature pertaining to IEP's calls for a link between individualized assessment and instructional planning (Goldbaum & Rucker,

1977; Hayes, 1977; Higgins, 1977; Jones, 1979; Schenck & Levy, 1979; Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1979; Schenck, 1980).

While the specific procedural requirements of the mandate provide the framework for operationalizing the assessment-IEP link, the special education literature indicates that these procedural requirements alone do not guarantee a logical progression from assessment to planning (Fenton, 1979; Schenck & Levy, 1979; Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1979; Schenck, 1980). Schenck (1980) compared the psychoeducational assessments of approximately 250 students with the corresponding goals and objectives of their IEP's and concluded that the goals and objectives were not predicated upon the psychoeducational assessment. These findings prompted her to question the concept of special education as "specially designed instruction" reflecting the individual needs of handicapped students.

In a related study, Schenck and Levy (1979) reported a discrepancy between the remedial strategies planned for students and their assessed needs. They found the number of cases containing reading and math objectives to exceed the numbers of cases revealing assessed reading and math needs. These investigations questioned the efficacy of the content of educational programs which cannot trace goals and objectives back to the diagnostic data.

Fenton (1979) examined the teams' perceived influence of assessment data upon the placement decision for a mildly

handicapped child. Her findings indicated that the case history information has only minimal influence on placement decisions by multidisciplinary teams.

Similar findings were reported by Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979) after analyzing the assessment and decision making practices of model learning disabilities programs in 39 Child Service Demonstration Centers (CSDC). Although they found the process to be positively characterized by its multidisciplinary nature, they were concerned with the amount of variability and inconsistency in the process. While their research did not directly investigate the types of information needed for effective IEP development, based on the assessment data that were collected and their reported purpose, Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979) suggested that there is no apparent relationship between the massive tests administered and the information needed for placing children and planning programs for them.

Due to the short span of time since 1977 when the IEP provisions of 94-142 became effective, corroborative explanations for this situation have not been forthcoming. Plausible reasons for the difficulties may lie within the substance of the assessment data, the nature of the written diagnostic reports, or as is the focus of this study, the process whereby planning occurs.

The substance of the assessment data collected may not be conducive to instructional planning. According to

Bagnato (1981), written diagnostic reports lack qualities vital to their utilization in planning individualized goals and interventions for children with special needs. Yoshida, Fenton, Maxwell, and Kaufman (1976) suggest that information sources are not presented in a usable format or evaluated in an optimal way which impacts on programming for the student. These difficulties in the quality and format of written diagnostic reports may contribute to the apparent failure to link assessment data to planning.

Germane to this study and the transition from assessment to instructional planning are the hypotheses offered by several professionals relative to procedural difficulties within special education. Marver and David (1978) report IEP developers lack the training necessary to facilitate the implementation of the assessment, interpretation, and communication aspects of the process. Jones (1979) notes a credentialing of 94-142 related activities (including the development of IEP's) for which those responsible may not be trained. Others contend that there is a lack of effective communication between teams delegated various responsibilities in the evaluation and placement process (Schenck & Levy, 1979; Holland, 1980) or there are no formalized operational guidelines in the process (Walker, 1976; Brown, 1977; Schipper & Wilson, 1978). Several researchers report that required IEP participants such as the administrator, are frequently missing or not active in the

IEP development (Schenck & Levy, 1979, 1979; Goldstein, et al., 1980; Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Allen, 1982; Tymitz, 1982; Traylor, 1982). The lack of active participation by some members is consistent with the suggestion that the special education teacher has the primary responsibility for planning, writing, and implementing the IEP (Schenck, 1980; Goldstein, et al., 1980). Delimiting the extent to which the above difficulties are pervasive may suggest a course for improving the transition from assessment to instructional planning.

Pertinent to this study and the assessment-IEP link is the role of the special education teacher. Whether or not special education teachers are delegated the primary responsibility for developing IEP's is a function of local school district policy. Local policies will guide the assessment and decision making process through the selection of IEP and multidisciplinary team participants, the types and amount of assessment data collected, the manner in which these data are transmitted to the IEP developers, and the utilization of the data by the IEP developers.

Delegating primary responsibility for IEP's to special education teachers is inconsistent with the intent for multidisciplinary involvement in the special education process. It can be speculated that special education teacher responsibility is assumed by default since the least recognized responsibilities of placement team members relate to establishing long term goals and short range instructional

objectives for students (Fenton, Yoshida, Maxwell & Kaufman, 1979).

Because the special education teacher may become the key agent in planning, writing, and implementing a student's individualized educational program by default, it is through these teachers that we may best explore current procedural practices and possible reasons for the failure to link assessment data to the development of IEP's. These teachers are in a position to provide answers to questions related to the IEP meeting itself, the specific operational procedures of the district relative to the IEP process, and their perception of the problems which may contribute to the breakdown in the assessment-IEP link. The delineation of specific IEP process difficulties may provide the guidance needed to ameliorate the situation.

The goal of the legislative mandate is clearly an appropriate education for handicapped students in which instructional planning is an integral part. If the procedures from the point of referral through IEP development do not promote a logical transition from assessment to team decision making, and provide the basis for the development of an individualized education plan, the legislation has been undermined.

The nature of local school district assessment and decision making practices, encompassing the IEP provisions of the mandate, has not been ascertained from individuals

directly involved in the process (i.e. special education teachers). Before attributing the breakdown in the assessment-IEP link to any specific variable, the nature of the special education process leading to the development of IEP's must first be described.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study is the lack of data describing the nature of the transition from assessment to instructional planning. Of interest is the manner in which instructional planning occurs, and the outcome of that planning as evidenced through development of the IEP.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

A review of the literature suggests that the special education teacher is the IEP team member who is likely to be primarily involved in the development of the student's educational plan. Further it has been suggested that, although state and federal regulations call for a logical/functional relationship between the evaluation and planning phases, this may not be evidenced in practice. Given this paradox, the purpose of this study is to describe the procedural aspects of the special education process as perceived by individuals directly involved in developing individualized educational programs for handicapped children. More specifically, the investigator will focus on the special education process as it pertains to handicapped children with specific learning disabilities. The selection of this handicapping condition for study was based upon the primary area of training and current responsibilities of the researcher.

Descriptions of the procedural aspects of special education will possibly identify factors associated with difficulties in the assessment to planning link. The outcome of this study may provide recommendations relative to the operation of special education procedures in local school districts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Consistent with the stated purpose of the study, the following research questions were investigated through use of a survey instrument which was distributed to local special education directors and Learning Disability teachers.

- 1.0 How can the special education process be described?
 - 1.1 What are the specific steps in the process from the referral to IEP development?
 - 1.2 Are the steps congruent with federal procedural requirements?
 - 1.3 To what extent are special education teachers involved in the process?
 - 1.4 To what extent do individuals participating in decision making and IEP development consider themselves trained for these tasks?
- 2.0 How can the development of IEP's be described?
 - 2.1 Who attends IEP meetings?
 - 2.2 Who is primarily responsible for planning and writing the IEP?
 - 2.3 What occurs at IEP meetings?
- 3.0 What are the perceived problems in the process of decision making and IEP development?
 - 3.1 To what extent are various areas of decision making and IEP development perceived as problems?
 - 3.2 Is the transition from assessment to the preparation of the IEP document perceived as a problem?
 - 3.3 When problems in the transition from

assessment to IEP preparation are identified, what is the perceived nature of the problem?

- 4.0 How can the utilization of the IEP document be described?
 - 4.1 Who receives copies of the IEP?
 - 4.2 To what extent is the IEP document related to the assessment data collected for an individual student?
 - 4.3 How useful is the IEP for L.D. students' instructional planning?
 - 4.4 Once written, how often do teachers refer to the IEP document?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of the study, the following definitions were used:

1. Assessment: A comprehensive examination of several dimensions of a child's behavior and adjustment which may include but is not limited to testing (Nazzaro, 1976).
2. Classification: The assignment of a student to a specific category of handicapping conditions.
3. Evaluation: A term used interchangeably with assessment.
4. Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written statement for a handicapped child that is developed and implemented in accordance with Sections 121a.341-121a.349 of P.L. 94-142 rules and regulations (Fed. Reg., Aug. 23, 1977, p. 42490).
5. Least restrictive environment: The placement of handicapped students with nonhandicapped students to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of that child.
6. Placement: The location, type, and amount of special education and related services to be delivered to a child.
7. Psychoeducational Assessment: "The study of an individual in an educational context, focusing on the quantitative and qualitative appraisal of his/her abilities, learning capacities, and emotionality as they relate to the child responding appropriately to the demands of the environment. The main purpose of psychoeducational assessment is to connect the outcomes of the assessment to educational planning for the child" (Walkenshaw & Fine, 1979, p. 8).

8. Related Services: Those services necessary for a child to benefit from special education.
9. Special Education: Specifically designed instruction . . . to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child . . . (Fed. Reg., Aug. 23, 1977, p. 42480).
10. Testing: The systematic study of a sample of behavior, usually expressed in quantitative terms (for example, the measuring and reporting of an IQ score or a reading level would be the function of specific testing) (Walkenshaw & Fine, 1979).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Litigation resulting in court ordered remedies to discriminatory practices in special education programming has led to the enactment of legislative mandates which set forth procedures designed to construct a link between diagnostic assessments and educational programming for handicapped individuals. In this chapter the legal and legislative mandates for providing that link are addressed and the research associated with the extent to which these procedures impact upon instructional planning for handicapped children, specifically in the development of the individualized education program (IEP) is analyzed.

Legal and Legislative Mandates

Legal attempts to require the provision of appropriate educational programs for handicapped children preceded the passage of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. In two significant cases (Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 1972; Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth, 1972) the

courts made it clear that a failure to provide a free appropriate education to handicapped children was a violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth amendment of the Constitution. While the primary focus in both *Mills* (1972) and *PARC* (1972) was the right to a publicly supported education, the courts held that the type of program required was to be suited to the needs of the student (*Mills*, 1972) and appropriate to the child's capacity (*PARC*, 1972).

Litigation surrounding the appropriateness of educational programs for handicapped students turned to the process whereby students were labeled and placed into special classes. Labeling practices were attacked for their reliance on intelligence tests to place children in Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) classes in which minority children were disproportionately represented (*Hobson v. Hansen*, 1967; *Diana v. State Board of Education*, 1970; *Larry P. v. Riles*, 1971). A common finding in these cases was the violation of substantive due process of law since the IQ tests were not reasonably useful in determining an appropriate education for a minority student (*Turnbull & Turnbull*, 1978).

The most significant allegations in the courts have involved the issues of testing, labeling, and placement in special education. *MacMillan and Meyers* (1979) present these issues as summarized by *Cohen and DeYoung* (1973) and *Ross, DeYoung, and Cohen* (1971).

1. Tests used are biased and inappropriate, and therefore do not reflect the true ability of the minority children.
2. Tests are often administered incompetently, which arises from the examiners' insensitivity to nontest factors.
3. Parents are often excluded from participation in the labeling process.
4. Special education programs are ineffective and constitute educationally permanent placements.
5. Placement and labeling are stigmas which are carried by the child for a lifetime (p. 176).

These legal concerns led to the enactment of specific provisions in P.L. 94-142 which guarantee "Protection in Evaluation Procedures" (Federal Register, Aug. 23, 1977, p. 42496). Section 121a.531 requires a full and individual evaluation before placing a child in the special education program. Specific evaluation procedures require that:

State and local educational agencies shall insure, at a minimum, that:

(a) Tests and other evaluation materials:

(1) Are provided and administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so;

(2) Have been validated for the specific purpose for which they are used; and

(3) Are administered by trained personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by their producer;

(b) Tests and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those which are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient;

(c) Tests are selected and administered so as best to ensure that when a test is administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or

speaking skills, the test results accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the child's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (except where those skills are the factors which the test purports to measure);

(d) No single procedure is used as the sole criteria for determining an appropriate educational program for a child; and

(e) The evaluation is made by a multidisciplinary team or group of persons, including at least one teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability.

(f) The child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, where appropriate health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities (Sec. 121a.532).

Upon completion of the evaluation, placement procedures in Section 121a.533 specify:

(a) In interpreting evaluation data and in making placement decisions, each public agency shall:

(1) Draw upon information from a variety of sources including aptitude and achievement tests, teacher recommendations, physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior;

(2) Insure that information obtained from all of these sources is documented and carefully considered;

(3) Insure that the placement decision is made by a group of persons, including persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options; and

(4) Insure that the placement decision is made in conformity with the least restrictive environment rules in Sec. 121a.550-121a.554.

(b) If a determination is made that a child is handicapped and needs special education and related services, an individualized education program must be developed in accordance with Sec. 121a.340-121a.349 of Subpart C.

Continuing, Section 121a.552(a) (2) requires each public agency to insure that each handicapped child's educational placement is based on his or her individualized education program (IEP). This and the above rules and regulations clearly provide the framework for linking assessment information to instructional planning. These procedural requirements, with emphasis on the IEP, reflect the intent of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee which "designed the individualized planning conferences as one method to prevent labelling or misclassification" (Senate Report No. 94-168, 1975, p. 27). In essence,

The IEP concept changes the focus of educational programming from a categorical base to one based directly upon an assessment of a handicapped child's educational needs. Placement decisions must now be justified in terms of how the child's needs are best served by them (Walker, 1979, p. 119).

Additional support for the logical-functional nature of the relationship between assessment and instructional planning is found in the federal definition for the term evaluation. Evaluation embodies the:

. . . procedures used . . . to determine whether a child is handicapped and the nature and extent of the special education and related services that the child needs . . . (Sec. 121a.500).

Once again the objective is to determine a child's specific instructional needs.

In summary, a systematic flow of procedures which links assessment information to educational planning is

mandated. The requirement to develop an IEP for handicapped children, the substance of the IEP document, the required evaluation and placement procedures presented above, and the guarantee of due process of law, provide the legal and legislative base for insuring the presence of that link.

Procedural Aspects of Instructional Planning

As previously indicated there are certain provisions and procedural requirements which must be followed by all educational agencies in an attempt to ensure an appropriate education to handicapped children. Foremost in the appropriate education requirement are the IEP provisions which define the nature of the IEP document and the procedural safeguards which must be observed in its development. Common procedures among educational agencies must include parental participation, nondiscriminatory assessment, and the employment of multidisciplinary teams for placement and instructional planning decisions (Federal Register, 1977b).

Prior to P.L. 94-142 there was an absence of research which described on a large scale basis, how special education committees operated (MacMillan & Meyers, 1979). Most reported studies have examined specific aspects of the special education process such as the selection of assessment devices (Goldbaum & Rucker, 1977; Schenck & Levy, 1979; Mardell-Czudnowski, 1980), without examining the entire process from the point of referral to IEP implementation. Since

conceptually, the prescribed process is a flow of interrelated steps (Gillespie-Silver, 1979), there is a need to look at the process in its entirety to determine how it impacts upon the development of student's individual educational programs. An understanding of the total process, as practiced in school settings, may explain the research findings which suggest the lack of a significant relationship between psychoeducational assessment data and corresponding IEP's (Schenck & Levy, 1979; Schenck, 1980).

Steps. Although the literature has not reported how the procedural aspects of special education affect programming, two major investigations have examined the special education process in terms of the sequence of steps in the process, the composition of multidisciplinary teams, and the assessment devices employed. Due to sampling limitations, however, the results "may not be exact reflections of the process as actually carried out in school settings" (Poland, Ysseldyke, Thurlow & Mirkin, 1979, p. 2). In one study the respondents were directors of special education (Poland, et al., 1979) who are often removed from practices at the case level. The respondents in the second study were professionals employed in model learning disabilities centers representing various educational enterprises such as state and local education agencies, colleges and universities (Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1979). For a description that reflects the manner in which procedural

aspects of special education are implemented, it seems data must be sought from individuals directly involved in the process.

In a survey of 97 directors of special education representing 49 states, Poland, et al. (1979) found the primary steps in the assessment and decision making process to be (1) child found or referred, (2) assessment, (3) development of the IEP, and (4) implementation of the program (p. 6). Although considerable variability was found in team membership and in the descriptions and number of intermediary steps in the process, those steps listed by the directors tended to follow the sequence of steps reported by 39 Child Service Demonstration Centers studied by Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979). Steps in the sequence are as follows:

1. Child found or referred
2. Review of referral
3. Appoint assessment team
4. Obtain parental permission to assess
5. Assessment
6. Review of assessment results
7. Eligibility determination
8. Contact parent after assessment
9. Develop IEP
10. Placement decision
11. Parental permission for placement

12. Develop strategies to implement IEP

13. Implement program (p. 22)

In both studies the major diversion from this sequence occurred in the timing of the placement decision (no. 10) which frequently preceded the development of the IEP (no. 9). Although only 19 directors listed placement decision and develop IEP as distinct steps, 74 percent of the 19 listed the placement decision before the development of the IEP. This finding is significant in that it conflicts with the regulations of 94-142. According to Turnbull, Strickland, and Brantley (1978), the placement decision may be suggested by the evaluation team but must be finalized by the IEP committee. It should be noted, however, that from the sequence of steps and descriptions included in their survey, Poland, et al. (1979) could not determine which meetings and decisions occurred on same or different occasions. It is possible that the placement decision and IEP development transpired concurrently.

Concern for the sequencing of the placement decision relative to the development of the IEP was expressed by Schipper and Wilson (1978). After two years of conducting workshops on the IEP process, they noted confusion by special educators, both at the local and state levels, "as to whether the IEP should be written before or after placement" (p. 5). Although no formal data analyses were performed, the authors were concerned that placement decisions were being made prior

to the development of IEP's and then teachers were asked to write IEP's. Further Schipper and Wilson indicated that administrators often pass the responsibility for writing and implementing IEP's to classroom teachers. They attributed this practice to "historical precedent, and the misunderstanding and/or unwillingness to change existing practices" (p. 10). Whereas special teachers were often excluded from the decision making process in the past, Hayes and Higgins caution that IEP difficulties may occur when education agencies tack the IEP meeting "on top of an already existing system of evaluating and placing handicapped children", (1978, p. 270).

The IEP meeting. Although many professionals have translated the IEP provisions of 94-142 into guidelines of what the "ideal" IEP conference should be (Hayes, 1977; Higgins, 1977; Torres, 1977; Turnbull, et al., 1978; Jones, 1979; Deno & Mirkin, 1980; Maher, 1980), descriptions of the actual IEP meeting as executed in local districts have been few. An investigation by Goldstein, et al. (1980) attempted to characterize IEP conferences by looking at the participants present, the topics discussed, and the length of the meetings. Although limited by the size, nature and demographic restrictions of the sample, Goldstein, et al. (1980) provided a descriptive analysis of naturalistic observational data collected during 14 IEP conferences in three North Carolina school districts.

The observed IEP meetings were scheduled for mildly retarded or learning disabled children and ranged in length from six to 72 minutes (\bar{X} =36 minutes). The researchers found the number of participants to vary from 2 to 6 with the resource teacher and one parent present at all of the meetings. In nine of the conferences the individual who is responsible for providing or supervising the provision of special education, other than the child's teacher, was not present. This finding is supported in the Report to the Congress prepared by the General Accounting Office (GAO) in 1981 which reviewed 456 IEP's and found that of those reviewed 52 percent "lacked evidence that all required participants attended the IEP meeting" (p. 60). Of those which lacked some of the specified participants, 34 percent were missing the local education representative other than the teacher and 6 percent did not have teacher participation.

Goldstein, et al. (1980) found the most frequently discussed topics to be curriculum, behavior, and performance. They were surprised at their finding that the topics discussed seldom included evaluation, placement, special services, rights and responsibilities, future contacts, and future plans. Another unanticipated finding was the positive reaction to the conferences by all participants. They speculated that the parents' positive reaction resulted from increased communication (not of a disciplinary nature),

the anticipation of special help for their child, and a failure on the part of parents to understand the purpose of the meeting.

Based on their observations, Goldstein, et al. (1980) concluded that IEP conferences generally consist of a resource teacher, characterized as the dominant speaker, presenting an already developed IEP to the parent(s). They suggested the need to determine if their observation is a trend in all school districts. A study spanning a broader geographic region would provide a more generalized description of IEP meetings.

Special education teacher involvement. Although the literature has not substantiated that administrators pass the responsibility for writing IEP's to teachers, there is evidence of major involvement of the special education teacher at IEP meetings (Schenck & Levy, 1979; Goldstein, et al., 1980; GAO, 1981). An examination of 300 IEP's revealed that the special education teacher was present for more IEP planning meetings than any other school personnel (Schenck & Levy, 1979; Schenck, 1981).

The naturalistic observations by Goldstein, et al. (1980) revealed "that the resource teacher assumes primary responsibility not only for the IEP conference, but also for the development and implementation of the IEP" (p. 284). If teachers are presumed by other team members to be responsible for the IEP, the implementation of procedural safeguards for

handicapped children is in jeopardy. Such a concern was raised by Fenton, et al. (1979) when 1,428 placement team members in Connecticut completed a questionnaire which revealed the team members did not recognize their responsibilities in activities related to programming and ongoing evaluation. Fenton, et al. (1979) stated:

Since the purpose of the placement team assessment process is to determine the specific program that is appropriate for the referred student, a thorough diagnosis without a prescription for remedial action leaves the job unfinished. Public Laws 93-380 and 94-142 both require states to provide safeguards in decision making related to the development of the student's educational plan. If all programming responsibility is relinquished by default to the teacher or teachers who receive the exceptional student, then what safeguard does the system provide to ensure the appropriateness of the program? (p. 643)

To determine why the special education teacher might be delegated the major responsibility for the IEP, one may turn to the federal regulations. Since the evaluation team must include a teacher as well as someone with knowledge in the area of the suspected disability (Sec. 121a.532 (e)), and the initial IEP committee must include a teacher and a member of the evaluation team or someone knowledgeable about the evaluation procedures used with the child (Sec. 121a.344 (b) (2)), the special education teacher can serve in several capacities at once. That is, the special teacher can serve as the teacher, the person with knowledge in the area of the suspected disability, and as the person knowledgeable about

the evaluation procedures used with the child. This strategy requires the presence of only two school employees at the IEP meeting without conflicting with the letter of the law.

In addition to conserving resources in terms of personnel, the nature of the task of developing an IEP would encourage major involvement of the special education teacher. Fenton, Yoshida, Maxwell, and Kaufman (1977) concluded that the special education teacher is perceived by the team as the individual who should suggest the student's subject matter needs, suggest instructional methods, and set the evaluative criteria for the student's academic performance. This conclusion is congruent with the finding that the special education teacher is listed most often by special education directors as the team member involved in instructional planning decisions (Poland, et al. (1979)).

Special education teacher involvement in other meetings. If team members do not recognize their responsibilities for programming, and/or the receiving teacher(s) are delegated this responsibility, the need to involve the special education teacher in the decision making process from assessment to IEP development is apparent. This seems especially true in light of research findings which suggest a positive relationship between participation and (a) one's willingness to accept a decision (Hoffman & Maier, 1959, 1961), (b) one's commitment to a decision (Swartz, Steefel & Schmuck, 1976), and (c) one's satisfaction with the team

process (Yoshida, Fenton, Maxwell & Kaufman, 1978a). The need for teacher involvement in the process is reiterated by the finding that the communication of planning teams to instructional personnel is informal and thus subject to varied interpretations (Yoshida, Fenton, Maxwell and Kaufman, 1978b). Involvement may alleviate the difficulty teachers experience when translating traditional written psychoeducational reports into individualized program planning (Shively & Smith, 1969; Bagnato, 1981; Tymitz, 1982).

As noted above, even though Poland, et al. (1979) found that the special education teacher was listed by directors of special education as the person most often involved in instructional planning decisions, 29 percent of the directors indicated that IEP implementers (i.e. special teachers) were present in 20 percent or less of the meetings in which instructional decisions were made. These findings should be interpreted cautiously. It could be that directors of special education are not in a position to quantify actual participation since they reported personal participation in less than 25 percent of placement teams limited to four professionals. Moreover, they also indicated their involvement in less than 38 percent of instructional planning decisions. Perhaps the lack of personal involvement by directors in various aspects of the special education process can explain their lack of clarity when describing the nature and frequency of the meetings in the sequence of steps linking

assessment to IEP development. Consequently, teacher participation in specific steps from assessment to IEP development cannot be discerned from the Poland, et al. (1979) study.

Conclusion

The above findings delineate several variables which appear to affect the assessment-IEP link. These variables are the intermediary steps in the special education process, the special education teacher's involvement in the steps, and the IEP meeting itself. At present, the role of the special education teacher in the intermediary steps from assessment to IEP development has not been ascertained. Other than the limited study by Goldstein, et al. (1980) which suggests the primary role of the special education teacher in the development of the IEP, the literature has not described experiences associated with IEP procedures, the nature of team participation, nor the substance of the IEP meeting.

There is a void in the literature which describes current trends in the development of IEP's. This study will fill that void by extending the studies of Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979), Poland, et al. (1979) and Goldstein, et al. (1980). In addition to directors of special education, data will be sought from learning disability teachers who may be more directly involved in the IEP aspects of the process. The present study sample includes school districts

representing a larger geographic area than the Goldstein, et al. (1980) observation. Information collected reflects the integrated rather than fragmented nature of the process from referral through the development of individualized educational programs. Thus, this investigation provides a description of the special education process from the perspective of individuals who are frequently involved in the overall system of educational planning and implementation.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the procedural aspects of the special education process from referral through the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's). Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire consisting of partially close-ended type questions, Likert scale items, and several open-ended responses. Using survey techniques recommended by Dillman (1978) the questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of special education directors and/or supervisors and selected learning disability teachers at the local education agency level in five eastern states.

Sample Selection

The population to which this study was addressed consisted of all learning disability (LD) teachers and special education directors and/or supervisors at the local education agency (LEA) level located in five eastern states. Based on the recommended sample size by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for a .05 level of confidence, a simple random sample plan was developed that allowed 430 school district directors and/or

supervisors of special education in the five states to be randomly selected from the Education Directory - Public School Systems 1977-78 (Williams & Warf, 1978). Although the sample was drawn by states, the focus of the study is with implementation of federal requirements and thus, will not address the practices of individual states.

Three LD teachers, representing elementary, middle, and high school levels, were selected from each LEA by the local director and/or supervisor. In an attempt to provide uniformity in subject selection, the director was instructed to distribute the questionnaire to a teacher whose name would appear among the first three on an alphabetized list of teachers for each level. The number of school districts selected from each is set forth in Table 1.

Of the 430 school districts randomly selected for the study, 188 or 44% agreed to participate. An additional 18 (4%) responded that they did not wish to participate. Only a speculative rationale can be offered to explain the failure of the remaining 224 (52%) to respond to the request for participation. It is possible that the initial correspondence was not received by individuals responsible for special education in these districts. The mailing label provided only the school district name, the city and state denoting the location of the superintendent, and the title Director of Special Education. Other factors unknown to the researcher

may have influenced the decision of these districts not to participate.

Since school district size is often thought to affect the response rate, school districts from each state selected for study were analyzed to determine if any patterns related to size were apparent. No systematic difference in the number of students per district and the willingness to participate in the study are evidenced in Table 1. The only discernible pattern between the school districts selected to participate and those agreeing to participate is the greater percentage of positive responses from states closer in proximity to the origin of the research (i.e., Roanoke, Virginia). As displayed in Table 1, 63% of Virginia and 62% of West Virginia districts agreed to participate, while 38%, 33%, and 32% of those contacted in Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, respectively, noted a willingness to participate.

From the final pool of 188 school districts that agreed to participate, 176 districts were represented in the final sample (93%). The distribution of the final sample of school districts included in the study can be seen in Table 1.

The states with the largest number of school districts (i.e., Pennsylvania and Virginia) represent the greatest percentage of school districts (36%) included in the final sample as seen in Table 2. Furthermore, the highest percentage of respondents represent Virginia (37%) and Pennsylvania (34%). Perhaps identification with the state initiating the

Table 1

Size of School Districts Selected and
Represented in the Study^a

District Size by State	School Districts		
	No. Selected for Study	No. & Percentages of Selected Dist. to Participate	No. in Final Sample
Delaware	26 (all)	10 (38%)	10
Small	19	8 (42%)	8
Medium	6	2 (33%)	2
Large	1	0 (0%)	0
Maryland	24 (all)	8 (33%)	7
Small	4	0 (0%)	0
Medium	8	1 (12%)	1
Large	12	7 (58%)	6
Pennsylvania	222	71 (32%)	64
Small	178	55 (31%)	50
Medium	42	15 (36%)	13
Large	2	1 (50%)	1
Virginia	103	65 (63%)	63
Small	63	36 (57%)	34
Medium	31	22 (71%)	22
Large	9	7 (78%)	7
West Virginia	55 (all)	34 (62%)	32
Small	24	16 (67%)	15
Medium	26	16 (61%)	15
Large	5	2 (40%)	2
Total	430	188 (44%)	176

^aNumber of pupils per district: Small=less than 5000, Medium=5001-15,000, Large=more than 15,000.

Table 2
Representation of States
Included in the Study

State	No. of School Dist.	Percent of Total	No. Responses Received	Percent of Total
Delaware	10	6%	34	7%
Maryland	7	4%	21	4%
Pennsylvania	64	36%	171	34%
Virginia	63	36%	189	37%
West Virginia	32	18%	93	18%
Total	176	100%	508	100%

study accounts for the positive response in Virginia. Although Pennsylvania districts were randomly selected more than twice as often as Virginia districts, both states are equally represented (36%) in the percentage of school districts included in the study, and Virginia had 18 more respondents than Pennsylvania.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study was adapted from the research questionnaires and subsequent findings of Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979) and Poland, et al. (1979) relative to assessment and decision making practices in special education. Both of these studies employed survey instruments consisting mainly of open-ended questions. After examining the instruments and the reported findings of the studies, this researcher categorized the data into a series of close-ended questions and Likert scale items. The questions were designed to obtain information concerning: (a) steps in the assessment and decision making process, (b) problems related to decision making and IEP development, (c) involvement of directors and learning disability teachers in the overall process, and (d) identification of persons performing various aspects of IEP development. Additional Likert scale items and open-ended questions were developed to explore the perceptions of directors and teachers regarding professional training, the assessment-IEP link, attendance at IEP

meetings, and utilization of the IEP document. The instrument is set forth in Appendix D.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with members of the special education supervisory staff in Roanoke County Schools (n=3) and LD interns from Radford University who were completing a Master's degree program in special education (n=12). These individuals analyzed the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher. They made comments and suggestions, both written and verbal, relative to the (a) clarity of directions, (b) content of the questions, (c) method of response, and (d) appeal of the format. Their analyses revealed the need to underline or extend portions of the directions, to present the Likert scale items in a consistent manner throughout (i.e., negative to positive from left to right), and to change the wording of several questions lacking in content specificity. All comments and suggestions were considered and incorporated into the refinement of the questionnaire as seen in Appendix D. The design and format of the instrument follow the style suggested by Dillman (1978).

Procedures

In August 1981, 430 school district special education directors and/or supervisors were sent a letter requesting their participation in the study (Appendix A). A stamped return postcard was included for directors to indicate their willingness to participate (Appendix B).

In October 1981, 4 questionnaires and 4 stamped return envelopes with an appropriate cover letter (Appendix C) were sent to the 188 school district directors and/or supervisors who had indicated their willingness to participate in the study. One week after the questionnaires were mailed, a postcard follow-up (Appendix E) was sent thanking those who had already returned the questionnaire and reminding those who had not. A second follow-up letter was mailed to the 12 districts who had not responded to the questionnaires within two months. The purpose of this letter was to determine the nature of the nonresponse (Appendix F). Five (42%) replies to this final mailing indicated that (a) the questionnaires were not received possibly due to staff changes, (b) LD teachers were not employed by the district, (c) time was not available to participate, and (d) the study was not valuable to the district.

Of the total 752 questionnaires sent (4 per district), 736 were distributed. Sixteen questionnaires were returned or discarded by the directors who indicated that less than three LD teachers were employed in their districts. The final number of questionnaires included in the sample was 508 representing a return rate of 68 percent. The distribution of responses per state is reported in Table 2.

Statistical Analyses

The data analyses were conducted using the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Computer

Facilities. Utilizing the packaged programs FREQUENCIES and CROSSTABS from Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (1975), a series of frequency distributions and cross tabular procedures were performed with the data from the close-ended and Likert scale items. The open-ended responses were coded and collapsed into categories by the researcher.

An inspection of the data from the frequency distributions revealed several variables requiring additional comparisons for appropriate interpretation. These variables were selected for cross tabulation to describe the differences in directors' and teachers' responses to perceived problems in assessment and decision making, involvement in various steps of the process, the frequency of reference to the IEP document, the usefulness of the IEP, and to problems in the transition from assessment to planning. Information collected from elementary, middle, and high school LD teachers revealed no differences in responses attributable to grade level; therefore the data are presented collectively across grade levels. In only one portion of the study will a distinction in level be made. The number of high school students participating in IEP development will be presented. The results of the above procedures are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the questionnaire administration. Following a description of the subjects, each research question as presented in Chapter One will be addressed. The presentation of data will be as follows: (a) a description of the special education process, (b) a description of IEP development, (c) a description of perceived problems in the process of decision making and IEP development, and (d) a description of the utilization of the IEP document. The final portion of the chapter is a summary of comments and recommendations made by the respondents.

Respondents

The 508 subjects from the 176 school districts in the study included 119 (23.4%) directors and/or supervisors of special education, 346 (68.1%) Learning Disability (LD) teachers, and 43 (8.5%) others associated with special education procedures comprised of guidance counselors, psychologists, instructional specialists, teachers of the mentally retarded, superintendents, and those who did not report their position.

Description of the Special Education Process

Specific steps in the process from referral to IEP development. A frequency distribution was performed to describe the special education process for LD students enrolled in the participating districts. There was general agreement among the 420 respondents who reported the specific steps in the process from referral to Individualized Education Program (IEP) development. Eighty-eight subjects did not respond to this item. As seen in Table 3 at least 80% of the respondents reported that most of the 15 steps in the list are customary practices (occurring more than 50% of the time) in their district. Three steps that were mentioned by less than 80% of the respondents as customary practices were: observation of the child in the regular class (76.0%), screening tests (73.3%), and preliminary development of the IEP without the parent present (78.1%). Of these three functions, only the observation of the child in the regular class is required by the LD regulations of P.L. 94-142.

Congruence of steps with federal procedural requirements. As evidenced in Table 3, local school district policies in the process from referral to IEP development are substantially congruent with federally mandated procedural requirements for LD students. The observation of the child in the regular classroom was the least frequently reported required step. Although only 24% excluded this step, this exclusion coupled with 12% excluding the comprehensive

assessment and team meeting to develop the IEP, suggest that total compliance with the mandate has not been achieved.

Extent of special education teacher involvement in the process. Involvement with specific steps in the special education process of assessment/decision making and IEP development varies with the nature of the task as seen in Table 4. A comparison of teachers and directors reveals similar involvement in most steps. Six areas of greatest disparity between teachers and directors include: Child Find or referral, screening tests, assignment of assessment team to case, preliminary development of IEP, team meeting to develop IEP, and implementation of the IEP. Discriminant involvement was noted in the administrative and instructionally related nature of these tasks. Directors more frequently indicated their involvement with administrative tasks such as Child Find or referral (61.3%), review of referral (61.4%), assignment of assessment team to case (65.0%), review of assessment results (75.6%), eligibility determination (78.9%), and placement decision (74.8%) than to tasks directly related to the child and instructional planning. Teachers, on the other hand, are more frequently involved with instructional tasks such as review of assessment results (74.6%), preliminary development of the IEP (73.5%), the team meeting to develop the IEP (80.9%), the placement decision (74.0%), and the implementation of the IEP (95.3%).

Table 3

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Customary Occurrence of Specific Steps in the Assessment/ Decision Making Process for Learning Disabled (LD) Students^{a, b}

Step	Percentage
Child Find or referral ^c	93.3
Review of referral	88.6
Observation of child in regular class ^c	76.0
Screening tests (not formal assessment)	73.3
Obtaining parental permission to assess ^c	94.0
Assignment of assessment team to case	83.5
Comprehensive assessment ^c	88.0
Review of assessment results	91.6
Eligibility determination ^c	92.8
Contacting parent after assessment	93.3
Preliminary development of IEP (parent not present) ^c	78.1
Team meeting to develop IEP (parent present) ^c	87.6
Placement decision	95.9
Parental permission for placement ^c	96.7
Implementaton of IEP	97.6

^aN=420 (88 subjects did not respond to this item).

^bOccurring more than 50% of the time.

^cFederally mandated procedural requirements for LD students.

Table 4

Percentages of Teachers (T) and Directors (D) of
 Special Education Reporting Their Involvement in
 Specific Steps of the Assessment/Decision
 Making Process for LD Students
 as Frequent or Always (N=508)^a

Step	Percentage	
	T	D
Child find or referral	43.1	61.3
Review of referral	54.9	61.4
Observation of child in regular class	37.0	30.2
Screening Tests	46.8	21.8
Obtaining parental permission to assess	37.3	43.7
Assignment of assessment team to case	32.1	65.5
Comprehensive assessment	44.5	42.8
Review of assessment results	74.6	75.6
Eligibility determination	63.6	78.9
Contacting parent after assessment	43.6	40.3
Preliminary development of IEP	73.5	30.3
Team meeting to develop IEP	80.9	52.9
Placement decision	74.0	74.8
Parental permission for placement	61.2	57.1
Implementation of IEP	95.3	45.4

^a119 Special education directors/supervisors (23.4%)
 346 Teachers (68.1%)
 43 Other (8.5%)

Perception of training for participation in decision making and IEP development. When asked about their training to participate in decision making and IEP development, most of the 508 respondents described their training as adequate (54.5%) or very adequate (27.9%). The training of other personnel in their district was also perceived to be adequate (60.0%) or very adequate (14.6%). Fourteen individuals (2.8%) noted that they had trained themselves to participate in special education committees. Availability of training in each locality was described as inadequate or very inadequate by 36.2% of the respondents.

Description of IEP Development

Attendance at IEP meetings. As presented in Table 5, the persons most frequently mentioned by the 508 subjects as usually attending IEP meetings were the special education teacher (96.3%), the parent (91.3%), the principal/administrator (72.6%), and the regular education teacher (40.9%). Forty percent of the respondents mentioned other persons in attendance including school psychologists, guidance counselors, speech and language therapists, IEP coordinators, and instructional advisors. The child or student was reported in attendance by only 49 or 9.3 percent of the respondents. One might anticipate that most high school teachers would include the student in the development of the IEP. However, only 22 of 89 (24.7%) high school teachers in the study reported that the child attends IEP meetings.

Table 5
 Percentages of Respondents Reporting the Attendance
 of Various Person(s) at Formal Individualized
 Education Program (IEP) Meetings^a

Person	Percentage
Special Education Teacher	96.3
Parent	91.3
Principal/Administrator	72.6
Regular Education Teacher	40.9
Child	9.3
Other ^b	40.0

^aN=508 Special education directors/supervisors (23.4%), LD teachers (68.1%), and other (8.5%)

^bOther: School psychologists, Guidance Counselors, Speech and Language Therapists, IEP Coordinators, Instructional Advisors

After noting those persons who usually attend IEP meetings, 118 respondents listed additional person(s) that they would like to participate in the meeting to develop IEP's. While these individuals may attend some meetings, more frequent attendance is desired. The most frequently mentioned additional person is the regular classroom teacher (mentioned by 45% of 118 respondents to this item), followed by the psychologist (19%), the principal (15%), the student (14%), the guidance counselor (13%), the special education administrator/supervisor (10%), speech therapist (5%), and parents (3%).

Persons primarily responsible for planning and writing the IEP. Of the 495 respondents indicating the person primarily responsible for planning and writing the IEP, the special education teacher was listed individually by 399 (80.6%) respondents. Twenty-two (4.4%) listed the special education teacher with one other person such as the school psychologist, while 74 (14.9%) of the respondents listed others such as IEP or special education coordinators, school psychologists, directors or supervisors of special education, a team, guidance counselors, and instructional advisors.

Occurrence of various tasks at IEP meetings. It is apparent from inspection of data presented in Table 6 that all required tasks of IEP development are normally performed. In the IEP process, the special education teacher is the person most frequently mentioned as performing all 12 tasks.

Between 93.5% and 96.9% of all respondents attributed goal setting and evaluative tasks to the special teacher. The special education teacher is the only person said to perform each task by greater than 60% of the 508 respondents. Though less than the special education teacher, the other most active persons in the IEP process are the principal/administrator and the persons listed as "other".

Of the 347 (68.3%) respondents including an "other" as performing IEP tasks, 227 (65.4%) listed the school psychologist, followed by 47 (13.5%) who identified the guidance counselor and 32 (9.2%) cited a team. The remaining 11.9% who indicated some "other" person is involved, named these as diagnosticians, IEP coordinators, consultants, instructional advisors, department chairpersons, supervisors, and central office staff. The task most often performed by the "other" was that of providing recommendations for placement (59.3%) which was attributed to the school psychologist. Other tasks performed by the school psychologist and "others" are found in Table 6.

The respondents listed the principal/administrator's performance most often in the areas of suggesting the environment in which instruction would take place. That is, the most active involvement of the principal/administrator was in specifying services needed (46.5%), providing recommendations for placement (48.8%), and deciding the extent of participation in nonhandicapped programs (45.1%). An exception to this pattern was the performance of the task of

reviewing compiled assessment data, mentioned by 45.5% of the respondents. Although the principal/administrator seems to be active, it should be noted that less than 50 percent of the respondents attributed any tasks to him or her.

The parent and regular education teacher were rarely mentioned as performing tasks when compared to the other participants. The most frequently mentioned task performed by the regular teacher was that of providing specific information describing the student's strengths and weaknesses, mentioned by 45.7 percent of 508 respondents. As demonstrated in Table 6, the child or student's involvement is characteristically nil.

Of all 12, the two least performed tasks are (a) explains instructional techniques and materials to the IEP team and (b) explains specific goals and objectives of the special program to the IEP team. These tasks were reported as not performed by 7.1% and 4.7% of the respondents respectively.

Description of Perceived Problems in the Process of Decision Making and IEP Development

Perceptions of problems in various areas of decision making and IEP development. As seen in Table 7, the most frequently noted problem areas in the assessment and decision making process are related to time to complete all tasks related to IEP development (68.5%) and the amount of paperwork (83.8%). The frequency of responses to NEVER or SELDOM a

Table 6

Performance of Tasks Related to IEP Development:
 Percentage of Respondents Reporting the
 Individual Performing Each Task (N=508)^a

Task	Individual Performing Task					
	Child	Parent	Principal/ Administrator	Special Education Teacher	Regular Education Teacher	Other
1. Makes arrangements for the IEP meeting	0.2	2.4	28.7	67.5	1.6	24.2
2. Provides specific information describing the student's strengths and weaknesses	1.2	17.7	11.2	67.9	45.7	46.3
3. Reviews compiled assessment data	0.4	19.3	45.5	76.8	24.0	48.6
4. Explains specific goals and objectives of the special program to the IEP team	0.2	1.0	17.5	71.7	3.5	26.2
5. Sets annual goals	1.8	21.5	12.4	93.5	17.9	19.1
6. Sets the short-term instructional objectives	1.8	13.8	6.3	96.9	13.8	10.6

Table 6 (continued)

Task	Individual Performing Task					
	Child	Parent	Principal/ Administrator	Special Education Teacher	Regular Education Teacher	Other
7. Specifies criteria for determining mastery of goals and objectives	0.8	5.7	5.9	95.7	7.9	9.3
8. Specifies educational services needed by the child	0.8	18.5	46.5	66.5	11.8	47.0
9. Provides recommendations for placement	1.6	17.1	48.8	60.2	30.7	59.3
10. Explains instructional techniques and materials to the IEP team	0.2	1.2	8.7	78.3	4.1	17.7
11. Sets dates and lengths of time for which services would be provided	0.8	12.8	26.8	80.9	11.0	32.5

Table 6 (continued)

Task	Individual Performing Task					
	Child	Parent	Principal/ Administrator	Special Education Teacher	Regular Education Teacher	Other
12. Decides on the extent to which the child would participate in programs designed for nonhandicapped children	3.7	25.0	45.1	81.1	29.9	44.1

^a119 Special education directors/supervisors (23.4%)
 346 Teachers (68.1%)
 43 Other (8.5%)

Table 7

Areas of Decision Making and IEP Development for
LD Students: Percentages of Respondents
Describing the Severity of Problems
in Each Area (N=508)^a

Area	Description of Problem	
	Never or Seldom	Always or Frequently
1. Scheduling a convenient meeting time for all members	42.5	56.7
2. Time to complete all tasks related to IEP development	30.7	68.5
3. Ability of team to appropriately interpret case file information for educ. planning	85.4	13.2
4. Consistency of outcomes as a function of team composition	84.6	11.8
5. Adequate number of personnel to participate in the IEP process for LD students	73.4	25.4
6. Availability of appropriate placement options for LD students	55.7	43.3
7. Availability of funds to purchase special materials	51.4	48.3
8. Access to needed related services	64.1	35.1
9. Involving parents in the child study team	41.8	56.3
10. Parental program expectations	70.9	28.2
11. Instructional utility of paperwork	35.7	60.5

Table 7 (continued)

Area	Description of Problem	
	Never or Seldom	Always or Frequently
12. Amount of paperwork	15.4	83.8
13. Availability of needed information	81.3	18.1
14. Consistency in the information received about a given child	78.9	20.3
15. Relevancy of information received to the IEP development process	78.3	20.7
16. Legal requirements in the implementation of decision making and IEP development	72.5	26.2
17. Keeping current with legal requirements	61.2	38.2

a119 Special education directors/supervisors (23.4%)
 346 Teachers (68.1%)
 43 Other (8.5%)

problem reflects few difficulties in the areas of: (a) team performance, (b) information for completing the IEP, (c) parental program expectations, and (d) legal requirements in the implementation of decision making and IEP development.

Several areas of assessment and decision making lack consistency (less than 68% agreement) in the extent to which they are perceived as problems. These were selected for further inspection to determine if the variability could be attributed to teachers or directors. These areas are set forth in Table 8 and include: scheduling meeting times, the availability of placement options and funds, access to services, parent involvement, instructional utility of paperwork, and keeping current with legal requirements. The variability appears to be attributed to teachers more often than directors. Review of Table 8 indicates that directors tend to agree in their descriptions of problems. At least 60 to 74 percent of them agree on the severity of all problems except those in the areas of involving parents in the child study team and keeping current with legal requirements. The directors are almost equally divided in their perceptions of the problems in these two areas.

While teachers vary in their perceptions of most problems in Table 8, they generally agree that access to needed related services (65.3%) and keeping current with legal requirements (64.7%) are never or seldom problems for them although thirty-four percent do perceive problems in these

areas. Inspection of Table 8 also reveals that when compared to teachers, directors more frequently note problems with the instructional utility of paperwork and keeping current with legal requirements. Perhaps directors perceive greater problems than teachers in these two areas because of their level of responsibility for implementing legal requirements and for their role in completing forms related to monetary purposes which may not be perceived as instructional.

In response to an open-ended question requesting a list of other areas of decision making and IEP development which were frequently or always a problem, of the 508 subjects, only 79 (15.5%) responded. A general description of the problem, with the number and percentage of the 79 mentioning it, is found in Table 9.

The most frequently written responses reiterated or clarified the nature of the problems with paperwork (62%) and time (28%) already identified. The responses consistently reflected concerns about the amount of time that paperwork takes away from teaching. The responses indicate that teachers have students assigned to them for instruction during the time in which they are testing other students, writing IEP's, and performing other clerical duties. In that vein, there is a problem identified as the lack of time for planning, writing and revising IEP's.

In order of frequency, after paperwork and time, problems rated by the greatest percentage of the 79 respondents

Table 8

Selected Problems in Decision Making and IEP Development
as Described by Teachers (T) (N=346) and
Directors (D) (N=119)

Problem Area	Percentage Reporting Severity of Problem			
	Never or Seldom		Always or Frequently	
	T	D	T	D
Scheduling a convenient meeting time for all members	44.2	35.3	54.9	64.7
Availability of appropriate placement options for LD students	52.9	64.7	46.5	33.6
Availability of funds to pur- chase special material	49.2	60.5	50.6	39.5
Access to needed related services	65.3	60.5	34.4	38.7
Involving parents in the child study team	39.9	43.7	57.8	55.5
Instructional utility of paper- work	40.2	22.7	55.4	74.8
Keeping current with legal requirements	64.7	48.7	34.7	52.3

included: too much responsibility for IEP's is placed on the special education teacher (25.3%), regular classroom teachers lack awareness of the problem (22.8%), parents are not involved (20.3%), special education teachers have difficulty writing an IEP before working with a child (19%), the definition of Learning Disabilities is too loosely defined (17.7%), the time lapse from referral to placement is too long, often due to over regulation (16.5%), and the psychological report or test data does not specify a child's problem (13.9%).

Transition from assessment to the preparation of the IEP document. When asked if there is a problem in the transition from assessment to the preparation of the IEP document, 151 (30.3%) of 499 respondents said YES. Of the 151 who did note a problem, 102 (67.5%) were LD teachers. This finding indicates that 29.5% of the LD teachers surveyed experience problems in the transition from assessment to IEP development.

Perceptions of problems in the transition from assessment to IEP development. The perceived nature of the problems from assessment to IEP development was described by 151 respondents who reported problems in the transition. They indicated that the information gathered is irrelevant to educational programming (43%), the data needed have not been gathered (42%), or they do not have time to review the assessment data (28%). Similar problems were indicated in Table 9 where difficulties were noted in writing an IEP before

Table 9

Additional Areas of Decision Making and IEP
Development Described as Problems: Number
and Percentage of Respondents
Listing Each Problem Area (N=79)^a

Problem Area	Number	(Percentage)
1. Paperwork takes teaching time	49	(62.0)
2. Time for IEP tasks is not provided	22	(28.0)
3. Too much responsibility for IEP's lies with the special teacher	20	(25.3)
4. Regular classroom teachers lack awareness of the problem	18	(22.8)
5. Parents are not involved	16	(20.3)
6. Writing an IEP is difficult before working with a child	15	(19.0)
7. Learning Disabilities are defined too loosely	14	(17.7)
8. Time lapse between referral and placement is too long	13	(16.5)
9. Psychological report and test data lack specificity	11	(13.9)
10. Continuum of services not provided	9	(11.4)
11. Special Teacher is not involved prior to placement	7	(8.9)
12. Forms for placement lack uniformity	7	(8.9)
13. Lack of competently prepared teachers	6	(7.5)

Table 9 (continued)

Problem Area	Number	(Percentage)
14. Overcrowding in LD rooms	4	(5.0)
15. Limited budget	3	(3.8)

^aAdded to the list of areas in Table 7 (written in response to an open-ended statement)

working with a child and in the lack of specificity in the psychological report and test data. Nineteen (12.5%) persons identified problems with the interpretation of data.

Description of the Utilization of the IEP Document

Persons receiving copies of the IEP. Once the IEP has been developed in the form of a written document, copies are distributed to certain persons or sent to various locations for filing. The persons or places most frequently mentioned as receiving copies are the special education teacher (89.2%), the parent (75.4%), the principal/administrator (58.3%), the regular classroom teacher (14%), and other (35.8%) (usually noted as the central office or confidential file).

Relationship of IEP document to assessment data collected. The relationship of the IEP document to assessment data collected for an individual student was rated by 502 respondents as often (50.6%) or always (38.8%) related. The actual degree of the relationship was not addressed in this survey. Therefore, all that can be said is that most respondents perceive the IEP document to be related more often than not to the assessment data, but not always. Only 49 (9.6%) persons indicated that they were never or seldom related.

Usefulness of the IEP for planning. The usefulness of the IEP document for LD students' instructional planning was rated by 497 respondents (111 directors, 345 teachers, 2 other) of whom 374 (75.2%) reported it to be useful while 123

(24.7%) rated the IEP as never or rarely useful for planning. Of the 123 who did not find the IEP to be useful for instructional planning, 98 (79.9%) were teachers. Consequently, of the 346 teachers included in the study, 247 (71.6%) see the IEP as a tool for actual instructional planning and 98 (28.4%) do not.

Frequency of reference to the IEP document. In the course of a year, persons refer to the IEP document at different times as depicted in Table 10. Forty-two percent of the directors reported that they refer to the IEP on an annual basis while 24.4% of them refer to the document at other times such as when requested, as needed, or when a problem arises. Teachers most frequently refer to the IEP at each grading period (24.9%) or monthly (23.7%). As one might anticipate, teachers refer to the IEP document more often than directors. From this study it cannot be determined how often the reference to the IEP is for monitoring purposes since the reasons for referring to the document were not explored.

Comments and Recommendations by Respondents

On the last page of the questionnaire, respondents were provided space for any additional comments they wished to make. Of 508, 229 (45.1%) elected to respond with written statements. The 229 responding included 34 (15%) directors, 182 (79%) LD teachers, and 13 (6%) other. The 182 LD teachers represent slightly more than half (52.6%) of all 346 teachers in the study.

Table 10

Frequency of Reference to the IEP Document:
Percentages of Special Education Teachers (T)
and Directors (D) Reporting Their
Points of Reference

Reference Points	Percentage	
	T(N=346)	D(N=119)
Annually	9.5	42.0
Once per semester	14.5	11.8
Each grading period	24.9	3.4
Monthly	23.7	1.7
Biweekly	7.5	0.8
Weekly	11.3	2.5
Daily	1.7	2.5
Never	1.4	4.2
Other ^a	5.5	24.4

^aAs needed, when requested, or when a problem arises

After examining all comments, the researcher selected the major points relative to the present study to be reported. An extensive list of comments appears in Appendix G.

Characteristically, the written statements were approximately one-third positive and two-thirds negative. The comments included several recommendations related to various aspects of special education. A summary of the more frequently occurring statements is presented below.

Positive comments. All individuals recording positive comments reflected upon the manner in which their school district had overcome specific difficulties associated with the requirements of P.L. 94-142. They noted a reduction in problems: (a) when teachers were given release time from teaching to perform noninstructional duties such as testing, developing IEP's, scheduling conferences, and observing students in the regular classroom, (b) when school districts employ a supervisory staff that is knowledgeable and capable of offering help with IEP related tasks, and (c) when the school has an established procedure for communication, inservice, and problem solving.

While difficulties in IEP development were acknowledged, the conceptual framework of IEP's was perceived as advantageous to handicapped students in that coordinated efforts for programming were required. It was noted too that once teachers realize the IEP is not intended to be a lesson plan, IEP development becomes easier and more effective. A

final positive comment relative to the development of IEP's involves parental expectations. Respondents stated that if explained, most parents understand that an IEP is a sample of expectations with variations and adjustments to be made.

Negative comments. The most frequently occurring negative comments were associated with: (a) the development of IEP's, (b) the magnitude of teacher responsibility, (c) the precedence accorded paperwork over teaching, and (d) the cost of special education. A summary of statements revealed perceptions that teachers are totally responsible for scheduling, conferencing and writing IEP's; that administrators get involved only when an agitated parent makes contact; and that paperwork and IEP's are emphasized with little attention to conflicting instructional responsibilities. Consequently, the development of IEP's has become mechanical, the process has not improved instruction, teachers are experiencing "burnout", and students are incurring an injustice. As stated by one LD teacher, "special education teachers are overworked, underpaid and unappreciated." However, from the comments presented, it did not appear as though teachers wished to dissolve the procedural requirements, rather a more realistic regard for teacher capabilities was sought.

Two superintendents expressed concern that non-handicapped students were experiencing revenue discrimination due to the complexity of special education and the increasing

number of students placed in LD programs. As alleged by one of the administrators, "the tail is wagging the dog."

Recommendations by respondents. Several respondents offered recommendations for the improvement of IEP related procedures. Common among the suggestions was the desire to find a means for making the IEP more beneficial and less time consuming. Elimination of short term instructional objectives was the most frequently occurring recommendation. Dissemination of forms from the federal government was suggested to ensure some manner of uniformity among districts. Others expressed the desire to maintain present procedures for initial placements, with the option to exclude administrators from annual reviews unless changes are to be made.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the procedural aspects of special education from the perspective of practitioners, specifically learning disability teachers and special education directors. Of primary concern were practices associated with the transition from assessment to the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for learning disabled students.

Results of the questionnaire administration, in light of legislative compliance, the related literature, and the perceptions of the researcher will be discussed in this chapter. The discussion will be organized around the research questions which sought descriptions of the special education process, the development of IEP's, the perceived problems in the process, and the utilization of the IEP document. Based on the discussion, conclusions and recommendations for future study will be set forth.

Discussion

Description of the Special Education Process. Steps in the assessment and decision making process, including the development of IEP's, are specified in the rules

and regulations promulgated to implement the requirements of 94-142. The results of this study indicate that in accordance with those regulations, LD students are referred, comprehensive assessments are conducted, students are found eligible for special education, IEP's are developed, and parental permission is secured before assessment and placement. While the lack of total compliance with the regulations remains an issue, this study found substantial compliance with all steps in the mandated requirements as reported in Table 3.

The steps reported as customary practices in this study are consistent with the 13 steps Poland, et al. (1979) and Thurlow and Ysseldyke (1979) found to be followed in their studies. Their instruments, however, did not include observation of the child in the regular classroom as a step in the process. Since the observation is required for children suspected of having specific learning disabilities (Federal Register, 1977c), it was included in the list for the present study and found to be the least implemented required step in the process. Because this requirement is idiosyncratic to suspected learning disabilities, the exclusion of this step as a customary practice by 24 percent of the respondents may relate to the problems identified in keeping current with legal requirements as indicated by 38.2 percent of the respondents in Table 7, or more likely, to the lack of time for observation. Noting that time was listed as a major

problem in Tables 7 and 8, and individual comments included time constraints, observation of the child in the regular classroom may not be given high priority in the special education process when compared to other requirements.

Although the failure to achieve total compliance with the regulations is not alarming, consideration of consequences should be addressed any time legal requirements are not completely followed. If a comprehensive assessment or IEP meeting is not held for each and every child placed in special education, by what means is the child placed? Could abuses of the past resurface if the procedural requirements are not totally implemented?

Special Education teacher involvement in the process from referral through the development of IEP's is more visible after the comprehensive assessment, although many teachers become involved with the initial review of referral (Table 4). Only 8.9 percent of 79 respondents indicated that lack of involvement prior to placement was a problem (Table 9). In fact, this study suggests that special education teachers are an integral part of the special education process.

The literature suggests that the personal involvement of special education teachers as evidenced in this study is needed prior to receiving the child for instruction (Hoffman & Maier, 1959, 1961; Swartz, et al., 1976; Shively & Smith, 1969; Yoshida, et al., 1978a, 1978b). However, when teachers report that the major problems in the process are paperwork

and time (Table 7) which infringe upon instructional responsibilities (Table 9), the advantages of involvement must be weighed against the instructional loss to other students. As stated by Price and Goodman (1980) ". . . time taken away from instructional programs for IEP development can be justified only if there is a resulting improvement in the program as a whole" (p. 453).

The training of individuals participating in the process did not seem to present a problem for the respondents. The directors and learning disability teachers in the present study consider themselves and others participating in the process to be adequately trained in decision making and IEP development which does not support the speculations (based on professional opinions) of Marver and David (1978) and Jones (1979) that those participating in the process lack the appropriate training. The adequacy of training in the present study should be interpreted with the understanding that self-report data were collected which may be affected by respondent bias. Future studies of training should be conducted in an objective manner to ascertain the quality of preparation for participation in decision making and IEP development.

The nature of their training was not within the scope of this study, yet much of it seems to be derived from experience. As noted by individual comments, several years of experience and practice with the procedures and the

development of IEP's has led to an easier, more effective and knowledgeable approach to the process.

Description of the Development of IEP's. The participants in IEP meetings represented in the present study most often include the special education teacher and parent, followed by the principal/administrator. While in substantial compliance with the mandates, the meetings often exclude the regular classroom teacher and rarely include the child. With the regular classroom teacher listed as the additional person desired more often at meetings, attendance by regular teachers must be improved.

Even when attending IEP meetings, however, classroom teachers experience limited participation, a finding which supports Pugach (1982) and Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Allen (1982). The limited participation by the regular classroom teacher may be due to several reasons including their lack of training in IEP development as reported by Tymitz (1982) and to the failure of the IEP document to address the regular classroom instructional program (Schenck, 1981; Pugach, 1982). The problem of limited participation by regular teachers is exacerbated when teams fail to clarify roles of team members (Traylor, 1982; Crossland, Fox, & Baker, 1982).

Another inactive participant in IEP meetings is the parent. Although in attendance, their participation in specific IEP tasks is even less than that of regular

classroom teachers. When assigning participation in the performance of various IEP tasks to individuals, the task respondents attributed most often to parents was that of deciding the extent to which the child would participate in regular programs. Even then, only 25 percent indicated that parents participate in this task. Only 21 percent indicated that parents participate in the task of setting annual goals (Table 6).

The limited participation of parents has been documented in the past (Goldstein, et al., 1980; Lusthaus, Lusthaus, & Gibbs, 1981) with an unexpected finding that parents are satisfied with IEP meetings (Polifka, 1981). According to Lusthaus, et al. (1981) parents are occupying roles they prefer, that of giving and receiving information. They caution, however, that as greater participation in and understanding of the educational system is achieved by parents, their desired role may change. It is questionable from the results of this study if parents are in fact giving information. From the extent to which the directors and teachers indicated the performance of tasks by parents, it seems that parents are merely receiving information.

Only nine percent of all respondents noted the child's or student's attendance at IEP meetings. Of this nine percent, 22 or four percent were high school teachers. Exclusion of the student to this extent was not the intent of the legislation. Since the mandate states that the child should

attend when appropriate (Federal Register, 1977b), it appears that most individuals do not view his/her attendance as appropriate or there are other unidentified factors contributing to the failure to include the student in IEP meetings. These factors may include scheduling, failure to recognize the need for student participation, or an awkwardness in knowing how to involve the student.

The overall composition of IEP teams in this study is consistent with the findings of Marver and David (1978), Schenck and Levy (1979), Goldstein, et al. (1980), Schenck (1981), and Pugach (1982). The finding of limited participation by classroom teachers in this study fails to confirm the finding of Poland, et al. (1979) in which 72 percent of the directors of special education listed the classroom teacher as attending instructional planning meetings. Perhaps as indicated earlier, these directors were not involved in instructional planning decisions enough to really know who attends. Their lack of personal knowledge of participation may explain the differences in findings.

The person primarily responsible for planning and writing the IEP is unequivocally the special education teacher. Not only are learning disability teachers involved in the preliminary development of the IEP without the parent present (Table 4), but they most often make arrangements for the meeting, and more than any other, they are reported to receive copies of the IEP. Comments of respondents suggest

that total responsibility for IEP's lies with the special education teacher. It cannot be determined from this study, however, who participates with the special education teacher in the preliminary development of the IEP. This may or may not include others such as the classroom teacher.

The conclusions reached by Schipper and Wilson (1978) and Goldstein, et al. (1980) that special teachers are delegated primary responsibility for IEP's is evidently widespread. A plausible rationale to explain why special education teachers are overwhelmingly responsible for IEP's may be related to the practice of only including special education goals and objectives in the IEP. Schenck (1981) and Pugach (1982) found IEP's to be lacking in instructional strategies for regular classroom use thereby reducing the multidisciplinary aspect of planning, and subsequently, the sharing of responsibility for IEP development. Unfortunately this practice is acceptable within the framework of federal requirements. Only the amount of time spent in the regular classroom is required on the IEP, not the manner in which the child is instructed there.

The occurrence of all tasks necessary to the development of the prescribed IEP document are reportedly performed (Table 6). In fact, only two tasks related to IEP development were even mentioned as not performed, and then by only 4.7 and 7.1 percent of 508 respondents. These two tasks involved explaining goals, objectives and instructional

techniques to the team (see Table 6). Performance of each task was most often attributed to the special education teacher. It is not clear whether all 12 tasks are performed in the team IEP meeting with the parent present or if they are completed in the planning phase during the preliminary development of the IEP. Perhaps some IEP tasks are performed outside the IEP meeting and are not discussed in the team meeting. Or they may be performed in other meetings with the parent or school personnel.

It would appear from the findings of the present study that Goldstein, et al. (1980) characterized the IEP meeting much as it occurs in other localities. Their study concluded that the IEP meeting generally consisted of a resource teacher (special education teacher in this study) presenting an already developed IEP to parents. The resource teacher was the dominant speaker in the meeting. Consistent with the Goldstein, et al. study the respondents in the present study characterized the special education teacher as performing most tasks, as being involved in developing the IEP without the parent present, and they depicted the parent as receiving most of the comments rather than performing tasks.

Description of Perceived Problems in the Process of Decision Making and IEP Development. Problems in decision making and IEP development are most often reported to be related to paperwork and time. An analysis of the recurring statements which clarify the nature of the problem suggest

while the problems stem from paperwork, the major problem, often difficult to measure, is that of frustration on the part of teachers. This finding is better reflected in responses to the open-ended items (Table 9 and Appendix G) than in the structured Likert scale items of the questionnaire. From their written statements learning disability teachers seem to be expressing frustration with: (a) the level of responsibility for noninstructional tasks assigned to them, (b) the amount of time needed to perform the tasks, (c) the failure of district policies to provide release time from teaching duties to fulfill noninstructional responsibilities, (d) the priority assigned paperwork over teaching, (e) the limited interest and involvement displayed by administrators, regular classroom teachers, and parents, and (f) the failure of professionals in the field to provide adequate guidelines for identifying and serving LD students.

Problems identified with time and paperwork preempting instructional time in the present study are not surprising when earlier studies by Safer, et al. (1978) and Price and Goodman (1980) are considered. Prior to the implementation date of the IEP provisions of P.L. 94-142, Safer, et al. (1978) reported that one of five concerns raised by teachers in anticipation of responsibilities related to IEP development was the fear of having less time for direct instruction of children. During the first school year of IEP implementation (1977-78), Price and Goodman (1980) found

instructional time to be the primary source of time for IEP development. They suggested that if subsequent experience with the process did not reduce the time required for IEP development, release time for IEP preparation should be considered. In four years of implementation, the reliance upon instructional time for IEP development is apparently remaining a problem.

The transition from assessment to IEP development is perceived by only 30.3% of the persons in the present study to be problematic which implies that it is not major. The problem is greater for teachers than for directors, an expected finding when teachers are delegated primary responsibility for IEP development.

On the surface, the problem might not be interpreted as severe, however, when almost one-third (29.5%) of all LD teachers in the study express problems in the transition from assessment to IEP development, the number of students affected may be substantial. Given the number of students each teacher serves, the implications for programming may be greater than that intimated by the percentages in this study.

Considering the magnitude of the difficulties in the assessment IEP link suggested in the literature (Fenton, 1979; Schenck & Levy, 1979; Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1979; Schenck, 1980, 1981), one might have anticipated finding a greater perception of problems in the transition from assessment to the development of IEP's in the present study. The discrepancy

in findings between this study and others may reflect sampling differences or inconsistency in the standards applied by the researchers in the other studies and the practitioners in the present study when determining the existence of a problem. The disparity may also pertain to access to distinct sources of information in analyzing the link. The researchers in other studies who analyzed objective data from written documents may have overlooked undocumented information sources upon which instructional decisions were made, thereby assuming the instructional plan was not based on appropriate data.

Another possible reason for the difference in the descriptions of problems in the assessment to planning link may include the motivation of the respondents in the present study. Given that most persons in the present study (i.e., LD teachers) are the persons primarily responsible for developing the IEP, they may have assumed that any identified deficiencies in the transition from assessment to IEP development would be interpreted as a reflection of their inadequacy.

The nature of the perceived problems in the transition from assessment to IEP preparation identified by 151 respondents, most often related to the irrelevance (43%) or absence (42%) of data needed for educational programming.

The finding of problems in the information base from which teachers develop IEP's is compatible with Bagnato's (1978) postulation that written diagnostic reports lack qualities vital to their utilization in planning. It cannot be determined from the present study if the identified problems of irrelevance or absence of data are verified or if as Fenton, et al. (1976) suggested, the manner in which the data are presented prevents teachers from utilizing it in an optimal way for programming. Since a small number identified problems with interpretation of the data, however, it is doubtful that the format of the presented data is a primary factor in problems associated with the assessment-IEP link.

While the data needed for IEP development is an identified problem in the transition from assessment to planning, the limited number of respondents reporting difficulties in this area fails to support a conclusion that this is the major variable contributing to difficulties in the transition from assessment to the development of IEP's. It would appear that the time constraints noted throughout the study may provide a better explanation for the difficulties even though only a few (28% of 151) reported specifically that they do not have time to review the assessment data.

Description of the Utilization of the IEP Document.

The persons receiving copies of the IEP document are reportedly the same as those in attendance at IEP meetings.

The regular education teacher was listed less often (14%) as the recipient of a copy. This finding is congruent with the finding of Pugach (1982) in which only 12 percent of 33 regular classroom teachers had IEP's on file in their classroom. Through written questionnaires and interviews, Pugach (1982) investigated the nature and extent of regular teacher involvement in and utilization of IEP's. The majority of the regular teachers (n=33) reported little need to consult the IEP document. They also indicated their lack of systematic involvement in the IEP development process.

Although access to the document was not explored in the current investigation, Pugach found that "when teachers had ready access to the IEP, it was more likely to be utilized" (1982, p. 374). It is possible that more than 14% of classroom teachers have access to the IEP's which are filed in confidential or administrative files. Their utilization of such is likely to be diminished if Pugach's contention is a reality. Learning Disability teachers, on the other hand, routinely have copies of the IEP which suggests the likelihood of greater utilization of the document by them.

The relationship of the IEP document to assessment data collected for an individual student was generally positive with most persons (50.6%) reporting that they were "often" related. The terms "often" and "related" could be interpreted by respondents in different ways. To some individuals "often" might have been selected if nine out of

ten IEP's were considered related to assessment data. To others "often" might have been interpreted as two of ten IEP's being related to assessment data. Also, as used in this study, "related" was not well defined and it does not indicate the degree of the relationship. Due to response set, respondent bias, or the nature of the terminology, it is difficult to know if "often" related is an acceptable standard or if a greater number would have been expected to describe the relationship as "always."

Only 49 individuals indicated that the IEP and assessment data were not related. This is an unusual finding when compared to the number of respondents (64) who attributed problems in the transition from assessment to IEP development to the absence of data needed for IEP preparation. Perhaps the terminology of the questionnaire accounts for this finding. Some individuals who noted problems in the absence of data needed for IEP preparation may have described the IEP document as "often related" to that assessment data which was collected even though the data was not considered sufficient. Or, prior to developing the IEP document, the teacher may have collected the additional data needed. The latter suggestion is posited in response to a finding by Price and Goodman (1980) that gathering diagnostic data to write the IEP is extremely time consuming for special education teachers.

The findings in the present study that the assessment data and IEP are perceived to be highly related and that few difficulties are evident in the transition from assessment to IEP development were not anticipated by the researcher. The underlying problem identified prior to conducting the research was the failure to achieve an assessment-IEP link as evidenced in the literature (Schenck & Levy, 1979; Schenck, 1980, 1981). The assumption of problems in the transition and in the relationship of the finalized document to assessment data was not demonstrated by the individuals who responded to the present study. Again, all of the above responses should be interpreted with the realization that the actual degree of the relationship remains unknown since "related" is subject to varied interpretations.

The usefulness of the IEP for LD students' instructional planning is generally perceived as positive. It is important to note however, that 28.4 percent of the LD teachers in the present study fail to value the IEP for planning. While instructional planning would seem to be one of the more obvious uses of the IEP document, it cannot be inferred from the present findings that the IEP serves no purpose for the 28.4 percent who fail to value the IEP for planning. Other uses of the document such as evaluation, reporting, and conferencing have not been explored. When an estimated 6.5 hours are consumed to prepare an IEP (Price & Goodman, 1980), additional uses require investigation.

The perceived usefulness of the IEP document may be related to a time factor in that, if teachers do not have time to refer to the document intermittently, they would not perceive it as useful for instructional planning. Another area related to the usefulness of the IEP is the teachers' perception of the extent to which the document serves as a guide to the learner's program. A comment in Appendix G indicates that it does not matter what gets written into the IEP, teachers get done what they can. Perhaps teachers are more comfortable with one method or strategy of teaching and employ this method for all students assigned to the special class. This practice would eliminate the need to utilize the IEP document for planning.

Once written, most teachers (63.1%) refer to the IEP document at least once per semester (Table 10). The reasons for referring to the IEP were not investigated in the present study. The frequency (24.9%) of teachers referring to it each grading period would suggest that, in addition to planning, it may be utilized for evaluation or reporting.

It is clear that the special education teacher is the individual employed in the school system who most often refers to the IEP. It has not been determined how often, if ever, parents refer to the document.

Conclusions

The conclusions below consolidate the information reported in the preceding discussion. They are drawn from a global perspective of the study.

The implementation of the special education process through the development of IEP's can be described as a process in which substantial compliance with the procedural requirements of P.L. 94-142 is evidenced. States and localities demonstrated a considerable degree of consistency in their descriptions of the process which suggests that formalized operational guidelines in the states and localities are probably based on federal guidelines. Regular classroom observation of children suspected of demonstrating learning disabilities remains a concern. Ways in which this step can become a routine practice in the referral to placement process should be explored.

The most marked finding of the present study is the degree of responsibility for the complete IEP process shouldered by the special education teacher. The special education teacher most often schedules the IEP meeting, develops a preliminary IEP before the team meeting, performs most tasks at the IEP meeting, receives copies of the IEP more often than any other person, and implements the IEP. Primary responsibility for these phases of IEP development seems to be a special education teacher role assumed by

default, which raises the issue of procedural safeguards posed by Fenton, et al. (1979). For example: Who ensures the appropriateness of programming? When the planning process is not genuinely multidisciplinary and when parents are inactive in IEP meetings, is the child protected? This study suggests that the safeguards for the child rest with the special education teacher.

Delegating primary responsibility for all aspects of IEP development to special education teachers is not without sacrifices. This study suggests that teachers assume these responsibilities at the expense of handicapped students which in turn is frustrating for teachers. The source of their frustration appears to be the amount of time consumed in noninstructional tasks which decreases time for instruction in the classroom. Likewise, to teachers it seems that federal, state, and local administrative requirements attach greater import to the processing of forms, testing, reporting, and conferencing than to the instruction of students.

The scenario of teacher frustration may be illustrated as follows: the special education process from assessment through the development of IEP's entails a substantial amount of paperwork, for which special education teachers are given primary responsibility in addition to assigned teaching duties. The prevailing priority reflected in the rules and regulations governing special education is paperwork over direct instruction, whereas the primary concern of teachers

is instruction. Teachers find themselves in classrooms surrounded by paperwork which needs completing and students who need teaching. With no anticipated release time to complete the paperwork, and assenting to the realities of being held accountable for it, teachers delay instruction and acquiesce to paperwork demands. Or, instruction proceeds as planned and the paperwork is taken home which infringes upon their personal time. The end result is FRUSTRATION so well supported by the comments of teachers responding to open-ended statements on the questionnaire (see Appendix G).

Other comments yielded credence to the theoretical base of IEP development for its' perceived benefit to students, however, practical application of the concept was portrayed as difficult due to time and scheduling problems and limited participation by regular classroom teachers, parents, and administrators. Experience in IEP development has improved the process for many individuals, but for others it has led to "burnout" and a desire to eliminate many aspects of the process.

The transition from assessment to IEP development was not described as a source of major concern for the respondents in the present study. Individuals also perceived the IEP document to be related to the assessment data collected for a child. An area of concern for some individuals however, was the lack of specificity in test data and psychological reports or the absence of time to review all assessment data.

Previous studies documenting that the goals and objectives of the written IEP document were not significantly related to the psychoeducational reports for a child, indicated problems in the assessment-IEP link which were not supported in this study. However, a person who analyzes assessment data and subsequently, prepares an IEP based on their interpretation of the data, may not be the best judge of the relationship between the two. Additional investigations are needed before reporting the relationship between assessment data and IEP development.

In summary, this study did not reveal that special educators are experiencing significant problems in the implementation of the procedural requirements of P.L. 94-142. Nor was the transition from assessment to IEP development regarded as problematic by most directors and teachers. When difficulties were noted, they usually related to the lack of time and the amount of paperwork needed to complete all requirements in the process of assessment, decision making and IEP development. Many of these problems seemed to materialize when teachers were delegated primary responsibility for all IEP related tasks without release time from instructional duties to perform them.

Contrary to special education teacher involvement, regular classroom teachers were reported to experience limited attendance and participation in IEP meetings. Parents,

usually in attendance, were not active in IEP meetings and students rarely attended any meetings.

This study identified several needs in the field of special education. Foremost among these is the need to achieve greater participation in IEP meetings by regular classroom teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, paramount to the provision of an appropriate education to handicapped children is a reduction in the amount of instructional time consumed in noninstructional tasks by special education teachers.

These conclusions should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind:

1. the initial request for participation in the study was sent to a randomly selected sample from five states, however, the final pool of subjects was restricted to those school districts and respondents volunteering to participate;
2. while the researcher provided the guidelines for teacher selection within each district, the actual selection and distribution of the questionnaire was at the discretion of the director/supervisor.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on an analysis of data from the current study, this researcher recommends consideration of several areas for future study. Investigations are needed to determine (a) the extent of congruence between the IEP document and the actual

delivery of special education services for handicapped children, (b) how the involvement of various individuals at IEP meetings can be improved, (c) how to maximize the IEP process, and (d) if students are protected in the special education process.

When teachers are using instructional time for IEP development, testing, reporting, and conferencing, it would seem that handicapped students would not receive all services listed in the IEP. Perhaps the IEP is a meaningless document without carry-over into the instructional program. If ongoing monitoring is at the discretion of the special education teacher, the safeguards for guaranteeing an appropriate education to handicapped children are not in operation. A research question might be:

Are students in special education classes provided the services and amount of instruction indicated on the IEP?

If students are to gain independence and exercise control over their educational destiny, their involvement in the IEP process must be improved. Once identified, the factors contributing to the lack of student involvement may be ameliorated. Several questions are posed:

How can the failure to involve students in the process of IEP development be explained? When is student involvement indicated? What specific roles are appropriate for students?

Parent participation in IEP development may be related to the nature of the preliminary development which has

transpired prior to the IEP meeting. If parents perceive that the plan is finalized, they may feel that their only option is to agree or disagree with the plan as presented. The manner in which the document is completed may affect their participation. When a written document is set before parents, they may not feel comfortable suggesting revisions or additions, especially if it is typed. Some parents, however, may feel that they need a starting point before offering suggestions and therefore, prefer the prepared document. A researcher might ask:

Is parent participation in IEP meetings different when an already developed IEP (handwritten and typed) is presented and when the initial development begins in their presence?

All steps leading up to IEP development may be followed to find that the IEP reflects methods in which the teacher feels comfortable and capable of implementing instead of reflecting the identified needs of the child. When all responsibility falls on the teacher, IEP's may be nothing more than a condensed lesson plan book. An indepth case study would provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the assessment and decision making process in promoting individualized instructional programs. A look at all IEP's primarily prepared by one individual may also assist in determining the extent of individualization. Answers might be sought to the following questions:

For an individual student, does the prescribed special education process lead to an individualized instructional program? Is the IEP a student plan or a teacher plan? How does a teacher select information needed for writing an IEP?

The IEP process encompassing the preliminary planning stages, the IEP meeting, and recording the information onto the document are extremely time consuming. If the IEP is not always perceived to be useful, perhaps individuals are not aware of ways in which it can be used such as for conferencing, reporting progress, evaluating goals with students, and for tasks which have not been identified. Specifying additional utilization strategies may affect the quality of IEP's, their perceived usefulness, and their degree of individualization. Research is needed to determine the answer to the following question:

How can the IEP process and the IEP document be used to maximize the instructional program for handicapped children?

Recommendations for Practitioners

Local school district assessment and decision making procedures including the development of individualized education programs (IEP's) are predicated on federal requirements. The intent of these requirements reflects much of what is considered "best practice" in individualized education. The implications which can be derived from this study are based on the recognition that specific aspects of the required process are necessary to effective educational

programming for handicapped children. From the educational perspective, this study revealed several needs in the area of special education that are particularly relevant for practitioners.

Foremost among these identified needs is improved multidisciplinary involvement in the IEP process including increased participation by parents, students, and regular classroom teachers. To meet these needs, school district personnel associated with the operation of special education should explore the practices within their district to determine if the concerns which emerged from this study are ones that may also need attention in their school district. Below are five findings which surfaced as important for practitioners followed by questions that each school system may wish to address.

Only forty percent of the respondents in the present study indicated that regular classroom teachers usually attend IEP meetings. Even when in attendance, very little participation in the IEP process is indicated. When regular classroom teachers are responsible for implementing a portion of the child's educational program, their involvement in the planning process is needed to coordinate the total instructional program for maximal benefit to the child. Recognizing that their participation is limited, one might ask:

What are the specific constraints which limit the participation of regular classroom teachers? By

what means can the attendance and participation of regular classroom teachers be improved?

Parents were reported to be in attendance at IEP meetings, however, they were not listed as active participants in the IEP development process. The literature seems to substantiate this finding. It would seem that active participation by parents can enhance a coordinated rather than fragmented approach to meeting the needs of the child. School personnel may ask:

Do we want and are we ready to accept active parental participation? What barriers currently exist which discourage active parent participation? In what way can active participation by parents be encouraged?

Students are rarely included in the IEP process; yet, they are the "consumers" of the resulting plans. To exclude them to the extent indicated by the present study fails to recognize the valuable input which they could possibly offer. Perhaps each district should address these questions:

Why are students rarely included in the development of IEP's? Does attendance by students at IEP meetings (or participation by some other means) seem appropriate to school personnel?

A primary concern expressed by teachers in the present study is the lack of time available to fulfill all responsibilities assigned to them. If teachers are feeling a "time crunch", local administrators need to know the extent to which this is a problem and the degree to which the instructional program of students is affected. As a first step in addressing this problem, it may be necessary to collect

information to document:

What amount of time are teachers actually expending on the various tasks associated with their position? Is the amount of time invested in various tasks consistent with local program priorities? In what ways can greater efficiency in time management be achieved? What effect would changes in time usage have on the level of teacher productivity and job satisfaction? What impact do these time efficiency efforts have on student outcomes? What alternatives are available to improve difficulties identified with time constraints?

The least performed step in the required procedural aspects of special education for LD students is the observation of the child in the regular classroom. An understanding of the child's functioning in the regular classroom should improve the quality of planning intervention strategies through IEP development. An objective view of the child's performance may be achieved as well. Ways in which this step can become a routine practice in the process from referral to IEP implementation are worthy of exploration in districts where this is not a customary practice.

Would the incorporation of a structured procedure improve the implementation of this step? Are there other ways to encourage routine performance of this step?

Given the nature of the diversity between school districts, posing questions to be considered by individual districts seems more appropriate than providing specific recommendations for changes. Each question is meant to stimulate school district thinking in hopes that the practitioners will address each of the needs identified in this study.

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Appendix A

LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

OFFICE OF DIVISION SUPERINTENDENT
ROANOKE COUNTY SCHOOLS
526 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE
SALEM, VIRGINIA 24153

August 10, 1981

Dear Colleague:

Public Law 94-142 has meant many things to many people. The major thrust of this legislation however, is the provision of an appropriate education for handicapped children.

In order to provide an appropriate program for handicapped children there are certain procedural requirements which must be met. Familiar to all of us is the requirement to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for identified handicapped children.

As a local special education administrator, I am interested in determining how all of us in special education at the local level are implementing these requirements and therefore, I am asking for your help.

In the near future (October 1981) I would like for you and three (3) of your Learning Disability teachers to complete a self-administered questionnaire which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. I am planning to send the questionnaires to you in hopes that you will distribute the copies to your teachers. Of course I will supply all envelopes and postage.

You have been carefully selected to represent what is happening regionally in special education. Your participation will allow the results to be truly representative of local special education agencies in our area. All data will be treated with anonymity. No individual or district will be identified. The questionnaire will be assigned an identification number for clerical use only.

Please indicate your willingness to participate by responding to the statements on the enclosed postcard and mail it to me at your earliest convenience.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. I look forward to working with you and I will be happy to share my findings with you.

If you have any questions, please write or call me at (703) 387-6569.

Sincerely,

Judy B. Engelhard
Learning Disabilities Coordinator

/dms

Appendix B
RETURN POSTCARD

Name _____ Address(work) _____

Position/Title _____

School Div. _____ Telephone(work) _____

Please check the appropriate space:

I am willing to participate in the regional study to determine how the procedural aspects of 94-142 are implemented.

_____ YES

_____ NO

_____ I wish to have a copy of the executive summary of the study (please check).

Appendix C
TRANSMITTAL LETTERS

OFFICE OF DIVISION SUPERINTENDENT
ROANOKE COUNTY SCHOOLS
528 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE
SALEM, VIRGINIA 24153

October 30, 1981

Dear Colleague:

In order to provide an appropriate program for handicapped children, there are certain procedural requirements of Public Law 94-142 which must be met. Familiar to all of us is the requirement to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for identified handicapped children.

As a local special educator, I am interested in determining how all of us in special education at the local level are implementing these requirements and, therefore, I am asking for your help.

Your school division has been carefully selected to represent what is happening regionally in special education. Fortunately, a representative of your district has expressed the willingness to distribute the enclosed questionnaire to selected teachers, one of whom is you. I will be most appreciative if you would complete the questionnaire and mail it to me in the enclosed envelope at your earliest convenience.

Your participation will allow the results to be truly representative of local special education agencies in our area. Since you are directly involved with IEP's, your responses are essential to the integrity of the study.

All data will be treated with anonymity. No individual or school district will be identified. The questionnaire will be assigned an identification number for clerical use only. The additional numbers by specific items are for data analysis only.

The results of the study will be made available to officials and representatives associated with special education. A summary of the findings will also be sent to your school district to be shared with you.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. I look forward to including you and your school district in the study. If you have any questions, please write or call me at (703) 387-6569.

Sincerely,

Judy B. Engelhard
Learning Disabilities Coordinator

OFFICE OF DIVISION SUPERINTENDENT
ROANOKE COUNTY SCHOOLS
526 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE
SALEM VIRGINIA 24153

October 30, 1981

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your response to my request of August 10, 1981 for assistance in determining how all of us in special education are implementing the procedural requirements of Public Law 94-142. As you may recall, I am interested in local implementation procedures related to Individualized Education Programs (IEP's).

I appreciate your willingness to complete the enclosed questionnaire and to distribute the other envelopes to several of your Learning Disability (LD) teachers. The distribution should include one elementary, one middle or junior high, and one high school level teacher. When making your selection, please choose a teacher whose name would appear among the first three names on an alphabetized list from each level. In other words, if you have an alphabetized list of elementary LD teachers, middle school LD teachers, and high school teachers, select one of the first three names from each list. If you do not have teachers at all levels, the extra envelopes can be given to any randomly selected LD teacher or returned to me in the stamped envelope included in the packet.

Since you were carefully selected to represent what local school districts in our region are doing in special education, your responses and those of your teachers are essential to the integrity of the study. Any help that you can provide in encouraging your teachers to respond will be greatly appreciated.

All data will be treated with anonymity. No individual or school district will be identified. The identification numbers and codes by specific items on the questionnaire are for clerical use and data analysis only.

Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires, the data will be analyzed and a summary of the results will be sent to you. The results will also be made available to officials and representatives associated with special education.

Again, I thank you for responding to my first request for assistance. I know how busy you are, and therefore, I am genuinely appreciative of your help again. Please complete the questionnaire and mail it to me in the enclosed envelope at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to including you and your teachers in the study. If you have any questions, please write or call me at (703) 387-6569.

Sincerely,

Judy B. Engelhard
Learning Disabilities Coordinator

JBE:jc

Appendix D
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

A REGIONAL SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS ABOUT
DECISION MAKING AND IEP DEVELOPMENT

This survey will provide information on how the procedural aspects of special education are implemented in our region. Your response will help us understand and identify concerns relative to the IEP process. Please answer all questions. If you wish to comment on any questions or qualify your answers, please feel free to use the space in the margins. Your comments will be read and taken into account.

Thank you for your help.

94-142

QUESTIONS

TO BE

ANSWERED

Pupil Personnel Services
and Special Education
Roanoke County Schools
526 South College Avenue
Salem, Virginia 24153

C6 Are you presently a: (Circle number)

- 1 DIRECTOR/SUPERVISOR of Special Education
 2 LEARNING DISABILITIES TEACHER (Check level)
 _____ Elementary
 _____ Middle School
 _____ High School
 3 OTHER (Specify) _____

Following are various areas related to decision making and IEP development for learning disabilities (LD) students. For each area, please circle the number which best describes the severity of the problem. Use the following scale in making your ratings.

		NEVER a PROBLEM	SELDOM a PROBLEM	FREQUENTLY a PROBLEM	ALWAYS a PROBLEM
1. Time and scheduling					
C7	a. Scheduling a convenient meeting time for all members	1	2	3	4
C8	b. Time to complete all tasks related to IEP development	1	2	3	4
2. Procedures					
C9	a. Ability of team to appropriately interpret case file information for educational planning	1	2	3	4
C10	b. Consistency of outcomes as a function of team composition	1	2	3	4
3. Resources					
C11	a. Adequate number of personnel to participate in the IEP process for LD students	1	2	3	4
C12	b. Availability of appropriate placement options for LD students	1	2	3	4
C13	c. Availability of funds to purchase special materials	1	2	3	4
C14	d. Access to needed related services	1	2	3	4

		NEVER a PROBLEM	SELDOM a PROBLEM	FREQUENTLY a PROBLEM	ALWAYS a PROBLEM
4. Parents					
C15	a. Involving parents in the child study team	1	2	3	4
C16	b. Parental program expectations	1	2	3	4
5. Paperwork					
C17	a. Instructional utility of paperwork	1	2	3	4
C18	b. Amount of paperwork	1	2	3	4
6. Information for completing IEP					
C19	a. Availability of needed information	1	2	3	4
C20	b. Consistency in the information received about a given child	1	2	3	4
C21	c. Relevancy of information received to the IEP development process	1	2	3	4
7. Legalities, regulations, compliance					
C22	a. Legal requirements in the implementation of decision making and IEP development	1	2	3	4
C23	b. Keeping current with legal requirements	1	2	3	4
8. Other: Please list any other areas of concern related to decision making and IEP development for LD students that you would have rated a 3 or 4 on the above scale.					

C24 Following are several aspects of the assessment/decision making process
 C57 for placement of LD students which may or may not occur in your school
 district. AFTER READING THE ENTIRE LIST, please check those steps which
 are customary (occur more than 50% of the time) practices in your district.
 Leave blank any steps which do not customarily occur. Please add any
 additional steps which your district follows.

	<u>Never Involved</u>	<u>Seldom Involved</u>	<u>Frequently Involved</u>	<u>Always Involved</u>
___ 1. Child find or referral	1	2	3	4
___ 2. Review of referral	1	2	3	4
___ 3. Observation of child in regular class	1	2	3	4
___ 4. Screening Tests (<u>not</u> formal assessment by psychologist)	1	2	3	4
___ 5. Obtaining parental permission to assess	1	2	3	4
___ 6. Assignment of assessment team (psychologist, visiting teacher, etc.) to case	1	2	3	4
___ 7. Comprehensive assessment	1	2	3	4
___ 8. Review of assessment results	1	2	3	4
___ 9. Eligibility determination	1	2	3	4
___ 10. Contacting parent after assessment	1	2	3	4
___ 11. Preliminary development of IEP (Parent not present)	1	2	3	4
___ 12. Team meeting to develop IEP (Parent present)	1	2	3	4
___ 13. Placement decision	1	2	3	4
___ 14. Parental permission for placement	1	2	3	4
___ 15. Implementation of IEP	1	2	3	4
___ 16. Other (specify) _____ _____	1	2	3	4
___ 17. Other (specify) _____ _____	1	2	3	4

Now, go back to the items you have checked. To the right of each item, please
 indicate the degree to which you are involved in that step of the process for LD
 students by CIRCLING THE NUMBER which indicates your involvement.

3C33 Who usually (more than 50% of the time) attends formal IEP meetings?
 3C38 (CIRCLE number by person(s) and add any additional person(s) not listed.)

- 1 CHILD
- 2 PARENT
- 3 PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR
- 4 SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER
- 5 REGULAR EDUCATION TEACHER
- 6 OTHER(S) _____

What additional person(s), if any, would you like to participate in the meeting to develop IEP's? List by position.

C39 Based on your experience, how closely is the finalized IEP document related to the "assessment data" collected for an individual student? Please indicate the relationship by circling the number on the scale.

- 1 NEVER RELATED
- 2 SELDOM RELATED
- 3 OFTEN RELATED
- 4 ALWAYS RELATED

C40 Once the IEP is written, how often do you refer to the IEP document? (Circle the appropriate number.)

- 1 ANNUALLY
- 2 ONCE PER SEMESTER
- 3 EACH GRADING PERIOD
- 4 MONTHLY
- 5 BIWEEKLY
- 6 WEEKLY
- 7 DAILY
- 8 NEVER
- 9 OTHER (specify) _____

C41 Once the IEP is developed, to what extent is that IEP useful for instructional planning for the LD student? (Circle the appropriate number.)

- 1 NEVER USEFUL
- 2 RARELY USEFUL
- 3 FREQUENTLY USEFUL
- 4 ALWAYS USEFUL

Who is the one person in your district who is primarily responsible for developing the IEP for an individual child? List the position of that person.

C42 We're interested in determining whether school district personnel run into problems with the transition from assessment to the preparation of the IEP document. Do you think there is a problem? (Circle the appropriate number.)

- 1 NO
- 2 YES

C43 If you circled YES above, please help us understand the problem by
C48 circling the number of each item which represents a problem for you in this transition from assessment to IEP development.

- 1 The information gathered is irrelevant to educational programming.
- 2 I cannot interpret the data.
- 3 Data I need has not been gathered.
- 4 I have difficulty gaining access to information on the child.
- 5 I do not have time to review assessment data.
- 6 Other (specify) _____

We're interested in the adequacy of training provided to people who participate in decision making and IEP development for LD students. Please respond to the following questions about training by circling the number which best describes your feelings.

- C49 a. My training was:
- 1 VERY INADEQUATE
 - 2 INADEQUATE
 - 3 ADEQUATE
 - 4 VERY ADEQUATE
- C50 b. The training of other personnel involved in decision making and IEP development in my district appears to be:
- 1 VERY INADEQUATE
 - 2 INADEQUATE
 - 3 ADEQUATE
 - 4 VERY ADEQUATE
- C51 c. The availability of training in my locality is:
- 1 VERY INADEQUATE
 - 2 INADEQUATE
 - 3 ADEQUATE
 - 4 VERY ADEQUATE

(Please to go next page)

What additional comments do you wish to make regarding the process of assessment/decision making, IEP development, team membership, or related areas?

Also, any comments you wish to make that you think may help all of us in special education will be appreciated, either here or in a separate letter. Your comments will be valuable. (TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SOUND OFF.)

Your contribution to this effort is very greatly appreciated.

Your school district will be sent a summary of the results. If you wish to review them, please contact the person who distributed the questionnaire to you.

Appendix E
POSTCARD FOLLOW-UP REQUEST

November 6, 1981

Last week questionnaires seeking information on how the procedural aspects of P.L.94-142 are implemented was mailed to you. You and your learning disability teachers were carefully selected to represent what is happening in our region.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire to me, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. Because it has been sent to only a limited, but representative sample of school districts in our region, it is extremely important that yours be included in the study if the results are to accurately represent our procedures and concerns.

If by some chance you did not receive the questionnaires, or they got misplaced, please call (703-387-6569), or write me as soon as possible and I will send them to you immediately.

Sincerely,

Judy B. Engelhard
L.D. Coordinator

Appendix F
FOLLOW-UP LETTER

OFFICE OF DIVISION SUPERINTENDENT
ROANOKE COUNTY SCHOOLS
 526 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE
 SALEM, VIRGINIA 24153

January 25, 1982

Dear Colleague:

Several months ago I sent you questionnaires seeking information on how the procedural aspects of PL 94-142 are implemented by local school districts in our region. As you may recall, four questionnaires were sent to you in hopes that you and three of your Learning Disability (LD) teachers would complete them and return them to me in the stamped return envelopes. As of today I have not received any completed questionnaires from your district.

The study was undertaken to determine how we at the local level are implementing the requirements surrounding Individualized Education Programs (IEP's). The results of the study will reveal local school district practices and concerns in the special education process.

I am writing to you again because of the significance each questionnaire has to the usefulness of this study. Since your district was carefully selected to represent school districts in our region and your responses are not included in the final analysis of data, I am seeking your help. When reporting the results of the study, I will address factors which may explain why several school districts did not respond to the questionnaire. To adequately reflect these factors, I would appreciate it if you would respond to the statements below and return the information to me in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. A summary of the results will be sent to you this spring.

All data will be treated with anonymity. No individual or school district will be identified. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Judy B. Engelhard
 Learning Disabilities Coordinator

Please detach and return in the enclosed envelope.

My school district did not respond to the questionnaire because: (Please circle the number of the appropriate reason or reasons)

- 1 I did not receive the questionnaire
- 2 I did not have time to complete and distribute the questionnaire
- 3 I simply forgot to complete the questionnaire
- 4 I do not believe the study will generate any valuable information
- 5 Other (please specify) _____

Appendix G
STATEMENTS BY RESPONDENTS

SUMMARY OF
WRITTEN COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF RESPONDENTS

Positive Comments

1. There are no problems in the process when given release time from teaching duties.
2. Teachers make the difference, and fortunately there are many dedicated people teaching.
3. Although writing IEP's is dreadful, it is important for all to meet and discuss students, as working close together is advantageous to the handicapped.
4. With practice and time, writing IEP's becomes more comfortable and effective, and they become more helpful to the teacher.
5. Although impractical, the concept of IEP's is good in theory.
6. If explained, most parents understand that an IEP is a sample of expectations with variations and adjustments to be made.
7. Having a good special education administration and supervisors who are knowledgeable and can give help, makes a difference in the atmosphere surrounding legal/paperwork hassles.
8. Having a district level IEP coordinator helps with the transition from assessment to placement, to the writing of the IEP.
9. It's a utopia with good communication, cooperation, and teamwork.
10. Once the district got the idea that the IEP was a general plan and not a step by step lesson plan, it became easy to write and useful to the receiving teacher who did not write it.

Negative Comments

1. The process has not improved the instructional program, any good teacher would do the same without the IEP procedures.
2. It does not matter what gets written into the IEP, the special teacher has all responsibilities for everything and gets done whatever can be done. IEP's are unnecessary and useless.
3. There is more emphasis on paperwork and IEP's than on teaching. There is an injustice to students when paperwork, scheduling, etc., takes teaching time. If paperwork were replaced with teaching, the result would be action (i.e., teaching-learning).
4. Teachers are totally responsible for scheduling, conferencing, writing the IEP, etc., and at the same time, cannot leave the classroom unattended.
5. There is never enough time available to prepare the IEP and update it.
6. It takes two hours to prepare an IEP that gets filed away with little immediate value during the year.
7. Parents show little interest and the IEP meeting is an irritant to them.
8. Experience has led to producing IEP's automatically, with expediency taking precedent over procedure; the IEP process has become mechanical.
9. Often, due to student progress, the IEP becomes obsolete before the review data, but because the process is so lengthy and time consuming, there is no review until the annual review is due.
10. Administrators are involved only when an irrational or angry parent makes contact.
11. It all leads to burnout.
12. Special education teachers are overworked, underpaid, and unappreciated.

13. It is obvious that no classroom teacher was present when 94-142 was conceived.
14. Could it be that no one really knows how to write an IEP?
15. Special education is too complex, causing revenue discrimination to non-special education students; the regulations are demanding at the expense of regular students--"the tail wagging the dog."
16. The inability of the professionals to provide adequate criteria for identifying Learning Disabilities is a reflection of the total field.
17. There is a lack of remediation tried in the regular classroom before special education placement.
18. If government officials came to the local level and experienced the frustrations with paperwork, perhaps teachers could get back to teaching.
19. The money used for documentation would be better spent for hiring more teachers and support staff.
20. There is always confusion with administrative changes. People change their philosophy of what should be taught in the LD classroom. "I feel like saying 'Just leave me alone and let me teach,' instead I have said, 'I am tired of the confusion, let me go back to regular education.'"

Recommendations by Respondents

1. Annual goals should be sufficient for the IEP without short term instructional objectives because short term objectives are reflected in lesson plans, they take the most time to write, they are the least understood by all, and commercially produced checklists are available. With students working on the same skill, teachers waste time writing the same objectives repeatedly.
2. There is no need to list evaluative criteria on the IEP as it is viewed differently by each teacher and may change frequently.
3. IEP's should be required less frequently, such as only when a change is needed.

4. There is no need to require the administrator at the annual review, they should only be required for initial IEP meetings.
5. The assessment procedure should remain the same, however, once the decision for placement is made, leave the trained teacher free to teach.
6. Teachers should be given release time from class to write IEP's, hold conferences, and observe in the regular classroom.
7. With all of the federal regulations, the federal government should develop all of the forms and distribute them with explicit guidelines.
8. When parents give permission for an evaluation they should indicate whether or not they request a formal IEP meeting and if they do not, it should not be required, as the IEP is seen as a means to inform parents, whereas the teacher uses lesson plans.
9. Someone needs to find a way to make the IEP more beneficial and less time consuming.
10. A simple philosophy works best: keep your ducks in order, inform everyone of any changes to be made, and follow the law to a 'T'.

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROCESS: CURRENT PRACTICES

By

Judy B. Engelhard

(ABSTRACT)

The procedural requirements of P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, are designed to ensure a natural transition from assessment to individualized program planning for handicapped children. Based on a full and individual evaluation, an individualized education program (IEP) is developed for each identified handicapped child.

The literature suggests a failure to achieve a significant relationship between written psychoeducational reports and IEP's which led to the present investigation which described the procedural aspects of the transition from assessment to IEP development. Information was obtained from individuals directly involved in the process.

Through the administration of a survey instrument to 508 special education directors and/or supervisors and learning disability teachers in five eastern states, the process from referral through IEP development as implemented in their districts was described. Data were collected which described, (a) the special education process of decision making and IEP development, (b) the development of IEP's,

(c) the perceived problems in the process, and (d) the utilization of the IEP document.

The results indicate substantial consistency in the process, with special education teachers appearing to be the most involved person in all IEP related tasks. The major problems in the process are attributed to the amount of paperwork and time required and the extensive degree of responsibility for IEP related tasks assumed by special education teachers. The findings indicate that special education teachers utilize the IEP more often than any other school personnel.

This study revealed several needs in the area of special education. Foremost among these needs is increased participation by parents, students, and regular classroom teachers in the IEP process and a reduction in instructional time consumed for noninstructional tasks.