A qualitative investigation of the special education identification, referral, and placement process: its relationship to the over representation of African American males in high incidence programs in an urban school system

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ABSTRACT

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M.Ed. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1994
Ed.S. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, 2001

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION
IDENTIFICATION, REFERRAL, AND PLACEMENT PROCESS: ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN
MALES IN HIGH INCIDENCE PROGRAMS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Advisor: Dr. Moses Norman

Dissertation dated May 2005

This study examines the relationship between the special education identification, referral, and placement process and African-American males' overrepresentation in high incidence programs in an urban school system. This study relied on perceptions of educators and parents regarding the special education process.

This study was based on the premise that the special education placement phenomenon is influenced by teachers' perceptions of behavior and teachers' perceptions that many African-American male students lack fundamental academic capabilities.

A qualitative approach which utilized focus groups and interviews was
implemented. Data were analyzed literally, interpretively, and reflectively in order to address each of the four study domains.

The researcher found that the overrepresentation of African-American males in high incidence programs was not a function of race, in the study district, but rather more related to gender and gender based issues.

The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest that gender related issues impact the number of African-American males in high incidence programs. Additionally, teacher tolerance and teacher expectations dictate how each teacher will implement the process.
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION, REFERRAL, AND PLACEMENT PROCESS: ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE OVER REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN HIGH INCIDENCE PROGRAMS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY
SARAH E. WILLIAMS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2005
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CHAPTER  I

INTRODUCTION

Children’s academic performance is typically assessed to determine (a) the degree to which the children are achieving instructional objectives, (b) what they need to reach these objectives, (c) the appropriate curriculum for them, (d) whether they should advance from one grade to the next, (e) any improvement or worsening in their academic performance, especially as a result of an intervention effort, and (f) causes of or contributing factors to low academic performance when it is evidenced. Usually, grades, standardized achievement tests, and intelligence tests are used as measures of academic performance (Bos & Vaughn, 1998).

Assessment of academic performance of African-American children often meets with much controversy and concern. The assessment methods and procedures typically used may be culturally biased, and the consequences of these assessments are often negative for African-American children, particularly males, and their families (Hilliard, 1991). These consequences for some African-American children may include being mislabeled as learning disabled, being inappropriately placed in special classes, being viewed as having low academic and intellectual potential, experiencing low academic self-confidence and efficacy, feeling like an academic failure, and experiencing little motivation to do well academically. Some consequences for many African-American parents include frustration, worry about their children’s academic future, and feeling
powerless regarding actions to move their children from academic failure to academic success (Irvine, 1991).

Schools, in particular teachers, play a major role in determining students’ academic success or failure. Educational analysts have long been aware of the many difficulties that face minority children in American public schools. Delpit, Irvine, Oakes, and Kozol and other educators have elucidated the many pitfalls of education for African-American students as they are forced through a system that often proves to be detrimental to their very existence (Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 1991; Oakes, 1985; Kozol, 1991).

Most school districts, including the district in which this study occurs, subject students to some form of Student Support Services before special education is considered. Students in high-incidence disability categories or soft disability categories are typically general education students before they are considered for special education services. Georgia mandates that each local agency develop a Student Support Team. The Student Support Team is a joint effort of general education and special education that identifies and plans alternative instructional strategies for children prior to or in lieu of a special education referral. Each building level team is comprised of such persons as administrator, classroom teacher, requesting teacher, special education teacher, counselor, school psychologist, special education resource person, school social worker, or central office personnel. Parental involvement is also a critical part of the Student Support Team process.

This interdisciplinary group plans modifications in a student’s educational program and engages in a six step process to include: identification of needs, assessment,
educational plan, implementation, follow-up and support, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The Student Support Team functions under the auspices of general education curriculum services and is based upon the child study concept.

Request for service from the Student Support Team may include curriculum modification, learning style assessment, behavior management techniques, achievement evaluation, home-school communication, or study skill assistance. Requests for special education services may also be made. Prior to consideration for special education referral, non-special education options should be considered. General education interventions must be implemented, documented, and described at the special education referral meeting. In limited instances, initial referral to the Student Support Team prior to special education referral will not be necessary. These cases are those in which the necessity for special education is so clear that use of non-special education options would be non-productive or harmful to the child. In those cases where initial referral is not to the Student Support Team, those reasons must be documented.

The special education process from child-find procedures through public schooling is delineated in this study. A definition of special education is offered: Special education is defined as instruction that is specially designed, at no cost to parents, to meet their child’s unique needs. Specially designed instruction means adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the student that result from his or her disability, and to ensure the student’s access to general curriculum so that he or she can meet the educational standards that apply to all children within the jurisdiction of the local education agency. The special education evaluation process is often described as a set of discrete decisions based on scientific analysis and assessment.
In reality, the evaluative decisions are more subjective, with many interdependent variables, including school politics and cultural bias. A host of factors, such as the quality of general education and classroom management are equally important, and often go unrecognized (Harry, Klingner, Sturges, & Moore, 2001).

Special education can include instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals, and institutions, and in other settings. It can include instruction in physical education as well. Speech-language pathology services or any other related service can be considered special education rather than a related service under state standards if the instruction is specially designed, at no cost the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Travel, training, and vocational education also can be considered special education if these standards are met.

The federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities is called the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly the Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA). The IDEA has its roots in Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), which was originally enacted in 1975 to establish grants to states for the education of children with disabilities. This law has been amended several times. Under Part B of the law, all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities are entitled to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

In 1986, the EHA was amended by P. L. 99-457 to provide special funding incentives for states that would make FAPE available for all eligible preschool-aged children with disabilities ages three through five. Provisions were also included to help
states develop early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities; this part of the legislation became known as Part H.

The EHA was amended again in 1990 by P. L. 101-476, which, among other things, changed the name of the legislation to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA; and was amended again in 1992 by P. L. 102-119. The newest amendments to this law are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, P. L. 105-17. The amendments restructure IDEA into four parts: Part A addresses General Provisions; Part B covers the Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities; Part C covers Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; and Part D addresses National Activities to Improve the Education of Children with Disabilities.

The IDEA is an important federal law, because it requires that FAPE, which includes special education and related services, be made available to children and youth with disabilities in mandated age ranges.

The major purposes of the IDEA are (a) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a “free appropriate public education” that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living; (b) to ensure that the rights of children and youth with disabilities and their parents are protected; (c) to assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and (d) to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Under the law, a free appropriate public education (FAPE) means special education and related services that: (a) are provided to children and youth with
disabilities at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge;
(b) meet the standards of the state education agency (SEA), including the requirements of
the IDEA; (c) include preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the
state involved; and (d) are provided in keeping with an individualized education program
(IEP) that meets the requirements of law.

The regulations for IDEA define “a child with a disability” as including a child
who has been evaluated according to IDEA’s evaluation requirements; who has been
determined, through this evaluation, to have one or more of the disabilities listed below;
and who, because of the disability, needs special education and related services. The
disabilities listed by IDEA are (a) mental retardation; (b) hearing impairment, including
deafness; (c) speech impairment; (d) visual impairment, including blindness; (e) serious
emotional disturbance; (f) orthopedic impairment; (g) autism; (h) traumatic brain injury;
(i) other health impairment; (j) language as specific learning disability; (k) deaf-
blindness; or (l) multiple disabilities. For children aged 3 through 9, a “child with a
disability” may include, at the discretion of the state and the local education agency
(LEA) and subject to certain conditions, children with the following issues: (a) physical
development; (b) cognitive development; (c) communication development; or (d)
adaptive development; and (e) who needs, for those reasons, special education and related
services. From birth through age 2, children may be eligible for services through the
Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Program (Part C) of the IDEA. IDEA was
designed to help children with disabilities and their families.

Most students with disabilities enter school undiagnosed and are referred by general
classroom teachers for evaluation that may lead to special education identification and
placement. Therefore, the cause of the observed disparity is rooted not only in the system of special education itself, but also in the system of general education as it encompasses special education (Ysseldyke, 2001). Most students referred for evaluation for special education are deemed in need of services. Ysseldyke found that if differential referral is a key element, then the perceptions and decisions of classroom teachers, as well as school-level policies and practices that have an impact on students in general classrooms, are likewise, key elements. Ysseldyke stated that “once a classroom teacher or parent refers a student for an evaluation, it is likely that the student will be found eligible for special education services. We have demonstrated repeatedly that teachers refer students who bother them” (p. 303).

Harry, Klingner, Sturges, and Moore (2001) found that the point at which “differences in measured performance and ability result in one child being labeled disabled and another not are totally matters of social decision-making” (p. 72). Special education evaluations are often presented to parents as a set of discrete decisions based on scientific analysis and assessment, but even test-driven decisions are inescapably subjective in nature. Subjective measures drive the entire process. Subjectivity must be expected because of the human element involved in education and decisions related to education. It is subjective when educators decide upon testing. Ysseldyke (2001) found that school politics, power relationships between school authorities and parents, the quality of general education, and the classroom management skills of the referring teacher are integral in this process. These events have proven to be problematic in the past, particularly for African Americans. These concerns continue to exist in the special
education process from referral to special education to placement and retention in special education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze factors, within the special education process, that may contribute to the uncommonly large numbers of urban African-American males placed in classes for students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, speech/language impairments, and mild and moderate intellectual disabilities without subsequent return to general education placements. These factors will be examined via the process through which students must travel. Perceptions of educators and parents regarding special education and how the special education process might be implicated in the study phenomenon are determined. Mislabeling of low-income minority students and continued placement in classes for students with high-incidence disabilities were linked to the social induction of this phenomenon by Serwatka, Dove and Hodge (1986). Paul (2000) disagreed with this unfortunate truth and concluded “thus the image remains intact that there is personal responsibility for poverty and that we, as a society, are exonerated from blame for it (poverty and lack of students academic success), and are relieved from the responsibility of helping to solve it” (p. 13).

According to Porter (1997) the treatment of African-American males mirrors America’s educational system and speaks volumes regarding American society. Public education was determined to be a litmus test for how productive or how well African-American males will achieve throughout their lives.
Rationale

The intention of this study is to examine reasons for the increases in special education placements of urban African-American males with emphasis on the special education process as a contributor to this phenomenon. The implications of this study may inform current practices relative to this fact. Perceptions of teachers, parents, and administrators are the basis of this research. The referral, identification, placement, and retention of African-American students into special education programs have caused considerable concern for parents, educators, and entire communities for the past four decades (Artiles & Zamora-Duran, 1997). African-American society is particularly concerned with equality of opportunity and equity of treatment in education. These concerns are often expressed in questions regarding the (a) methods of assessment and assignment, (b) the quality of education in special classes, and (c) the return of assigned students to general education classrooms without stigma (Paul, 2000).

Between 1977 and 2002, the percentage of children with specific learning disabilities as a percentage of total public school enrollment rose from 2 to 12 percent, with substantial increases in African-American male students. Comparable increases have been noted in all high-incidence disability areas such as behavior disorders, mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, and speech/language impairments. These increases have been detrimental for African-American males particularly in urban settings. According to Peterz (1999), the increasing number of African-American students placed in special education has been recognized, but still not resolved by State Departments of Education. The racial and ethnic composition of classrooms is widely known by educators, boards of education, and the United States Department of Education.
Paul (2000) stated, "Research seems to suggest that socioeconomic status is the greatest corollary to academic success. This message does not frequently reach the public. Instead, standardized tests are used to unfairly castigate poor children and those of color, as well as to provide a skewed rationale for the indictment of parents and communities" (p. 13). Further, Paul (2000) found that poor children are often African American with the least capital, both cultural and monetary, and that it has become too easy to suggest that their school failure is a result of their own inabilitys (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Kozol, 1991). According to Porter (1997), society has not made any real and earnest attempts to eradicate the growing numbers of African-American children placed in classes for students with special needs.

Background of the Study

To often African-American males are undereducated and miseducated in public school systems throughout this nation. The United States Department of Education has acknowledged that African-American males are overrepresented in high-incidence special education categories. The increase in the number of failures of African-American males is problematic. Students are placed in special education classes after they experience failure or difficulty in general education classes. Educators consistently fail to identify accurately prospective special education students.

Numerous studies have found that equality in education remains a major concern for the African-American community. Parents are demanding equity in education and educational opportunity for their children. Once labeled and placed in special education, the majority of these students are ill fated to remain in these improper classifications. Equity has not been realized.
Statement of the Problem

African-American males are overrepresented in classes for students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, speech/language impairments, and mild and moderate intellectual disabilities (Perlmutter, 1983, USDOE 2002). This overrepresentation is due in part to many factors or reasons that may be found to be subjective and culturally irrelevant. Some measures may have allowed teachers, especially teachers with prejudice, to make recommendations for inappropriate placements. Inappropriate placements may not be subjected to reevaluation, and if not, students may spend entire school careers in special education classes (Serwatka, Dove, & Hodge, 1986; Hilliard 1980). According to Grant (1992), the young Black male could be a possible target for destruction, if this is true, one might be suspicious of the present use of PL 94-142, which has supported the fact that 84% of all Blacks in special education are male.

The problem of placing African Americans in special education classes becomes very acute if one realizes that African-American students are more frequently placed in more restrictive, self-contained classes than in less restrictive special education classes (Grant, 1992). African-American children constitute 13% of all students, but comprise 33% of all special education placements, primarily moderately intellectually disabled and behavior disorders. African-American males disproportionately are 84% of African Americans in special education (USDOE, 2001).

Significance of the Study

New information may be determined relative to the special education process and how this process may impact the overrepresentation of African-American males in high-incidence disability categories. Teachers, parents, and administrators may benefit from
an awareness of the varied and complex factors that contribute to the uncommonly large numbers of urban African-American males placed in classes for students with high-incidence disabilities. This research is instrumental in identifying factors that make these placements permanent arrangements without subsequent return to general education placements. High-incidence disabilities include the following: learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, behavior disorders, serious emotional behavior disorders, and mild and moderate intellectual disabilities. This study delineates implications for urban educators, specifically in this school district, for consideration during referrals, placement, and retention of students in the preceding classifications.

Data collected from this study could be used to inform district administrators and special education directors of new considerations regarding the referral, placement, and retention processes of students (with particular emphasis on males) in special education arrangements. Data collected from this study could be used to redesign policies and procedures as they relate to testing and usage of test data for special education placements. According to Hilliard (1980), the evaluation of African-American students' placement into special education leaves much to be desired. The methods of testing may be inconsistent and invalid. In the area of test bias, researchers have found that African-American students are less likely to score well on particular types of tests, such as intelligence tests, because of past life experience rather than by reason of innate ability. Frame, Clarizio, Porter, and Vinsonhaler (1982) found that many questions on intelligence tests most often are taken from life experiences afforded in middle class society rather than the experiences of lower socioeconomic society.
McNamara, Barry, and Edwards (1998) found that it was necessary to address the overrepresentation of students from minority backgrounds in special education through the examination of the referral process and assessment procedures. General education methods were implicated and integral in the special education process. McNamara et al. determined that many approaches did not recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity found in students classified as having high-incidence disabilities. The conceptual basis for the professionals’ research questions is derived from the work of Harry et al., who sought to find solutions to overrepresentation rather than the identification of problems. This study reengineers perceptions of the referral process, assessment procedures, and instructional approaches for urban African-American male students.

Research Questions

Research Questions for Professionals

1. What policies and practices protect students from inappropriate referral?

2. What kinds of information assist professionals in making decisions that ensure the individualization of this process, rather than merely ensuring compliance with district guidelines?

3. How do teachers distinguish between students who they can help and those with needs beyond the capacity of the typical general education classroom?

4. How do education professionals ensure that even the most denigrated parent is treated with respect when he or she comes to a referral or placement conference?

5. Are you able to articulate exemplary processes that may counteract whatever negative circumstances and practices that contribute to inappropriate placements in special education?
Research Questions for Parents

1. Did you understand the referral and placement processes as your child entered special education?

2. Were you adequately included in the referral and placement process?

3. Did you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed to your satisfaction?

Summary

To understand how students are identified for various special education categories, particularly emotional behavior disorders, is important to first understand how behavior is viewed differently across cultures. Behavior is culture related. Humans learn to behave through their cultural references and expectations. Because of this, all the behaviors exhibited by an individual reflect the experiences encountered in his or her life. Furthermore, the aggregate of one's experiences defines one's culture; this notion of culture may be a major factor in determining special education referrals and placements.

So overarching is the impact of cultural issues that they affect category definitions, assess processes, placement decisions, advocacy efforts, and training of professionals who work with these students. Special education programs overall are currently in the process of being redesigned; however, it is duly noted that any redesign and this study are limited by the cultural experiences and responses of its participants. Responses of study participants form the basis for this study's data. All participants were employees and parents within the same urban school district.

In sum, school procedures and practices disproportionately exclude many African American and low socioeconomic status students from learning opportunities that may
occur in general education classes. Schools may address this phenomenon by examining their discipline data, discipline policies, and instructional practices. School personnel may rethink attitudes and beliefs held about African-American male children and families and also acknowledge and incorporate those students’ and families’ unique talents and expertise (Oakes, 1985). Moreover, meaningful and effective management strategies may be developed and implemented when school personnel begin to understand behaviors and communication systems that may be unique to African-American males.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organization of the Review

The focus of this study was to examine contributing factors regarding the referral, placement, and subsequent retention of African-American males in high-incidence disability categories. An examination of the literature revealed several suspected or probable causes. From child-find through exit from special or the inability of students to exit special education were examined.

The review proceeds as follows (a) social construction of disabilities, (b) psychological assessments, other assessments, and testing as guideposts, and (c) the referring teacher. The special education process is completely delineated and encompasses the following areas screening, referral, assessment, service delivery, and lastly review.

Social Construction of Disabilities

According to Harry, Klinger, Sturges, and Moore (2001) disproportionality in special education placements occurs through a process of social construction by which decisions and its appropriate treatments are negotiated according to official and unofficial beliefs and practices. Harry et al. found agreement with the notion that disabilities are socially constructed and that the notion of social construction could be demonstrated. Harry et al. found that the 1969 decision of the American Association on Mental
Retardation (AAMR) to change the cutoff point for mental retardation from an IQ score of 85 to 70 was indeed a social construction. As has frequently been observed by special education practitioners, and Harry et al. "that decision effected a swift cure for thousands of individuals labeled mentally retarded" (p. 71).

Learning disabilities as a category was scrutinized because of its definition. This definition seeks to establish a discrepancy between students' scores on IQ tests and their scores on measures of academic performance. This criterion has been problematic for many special education practitioners. These practitioners continue to debate the validity of this criterion (Fletcher, Francis, Shaywitz, Lyon, Foorman, Stuebing, & Shaywitz, 1998). Some researchers have found that the implementation of this criterion is not uniform (MacMillan, Gresham, & Bocian, 1998). MacMillan et al. determined that it is only a matter of time before the conceptualization and operationalization of this disability will undergo radical revision. The category of emotional disorders, has received much criticism because it has been impossible to standardize. Emotional disorders continue to defy understanding and explanation. The reliance on checklists and anecdotal information from teachers allow for complete subjectivity. According to Harry et al. "the definitions of high-incidence disabilities and the criteria by which they are operationalized represent social decisions not factual phenomena (p. 77).

Harry et al. found that disabilities were socially constructed, however, it was duly noted that student differences is a reality. Given this reality it was determined that measured performance does not always reflect absolute ability. To what extent does performance equal true ability? This question continues to be posed by researchers and special education practitioners in an attempt to be fair and impartial in assessment and
placement decisions. According to Reschly (2000), this is one reason that the designation of minorities as disabled is problematic in high-incidence categories. The absolute benefit of many special education programs cannot be determined. The outcomes of such placements remain questionable (Kavale, 1990). If the process was a matter of social decision-making that leads to questionable outcomes, then there is clearly a problem as determined by Kavale. One key aspect of the decision-making process was the issue of the reliance on psychometric testing for eligibility for special education services. After years of debate on the importance of psychometric testing in the special education process, psychological evaluation continues to be at the heart of this process.

Psychological Assessment and Testing as Guideposts

Bronfenbrenner (1979), found that ecological validity in research was critical and that researchers were often caught “between a rock and a soft place, the rock being rigor and the soft place being relevance” (p. 513). In the assessment of children suspected of having a disability in one of the high-incidence categories, it was necessary to use some form of standardized assessment. However, caution was advised in the assessment of intelligence and emotional functioning at the mild end of the spectrum. Assessment of intelligence and of emotional functioning at the mild end of the spectrum is unquestionably a “soft science.” Bronfenbrenner determined that research must be capable of accessing those soft places. Beliefs, personal judgments, and socially negotiated decisions that are integral in assessment and placement decisions were determined to be soft places. Relevance was a crucial component of Bronfenbrenner’s argument regarding assessment in mild or high-incidence categories. He found that some materials, perhaps IQ scores were not necessary or relevant for some students.
Assessment continues to be one of the most important pieces in the determination of high-incidence disabilities. In order to explain the importance of assessment, Harry, Klingner, Sturges, and Moore (2000) determined the following:

In the field as a whole there have been many attempts to acknowledge the limitations of psychological assessment. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) seeks to avoid diagnosis, so in many school districts, the psychologist does not actually diagnose a disability. Rather, he or she determines which special education services are required. This approach is an attempt to counter the reification of the concept of disability by focusing on placement and services, rather than within-child deficits. In reality, however, the usual procedure is to determine eligibility using the same criteria commonly used as indicators of disability. Thus the determination of disability continues to rely almost totally on the child’s IQ score, academic achievement level, and behavioral features (p. 76).

The field of educational assessment has evolved from a psychometric perspective, in which tests were administered primarily to determine differences among children. This perspective was based on a behavioral approach to development and learning, which viewed learning as the acquisition of incremental units of information. This viewpoint was inherent in the work of the early experimental psychologists, who attempted to assess distinct functions within individuals (using norm-referenced tests) and to quantify differences among individuals based on the analysis of these discrete and separate functions (S. Smith, personal communication, June 10, 2003).

A developmental approach to education, in contrast, views human beings as totally functioning individuals, who cannot be analyzed and reduced to separate components. From this perspective, discrete behaviors do not exist in isolation except in the sensory systems. If the developmental approach is followed, then assessment should not focus on differences in test performance, which purportedly indicates students’ strengths and weaknesses. Instead, the focus should be on the qualitative changes in
students’ thinking. Students have demonstrated that they are capable of changing, sometimes the changes are positive, while instances of negative changes have been recorded. In the district under study, records of student improvement are published quarterly. Specific students are monitored in order to determine growth or regression in placement decisions (S. Smith, personal communication, June 10, 2003).

Assessment is much broader than test administration and the quantitative aspects of obtaining test scores that are based on students’ responses to previously determined questions or on their performance of tasks under specific conditions. Tests are but one component of the assessment process; as such, they should be used to benefit students in their pursuit of educational opportunities. However, we should remember that tests measure only a small sample of behavior (under controlled conditions), which may or may not be representative of a larger constellation of behaviors.

Although testing is a major part of the special education process, it remains that tests should be viewed as only one component of this process. Tests are not the sole basis for educational decision-making. Rather, tests should be viewed as tools that may help practitioners answer questions about students. Tests are part of the larger process of assessment, which is concerned with students’ problem-solving skills and abilities, how they perform on tasks in different settings, the meaning of any particularly unique test performance, and the reasons why they perform in a certain manner.

Special education assessment is not an end in itself and does not result in a score; rather, assessment focuses on gathering systematic, valid, reliable, and relevant information as the basis for appropriate educational decision-making. Assessment is an ongoing and active process that incorporates data from a variety of disciplines. It
encompasses two major perspectives, assessment for identification of students’ learning skills and abilities, and assessment for intervention (program planning). The assessment components overlap significantly, yet common sense and legal considerations that arise in this area suggest that they be presented and discussed separately (S. Smith, personal communication, June 10, 2003).

The Referring Teacher

Mehan, Hartwick, and Meihls (1986) considered how evaluation teams made final decisions to refer or place students in high-incidence disability categories. Their research questioned the timing of referrals. Is the decision to refer a discrete event? Mehan et al. determined that in many instances the referral decision sets the tone for following events. According to their research the events of testing and placement are often foregone conclusions following the teacher’s decision to refer. Following numerous sessions during which the student fails to perform academically or fails to behave in an appropriate manner (according to the teacher) the referring teacher becomes the authority. To the extent that personal beliefs and biases impact the referring teacher, the entire process is impacted or skewed. Mehan et al.’s five-year ethnographic study focused on how team decisions were made and concluded that “placement outcomes were more ratifications of actions that had taken place at previous stages of the decision-making process than decisions reached in formal meetings” (p. 164).

Reschly (2000) found that the decision to evaluate embodies several contributing factors. Test scores, the school’s standing in the community, administrative pressures, and teacher tolerance are integral in teachers’ decisions regarding referral and testing. The assessment process appears scientific, however, it involves many human actions and
reactions to students. The needs of the student must be considered as the entire process is implemented. Parents are integral in many referral and placement decisions. Parents have the right to request changes in their child’s educational programming and they often make such requests. Urban schools are constantly under pressure to increase student performance and thereby achievement. These challenges reflect the real life of urban schools.

The central role of the referring teacher has been documented by research. Gerber and Semmel (1984) published “Teacher as Imperfect Test: Reconceptualizing the Referral Process.” Teachers were found to be perfect tests in determining the findings of psychologists. The need for testing was not necessary following teachers’ assessment of the underlying problems or concerns. Psychologists may have been biased or more willing to find in favor of the presenting teacher. Shinn, Tindal, and Spira (1987) corroborated this idea and went further to say that teacher judgment also displayed gender and ethnicity biases; typically boys were referred more often than girls.

Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, and Ialongo (1998) determined that the general education classroom substantially contributed to students’ failure. The overall general education classroom was found to be one determinant of student success or student failure. Kellam et al. found that a first grader’s experience in a disorderly classroom set the stage for future aggressive student behaviors for boys who were initially resistant to school discipline. As African-American males enter the referral process, there remains little research to determine previous classroom ecology. Therefore, if the issue is the teacher rather than the child, this information is difficult to bring to the table. Educators are reluctant to suggest that a colleague is deficient or unable to structure his/her class.
Many classrooms are characterized by weak or nonexistent instruction and behavior management; however, the question of whether the child might learn more or behave better in a different classroom is rarely if ever presented for discussion. These are important variables that should be considered in the placement process.

This study elucidates the entire special education process from screening in the general education classroom through placement in special education classes because this process is implicated in the phenomenon under study. In order to lessen the occurrence of this phenomenon this research documents and dissects the special education process via the following sections as federally and locally mandated (Georgia Department of Education, 2003). The entire Special Education Process is outlined and explained in Appendix F (study district’s Special Education training manual).

The Special Education Process Defined

In totality the special education process may be viewed as a comprehensive set of six assessment and intervention routes that will facilitate delivery of the appropriate education services. The process includes screening, referral, assessment, staffing, service delivery, and review.

Screening

Screening is a process that occurs throughout the total educational system. It helps to identify students who may have different needs from those of the general school population. The screening process helps to determine if there are any unusual concerns about students’ functioning and may address health and physical states, psychological, communicative, educational, social, and emotional development. This approach provides an overall perspective of students’ impairments and aids in identifying students who may
require additional assessment or alternative educational strategies. It should be noted that parental permission is not required for the screening process when screening is applied to all students. Parental involvement, however, at the information-sharing level is good educational practice. If as a result of screening there are concerns, students enter the next phase of the process, which is the referral conference.

**Referral**

The referral process falls within the jurisdiction of regular education and may be initiated by classroom teachers, administrators, parents, or community members. Referral may be made when students experience learning or behavior difficulties in the regular classroom setting or is viewed as disabled or requiring special services. Referral and screening are complementary processes that enable practitioners to focus additional attention on students who may require special assistance. Many school districts provide general guidelines to assist teachers in determining whether referrals should be made. The guidelines may include a description of the referral process and actual referral forms. The forms help teachers to remain objective in their observations, (S. Smith, personal communication, June 10, 2003).

A referral conference or preliminary review is conducted as part of the referral process to determine if general education can meet the needs of students about whom there is concern or if additional assessment considerations are necessary. It is a review of the available information (cumulative records, observations, interviews) in which questions are generated concerning students' current educational status. The conference participants include those persons who are involved directly with the student and who can provide insight concerning students' total functioning. Most often referral conferences
include school administrators, general and special education teachers, and parents. Since referral is part of general education’s responsibilities, parent permission is not required; however, it is important to keep parents informed. Parents must know that concerns were expressed about their children’s current educational status, the possible need for special education services, and the resolution of the concerns that were expressed.

The referral conference should be considered a problem-solving activity to determine if students may benefit from a general education setting and to explore alternatives and modifications in students’ present educational program. Consultation assistance should be provided to the general classroom teacher to assist in making instructional modifications.

If there are indications of a possible disability and that the student should receive special education services, the student is referred for special education assessment. Questions are then generated concerning the student’s functioning in the five areas to be assessed: (1) health and physical state, (2) psychological, (3) communicative, (4) educational, and (5) social and emotional development.

It is at this phase of the assessment-intervention stage that students enter the area that is more directly the responsibility of special education and in which procedural safeguards must be initiated. Parents must be notified that their child is being referred for special education consideration based on the possibility of a disabling condition. In addition, parents must be notified, in their native language, of their rights according to due process, and they should be apprised of the type of assessment to be conducted in each of the five areas. Finally, written parent permission must be obtained prior to initiating formal assessment procedures.
It is also at this point that a case manager is appointed to oversee and coordinate the functions of the assessment team. The case manager should be a person who is aware of the difficulties being experienced by the student and may be one of the following: (a) general classroom teacher, (b) special educator, (c) administrator, (d) or psychologist. The case manager is not necessarily the same person for each and every assessment that occurs within a particular school.

There are three problem areas in student referral. The first concerns teachers’ reasons for referral. Student characteristics, abilities, behaviors, or skills that students exhibit, interact with teachers’ beliefs or characteristics to influence referrals for special education placement. Individual differences among teachers, in beliefs, expectations, evaluation methods, efficacy or skill in dealing with specific kinds of problems, all interact and influence decisions to refer students for evaluation. Teachers’ sense of efficacy (or beliefs held about professional competence) is at stake when a student “fails”. Referral decisions are also influenced by instructional goals and the availability of specific kinds of strategies and materials. Additionally, teachers’ decisions to refer students are influenced by institutional constraints and external pressures. For example, “new standards for excellence” or desire to provide access to recently developed programs increase the likelihood that low-performing students will be referred. Teachers refer students when parents, teachers, and other professionals insist on referral of those students; they may not refer students when other people are opposed to referral. Similarly, the presence or absence of advocacy groups (such as the Association for Retarded Citizens or the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities) and the perceived or actual clout of those organizations can influence referral. Many
teachers refer students because the process previously resulted in removal of difficult students from their classroom.

The second problem area in student referral is the rate of referral. High rates of referral create problems for school personnel because most states have regulations mandating the maximum time that can lapse between referral and completion of evaluations. In this particular district evaluations must be completed within sixty days of referral, and failure to do so gives parents the right to enroll their child in a private facility for students with disabilities, with the district and state responsible for paying the tuition (GDOE, 2002).

The third problem area in student referrals concerns what happens to referred students. Given that large numbers of students are referred for evaluations and that most referred students are tested, the probability that tested students will actually be declared eligible for and receive special education services is of interest. The district in which the study takes place reported that ninety seven percent of students referred to special education were actually placed in special education during the 2001-2002 school year with ninety eight percent of referred students being placed in the 2002-2003 school year.

Assessment

The assessment stage must be multifaceted in order to provide a total picture of students’ abilities. This is accomplished by assessing students’ physical, psychological, communicative, educational, and social status through formal evaluation, classroom observation, interview, and consultation. It is critical that each of the five areas be assessed to the extent necessary to provide a comprehensive picture of students’
functioning. In addition, no one facet of the assessment should be considered to be more important than another.

The primary goal of the assessment phase is to gather sufficient information to provide a basis for decisions about students' educational programs and alternative or remediation approaches. This includes a determination of possible learning and/or behavior disorders, the degree and severity of such disorders, and the existence of related environmental factors. As such, the assessment should be process oriented rather than instrument or test-score oriented. The professional's judgment is critically more important in the decision-making process than isolated data. The assessment should be a collaborative effort that involves the active participation of all team members to determine students' educational status and the impact of the suspected disability on overall functioning. It is imperative that team members maintain open lines of communication. Assessment of students with suspected learning disabilities, emotional and/or behavioral disorders, or intellectual disability varies from state to state. The requirements of IDEA, however, have led to many similarities in assessment procedures in various areas of the country.

Staffing

Staffing is an integral part of the assessment process. The major purposes of the special education staffing are to develop appropriate education programming alternatives for students. The members of the assessment team should be represented at the staffing and include at least the following: (a) the principal who has basic responsibility for all students in the building, (b) the classroom teacher and counselor who provide services to the student, (c) special educator(s) who helps to interpret educational assessment data,
(d) school psychologist who assists in the interpretation of assessment data related to the cognitive and social-emotional aspects of assessment; (e) special education director or representative who serves as an advisor on appropriate procedural safeguards; (f) parents, who can provide insight concerning their child's needs and levels of functioning outside the academic environment. They may assist in formulating the annual goals of the individual education program (IEP). If the parents choose not to attend the staffing, documented evidence must be maintained to verify the school's attempts to involve them in the assessment intervention process. (g) any other specialists who can help to interpret and discuss information about the child (vision and hearing specialists or speech and language pathologists, as appropriate).

The primary functions of the staffing committee should be accomplished through the following sequential activities. First the committee should certify that the particular student was assessed in each of the following areas: developmental history including a physical assessment and vision and hearing, psychological assessment, communication assessment, educational assessment, social-emotional development, and any other supporting data. Additionally, the necessary report must be written. Second, assessment results should be interpreted to determine students' functioning levels and to answer questions posed at the referral conference to identify students' unique needs. Interpretation of assessment results should be a collaborative effort to provide a complete picture of students' functioning and to determine specific needs. Special education intervention based on students' needs, in contrast with program placement, is gaining popularity throughout the nation. Third, the staffing committee must decide whether it can certify the presence of a disabling condition. It is important to understand the
underlying conditions that cause students' need; however, it is equally important, perhaps more important, to identify students' unique needs and the characteristics of services required to meet those needs. Therefore, the initial question to be asked is whether students can profit from general educational programming with appropriate modifications and without direct special education intervention. If the response to this question is yes, and no special educational intervention is needed, students exit the assessment intervention process. Recommendations, consultation, and assistance for individualized program modifications to be made within the general class setting are provided to the classroom teacher.

If it is determined that students cannot receive reasonable benefits from general education, the question to be answered is whether the need for specialized programming other than that implemented within general education is due to a disabling condition. If it is determined that students' needs are not due to disabling conditions, then a statement related to the likely cause is needed. If the cause is related to cultural or environmental factors, students should be referred for further consideration to programs established for that purpose.

If the committee determines that there appear to be disabling conditions that underlie students' identified needs, then determinations of students' primary disabilities are made for data collection and reimbursement purposes, since state and federal funding is determined on categorical bases. Labels should not be used outside the context of data collection and reimbursement. Students' programs should be based on unique needs rather than on some abstract inexact label. Annual program goals should be developed in a manner consistent with the philosophy of meeting students' needs.
The fourth step in staffing is to identify the characteristics of instructional and related services to meet established goals. It is important that these characteristics flow directly from students' needs and describe specifically the services required to allow students to function and learn. The entire process should be student centered and focus on students rather than on trying to find an appropriate placements or assignment to rooms. An example of an appropriate description of service characteristics is a structured and consistent small-group learning situation.

In conjunction with determining the characteristics of services to be delivered, the staffing committee also recommends service providers, the initiation date and expected duration of services, and the percent of time the student should spend in the general education program. The steps completed up to this point are preliminary and lead to the development of an individualized education program (IEP).

The final step in the staffing process is completion of the IEP, which is an action plan that provides essential guidelines for program implementation and means of determining the extent to which educational goals are being met. The IEP is developed jointly by the parents and other members of the staffing committee. Depending on the administrative design of the school, short-term objectives may or may not be developed at the time of the staffing. The basic IEP may be expanded by those who deliver the program services to include more details. Parents must approve the IEP and provide written consent for the services to be provided.

**Service Delivery**

The provision of special education and related services is a coordinated effort that may involve community services as well as more traditional in-school programs.
Services must be appropriate for students’ learning and behavior needs and be provided in the least restrictive and most productive environment by appropriately qualified personnel.

Therefore, students with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and mental intellectual disabilities should remain in general education classrooms whenever possible. However, if more extensive, segregated service is required, it must be provided. IDEA requires that a continuum of educational services are provided and that the least restrictive service delivery model is utilized whenever possible. Additionally, these services should include transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities comparable to those afforded to, and used by, nondisabled peers.

**Review**

The review process and revision of the IEP should occur at least annually and appropriate changes made in the annual goals, short-term objectives, and service delivery. Changes should be consistent with individual academic growth and should reflect new needs based on the notion that the student is an active learner in an ever-changing environment. Annual review usually occurs within a given twelve-month calendar year. In this particular district annual reviews typically occur at the end of the school year, whereas in other districts they may occur on students’ birthdays or anniversary dates of the initial IEP. Reassessment of students’ functioning in all areas should occur every three years or more frequently if warranted or if requested by students’ parents or teachers.

The comprehensive assessment-intervention model of student program management recognizes that assessment is an active decision-making process based on
data collected through formal and informal measurement. Appropriate program choices are made from a number of alternatives, and the decision will directly affect students' education. In addition, the model is designed to provide insight into students' total functioning. It is also a needs-based model, which requires a shift in focus from appropriate placement into specific program to identification of the student's needs and assignment of appropriate service deliverers to meet those needs. Determination of needs is critical in the decision-making process.

Summary

The point of this literature can best be summarized from the research of MacMillan, Gresham & Bocian (1998). The reification of soft or high-incidence disabilities is a reality in the American system of education. The conceptualization and operationalization of disability categories continue to receive scrutiny from the federal government, state governments, and local school districts. PL-94-142 mandates the special education process for children from birth through adulthood.

This process as implemented currently by various local education agencies has caused African-American males to become overrepresented in high-incidence special education classes. The special education process is comprehensive, inclusive of the following components: (a) screening, (b) referral, (c) assessment, (d) staffing, (e) service delivery, and (f) review. Each component is guaranteed to each individual student and is designed to safeguard students' rights.
CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examined perceptions of professionals within the field of education and parents relative to the special education process. The process was dissected in order to determine if “the process” itself was a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of African-American males in high-incidence special education classes.

This research is theoretically based on effective schools correlates as espoused by Ron Edmonds (1979). Edmonds stated that, “all children can learn” and “we know all there is to know to effectively educate all children whose education is of interest to us.” Theoretically speaking, effective schools that expect excellence from all students are less likely to refer and place extreme numbers of students in special education classes. This may be due to the fact that students’ needs are met in general education classes.

Effective schools also report fewer behavior and discipline problems. According to J. Jerome Harris, Director of Ron Edmonds Leadership Institute, effective schools produce positive change in the school environment and in student achievement in a specified period of time (J. J. Harris, personal communication, July 10, 2003). Harris stated that “an effective school’s program is not effective unless the educational attainment of all students is equivalent to the level that is appropriate for their age, or unless the school is demonstrating progress in helping the students achieve that desired level of attainment.”
Harris (2003) determined that an overwhelming majority of teachers are mis-educating the nation's poor and minority student. According to his research and experience this mis-education is due in part to mis-information that has constantly been fed to teachers regarding the culture of educational institutions and misunderstanding of the education process. Harris found that many teachers are willing to accept the notion that Blacks are culturally deprived and that poverty and deprivation are factors that determine learning ability. Additionally, he asserted that social and economic factors should not be considered as determinants of learning ability and therefore should not determine the school environment nor its instructional strategies. Finally, Harris (2003) stated that, "Many Blacks never realized that we (my generation) also could have been defined as culturally deprived and therefore, incapable of learning. We assimilated so well into our new cultures as educated persons that we forgot that in spite of the poverty and deprivation that we suffered, we achieved."

The mis-education of poor and minority students may have been fostered by such research as *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, which was published in 1966. Other researchers found that schools were powerless to overcome factors of home, community, and genetics. This type of research concluded that all students were not educable and that school reform was wasted on the poor since only massive interventions in their lives would ameliorate the intrinsic disabilities from which they suffered. Many schools allowed this line of thinking and research to affect their cultures. These school cultures expected little of the poor and minority student.

Dr. Ronald Edmonds, noted African-American educator, social scientist, researcher, and founder of the effective schools movement, was alarmed by the poor
academic record of urban students of African-American heritage. Edmonds devised a research model that challenged the traditional result of schooling for the urban poor and minority student. Edmonds found that while most schools were failing in their efforts to educate the urban child, a few schools found success with their students regardless of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or gender. Successful schools were studied by Edmonds in an effort to determine how these schools effectively educated students while other schools failed. Edmonds’ research identified schooling practices and characteristics associated with measurable improvements in student achievement, attitude, and excellence in student behavior. In the late 1970s Edmonds asserted that “all children can learn the intended curriculum” and that what prevents us from reaching this goal is lack of political will. Teddlie and Stringfield (1989), in their longitudinal study of Louisiana schools, found that to become effective requires the mustering of political will as well as new knowledge and skills. Outside help and support are often needed to build the political will for change and to enable a district to gain insights into its existing practices and cultural traditions.

Five correlates for effective schools were delineated by Edmonds (1979). The first correlate is strong leadership at the administrative level. The principal is in charge. The principal knows instruction and spends a large portion of time in classrooms assisting with the instructional process. High expectations on the part of students and staff are the second correlate. The staff believes that students can learn and students believe in their ability to learn. Thirdly, a safe and orderly climate for teaching and learning must be in place. In an environment conducive to teaching and learning, there are processes in place that ensure safety, cleanliness, and order. The fourth correlate is an
emphasis on instruction. This emphasis ensures that the acquisition of basic and higher order skills takes precedence over all other school activities. Schools should have a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus. Finally the fifth correlate is frequent and consistent monitoring of student progress that provides achievement data to be used in evaluating program success. It also gives teachers an ongoing assessment of their effectiveness and allows teachers the opportunity to alter pedagogic practices and re-teach. Theoretically, effective schools find it necessary to refer fewer students to student support teams, and fewer students to special education with concomitantly fewer students being placed in high-incidence disability categories.

Factors that contribute to the uncommonly large numbers of urban African-American males placed in classes for students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, speech/language impairments, and mild and moderate intellectual disabilities without subsequent return to regular education placements via the special education process must be analyzed. Theoretically this local education agency (LEA) is favorably situated to improve learning outcomes of all students. Systemic reform efforts are indicating student performance increases (district newsletter, 2004). Therefore, fewer special education referrals may be forthcoming (L. James, personal communication, January 9, 2004). The special education process as delineated by the district under study, its subsequent effect on special education referrals and placements were reviewed in Chapter II.

Assumptions

The mislabeling of low-income minority students and continued placement in classes for students with high-incidence disabilities were linked to the social induction of
this phenomenon by Serwatka, Dove, and Hodge (1986). Paul (2000) disagreed with this unfortunate truth and concluded “thus the image remains intact that there is personal responsibility for poverty and that we, as a society, are exonerated from blame for it (poverty and lack of student’s academic success), and are relieved from the responsibility of helping to solve it” (p. 13). According to Porter (1997) the treatment of African-American males mirrors America’s educational system and speaks volumes regarding American society. Public education was determined to be a litmus test for how productive or how well African-American males will achieve throughout their lives.

African-American males are overrepresented in classes for students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, speech/language impairments, and mild and moderate intellectual disabilities (Perlmutter, 1983; USDOE, 2001). This overrepresentation is due in part to subjective and culturally irrelevant measures that have allowed teachers, especially teachers with prejudice, to make recommendations for inappropriate placements. Inappropriate placements are rarely reevaluated, thereby relegating students to entire school careers in special education classes (Serwatka, Dove, & Hodge, 1986; Hilliard, 1980). According to Grant (1992), if one understands that the young Black male is a target for destruction, then one might be suspicious of the present use of PL 94-142, which has supported the fact that 84% of all Blacks in special education are male. Grant found that this destruction was evident in America’s schools.

The problem of placing African Americans in special education classes becomes very acute when one realizes that African-American students are more frequently placed in more restrictive, self-contained classes than in less restrictive special education classes (Grant, 1992). African-American children constitute 13% of all students, but comprise
33% of all special education placements, primarily moderately intellectually disabled and behavior disorders. African-American males disproportionately are 84% of African Americans in special education (USDOE, 2001)

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on causes or contributing factors that produce disproportionate numbers of African Americans (specifically males) in special education arrangements. Educators, parents, and administrators examined their attitudes and framed their responses according to their professional and personal knowledge of exceptional children and students in general. Professional and personal knowledge of study participants may have contained bias.

Given these confounding and other current issues in education, this study was limited in the following ways: 1. Four schools were part of this study therefore it may not accurately depict the entire local education agency or district, however insights and results may be generalizable in this and other large urban school districts. 2. The study results are not generalizable to high schools. The grade levels that were considered are the elementary grades (K-5). 3. The study is restricted to elementary schools with populations of 398-574 students; results may differ for schools that are substantially smaller or larger in number. 4. No consideration was given to the race of participants/interviewee.

Definition of Terms

Each term will be integral to the discussion of contributing factors that affect the high number of African-American males placed in high-incidence special education
classes. The study participants will examine local education agency practices and policies that contribute to this phenomenon. The following definitions will be used.

Speech Language Impairment: A speech language impairment is one in which a communication skill differs so far in manner or content from that of peers that it calls attention to itself, disrupts communication or affects emotional, social, intellectual, or educational growth. Speech language impairment refers to impairments in the areas of articulation, fluency, language or voice. Speech language impairments may be primary in nature or they may be secondary to other disabilities. Speech language impairments range from mild to profound. The term language impairment does not include students (a) whose communication problems result from their native language being other than English, (b) who have dialectal differences, (c) whose auditory processing problems are not related to oral language deficits (Georgia Department of Education, GDOE, 2002).

Emotional Behavior Disorder: An emotional disability that is characterized by the following (a) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers, (b) an inability to learn which cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (c) consistent or chronic inappropriate type of behavior or feelings under normal conditions, (d) displayed pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (e) displayed tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains or unreasonable fears associated with personal or school problems. A student with an emotional behavior disorder is a student who exhibits one or more of the above emotionally-based characteristics of sufficient duration, frequency, and intensity that it interferes significantly with educational performance to the degree that provision of special educational services is deemed necessary. When determining whether or not a student
has an emotional behavior disorder, it is often helpful to consider possible descriptions of each characteristic. Most students display some of these behaviors from time to time, however, students with emotional behavior disorders exhibit behaviors chronically and disproportionately to those exhibited by their peers (GDOE, 2002).

Behavior Disorder: Students with behavior disorders will find it difficult or impossible to sustain relationships with peers, learning will be problematic as experienced by students with emotional behavior disorders, however, the intensity and duration of these episodes will not be as frequent nor as severe as students in the preceding category. Students with behavior disorders are typically taught in school settings rather than more restrictive settings such as psycho educational centers or residential placements (GDOE, 2002).

Mild Intellectual Disability: A student may be classified as having an intellectual disability when a comprehensive evaluation indicates deficits in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Such classification allows the individual to be eligible (as if this is a privilege) for consideration for special education and related services. A student may be classified as having an intellectual disability at one of four different levels, mild, moderate, severe, and profound. A mild intellectual disability is considered present when students display significantly sub average general intellectual functioning. Significantly sub average general intellectual functioning is defined as approximately 70 IQ or below (GDOE, 2002).

Moderate Intellectual Disability: Students with moderate intellectual disabilities score from an upper limit of approximately 55 to a lower limit of approximately 40 on standardized measures of intelligence. In addition to the intelligence measure, these
students must exhibit deficits in adaptive behavior which significantly limit their effectiveness in meeting the standards of maturation, learning, personal independence or social responsibility and especially school performance that is expected given the individual's age level and cultural group, as determined by clinical judgment (GDOE, 2002).

Specific Learning Disability: A student may be deemed to have a specific learning disability if a team of educators, parents, and other professionals determine that:
1. The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics reasoning. 2. The team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the same areas listed in the preceding statement. In addition to the academic component, and discrepancy factor, an exclusion component must exist which includes the following areas: The team may not identify a child as having a specific learning disability if the severe discrepancy between ability and achievement is primarily the result of (a) a visual, hearing, or motor handicap, (b) mental retardation, (c) emotional disturbance, (d) environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (GDOE, 2002).

Referral: The referral process enables professionals to (a) determine whether a student is a viable candidate for special education services, (b) make contact with parents to discuss the student's difficulties, (c) begin a screening study to locate problem areas
and contributing factors, and (d) meet with the parents and appropriate professionals to determine whether a formal evaluation is needed (McNamara, Barry, & Edwards, 1998).

Assessment: Educational assessment is a multidimensional process that involves much more than test administration. Quality assessment is based on the premise that an individual’s performance on any task, is influenced by the requirements of the task, the individual’s background and characteristics, and the factors inherent in the assessment setting. In order to provide assessment in a nondiscriminatory or unbiased manner, educators must consider sociocultural factors in dealing with students who are culturally and linguistically different.

Children’s academic performance is typically assessed to determine (a) the degree to which the children are achieving instructional objectives, (b) what they need to reach these objectives, (c) the appropriate curriculum for them, (d) whether they should advance from one grade to the next, (e) any improvement or worsening in their academic performance especially as a result of an intervention effort, and (f) causes of or contributing factors to low academic performance when it is evidenced. Usually grades, standardized achievement tests, and intelligence tests are used as measures of academic performance (Bos & Vaughn 1998).

Teacher Race: Webster (2002) found that race might be defined as a great division of mankind, having certain inheritable physical peculiarities in common. Amazingly this definition focuses on peculiarities, or differences between members of mankind. However, Webster (2000) stated further that race binds particular members together through and by their similar characteristics or ancestry. Teachers are as diverse as student populations; therefore, race has the possibility of causing concern for entire
schools and communities. The variable, teacher race, need not be a causative factor in this discourse regarding African-American males in the district under study. It appears that race is not central here. According to Porter (1997), many African-American teachers and administrators have been socialized by Caucasian controlled policies, culture, and institutions to such an extent that it does not matter that the subjects are of the same race. Porter further cautions that "educated" African Americans who find agreement with the treatment or mistreatment of African-American males are misguided, miseducated, and have internalized self-hate to a frightening degree. Since there are more Caucasian female special education teachers than any other group, it is important that their communication styles are examined as they relate to African-American males in the classroom (Porter, 1997).

Teacher Attitude: Certain attitudes are important to the success and enjoyment of teaching students with learning and special needs; without equivocation all teachers are subject to these attitudes. According to Irvine (1991), many teachers have come to believe that "low-income black children bring to school a set of antischool behaviors and traits that emanate from a culture of poverty" (p. 17). These teachers do not feel that any injustice exist because they contribute these students' problems to various factors such as: undisciplined and unstructured home life, early exposure to crime, lack of male models, and complete disregard and disrespect for adult authority figures (Irvine, 1991; Grant, 1992).

Teachers in special education, and indeed all fields should examine relevant thoughts and attitudes. For example, it helps if a teacher thinks that teachers can make a difference. This thought frequently appears as slogans on T-shirts and bumper stickers.
However, in order for teachers to help special needs students to use their many resources to learn and experience a positive and productive school life, the teacher must think that he or she can make a difference. It also helps for the teacher to think that students are likable and enjoyable rather than just another facet of the job (Grossman, 1995).

Teacher Characteristics and Belief Systems: Teachers exhibit personae that are perceived as positive to students; however, many teachers display or exude negative vibes; these negative vibes are quite often detected by their students. Many students with learning difficulties have cultural and linguistic backgrounds that differ from their teachers' backgrounds. It is important for teachers to value students' cultural differences and provide comfortable ways for these students to share their rich heritage with others. These activities help students respect variations among individuals and provide minority students with events that foster positive self-worth and motivation. Moreover, by becoming acquainted with the cultures of diverse learners, the teacher can adapt curriculum, instruction, and management strategies to accommodate their learning preferences and needs. The many ways in which teachers react with, treat, and behave with their students is a product of their belief systems (Tucker, 1999).

Local Education Agency Policies and Practices: The local education agency is headed by the board of education and is charged with the education of all students within its district, including students with high-incidence disabilities, suspected disabilities, and related services for all students. Over time ways and means of providing services to students are devised, modified, examined, and reexamined until the board of education and other concerned parties agree that an appropriate set of rules has been developed (S. Smith, personal communication, June 10, 2003).
Student Characteristics: Townsend (2000) characterized African-American students thusly:

Many African-American students who are suspended believe they have poor relationships with their teachers. In one study (Garibaldi, 1992), 40% of African-American males perceived their teachers had lowered goal expectations for them, and 60% believed their teachers failed to push them enough. Ironically, when the teachers were asked if their African-American male students would go to college, 60% of them indicated that they would not. Since 65% of the teachers in the study were African American, that author noted the susceptibility of both dominant culture and African-American teachers to hold lowered expectations for African-American male students (p. 381).

African-American children are often aware that they are being treated harshly. Irvine (1991) found that the nonachievement of African-American students is related to the disproportionate use of severe disciplinary practices. Unfair student treatment accounts for excess numbers of expulsions and exclusions from classes, which leads to more misbehavior and subsequent dropouts or inappropriate special education placements. Student characteristics will vary according to each study participants’ personal understandings and beliefs regarding students and students’ capabilities.

Hidden Curriculum: Schools imply certain values, beliefs, and ideas that are not specifically taught nor sanctioned by the local education agency. The hidden curriculum in schools often reinforces society’s prejudicial view that Black children, particularly low-income Black children, are generally slow to outright stupid. Rist (1970) found that once students had been tracked or categorized by early teachers, the probability of students being placed in higher tracks was virtually nonexistent. Paul (2000) warned that schools are sites of cultural and social reproduction. Factors such as racism, classism, and sexism are found in school cultures almost in direct proportion to society. Paul stated that "the hidden curriculum refers to those messages about society, power, race, class,
gender, and other positionalities that are transmitted subtly and implicitly to students
through knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, rules, and practices" (p. 14).

The foregoing variables are central in this research and in the discussion of the
overrepresentation of African-American males in mild, soft, or high-incidence disability
categories and in the reconceptualization of the Special Education Process. According to
Artiles and Trent (1994), the overrepresentation of African-American males in special
education programs for students with learning disabilities, severe emotional or behavioral
disorders, and mental disabilities has remained a persistent reality even after more than
twenty years of its recognition. The literature is replete with causal factors that range
from failure of the general education system to inequities associated with the special
education referral, assessment, and placement processes. Yet, the problem of
overrepresentation of African-American males persists even after causes have been
unequivocally noted. The proportion of African Americans identified as mentally
disabled has not changed much from 38% in 1975; as of date, the percentage is 37%
Harry and Anderson (1994) found that African-American males are particularly
overrepresented in both disciplinary practices (recipients of corporal punishment and
suspension) and in certain special education categories and typically receive their special
education in segregated classrooms or buildings.

Ysseldyke (2001) found that labels associated with the sociocultural construction
of the categories of mild mental disability, learning disability, and serious emotional or
behavioral (SED) disability have definitional and validity problems with serious negative
implications for African-American learners. Ysseldyke observed that the arbitrary shifts
in diagnostic criteria and frequency rates for the SED label coupled with the extreme
variability in placement rates across the states call into question the validity of the SED category. Porter (1997) found that these concerns and the attendant cultural variability of student behavior and teacher judgment place African-American males at great-risk of being falsely labeled as SED. Similar arguments have been made for the educable mentally retarded (mild intellectual disabilities) (EMR) and specific learning disability (SLD). The literature about this subject is also clear. Given the ambiguity and subjectivity embedded in the mild disabilities categories, teacher judgments in the referral process combined with the inherent biases of the assessment process contribute to the disproportionate referral and special education placement of African-American males.

Summary

To understand how students are identified for various special education categories, particularly emotional behavior disorders, it is important to first understand how behavior is viewed differently across cultures. Behavior is culture related. Humans learn to behave through their cultural references and expectations. Because of this, all of the behaviors exhibited by an individual reflect the experiences encountered in his or her life. Furthermore, the aggregate of one’s experiences defines one’s culture; this notion of culture may be a major factor in determining special education placements.

So overarching is the impact of cultural issues that they affect category definitions, assessment processes, placement decisions, advocacy efforts, and training of professionals who work with these students. Special education programs overall are currently in the process of being redesigned, however, it is duly noted that any redesign and this study are limited by the cultural experiences and responses of its participants.
Responses of study participants form the basis for this study’s data. All participants were employees and parents within the same urban school system.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Design of the Study

This study required a qualitative approach because the phenomenon under study lends itself to this form of inquiry. Focus groups were central in the data collection process. The focus group technique was developed as a way of getting beneath the surface. The open-ended interaction of focus groups leads to stimulation of thoughts and emotions, the revelation of material that is not ordinarily forthcoming in an individual interview, the examination of how people in various roles interact, and the observation of important behavior. This qualitative method allows for the uncovering of the underlying reasons for why people do what they do, and provides a full picture of and compliments data obtained by other research methods.

Four in-depth interviews and eight focus group meetings were conducted. The groups were comprised of special education professionals, administrators, general education professionals, and parents of students with special needs. Initial group sessions were followed by individual interviews of four parents and four education professionals. The data are compilations of perceptions, experiences, thoughts, opinions, and ideas of teachers, administrators, and parents regarding special education and the special education process with emphasis on African-American males in urban settings. Specifically, the concern was that of the overrepresentation of African-American males in
high-incidence special education categories. This study explored the entire special education process of students, from their experiences in general education through their perhaps disproportionate referral to, assessment for, and placement in special education programs and subsequent retention in those special education programs.

The focus group interview can be useful as a “self-contained” method of research or it can be part of an on-going, multi-method study when used in conjunction with individual interviews of participant observations. According to Marczak and Sewell (2002), the following are essential ingredients for a successful focus group:

- A clearly understood objective. Is the focus group part of an on-going research project or is it self-contained?
- Homogeneity within the group. The participants should be homogeneous in relation to the topic under discussion (i.e., all should either have or have not been exposed to the topic of study).
- Good recruiting. Recruiting should be done to insure homogeneity and a sufficient number of qualified participants.
- A relaxed atmosphere. The moderator should insure confidentiality and promote openness.
- A moderator who listens. The moderator must insure that the discussion does not stray too far from the point of interest, yet must not rule out things that may seem unrelated.
- A well-prepared moderator. The moderator typically follows an unstructured interview guide.
Free-flowing dialogue. The moderator should begin the discussion by inviting honest and open dialogue and guiding the discussion only when necessary.

Restrained group influence. The moderator should refrain from contributing to the discussion unless necessary.

Skilled analysis. The data can be analyzed by either a qualitative, or ethnographic summary, or a quantitative systematic coding via content analysis.

Competent researchers. The research team should be sure that all necessary details are controlled.

A successful focus group is one in which a variety of responses are generated which are germane to the topic of study. All participants are free to express opinions and thoughts regarding the topic at hand.

Advantages of focus groups were also delineated:

Release of inhibition by participants. A well-moderated group encourages full and open expression of perceptions, experiences, opinions, thoughts, and attitudes.

Flexibility. A focus group is typically more flexible than an individual interview.

Handling contingencies. A focus group is amenable to exploring linkages that go untouched in a statistical survey. Moreover, it is possible to explore avenues of importance that may arise other than those listed on a questionnaire.
Time. Eliciting responses from four to six respondents in a focus group lasting one hour is more time effective than interviewing the same number individually.

Interpretability of data. Through the data usually contain a wide range of responses, identification of issues, and the reasons participants hold positions on issues is usually clear upon careful analysis. The group often stimulates recall and actuates important but forgotten personal detail.

Provision of basic exploratory information. When little is known in advance of investigation, the focus group may provide a basis for formulating research questions and hypotheses.

Finally, focus groups may be valuable in exploring new territory in which little is known beforehand, or to gain unique insight into existing beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, thus this method of research is an invaluable tool.

Access and Entry Process

Access into the urban public schools of this study was obtained by written request to the Research, Planning and Accountability Department (RPA). Permission was granted to conduct this research as outlined in the Research Prospectus. Four elementary schools were identified in the written request to RPA. The proposed Elementary Schools were contacted via letter to each principal in order to gain entry and to conduct the focus groups for research purposes.
Description of School District

This is an urban school system with an active enrollment of 55,812 students, attending a total of 89 schools: 63 elementary (K-5), two of which operate on a year-round calendar; 16 middle (6-8); and 10 high (9-12). The school system supports two nontraditional schools for middle and/or high school students, two evening high school programs, an adult learning center, and seven charter schools. The student population of this district is made up of the following: 49,766 African-Americans; 3,686 whites, 1,685 Hispanics; 458 Asians; 39 American Indians; and 178 multiracial students (School District’s Office of Communications, 2003).

Description of Selected Schools

In order to obtain the perceptions and ideas of education professionals from various schools and varying perspectives, school requirements were determined. Each school received Title I funding and is located in the northwest section of this urban setting. The total enrollment could not exceed 600. The total enrollment of School A during the 2001-2002 school year was 398. Twelve (12) students were referred to the Program for Exceptional Children during the school year with 12 students placed; 33 students were currently receiving special education services. School B referred and placed 14 students to the Program for Exceptional Children; the total enrollment was 521 with 46 students currently enrolled in special education. School C referred and placed 5 students in the Program for Exceptional Children with 337 as total enrollment and 15 students already receiving special education services. Finally, school D had an enrollment of 574; 8 students referred and placed in the Program for Exceptional Children during the 2001-2002 school year with 38 students already in the program at the
outset of the school year. Enrollment figures are for grades K-5. Demographics of each school are presented in Appendices A, B, C, and D.

Description of Focus Group Members

The research questions are central in discussions of teacher perceptions, expectations, and their impact on African-American males and students in general. Only district parents, teachers, and employees participated in this study. The Principal, Assistant Principal, or Instructional Liaison Specialist of each selected school assisted the researcher in the selection process of group members. Each school employee was certified in at least one of the following disciplines and had direct experience with students from at least one of the following areas: (a) behavioral disorders, (b) mild intellectual disabilities, (c) moderate intellectual disabilities, (d) interrelated, (e) speech/language impairments, (f) elementary education, or (h) occupational therapy/physical therapy/adapted physical education. Parents had at least one student currently enrolled in the Program for Exceptional Children within the district.

Understanding the Special Education Process – An Overview for Parents is presented in Appendix E.

Data Collection Procedures

After proposed focus group participants were identified each participant met with the researcher. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and solicited individual support. Each participant was given a copy of the research questions. The purpose of distributing the questions prior to the meeting was to allow group participants an opportunity to reflect on previous experiences and to be prepared to converse regarding the purposed issues. Group participants were encouraged to jot down thoughts or urgent
and related concerns that they wanted to bring to the discussion, regarding the research questions.

Secondly, groups were convened. Each group met twice; each meeting was for one hour's duration. First sessions were rich in participant perceptions and experiences. During second sessions group members recapitulated or presented additional data. One member from each group was randomly selected for one individual interview. Individual interviews were scheduled within one week of the participant’s group meeting. Additionally, one parent of a student with a disability from each school site participated in an interview session.

To validate the written interpretations of the researcher, an independent transcriber was present and transcribed all sessions. Each session was also audiotaped. Field notes and the researcher's reflections were maintained throughout the study. A review of the transcriptions and field notes yielded a complete picture of the study participants' perceptions regarding the study phenomenon. A summary of all transcriptions was shared with each participant for accuracy and approval.

Data Analysis Process

Each focus group meeting and individual interview was transcribed. Emergent themes were developed. The findings were categorized using the following major headings: administrative concerns, policies, and constraints, teaching practices, policies and procedures, and parents and schooling. A comparative analysis relative to common or different themes in participant responses was made between the four groups and interviews of professionals and parents. Coding was done to identify common language or common descriptions of experiences and perceptions.
Summary

Krueger (1998) described the focus group discussion as occurring in a “permissive, nonthreatening environment” (p. 6). In terms of opinion formation, group interaction process was said to be analogous to the individual’s development of an idea. This can be described as movement from uncertainty to sharing of experiences and perspectives. Additionally according to Krueger (1998), the group finds common ground for discussion of the points on which they agree and disagree. Participants sometimes change their views during the group discussion. Thus, the focus group is a dynamic setting where opinions are expressed and sometimes even formed. Participants of this study willingly expressed opinions and perhaps they changed some of their previously held notions.

The study embodied five research questions for professionals and three questions for parents. Each professional question was explored in a focus group format followed by random individual interviews of one group member per school. One parent interview was conducted for each school under study. The data collection process was extensive. The process consisted of audiotapes, researcher notes, participant notes, and transcriptions. The researcher listened to and internalized answers to questions, comments, preferences, and biases of each participant in order formulate informed and in-depth answers to each question. This study embodies high face validity according to Krueger (1998). He indicated that high face validity may be determined if there is believability of participants’ remarks. Each participant in the study had first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon under study and a wealth of knowledge regarding the education of children, including children with special needs or disabilities.
CHAPTER V
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Overview of the Data Collection Process

The focus group informants generated the data presented in this chapter by participating in four focus groups and one individual interview per group. Focus groups were formed at four elementary schools in the northwest section of the city. All schools received Title I funding during the 2001-2002 school year. Each school’s enrollment was less than six hundred students.

A qualitative approach was used to collect study data. In depth interviews and focus groups comprised of administrators, general education professionals, and parents of students with special needs were convened and interviewed to unearth special education concerns. The specific concern was that of the disproportionate placement of African-American males in programs for students in high-incidence disability areas via the Special Education Process.

The research questions were central in discussions of teacher perceptions, expectations, and their impact on students. Only district parents, teachers, and employees participated in this study. School employees were certified in at least one of the following disciplines or had direct or indirect experience with students from at least one of the following areas (a) behavioral disorders, (b) mild intellectual disabilities, (c) moderate intellectual disabilities, (d) interrelated, or (e) speech/language impairments,
(f) elementary education. Parents had at least one student currently enrolled in the school district in the Program for Exceptional Children.

Four schools were part of this study and four focus groups were convened. Two meetings per school were held so that thoughts, feelings, and group interactions could be completely understood and transcribed by the researcher and an independent transcriber. Meetings were held at each school site. One individual interview followed each initial meeting. Interview participants were randomly selected by drawing. Each research question was asked (during focus meetings) and other questions that emerged were discussed as the group dictated. One parent from each school was interviewed.

The researcher and transcriber audio recorded all meetings and interviews. Additionally, the transcriber took detailed notes during each session. Each meeting was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher in order to determine accuracy and depth. Each transcript was read and color-coded for specific terms and phrases in order to provide a literal interpretation of the data. Actual words and meanings of words were determined with clusters of similar concepts formed. Sentence strips were made using red, yellow, green, and blue to represent each domain under study. These strips contained the actual words of respondents; the data yielded natural levels or themes in the topic. Specificity of all responses was integral. All responses were specific and based on experiences therefore these responses could be given more weight or credibility than any vague and/or impersonal responses. Transcriptions of each meeting and interview were subjected to literal, interpretive, and reflective readings by the researcher focusing on the researcher’s interpretations and understandings of the study phenomenon and the
context in which statements were made. Interpretation of the data focused on giving meaning to or stating in usable terms the exact intent of each respondent.

The presentation of raw data provides a panoramic view of the perceptions and knowledge base of educators and parents. The usage of four schools allowed for comparisons across groups in order to determine common practices and perceptions across the district. Therefore, raw data from each school are presented. Secondly, emergent themes were derived from each data set. Finally, the data are presented in graphic form for all schools.

School A

Prologue and Observations of School A's Focus Group

Scheduling of meetings was done to coincide with one district planning day and one late tutorial day during the following week. Each group member was contacted by the Instructional Liaison Specialist of School A. Focus group members were given copies of the study questions several days in advance of the meeting. Members were eager to meet for lunch on a teacher workday. The Kindergarten and Third Grade teachers of this group were able to arrive at the media center early in order to assist with the preparation of lunch and to design seating strategically or creatively for other group members.

Each group member prepared lunch from a buffet-styled table. The independent transcriber was introduced and included in the repast. Group members were able to talk and eat simultaneously. Group rapport had been developed over years of working
together as a faculty, although on various grade levels. We began each session as we proceeded to eat. These sessions were personal, in-depth, and quite revealing.

**Data Analysis/School A**

Careful analysis of the data revealed that each focus group expressed concerns regarding many of the same issues that confront elementary school teachers within this urban school district. School A was comprised of leaders within this particular school; they felt and expressed confidence in their abilities to inculcate students and handle administrative demands. Each member had taught for more than fifteen years and felt a sincere closeness with their students and their needs. Generally, their concerns were focused on administrative constraints, policies, and requirements; however, neither member would allow administrative concerns to change their commitment to their students. They were sure that student performance was not always indicative of teacher performance. In answering the question regarding protections for students against inappropriate referral, the concern was that students' needs are often not met. After their discussion of teachers receiving reprimands if too many of their students were referred to the Student Support Team, School A's Second/Third Grade Teacher said: *(Question I)*

You know what I didn’t understand about that was, the teachers that referred the most students were the smart teachers, in that they knew that those children had problems and they didn’t mind sitting down and going the extra mile to refer children to SST and ultimately to special education. Other teachers, that the child had, obviously said, ‘ok, I’m not being bothered, I’m not doing the paperwork, let him go.’ That’s the problem with that.
School A’s Focus Group knew that students should be afforded every protection that could be allowed against inappropriate referrals; however, they found that some referrals were warranted. The Kindergarten Teacher from this group made the following comments:

I think that once you go through the referral process and get to see exactly what is involved, you may not refer as many students. Once you state your problem and they throw back these strategies for you to use in your classroom with the particular child, then to me that’s the first step in protecting students from being referred when it’s not necessary. Because, usually when I refer a student, I mean when I really refer them, I have already tried all the things that they tell me to go back and try anyway. So I only refer my students as a last resort. I have not been able to reach this child with my expertise, so I figure that maybe someone else might.

School A also found that many students who were in need of special education services were not receiving services because of the same process that affords protection against unjust placement. For example, if a student presents constant behavior challenges for various teachers and across various settings, all teachers’ hands are literally tied if the parent does not agree with the suggested placement of the student; therefore, student protections are effective. The Fifth Grade Teacher summarized thusly:

There are more policies to protect the child than there are policies to guarantee that a needy child gets those services. For example, Student N. has been tested and is to be in special education but as long as she doesn’t wear her glasses she cannot be placed in special ed.
The Instructional Liaison was able to confirm that this state of affairs was prevalent in this district. There are many instances in which students’ parents were able to stop the process by not completing requirements, such as vision and hearing. Before a student is sent to the In-School Team for special education consideration, auditory and visual problems must be eliminated as underlying or contributing factors to the student’s inability to meet academic or behavioral standards. School A’s Instructional Liaison Specialist agreed that another student was positioned to be referred for special education services, “but the law protects his parents; his parents refuse to sign his papers.” It was determined that there are ways and means of circumventing the special education process as it relates to appropriate referrals and inappropriate referrals.

This focus group found that referrals are related to specific teachers; however, behavioral problems that were more pronounced were also likely to be referred to special education faster than academic problems. Teachers were more willing to continue instruction, to try to reach a student with academic difficulties, however, they were less inclined to expend as much time and energy solving behavior problems. The Fifth Grade Teacher explained:

What is it with behavioral problems? They will always take precedence over everything else. Behavioral problems will always take precedence over everything else. Behavioral problems are very visible. It’s very easy to manage the process or very easy to go in and say this child did a, b, c, and d. But when you have a learning disability then it becomes questions as to why should you prove that this child needs special education. It’s not really worth the school
system's trouble to go out and do that. Now behavior is different.

Another pressing concern for this group was the amount of time needed to start and complete the process of students being referred for special education. Again the Fifth Grade Teacher was the spokesperson:

Yes, right. The process is so long that you never see it happen. I've had kids that have been referred prior who ended up in special ed. But you never see it to fruition. All you see at 5th grade . . . you catch the tail end of it where they were referred in third grade and they make it to special ed by 5th.

*Question two* required a response regarding individualization of this process. This group found that individualization was necessary and that professionals do not avoid this step. The Kindergarten teacher said:

You know if that child needs an individualized package. You have to do that for the child to see if you can move him or her; and after a certain period of time if the child hasn't made progress, you have to go through an instructional program. Afterwards that's when you come back and say, 'I've tried all of these strategies and they're not working.'

The First Grade Teacher was sure that she covered all bases if referral was ever necessary on her grade level. She stated:

And each student has his own individual set of materials, you have to present anecdotal records and work samples to prove that the child is not working on grade level.
The group felt that being sure of the child’s individual needs should be the catalyst that prompts referral and consideration for special education in the first place. The discussion followed the path of knowing your students and providing them with every opportunity to succeed. The Kindergarten Teacher recounted an instance in which individualization of the process was somewhat extreme:

    Okay, I understand what you mean because I had this little boy that I referred and it went all the way to the Central Staffing Team person. He was tested by the psychologist and all of that. It came back, ‘oh, no he does not qualify’, the psychologist tells me, and I said, ‘you’re kidding me. How can this be?’ But he doesn’t qualify. She told me, ‘you have to wait until he gets to first or second grade where he is expected to be able to do more critical thinking kinds of things, and then when he falls down in those areas then we will see if he qualifies.’

    Turning to question three: How do teachers distinguish between students that they can help and those with needs beyond the capacity of the typical general education classroom? The previous discussion of individualizing the process was still fresh as this new question was presented, the Kindergarten Teacher was still sure of her point and made the following statements:

    When I have tried all the strategies they come up with, then what can I do? Everything that I can do, I’ve done. You know when you know. I’ve just racked my brains for all kinds of little teaching strategies and little gimmicks and gadgets and he still doesn’t get it. So that lets me
know that he needs to go to someone else.

The group could not agree on a scenario in which sending the student to another teacher might be the answer. Following this segment of the discussion the Kindergarten Teacher was not convinced, and made this observation:

You know that it’s not just another teacher because we have tried that. If I do everything I can do, then I give him to Ms. G. to do one-on-one or whatever and then the EIP (Early Intervention Program) teacher comes in and that’s three adults right there who cannot do anything for this child. So it’s not just another teacher. He needs some kind of specialized help from some who is . . .

The Instructional Liaison Specialist knew that she had to make her point regarding changing teachers as a means of insuring individualization of the entire process from referral to SST through placement in a special education class.

Give them time; they usually don’t like to test too early. They used not to test kindergarten or first grade students, until they’ve matured a little bit but then also, a child might not do well with you, but be might do well with somebody else. Now you know you don’t want to admit that but it might happen.

The discussion regarding parents and respecting their right to be integral parts in discussions regarding the education and care of their children was rather revealing. However, each member of the group agreed that it does not matter what the teacher may need to tell parents, it is critical that the speaker is aware of his/her tone. The First Grade Teacher was first to speak, and made the following statements: (Question Three)
I think from the very beginning all of the aspects of the process should be explained to the parents so that they understand. It should be told or spoken in layman's terms so they can understand that their child does not retain information, therefore, we have to test him. I just think everything should be open to the parent and without belittling them as if they don't know. And some of them don't, but we can't make them feel worse than they already do. They want to know what's wrong with their child; a lot of them really want to know.

All group members agreed that it is very difficult to suggest that something is wrong; that to receive bad news is difficult enough and this news must be delivered with extreme care. The Instructional Liaison Specialist deals with parents on a daily basis and certainly must have or develop tact as she works through many difficult situations involving students. She was moved to make this observation:

I find that in SST you have parents coming in for the first time. Somebody is saying to the parent that something is wrong with your child. Those parents take offense because that's their heart, and they're sitting up there and might not have had a clue that something was wrong with their child. It's the way you handle them and talk to them; that we are working together on this. 'You have a problem and we're going to work with you on this problem. We're all here to help you'. So it's the way that you talk to them.

Although there was agreement that working with parents deserves constant consideration by all education professionals, it had to be brought out that parents have notions that make this part of the process difficult. Parents must be contacted and they
must agree with any placement decisions, or any decisions that significantly alter the
general education condition. With this in mind the Fifth Grade Teacher summarized it
thusly:

But you know there’s also a perception. Yes and parents don’t like that. The
problem is this perception as a community of special education. Parent’s
come in here with preconceived notions about special ed automatically.
Like for perfect example, Robert’s parents have to . . . there is no way that
they cannot know that he needs to be in special ed. But the thing is, they
refuse to for whatever reason because . . .

And the First Grade Teacher finishes his statement with:

Because once you’re in it, you’re always in it.

As School A’s group answered research question number five the remembrance of
former students surfaced. The question was: Are you able to articulate processes that
may counteract whatever negative circumstances and practices that contribute to
inappropriate placements in special education? One problem that was uncovered was the
district’s practice of leaving students in the general education classroom long after the
placement decision has been made. The Second/Third Grade Teacher recalled this
situation:

A good example in third grade, using one of my former students who’s
now in another classroom, if you take Student D. away, it would just make
us happy because he’s gone. Student D. is a case where the academics were
so low that he acts out to draw attention away from his academics. But
using Student S. as another example, he’s a case where the behavior is
affecting his academics. It’s the reverse. Because he has the ability but, because he cannot control himself, his grades drop for whatever reason.

It was determined by this group that administrative practices of allowing students to be served in a resource setting rather than more restrictive placements affords students opportunities to remain with their general education peers. Although in theory this is a desired practice from students’ perspectives, this is not necessarily the case for teachers who serve these students. The Third Grade Teacher and Instructional Liaison were eager to explain and did so as follows:

I’ll give you a prime example of what’s inappropriate. That lil crazy boy down in Mrs. G’s room; he has no business being in her room. (ILS interjects) They have him in resource when he needs to be BD. What I see happening, is that there’s a shortage of BD teachers, so I see them placing students who have BD and a lot of BD problems in resource. And Mrs. F. said that she is not a BD teacher and she has a lot of BD students.

The group found that in many instances delaying special education placements could benefit students. Many behaviors that were considered problematic in the early elementary grades are not found in the upper elementary grades. The consensus of the group was that students matured and learned which behaviors were appropriate and which behaviors were inappropriate. The Fifth Grade Teacher championed this practice and said:

The kids that you have in first, second, and third who are considered BD and act out – those are the same kids who become the quietest kids in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. See it’s a whole role reversal. Let me explain. Those kids
act out in behavior ways. They act out in ways to deal with not knowing.

But somehow these kids know that there’s a certain behavior that you use in first second, third, and fourth grade and the behaviors that you use in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eight. You have very few kids who act out in the upper grades. They were the same kids in trouble when they were in elementary. Of course you’re going to have some. But a large percent of them get very quiet and very reserved as they get older. Maybe it’s just the social aspect of ‘I want to be cool.’

This group continued to be concerned with parents and their perceptions of how general and special education work. Parental involvement was determined to be a critical factor in the education of all students. It was also determined that special education may not continue forever and that students may return to general education placements. The Second/Third Grade Teacher said:

Usually if you explain to parents that you can get out of special education, in fact my best friend whom I’ve known for almost twenty years was in special education. If he’s special then I’m a monkey’s uncle. But the thing is and not only that, I’ve had BD kids that have come out.

Table 1, which follows, summarizes and delineates by study domain the strongest points and arguments as stated by focus group participants of School A. These statements were subjected to literal, interpretive, and reflective methods by the researcher.
Table 1

School A – Responses and Observations by Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Concerns and Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✦ Number of students that may be referred per class was questioned. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Effectiveness of specialized programs was not determined. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Reassign students to different teachers. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Students remain in general education with pull-out model was preferred. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Specialized teachers were not on faculty. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Special education teacher shortage impacts general education. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Delay in special education placements is problematic. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Students may return to general education placements. (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✦ Refer behavior problems before academic problems. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Individualized packages are available. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Implement all suggested SST strategies. (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✦ SST and In-School Team strategies were helpful. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Student safeguards, i.e., vision and hearing assist in placement decisions. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Entire referral process too long. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Anecdotal records provide useful information. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✦ Psychological testing is often required. (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (Continued)

Parents and Schooling

- Thoroughly explain the entire process. (4)
- Difficult to suggest students are deficient. (4)
- Parents on offense when they arrive at school. (4)
- Community perception of special education is poor. (4)
- Remember parents’ regard for their children must be considered. (4)
- Sensitive approach is needed. (4)

The most prevalent points and arguments are posted under the applicable domain.

Responses to specific questions are noted in parentheses.
School B

Prologue and Observations of School B's Focus Group

The principal of School B scheduled meetings for this focus group. Meetings were held in the media center at 3:30 p.m. on two consecutive Tuesdays. Tuesdays were identified as late days for this faculty. In as much as this principal was serving as a peer debriefer, she was instrumental in selecting focus group participants. The principal's selection consisted of a Core Coordinator (a reading and core curriculum specialist), a Fourth Grade Teacher, a Fifth Grade Teacher, and a Parent of a student with mild intellectual disabilities. The principal selected three faculty members who are excellent in the education profession and were willing to discuss the study issues. These participants were given the study questions one week in advance of the first meeting; this move allowed all participants an opportunity to become familiar with the direction of the study.

Afternoon refreshments were provided for focus group participants. The independent transcriber was introduced and included in the repast. Sessions were started as participants ate and discussed the study questions. Thoughts, views, and feelings were explored so that in-depth information was unearthed. Their stories are told in the following raw data.

Data Analysis/School B

The school principal was instrumental in putting this group together. Group members were selected because they were knowledgeable and capable of representing their school well. They had their responses ready for question number one: What policies and practices protect students from inappropriate referral? The group was willing to
begin by stating a major problem within the district and with the referral process overall. Teachers must be accountable for their actions and their actions need to be grounded in sound practices; knowing and following procedures are critical aspects of schooling and the referral process. The Fifth Grade Teacher reiterated this notion and stated: *(Question number one)*

I think that even before the prescreening or anything else an understanding is necessary. Make sure that the teacher has some type of workshop or some type of staff development to make sure that the teacher understands what he/she’s looking for in the observation. You know when I’m observing a child, if I suspect that this child may need a referral, I need to know first of all ‘what am I looking for’ as far as knowing how to refer.

Not only should the teacher know precisely what he or she is looking for, the teacher should realize that students react differently in different situations and with different teachers. In order to protect students from inappropriate referrals, perhaps administrators should allow students to experience a different teacher in order to determine if the problem exists across settings and teachers. The Core Coordinator found that a change of teacher may precipitate a change in student behavior and academic performance and made the following observations:

Just having known children that I’ve had, that when I look at their PR folder and it says one thing, or when I talk to the teacher that they’ve had before, ‘she did so and so’ thing in their class, which may not be occurring in my class. So in that particular instance I think that it had to do with the teacher. A lot of times some children need challenging. Some children don’t have
behavioral problems it's just that particular situation that they were in, it came out to be that way which does not necessarily mean that it's actual.

This group felt as if there are policies in place to prevent inappropriate referrals such as the observation period, pre-screening, test scores, behavior recordings, and diagnostic tests. They felt that all of these measures should be implemented before any referral is undertaken.

As the group approached question number two the moderator reiterated the question for the sake of clarification: “When we talked previously, we mentioned the prescreening that we have to do, forms that we complete, etc. all of these things that go into place before a student is actually sent through SST (and ultimately to special education). Is there a time when we could actually redo whatever we're doing as we refer children? How do we truly know that we are meeting the needs of the child rather than completing everything that we must do because the system has guidelines?” The Core Coordinator had an immediate answer:

That is one of the biggest problems and complaints that I receive from teachers. Having been a teacher myself in the classroom for many years, that is also my issue. A lot of the red tape and the things we have to go through to get a child to referral when sometimes you can just right off the bat, just by interaction with the child you might automatically know if the child needs speech. By interactions you know, or cognitive things such as not following directions or things like that; small things allow you to identify children that have problems. It could be hearing, it could be a lot of different things, but because we have so much red tape that we have to go through it really adds
Individualizing the process was a major concern of this group. The core coordinator had made it clear that in “knowing students,” professionals may spot problems long before any formal measures are implemented. It was determined that compliance and district guidelines hold up the process of giving children the assistance that they need on an individual basis. The hold up was blamed on the suggested timeframe for various aspects of the process that cannot be individualized. For example: there cannot be a referral until thirty days have passed when a suspected problem has been identified, then twenty days of anecdotal notes, followed by scheduling constraints between school administrators, parents, and teachers. Typically the time period is sixty school days or three-twenty day grading periods.

The Fifth Grade Teacher confirmed the fact that knowing one’s students is critical in the discussion of individualizing instruction and processes. The following is her summation:

I mean to know your students; if you assess your students and you know what your students can do, to me that’s knowing your student. Knowing and assessing goes hand in hand. And then once you find out what the child can do, then you tailor your instruction to meet that child’s needs. If he or she is still having problems then you go about working with that student. That’s one way to ensure the individualization of the process. You’re just compiling data to assist that child in the process that he or she needs. It’s just data. Data and assessment are critical elements in knowing and providing quality instruction for all students.
*Question number three* was an interesting question for this particular group of educators and finally the parent wanted to be heard on this question. The parent was concerned that teachers don’t spend enough time working with students on a one-on-one basis. She said that she realized that there were other students in the classroom. However, she stated that she was also aware that her child, with mild intellectual disabilities, appeared to be slower than her other children before the school actually suggested that perhaps special education could be the answer. The parent stated that she had been trying to get assistance for her son since he entered first grade and that he was in his fourth grade year before he was finally placed in a special education group with speech services. In her words she explained:

I did know that my son had a speech problem and that he was not able to do things that my other children could do; I knew this when we took him to his other school. But, this school (School B) helped me and my child. He just could not talk right and keep up in his work. Instead of helping me with my son, the teachers just kept telling me how bad he acted all of the time. I didn’t think that anybody was trying to see exactly who he was. Now I do think that he just didn’t know what else to do, but to be bad.

The Core Coordinator responded by saying that:

The individualization process that’s where a child gets individualized assistance that he or she might need. Whether it’s speech, whether he or she can’t see out of one eye, I mean just all the different things that we say under 504 as constituting children with special needs. So that particular
point of how long it takes for that child to get assistance is based on that compliance and the district guidelines. I think all of us know that it takes a while for a child to go through this process. It’s just saying what kinds of information that assist the professional in making the decisions. That it (the process) should guarantee individualization of the process.

This group determined that the process itself should be individualized and that all of the assessments, observations, and testing should be done on a case-by-case basis because no two problems present themselves in exactly the same manner. Therefore, the process itself becomes individualized.

School B was ready to consider question number four: How do teachers distinguish between students that they can help and those with needs beyond their capacity to help in the general education classroom? This question made the group realize that we had talked about things that teachers do in order to refer students in the first place. With this in mind they determined that all strategies for improving student performance should be considered. They concluded that “you know what you know” because you have observed the student, you’ve assessed, you’ve tried any and all suggested strategies, then finally you’re at a point where you cannot do anything else. You can’t do anything else for your student; you’ve got to ask for assistance. The group’s Fifth Grade Teacher said:

After you’ve assessed and assessed and assessed and then you’ve observed. That’s all you can do. Well based on the question using all of those strategies that are given by the SST team and then assessments that will help us to know whether we’ve done all that
we can do. That’s what we have in place after we’ve done all that we can do in the general classroom on an individual basis.

Next we discussed the treatment of parents as they come into the school or whenever the need arises to have conversations regarding their child’s behavior or academic performance. The group found consensus in speaking with parents often and before there is problem to report. The Fifth Grade Teacher made this observation:

*(Question number five)*

We have conferences with them prior to that (academic or behavior problems) and they know how their children are performing. So we have the conference with the parent ahead of time; so that when they come or when we do refer the child and they come to the SST meeting, they know exactly why we’re referring them.

Additionally, how educators talk to parents was of concern to this group. The group realized that teachers are not able to gain the most respect and cooperation from a disgruntled parent. Parental cooperation is imperative in this whole process. It is also human nature not to want to hear bad news or what is perceived as bad news. The Core Coordinator was astute in observing the relevance of parental input and support for school initiatives by observing:

They don’t want to confront the fact that there’s something wrong with their child. You know, nobody wants to deal with that. So I think that if we had more sensitive approaches to the way we call the parent up for SST that would eliminate some problems. Then we should have at the very beginning communicated, in a special kind of way, to the parent exactly what
we are trying to do. Some people are receptive and some people just close up when teachers call them. They don’t want to hear it, they don’t want to know that their child is different.

This group determined that some methods are more suitable than others for communicating with parents regarding this very delicate matter. However delicate the matter, educators must make parents understand that we are not trying to put them down; our aim is only to help the student. Educators must never stop talking to parents and must always try to let them know exactly what we are trying to accomplish. Additionally, we should always give or suggest strategies for parents to try at home with their children.

Finally question number five: Are you able to articulate exemplary processes that may counteract whatever negative circumstances and practices that contribute to inappropriate placements in special education? The general consensus was that in order to combat negatives the parent must be positive about the entire matter and then the school system could work on processes to combat inappropriate placements within.

One example of an exemplary process within School B was in the Fifth Grade Teacher’s class. None of the general education students or the involved special education student knew that he was in special education. When students are included in all activities and allowed to work within his or her level, without undue attention, the special needs student may avoid teasing or embarrassment. The Fifth Grade Teacher had a case in point:

Does the rest of the class really need to know if a student is going out to special education? And the reason why I say this is because
I have a child who’s been going to PEC all year and he didn’t realize that it was a special education class. And he was loving it. It was like, ‘it’s time for me to go, it’s time for me to go’ until another child actually told him, ‘you’re in a special ed class.’ ‘No, I’m not in no special ed’, he said. He was an LD student; and that’s when it seems like it changed. He doesn’t really want to go now. He doesn’t really want to leave the room, he prefers to stay in the room. So do they (classmates) really need to know?

Another exemplary practice was identified. A collaborative or team teaching approach could alleviate some of the stigma of being labeled special education. For example if the special education teacher were assigned to teach two or three students on their grade level and in a general education classroom the traditional pull-out model would be eliminated. Students within this particular classroom would not need to know that the situation was contrived to help any particular students within the classroom. The Third Grade Teacher spoke of a similar arrangement from a surrounding urban school district:

They have the general education teacher, and the special ed teacher is also in the classroom. It could be in your classroom. If those two students that are special ed are in your general education classroom, then those special education students would be the focus of the special education teacher. Whatever they’re doing or whatever you’re doing with them, they will have that particular special education teacher to assist them. You would go about teaching the other children in general education as you normally teach.
The Core Coordinator saw that monetary constraints could hinder such a teaching arrangement. School districts would need to hire more teachers in order to accommodate such an arrangement. She was emphatic regarding money in this urban school district:

Isn't it all about money? Because in the particular way that you were speaking of, such as collaborative teaching, the need would be for two teachers. That would be more on the budget as it relates to having one interrelated person teaching all of the special needs children with just a paraprofessional versus hiring several teachers. So that would have something to do with the structure of the entire system.

Table 2, which follows, summarizes and delineates by study domain the strongest points and arguments as stated by focus group participants of School B.
Table 2
School B – Responses and Observations by Dimensions

Administrative Concerns and Constraints

- Teacher training is needed. (1)
- Reassign students to different teachers. (1)
- Scheduling constraints between administrators, parents, and teachers exists. (1)
- Too much time elapses between identification and placement. (3)
- Budgetary constraints impact teaching practices, i.e., hiring of specialized personnel. (5)

Teaching Practices

- Students need challenges. (1)
- Teachers perceive of the process as red tape. (2)
- Teachers assess students in order to “know” them. (2)
- Not enough one-on-one instruction. (3)
- Individualized packages are available. (3)
- Try all suggested SST strategies. (3)
- Collaborative or team teaching between special and general educators was desired. (5)

Policies and Procedures

- Pre-screening, test scores, and behavior recordings help professionals make decisions. (1)
Table 2 (Continued)

- SST and teacher strategies are used before in-school referral. (3)
- Conferences with parents prior to referral were suggested. (4)
- Include special needs students in all activities. (5)

Parents and Schooling

- Parents’ perception of special education is poor. (4)
- Parents are on the offensive when they arrive at school. (4)
- Remember parents’ regard for their child. (4)
- Sensitive approach is needed. (4)

The most prevalent points and arguments are posted under the applicable domain.

Responses to specific questions are noted in parentheses.
School C

Prologue and Observations of School C's Focus Group

The Assistant Principal of School C scheduled two after-school meetings for this focus group. Each meeting was held in the Assistant Principal’s office, a spacious area with necessary tables and an added refrigerator. Three Fourth Grade Teachers were selected for this group. These teachers were similar in the following aspects: (a) years of teaching experience, (b) years spent at this particular school, (c) common grade level, (d) shared planning time, (e) congruent educational degrees, and (f) age. The Assistant Principal felt that shared experiences and similarities would enable this group to express themselves and work together without any fear of expression. Additionally, a common group was expedient to assemble. The Assistant Principal distributed the research questions to the group one week in advance of the first scheduled meeting.

Our meetings always started with our afternoon refreshments. As group members gathered their refreshments, the independent transcriber was introduced and welcomed into the first meeting. Group rapport had been developed over several years of working together as a grade level team. The researcher, assistant principal, and independent transcriber were not naturally connected to this group, therefore, the focus group was completely at ease with each other and responded honestly to the research questions. School C’s focus group was very informative and energetic because each member teaches a critical group of students as it relates to state and district testing standards.

Data Analysis/School C

This group was formed with all teachers on the fourth grade level; they were accustomed to teamwork and sharing information and ideas. As the discussion began, we
wanted to discover the policies and practices that protect students from inappropriate referral as a contributing factor in special education placements. This group determined that the time factor involved in referrals is one safeguard because students have an opportunity to mature, grow, or change. Additionally, teachers may form new opinions.

Fourth Grade Teacher #1 made the following comments: (*Question number 1*)

I think the process itself, because it’s not as swift as it probably should be, there is so much that you have to do to refer. I think that while you’re doing anecdotal notes and you are actually worrying the student, you may have come across something. I know I have students that were referred last year and the process was started. School administrators came back to me this year and asked, ‘well what do you think, does this student need to continue in the referral process?’ I said, ‘well not in my opinion.’ So I think it may prevent or protect but it also may hinder sometimes that same process.

Fourth Grade Teacher #2 had not made any referrals in this current school year, however, was able to articulate an instance in which the process, in his opinion, had not protected at least one of his students. A major focus of this study was to determine if there are instances of inappropriate placements in high-incidence disability categories. It follows that if the placement were inappropriate then it is highly probable that the referral itself was inappropriate. This teacher commented:

I haven’t referred any students in this current school year, but I have had maybe five or six students that came to me already in referral status. Out of that six I think there was one that shouldn’t have been. I
think that the way she was before she came to me really put her in a position to be referred because of her behavior. Her grades are still good and her behavior has changed from what her records indicate. That was reported from a previous school and they placed her. We are not experiencing any behavior problems. So I think that this child was actually lost in this entire process.

And not surprisingly teacher difference and the need to change teachers when suspected problems arise were cited as possible factors in the discussion of inappropriate referrals and protecting students from inappropriate referrals. We heard from each group member on this particular question. Fourth Grade Teacher #3 stated:

I feel that different teachers may see different academic performance and behavior from the same student. Sometimes all children cannot successfully work with a particular teacher. Whenever a student is being sent through the referral process whether it’s SST referral or referral to special education, the child should be sent to another teacher first just to verify the problem. Other professions count on second opinions before major decisions, perhaps we could learn from them. We should learn to seek and value the opinion of other professionals before we subject any child to a major or life-changing event.

We found that professionals individualize instruction whenever the need exists within their classrooms. However, particular attention is given to any student who is having trouble achieving the desired goals. Therefore, the question was rephrased this
way: "How do you individualize this entire process? If one goes to SST with a concern and receives a number of strategies, then implements those strategies, still, how does one know that all has been done for that particular student? Fourth Grade Teacher #2 summarized: (Question number two)

When the strategies that they have given me have not worked and if the child still continues to be a behavior problem or is academically challenged and there is simply no progress, that's all that I can do. Everything is still at a standstill. Meanwhile, I'm still using these strategies that should work but they still don't, what can I do?

Change of teacher was also cited as a possible strategy in the individualization of the process. Instances were given to show that students might prosper when a change of teacher is put in place. Teacher #1 introduced the fact that student motivation is a major or a contributing factor in student performance, both academic and behavior. Teacher #1 stated:

There's a motivational factor that may come into play here. A student may be more interested in pleasing a particular teacher and therefore he or she may try harder and therefore may appear to be learning more. Teacher #3 quickly said: I don't mean to cut you off, but if a child is placed in a different environment, he or she will often change to meet the expectations of that environment. Our kids are grouped according to their scores and ability levels. So, in my class they might make above level and in his class they make below level. If a child is placed in an environment where everyone around him or her is making good grades, then he or she may try harder.
They are going to raise the bar when expectations are high and they're going to try to do as well as the other children. Versus if I'm in here and everybody's on that low level, you know that and it's also different.

Question number three asked teachers to distinguish between students that they could help and students who had needs beyond their capacity to help in general education classrooms. When teachers have used every strategy and gimmick that they and others think of, exactly what else can be done? This line of reasoning was evident in this particular group. Try, try, and try again was their philosophy, however, each member knew that there would come a time when they didn't know anything further to do for a given student. Teacher #2 made the point for the group:

I know when I have tried everything, well not everything. I have tried numerous ways to get him or her to understand the concepts and they just can't understand. I suppose it's the way I'm teaching various concepts; my methods are not reaching that particular student. However, other students are understanding and moving on just fine. Then of course it's time for someone else to try to reach him or her; it's time for me to move on. That's also when I think that I need to refer the student if we cannot reach him or her via various methods and teachers. That's when I know I need to refer, when we can't reach them. Right now there are some kids that I already know that they are not going to make it on the CRCT, and I know there are some who will make it. It seems like we are more geared towards those that we know are going to meet the targets or exceed them.
This portion of the conversation was indeed interesting because this group member had summed up the state of affairs across this urban school district. Because students must meet targets, goals, and standards there seems to be an effort afoot to work with those students who are expected to meet standards at the expense of lower achieving students. This amazing discovery prompted the conversation to continue. The Moderator asked: “What do mean, we’re geared toward those?”

Response: It’s like this, we work harder to push those than we try to push those whose classes are low, low achievers. And we shouldn’t do that but . . . Teacher #3 said: It’s wrong but that’s what it tends to make you do . . . testing and the need to meet standards.

*Question number four* required that the group recommend or recount strategies and methods of making parents feel respected and welcome in referral and placement conferences. In an attempt to make parents feel respected it was advised to give them strategies and materials to use at home. They need to feel integral in this entire process, they need to know that they have a hand in the education of their children. Two group members agreed that parents need to work with their children on school materials and make classroom and school observations of their children. Parents and schooling was a critical issue for this particular group. The group could not find consensus on this; Teacher #1 found that many parents do not want to be involved in the education of their children and summed it up thusly:

I don’t know if it’s my opinion, I believe that I’ve developed or picked up along the way, but I have really yet to come across a parent who shows the level of involvement in their child’s education
that I deem appropriate for a parent. Therefore, I kind of make
the assumption that all of my parents are that way.

This phase of the discussion ended with the group finding that it takes diligence
and reserve when dealing with parents. The Moderator stated: “Well that takes a lot. But
I’m just trying to figure no matter what they (parents) say and what they do, don’t we
owe it to them to keep working with them because we can’t do it alone.”

Finally the group considered question number five. We attempted to articulate
exemplary processes that counteract negative circumstances and practices that contribute
to inappropriate placements in special education. We asked the question, could students
spend perhaps one half of the school day in the suggested placement and perhaps remain
in general education in order for a determination to be made regarding the
appropriateness of the suggested placement? This was just one of the suggestions for
making sure that placements were appropriate.

Sensitivity training was recommended for general education students. This
training would allow all students to realize and experience some of the many difficulties
that accompany special education placements. Even with appropriate placements the
affected student will have to overcome some of the preconceived notions and negatives
of the general population. Teacher #1 commented:

You know, one of the things that I tried to do ... the thought crossed
my mind because you know that kids will call each other sped and all this
and all that or PEC. Make them come spend some time down here
(in special education classes). But I think kids need to understand
that there are things that everyone has trouble with, everyone. And just
because you haven’t found yours yet or I haven’t found it, that doesn’t
mean that it’s not coming. Because I’m getting frustrated with my
normal children for the things that they are saying to the
special needs students.

We also talked about removing students from the program when we determine
that the placement is no longer (if ever) appropriate. Teacher #1 asked:

Negative consequences? You know, I believe and maybe I’m
just foolish, but I believe that students who are placed
inappropriately will find their way out. They’ll find their
way out if they are good students.

Finally the determination was made that teachers may suggest and bring the need
for a change in placement before the staffing committee in order to send students back to
general education. The staffing group may decide that the student has done well with the
placement and is ready to be returned to a general education classroom. Students may be
returned through the staffing process which changes the placement or eliminates special
education altogether. These were final recommendations for counteracting negative
circumstances and practices that contribute to inappropriate placements in special
education.

Table 3 summarizes and delineates by study domain the strongest points and
arguments as stated by focus group participants of School C. These statements were
subjected to literal, interpretive, and reflective methods by the researcher.
Table 3
School C – Responses and Observations by Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Concerns and Constraints</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Reassign students to different teachers. (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Too much emphasis on state assessments and mandates such as testing. (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Students’ placements may be changed. (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Students may be returned to general education placements. (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Students may remain in general education with pull-out model. (5)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Individualized packages available. (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Raise teacher expectations. (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Teacher assessments may decrease referral numbers. (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies and Procedures</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Entire referral process too long. (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ SST strategies or teacher strategies are implemented before in-school referral. (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Clear student assessments are implemented. (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Sensitivity training recommended for general education students. (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Grouping students via varying instructional methods is required. (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents and Schooling</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Parents need to feel integral in students’ schooling. (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (Continued)

- Parents should work with their children at home. (4)
- Preconceived notions and negatives by general population. (v)
- Respect parents. (4)
- Sensitive approach is needed. (4)

The most prevalent points and arguments are posted under the applicable domain.

Responses to specific questions are noted in parentheses.
School D

Prologue and Observations of School D's Focus Group

Selection of study participants was completed by the Instructional Liaison Specialist of School D and the researcher. In as much as previously formed groups contained more upper level elementary teachers; it was incumbent upon the researcher to include some lower level elementary professionals from School D and the parent of a student with an identified disability. This focus group consisted of three teachers, two First Grade and one Fourth Grade. Their years of experience and ages were dissimilar; however, the congruent grade level aligned the First Grade Teachers in many aspects. The inclusion of the Fourth Grade Teacher and Parent was intended to add divergent views. At the group's inception it was not known that issues related to state and district mandates would align all members. Each member agreed to meet at 4:00 p.m. for two consecutive Wednesdays.

On the Wednesday of the first meeting, afternoon refreshments were provided for group participants in the researcher's classroom. The independent transcriber was present and was introduced to the group before the refreshments were served. Group members ate and simultaneously discussed the research questions with openness and honesty.

Data Analysis/School D

Careful analysis of the data revealed that each focus group member expressed concerns regarding many issues that confront elementary school teachers within the district. This group was comprised of two First Grade teachers and one Fourth Grade
teacher. Neither member had taught more than five years, however, each member was highly regarded in the school. One member was the current teacher of the year; the second was nominated for teacher of the year (for the upcoming school year); the final member was a coveted science fair winner and teacher of science. Generally, their concerns were focused on administrative constraints, policies and practices that hinder the referral process and the need for teacher training. We began by discussing research question number one. What policies and practices protect students from inappropriate referral? This group felt that there were many problems and obstacles that children must overcome or confront. Therefore, it is prudent to seek assistance as soon as problems are identified. The school social worker and counselor were mentioned as resources to assist in the education of students. Home-based problems were determined to be the root of many students’ school difficulties, both academic and behavioral difficulty. Therefore, extended periods of time should not lapse before assistance from outside of the typical classroom is sought. Attendance was cited as an example of a home-based problem.

First Grade Teacher #1 elucidated:

First I believe that students just don’t stay focused; other things could be occupying their minds, things other than the lessons being taught.

So perhaps the counselor could help us or get involved when we identify problems early on.

First Grade Teacher #2 added:

The counselor may also think that the social worker needs to be involved.

That is in some situations or for so many problems that we see developing in children.
An additional determination was that different teachers are able to elicit different responses from students. Responses were of two types, those relating to academics and those that related to behavior. Each previous group determined that change of teacher was an important factor to consider in understanding students and their motivations. Different environments, different teacher mannerisms, and expectations contribute to appropriate student responses as well as inappropriate student responses. First Grade Teacher #2 made this observation:

If the child were taken out of one teacher’s class and put in another teacher’s class... and we found that the teacher might be the problem for that child.

The Fourth Grade Teacher did not completely agree that the mere change of teacher would bring about change in students’ academic responses. Student motivation, teacher expectations, and classroom climate have been determined (effective schools research) to be factors in students’ academic performance. Albeit, effective schools research does exists, the Fourth Grade Teacher responded thusly:

I think that might be more of a behavioral thing. As far as students responding. Certain behaviors you’ll see in certain classrooms, but you won’t see them in all of the classrooms, but like not being able to read, you’ll be able to see that in every classroom. They won’t simply not read for one teacher, if they can read for another. So, I partially agree and then I partially disagree.

In an attempt to formulate a correlate that would be useful in elementary school settings the Moderator asked: “But then is it safe for us to assume that behavior is different across
teachers and across settings, but academics will remain constant?" In order to fine-tune this correlate, The Fourth Grade Teacher formulated this correlate:

It's safe to assume. It's an assumption, because we all know that even though they're separate there's a correlation between behavior and achievement. Because if I'm misbehaving, I can't achieve to the level that I can achieve. One might be able to achieve, but it will still be below one's optimum level.

Therefore, behavior is an important factor in the determination of academic success for elementary students.

Question number two required the group to relate information that assist professionals in making decisions that ensure the individualization of this process, rather than merely ensuring compliance with district guidelines. Immediately the concept of differentiated instruction was brought to the fore because differentiated instruction is being touted as a save all and be all in this urban school district. However, the First Grade Teachers were not satisfied that this instructional method was a useful tool in the attempt to individualize instruction. First Grade Teacher #1 responded:

Do you mean as far as differentiated instruction and making sure that you've tried to adjust for different learning styles within that one child?

Exactly what does differentiated instruction mean for each individual child?

It just means grouping them; you are not going to get any individualized.

I have students in my bottom group, there are going to be some who still don't know their alphabets and some who can't get their sounds. So there's no way for me as a teacher with seventeen students in my class to actually
individualize it.

Another instructional approach that may help in individualizing the process is the usage of the Early Intervention Program (EIP). This program allows students who have been identified as at-risk for failure to be monitored and assisted by a specialty teacher through a pullout model. However, its effectiveness was challenged because of administrative controls. First Grade Teacher #1 stated:

I mean, we have an EIP teacher that pulls out certain students and works with them on different skills. It would help if it were more consistent. And it’s not on the part of the EIP teacher, it is on the part of administrators because the EIP teacher is pulled at anytime, whenever they feel like it without any notice.

In the area of teacher training, the group determined that this urban school district is not meeting this standard. Classroom teachers and EIP teachers appear to be in need of additional training in order to meet the needs of students who are experiencing school difficulties. These teachers did not know exactly what to do in order to make the referral process work for the benefit of students. Training in this area was indicated. Additionally, EIP teachers needed specific training, training that would produce the level of competency that is required to assist students who are at-risk of academic and behavioral difficulties. Teacher #2 determined the following:

But, one thing I’m going to say about the referral process that is wrong within this district, is that we have never gone through a class or no one has ever sat down and said, 'this is what you do, don’t do this, look for these signs, here’s a book that outlines
behaviors to watch for.’

Regarding the EIP process Teacher #2 continued:

And another thing, the EIP teacher is not trained. The EIP teacher is told ‘here this is what I want you to do’ and that’s it. Ms P. wasn’t given anything. We have given her everything to work with. She observed Mrs. F for a while, which I think helped her. She has gotten some things and activities but, that’s how the system works. They put an EIP teacher in there who is new like most of them were last year.

Specialized attention was given to students who were expected to meet or exceed district and state standards. Students that were occupying the lower percentiles based on standardized measures were not the focus of teacher instruction. Previously, students at the fourth grade level proved to be critical in determining school status on state measures.

The Fourth Grade Teacher made the following observations:

Meet or exceed those are the only standards that we’re trying to achieve.

We’re not worried about pass, those that are not expected to pass will remain not expecting to pass. We’re not going to expend energy on trying to bring you up to the standard. We’re either going to get you to meet or exceed it.

Individualizing during general instructional activities and individualizing instruction for referral purposes were problematic. Students already placed in resource situations were likely to be given individualized attention more than students in the referral process or students in general education situations. First Grade Teacher #1 recounted:
We have students in groups and then there are students who have been placed, like Little T. who has been placed and he’s pulled out. He works with the resource teacher and he has more individualized work given to him.

Teacher #2 continued:

I think if we have EIP teachers and if we had paraprofessionals back in the first grade as we had before, that would help. We could have the paraprofessionals work with the slow children or we could work with the slow children but by us being only one with sixteen or seventeen children.

More training for current faculty and staff, and increased personnel were determined to be required elements for the individualization of instruction in both the referral process and general classes.

*Question number three* required teachers to distinguish between students that they were capable of helping and students whom they felt were beyond their capacity to help.

From the following passage of raw data, the researcher discerned teachers’ frustration and undying dedication to helping students achieve their maximum potential. This exchange ensued (Fourth Grade Teacher speaking):

I don’t know, I mean I don’t think that it’s ever that easy. You realize that you could do more but it comes down to logistics. It comes down to energy, time, money, space, you know, the day is only so long. The day is only so long and you can only contribute so much of your personal life to this one student and the other sixteen, fourteen, or thirteen or however many
you have. You’ve got to draw the line for your sanity somewhere. But I mean I can sit up at night and think what more is there that I can do? But unless the hours of the day exist, unless someone develops a plan or a strategy that hasn’t hit the pages yet. Or you just say, I don’t have the knowledge base yet. I don’t have the knowledge base to work with this student. When we spoke with you last week that’s the situation that I was dealing with the new student in my classroom. I don’t have the knowledge base or the breadth of information to deal with this student.

The moderator asked:

What are you doing with the student?

Reply:

I send him to resource when he’s supposed to go, if resource can’t take him, he sits in my room and does nothing; because he can’t read, he can’t write, he can barely speak. I mean what? I’m nice to him, what?

One very important aspect of student learning must be recalled in situations where the teacher is unable to reach or help students; all students need to find a measure of success in some area of schooling. The First Grade Teacher #1 advised:

And you also want to give him successes. That was one thing that I was going to say. This is what I do with my low ones, the ones that I know there isn’t much more that I can do with them, I just celebrate the small successes that they have.

Teachers found themselves throwing their hands up and giving up because of their inabilities to see student gains. Additionally, teachers found that teacher incompetence
was suggested as an impediment in individualization of the process. Teacher #2 told of her experience with referral:

One thing I want to say about the referral process is that when I made a referral on a student, I was sure as the teacher. Then the ILS suggested that I was the problem in front of the parent. That child and that referral process kind of dwindled right there. Now that child is in the fourth grade and our fourth grade teacher can tell you that something is wrong.

Individualization of the process was discontinued following attempts to gain support from school administrators. Therefore, individualization of the process required concerted efforts from teachers and administrators.

**Question number four** involved dealing with parents. How do education professionals ensure that even the most denigrated parent is treated with respect when he or she comes to a referral or placement conference? Parents may not realize the exact nature of the problem as reported by the teacher. However, in many instances parents realize that something is just not right. Throughout the referral process agreement with parents is not easily garnered as is evidenced by the following comments. Disagreement between parents and teachers appears to be the norm, the First Grade Teacher #2 elucidated:

The parent did not see anything wrong with the child, she was saying that she never had any problems before with the child and that maybe it was just my style of teaching and that was confirmation for the parent when the referral official agreed. Then I realized that 'I can’t do anything with the parent.' Then I said, ‘I’ll just close my mouth and sit there.’
There were observed instances of parents agreeing or cordially working with schools’ assessments of the students’ difficulties. The consensus was that working with parents requires much tact, but there will be instances of agreement and disagreement.

I’ve spoken to other people who have the same opinion about her (the mother). It’s hard for me because I speak to her all of the time and she seems to be concerned. She’s also frustrated, she’s bringing that child home, she has to deal with him at home and I couldn’t imagine. So I think that she really wants to see what the problem is. Yes, I also think that there is a little bit of denial as far as her thinking, ‘is there a problem, we need to test him to see.’ There is a problem, but he needs to be in my class (general education). He should be in my class.

Lack of parental commitment to visit the school so that relationships may be forged is a particular problem for many elementary school teachers. Eventually teachers began to feel that little could be done as it relates to respect and dealing with parents in general.

First Grade Teacher #2 found that:

Really there is nothing that you can do. Some parents are concerned, they will come up here and they will try. You have some parents that are in denial that anything is wrong with their children. Some parents know that something is wrong, they don’t know what to do, and they’re depending on you to solve their child’s problem because they don’t know what to do. Sometimes parents do worry; they blame themselves for things and they don’t know how to deal with it.

Finally, Teacher #2 said:
With some of my parents, there is no workshop that could teach you to deal with parents.

Lastly, question number five was discussed. The articulation of exemplary processes that may counteract negative circumstances and practices that contribute to inappropriate placements in special education was the topic. This focus group found that a better working knowledge of the entire special education process and special education in general would help them to formulate and execute exemplary practices. One determination was made regarding the timeline for special education services to begin. Specifically, the fact that it takes too long for teachers to complete the referral process and actually see the student placed in special education was problematic. Therefore communication and cooperation between classroom teachers and referral officials (administrators) is crucial in the development of exemplary processes. Teachers' inability to see the process completed has lead to or significantly contributed to teacher dissatisfaction with the whole of special education. First Grade Teacher #2 was willing to field this question and made these comments:

If we had more training to help us find out how special education works, that would be helpful. If you tell me right now that my children (students) will not be put in special education, then I will not refer them. I don't think that we (School D) have any inappropriate placements in special education. From what I've seen, we have a problem placing children in special education. I've been here five years, I know of two maybe three students that have been placed in special education from my grade level, not from my classroom. The ones that we have referred here, like the child that Mr. X had, and
so many other children that we have referred... and when we see them the
next year the second grade teacher is complaining about this child being
slow. Then the second grade teacher refers them again. Mr. X. has had six
or seven meetings on children, and nothing has happened.

Another exemplary process that was identified by School D was the practice of
having students in referral status observed by several teachers and in several
environments. Also, perhaps the student could be placed in another general education
teacher’s classroom in order to continue the process by an unbiased observer. The notion
of a second opinion was expressed by another school’s group and is also congruent with
this theory. First Grade Teacher #2 made the case:

When considering a student for placement, generally only the classroom
teacher is talked to; what about the music teacher, the PE teacher, and the
art teacher, or maybe this student should be given a chance in another
teacher’s classroom. If a child is acting up in art, music, PE, and the class-
room then more than likely that child has a behavior problem. Most of the
time Coach and the Music Teacher don’t have any problems out of the children
because they want to go to art, music, and PE. I think if you look at all teachers
and not just the core classroom teacher that will give you a better understanding
of the student.

Although First Grade Teacher #2 was speaking primarily of behavior, further research is
needed to determine if this theory may be applied to academics as well as behavior.

Another exemplary process as identified by School D was to keep a record of
behavior in the permanent record folder. The permanent record folder already houses
students' academic histories. These records may be confidential and available only on a need to know basis. This particular line of thinking was espoused by First Grade Teacher #1:

Keeping previous comments of other teachers in a folder, perhaps the PR folder would give current teachers an opportunity to look back and see if similar problems existed with other teachers. Sometimes if there were records of previous problems then we could look and see.

Finally School D determined that throughout the entire process of schooling, referral, or special education placement, a major component of the teacher's role is to remain professional. This professionalism involved dealing honestly and forthrightly with students' academic and behavior difficulties. First Grade Teacher #1 was spokesperson:

But I also think that if we were true professionals, as far as Little T is concerned, I heard a lot of things or behaviors that he had prior to being placed in my class. I didn't let that affect me one way or the other. It was a new year for me and this is a new student for me. They're growing so much at this age, he could have grown out of those behaviors. But I did keep my eyes open for it . . . but I didn't let it affect how I'm going to teach or what I really think of the child.

Once again we observed that teacher expectations and behaviors are critical factors in the success of elementary school students. Many times students are aware of teacher behaviors that reflect the teacher's true feelings.
Table 4 summarizes and delineates by study domain the strongest points and arguments as stated by focus group participants of School D. These statements were subjected to literal, interpretive, and reflective methods by the researcher.
Table 4

Responses and Observations by Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Concerns and Constraints</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ School resources are available, i.e., social worker, counselor, psychologist. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Reassign students to different teachers. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Early Intervention Programs help to individualize instruction. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ EIP is not consistently implemented. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Teacher training is needed for EIP teachers and general teachers. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Too much emphasis on state assessments and mandates. (2)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ Raise teacher expectations. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Refer behavior problems before academics. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Accommodate various learning styles. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Not enough time to individualize instruction at the desired level. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Allow all students a level of success. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Students’ difficulties should not affect teacher treatment of students. (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ Differentiated instruction is desired. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Communication and cooperation among school personnel is desired. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Students in referral status should be observed by several teachers. (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (Continued)

- Students’ permanent record folders should contain academic and behavior records. (5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents and Schooling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Home-based problems interfere with schooling. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents are often unaware of the exact nature of the problem. (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents do not visit schools enough. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concerned parents try to be involved in schooling. (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some denial on parents’ part is expected. (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents’ regard for their children must be considered. (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most prevalent points and arguments are posted under the applicable domain.

Responses to specific questions are noted in parentheses.
Prologue to Individual Interviews

One individual's name from each focus group was randomly drawn and that individual was asked to respond to the research questions via individual interview. Thoughts, feelings, and individual perceptions were unearthed as individuals responded without group influences. In preparation for the interview, each respondent reviewed the research questions. The raw data from these encounters are presented below.

Individual Interview/School A

Response to Question I: The policies and practices that protect students from inappropriate referral are the formation of the SST team that consists of teachers, parents, social workers, principals, and other interested parties. Because of the makeup of the team, placements that suit the best interest of the child are assured and parents are able to accept or reject any placement that they deem unfit or inappropriate. Prior to referring any child there are several preliminary practices that are in place (e.g., anecdotal notes, modifications, etc.). This ensures that everything was done in the regular classroom to accommodate the child prior to beginning the referral process.

Response to Question II: The information that assist professionals in making decisions that ensure the individualization of the process are the above mentioned things as each member of the team has to bring to the table information that relates directly to that child. District guidelines, while restricting, do allow for a certain degree of autonomy and professional input when it comes to referring or placing a child into a special education program.

Response to Question III: Teachers distinguish between students who they can help and those whose needs extend beyond the capacity of the regular education
classroom by strategically implementing a variety of practices that are designed to increase students competency, attention span, etc. It is only after most or all of these practices have failed that we seek other professionals (e.g., counselors, social workers, psychologists) to look for additional problems and/or concerns that are preventing a child from reaching his or her full academic potential. In dealing with so many children who are deficient in so many other areas, research shows that if a child is not properly nurtured, supported or loved, this will have some effects that are revealed through either his or her academic performance, behavior, or both.

Response to Question IV: To ensure that even the most denigrated parent is treated with respect when he or she comes to a referral conference, the school referral team listens to their concerns patiently and works to understand the emotional side that comes with a child’s placement into a special needs program. The stigma that goes with such a placement can be very disheartening, so it is crucial for the success of the student that the parents understand that, in the end, the child will be better off. By explaining, in detail, the process and the benefits, the team can hopefully dispel the myth that children in special needs programs are not being serviced. They are receiving services sometimes more so than general education students, because their specific needs are catered to with great effort and diligence.

Response to Question V: One way that professionals may counteract negative circumstances that accompany inappropriate placement is to include parents in the process from the beginning. When students are in general education, before there is a need to refer, parents need to be involved in selecting and implementing strategies to increase student performance. Parents need to accompany teachers to workshops that
address student achievement so that they will be well informed or know what the school is assessing. Inappropriate placement as a result of behavior or academics will decrease when parents are able to state definite reasons for refusal to place students in special education. Parents already have the right to refuse a suggested placement, however, this right is rarely used. Therefore an exemplary process would involve educating and training parents for participation in critical educational decisions.

*Individual Interview/School B*

*Response to Question I:* The student support team process is the way that the school system has to assure that students are not referred to in-school team without just cause. SST, IST, along with multiple tests and checklists provide supporting documentation. All of these documents are subject to the Open Records Act.

*Response to Question II:* Actual documentation of students' standardized test results as well as performance on grade level tests should be used in the decision-making process. These results are compared to state expectations and standards for the specific grade level. Each student being referred has his or her individual packet of materials. Teachers present anecdotal records and work samples. Additionally, strategies are given to the teacher to try for a period of time.

*Response to Question III:* Once the recommended strategies are tried for a prescribed length of time, the presence or absence of remediation of the problem will determine whether the student's deficits can be handled within the general classroom setting. After an appropriate time span, students should be performing on grade level. If students can't retain the information, referral is needed.
Response to Question IV: Make sure that information is given in terms that are easy to understand and that the parent is encouraged to ask as many questions as needed. Adequate documentation of the facts should be presented and explained to the parent. All aspects of the process should be explained so that they understand. All questions should be answered in layman’s terms without belittling the parent.

Response to Question V: One way to counteract circumstances that contribute to inappropriate placement is to place steps of accountability into the entire referral process beginning with SST straight through to the In-School Team. Another idea is to address parents positively, stating that being placed in special education is not a life sentence. Some children only remain in the program for a short period of time. However, if a child is diagnosed as having a disability, he or she may be able to learn life and work skills in order to become a functioning adult.

Individual Interview/School C

Response to Question I: The policies and practices that are in place to protect students from inappropriate referrals include the student support team meetings that provide strategies for teachers to use with students. These strategies are to be implemented for a period of time, and then their success is discussed. Additional strategies are recommended to try. Because this process takes place over a long period of time, the appropriateness of the referral can be determined by the results achieved from the strategies that were recommended. Additionally, consultations with members of the In-School Team eliminate inappropriate referrals.

Response to Question II: Information that is helpful in making decisions concerning the referral process includes the student’s performance over time when
records are examined. Teachers also make referral decisions after administering surveys and assessments of the student's skills and areas of deficiency.

*Response to Question III:* Teachers use student performance as compared to their peers as an indicator of need for support beyond the classroom. When students are performing far below the norm of the group in which they are working and strategies that the teacher uses are not producing improved performance, it becomes apparent to the teacher that support is needed to help meet the needs of the student.

*Response to Question IV:* The assembly of a team of professionals at the meeting can be intimidating to a parent. This team of professionals attempts to use language that the parent can understand and offer explanations of terms used. The parent is informed of the availability of a parent advocate that can help explain the process and protect their rights.

*Response to Question V:* I cannot say that I have observed a student that was inappropriately placed in special education. I think that the referral process is thorough in that it is detailed and occurs over long periods of time with accompanying documentation and records. If anything, I think that regulations of the program concerning the cut-off for placement leaves many children out and allows them to fall through the cracks educationally. These students are not successful in the regular educational program and do not qualify for special education.

*Individual Interview/School D*

*Response to Question I:* I am not clear as to what policies and practices protect students, however, students undergo testing and a process that should identify a specific
need for placement. If a need is not identified through testing, he or she is not a candidate for special education.

Response to Question II: Previously using the process is the best means by which a professional learns, understands, and is able to use the process appropriately. The African-American male's environment, family life, and socioeconomic status play a vital part in his education and should be taken into account during assessment.

Response to Question III: This is always a difficult process due to a lack of time within the general school day, this prohibits the amount of time that can be committed to any individual student. I look for students who try but fail to meet both their and my expectations.

Response to Question IV: Parents must be clear that the process is in place for the purpose of meeting the educational needs of their child. It is a process designed by a caring, concerned union of people to ensure the best possible future for their child. Speak to parents with care and respect.

Response to Question V: One exemplary practice would be to consider environmental factors when testing students. Students often know more than can be revealed in typical testing situations. Test scores should not be a determining factor in student placement. Teacher observation and teacher-made assessments should be the primary assessment methods in determining appropriate student placement.

Data Analysis Individual Interviews

Individuals expressed many of the same ideas in one-on-one situations as had been found in focus group situations. The notion that district policies were restrictive was given; albeit some autonomy exists for teachers to make decisions in the
implementation of the Special Education Process. For example, teachers make the
decision to refer or not to refer students. Teachers may also adjust their style of teaching
to accommodate students’ perceived difficulties. Different teachers might have been
more willing to continue strategies at very differing rates.

The notion that accountability should be built into the process in steps was
articulated. However, in its current form the process should demand accountability from
the referring teacher to the school’s referral official through the In-School Team. The
group also found that the referral process is thorough and this thoroughness should
prevent inappropriate placements.

It was determined via focus groups that parental involvement was crucial. This
group of individuals also pointed out the need to keep parents involved in every stage of
the process. Specifically, individual interviewees determined that parents should be
involved before the need to refer evolves. In their discourse relative to parents they
determined that parents are reluctant to admit that their children are deficient, therefore, it
is necessary to recall this fact when dealing with parents. Additionally, information must
be presented to parents in terms that are understood easily.

A particularly noteworthy comment was that special education students receive
more individualization than general education students might, therefore, special
education may be seen as a desirable condition for struggling students. Student
performance over time should indicate the need for referral and the need for
individualized instruction. Testing was found to be a component in placement
determinations or if individualization was required. Consideration of environmental
factors during testing was determined to be an exemplary practice in the implementation
of the Special Education Process. Table 5, which follows, will depict graphically and combine responses, concerns, and observations obtained from the individual interviews of schools A, B, C, and D. The most prevalent concerns and answers relative to each question are posted under the applicable domain. Responses were provided to specific questions as indicated in parentheses.
Table 5

Individual Interviews – Responses and Observations by Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Concerns and Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Restrictive policies, however, some autonomy exists for teachers. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Place accountability in steps throughout process. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Referral process is thorough which prevents inappropriate placements. (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Use input of counselor, social workers, psychologist, and others. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Special education students receive more individualization than students in general education classes. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Actual documentation of student performance guide teacher decisions. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Determine appropriateness of referral via results of SST strategies. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Compare student performance to peers. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Consider students’ environment and family life in the assessment process. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Use teacher made assessments in the Special Education Process. (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Involve parents in selecting and implementing strategies. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ SST and In-School Team strategies along with multiple tests and checklists provide supporting referral documentation. (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Implement all suggested SST strategies. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Testing is part of the process that identifies need for placement. (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (Continued)

Parents and Schooling

- Parents' regard for their children should be realized. (2)
- Involve parents before the need to refer. (4)
- Parents may refuse suggested strategies; however, parents should have input in all decisions. (5)
- Give information in easily understood terms. (4)
- Help parents understand that the process is designed to meet the educational needs of students. (5)

The most prevalent points and arguments are posted under the applicable domain. Responses to specific questions are noted in parentheses.
Prologue to Parent Interviews

One parent from each selected school was contacted and asked to participate in his/her respective focus group by responding to questions framed specifically with parents in mind. Their perceptions and views regarding their children’s education varied from school to school. The raw data from these encounters are presented below.

Parent Interview/School A

*Question number one:* Did you understand the referral and placement processes as your child entered special education? Response: Yes, I did understand all the placement and referral processes; they were explained to me in reference to my child’s wellbeing. If I needed additional assistance, the school gave the information I asked for. One of my questions was about speech therapy and that was scheduled and taken care of through the speech therapist.

*Question number two:* Were you adequately included in the referral and placement processes? Response: I was adequately involved in the process of placement for my child all the way through. The school gave me very good information along the lines of my child’s day-to-day educational process. The teacher’s methods of getting through to my child and the principal’s ongoing evaluations of the class’ progress helped me to understand what was being suggested for my child.

*Question number three:* Did you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed to your satisfaction? Response: All of my concerns and questions in reference to my child were addressed during placement. I was impressed with the school’s follow through and I commend their efforts to make sure all the needs were met for my child. No matter how involved, the teachers were very cooperative. The principal was always
available if questions or concerns came up during the school year. The PEC (Program for Exceptional Children) program was very impressive for my child’s development, being at school to learn and grow no matter how limited he was in life.

Parent Interview/School B

Question number one: Did you understand the referral and placement processes as your child entered special education? Response: Not really, it took a year and several different programs before I began to understand the process. It was very long and tiring. There was meeting after meeting and I still didn’t know exactly what we should do for my son. I knew that he had problems learning and speaking, but I didn’t know how the school would address these concerns. After his second or third year in the program, I finally started to understand.

Question number two: Were you adequately included in the referral and placement processes? Response: I don’t believe I had any choice in this present placement, so I would have liked more details on exactly what intellectually disabled meant.

Question number three: Did you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed to your satisfaction? Eventually everything was answered and explained to my satisfaction. In the beginning I was really lost and I couldn’t understand what was going on. His teachers kept working with me and I kept working with them; eventually I was satisfied. The school that he was in before was not as helpful as this school.

Parent Interview/School C

Question number one: Did you understand the referral and placement processes as your child entered special education? Response: No, I just couldn’t understand all those
terms. Mildly intellectually disabled – what does that really mean? I didn’t know what to think. Then one teacher said that he was just a slow learner. It was a trip. We had too many meetings and I still had trouble understanding what they wanted me to do. Finally, they told me that the psychologist had finished and that a decision could be made.

Question number two: Were you adequately included in the referral and placement processes? Response: Yes. They tried to keep me up to date. It was a big step for me and it was a lot for me to digest at one time, but the school included me.

Question number three: Did you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed to your satisfaction? Response: No. In the beginning I just did not know what to ask; I didn’t have enough information. But I am satisfied that all of the teachers were trying to help us. Now my child is happier at school.

Parent Interview/School D

Question number one: Did you understand the referral and placement processes as your child entered special education? Response: Yes, they explained very thoroughly about the referral and how the placement would benefit my child.

Question number two: Were you adequately included in the referral and placement processes? Response: Yes, and they allowed me to ask any questions, concerns, or comments about why my child would be referred. Also, I asked if additional homework assignments would be beneficial to my child’s progress.

Question number three: Did you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed to you satisfaction? Yes. I was unclear on how we would be able to determine improvement and how with improvement my child could be removed from the program.
Data Analysis/Parents

Parents were asked to respond to three questions. These questions required an affirmative or negative response with further elucidation. If question number one were answered in the affirmative then it could be posited that educators were adequately explaining referral and placement. Only two of the four parents felt that they fully understood these two components of the Special Education Process.

*Question number two* asked if parents were included in this phase of the process. From an educator's perspective an answer in the affirmative was desirable. Seventy-five percent of parents perceived themselves as being in an inclusive situation. Question two showed that educators did attempt to include parents. After looking at the responses from question one, it was determined that parents felt a sense of inclusion, however, their understanding was not as great. Focus group data showed that educators were aware of the need to explain the Special Education Process in understandable terms and that parents needed to feel integral in students' schooling. Additionally, educators realized that preconceived notions and negatives regarding special education might interfere with open and honest dialogue between involved parties.

*Question three* was an indicator of parents overall satisfaction with the entire process. Concerns or questions not addressed to parents' satisfaction were negative signs and suggested the need for system-wide improvement. Seventy-five percent of the respondents felt that their concerns were satisfactorily addressed.

Responses from parents were subjected to literal interpretation based on a yes/no format with further elucidation from each parent. Table 6 summarizes their response.
Table 6
Responses to Parent Research Questions by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of parents' ratings revealed that two parents were satisfied with their explanation of the Special Education Process while two parents were not satisfied. Three parents felt that they were included in the referral and placement processes and one parent was not satisfied. Finally, questions and concerns were satisfactorily addressed for three of the study parents with one parent unsatisfied.
Compilation of Observations - All Study Participants

- Reassign students to different teachers when they are in referral and pre-referral status.

- Consider implementing specialized programs as designed.

- Students may be returned to general education placements.

- Implement all suggested SST strategies.

- Thoroughly explain the entire process to parents.

- Parental regard for their children is an important consideration in school and home dialogue.

- There is not enough one-on-one instruction within elementary schools.

- Budgetary constraints impact teaching practices, i.e., teaming, hiring of specialized personnel.

- Pre-screenings, test scores, and behavior recordings help professionals make decisions.

- Conferences with parents prior to referral are desirable.

- Behavior problems are generally referred before academic deficits.

- Allow all students to achieve a level of success.
Special education students receive more individualization than general education students.

Consider students’ environment and family life in the assessment process.

Communication and cooperation among school personnel, i.e., referral official, general and special education teachers, psychologists, etc. is crucial.

There is too much emphasis on state and district assessments and mandates.

Parents may refuse suggested strategies; however, parents should have input in decisions.

Include special needs students in all activities.

Training relative to the Special Education Process is needed across all levels for school administrators, referral officials, and teachers.

The entire Special Education Process is too long.

Summary

In order to obtain data for this research, the perceptions of education professionals and parents were subjected to a comprehensive analysis that determined commonalities and differences between four schools in their understanding and usage of the Special Education Process. By using several schools, a broader collection of data for presentation was provided. Therefore, numerous data were collected, which was presented in its raw form so that the reader might feel the import of group discussions.
The presentation of raw data and subsequent analyses from each group are followed by summaries in table form. Emergent themes are listed under the dimensions to which they pertain. Additionally, literal answers to research questions are provided from both parent and individual short interviews. Individual and parent interviews were examined for emergent themes. These themes were included in merged responses for all study participants. Each theme was analyzed in respect to its impact on implementing the Special Education Process. The data presented in each table represented a culmination of the expressed feelings and perceptions of participants. Finally, raw data were presented so that the reader is able to formulate impressions as the actual words of the study participants are presented. The presentation of raw data of educators and parents from four elementary schools presented a panoramic view of perceptions relative to the Special Education Process. A primary concern of this research was to determine if the Special Education Process was implicated in the overrepresentation of African-American males in high-incidence special education categories. Raw data were provided so that the reader could experience the importance of this phenomenon. The data were analyzed and categorized using the following four dimensions: administrative concerns and constraints, teaching practices, policies and procedures, and parents and schooling. Comparing and contrasting of emergent themes lead to a summary of best practices according to all participants, which contributes to understanding and implementing the Special Education Process.
CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter VI is organized in four sections: findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Summary of Findings

The findings address primarily five research questions that were posed to education professionals with three related questions that were posed to parents of students with disabilities. Findings were presented in graphic form with analyses supported by raw data.

Administrative Concerns, Policies, and Constraints

The reassignment of students to alternate teachers should be done before referral is initiated. Second opinions should be integral in every pre-referral. Each focus group revealed several similar observations under this dimension. According to these groups the reassignment of students to different teachers was helpful in assessing students' suspected difficulties. This form of assessment is more effective than using assessments from only one teacher. Each group felt that if their particular style of teaching did not benefit students in referral or pre-referral status, then another teacher should be consulted for assistance. Students would also be assigned to other teachers at that point. The
notion of a second opinion is common in many professions and was cited as a possible model for educators.

Another common observation was the need for more specialized faculty. School A determined that the current special education teacher shortage impacts the special education process, including placements and delivery of instruction to students with disabilities. School B found that budgetary constraints impact the number of teachers available to work with students with disabilities. This group spoke of teaming or collaborative teaching as a means of assisting students with special needs without removing them from the general education classroom. However, such arrangements were constrained by administrative practice. That practice might be directly related to budgets. If collaborative and team teaching (between general and special teachers) were implemented, more teachers both general and special education would be needed. School C also found that students with special needs are remaining in general education classes where they receive special services via pull-out models. These arrangements require fewer special education teachers per faculty. School D did not address specifically the need for more teachers in relation to budget, but rather they suggested more efficient usage of current personnel.

Two of the four groups were adamant that too much emphasis is placed on state assessments and mandates, specifically testing. They found that this practice takes away from teachers’ abilities to present individualized materials to specific students. They found that teachers must move on and cover mandated Quality Core Curriculum materials (in order to meet testing requirements) at the expense of students in need of more attention. Individualizing instruction in the general education classroom was
problematic. Programs have been designed to meet the needs of students in these situations, that is, those in need of more individualized attention. Programs such as the Early Intervention Program (EIP) was discussed. The effectiveness of this particular program was questioned. Specifically, School D felt that this program was designed to help individualize instruction for students who were at-risk of failing. However, consistency of implementation was problematic. Additionally, they found that both EIP teachers and general teachers needed more training in order to work effectively with students who are experiencing unusual or extreme learning difficulties.

Teaching Practices

Two common practices among all groups were to raise teacher expectations and individualize packages for students in general and specifically for students at-risk of failing or at-risk of being referred to the Student Support or In-School Teams. After referral to either, individualization of instruction is mandated along with implementation of suggested strategies from either team. Although time was a constraining factor in the individualization of instruction, all groups were willing to accommodate various learning styles, which is an essential consideration in the individualization of instruction. School D determined a critical practice. The practice of allowing or making success part of every student's academic experience was found to be just as important as making referrals for the benefit of students. Groups A and D determined a compelling and informative correlate in the overall referral process. The correlate was that the number of referrals is affected by type of problems presented. Specifically, behavior problems are referred earlier and at a greater frequency than academic problems. Teachers tended to continue indefinitely the attempt of new strategies designed to ameliorate academic
difficulties. However, teachers were less willing to continue indefinitely strategies that were designed to ameliorate or correct behavior problems. Academic concerns were seen more as difficulties (for students and teachers), whereas, behavior concerns were seen more as problems. This was largely because behavior problems disrupt learning processes for entire classrooms (difficulty vs. problem).

Policies and Procedures

A major obstacle for each group was the length of time involved in the referral and placement of students in Special Education settings. In fact, School B found that teachers perceive the process, as red tape because there were areas in which the need for special assistance was evident and should not have required excessive determination procedures. For example they cited a speech problem that was evident to anyone who listened to the student as a type of special education concern that should not require an extended period for student placement.

The following are exemplary practices and findings from the four groups:

1. Vision and hearing screenings are student safeguards.
2. Psychological testing is sometimes required.
3. Conferences with parents prior to referral may reduce the number of referrals.
4. Pre-screenings, test scores, and behavior recordings help professionals make decisions based on student need.
5. Use varying instructional levels to group students; differentiated instruction is critical.
6. Communication and cooperation among school personnel, i.e., referral officials, general education and special education teachers, psychologists, etc. is mandatory.
Parents and Schooling

Working with parents and making parents integral in the education and schooling of all children is one goal of this urban school district. The four focus groups determined several exemplary practices in this dimension and the groups delineated several areas of concern. The exemplary practices included explaining thoroughly the entire process to parents. Parents need to know exactly what the school is proposing in the education and welfare of their children. Focus Group D noted that parents are often unaware of the exact nature of the problem. Schools A, B, and C determined that a sensitive approach was needed because educators must remember that parents love and regard highly their children. The necessity of stating student deficiencies must be approached with sensitivity. School D found that some denial on parents’ part is to be expected considering the closeness between parents and students; however, concerned parents try to be involved in schooling. At this juncture, School A told us that it was difficult to suggest that a student is deficient to a parent; however, a thorough explanation of the entire process must be given to each parent.

Each group found that parents arrive at school “on the offensive” as stated by Schools A and B. Arriving at school on the offensive may be due to the following causes as stated by varying groups: 1. The community’s or general population’s perception of Special Education may be questionable according to A and C Groups. 2. Group B felt that parents’ perception of Special Education was poor. 3. Finally, Group D found that, parents do not visit schools enough.
Conclusions

The findings of this study elucidated several important implications for best practices and revised policies within this urban school district relative to the Special Education Process in elementary schools. The following conclusions are offered based on the research questions and analyses of data.

This research found that focus groups from each school felt that administrative policies were fraught with red tape that often resulted in misuse of faculty and time. They felt that the individual responsible for referrals within a particular school should be well informed regarding all aspects of referral and placement processes. Policies such as the number of students that may be referred from one teacher’s class, per school year, were questionable. It was not determined if this was a set number or a percentage of the entire class. In either case they felt that this number should be in response to student need rather than a preset administrative determination. In order to counteract concerns regarding the uncertainty of referral and placement procedures, the need for teacher and inclusive faculty training was recommended.

This study determined that the reassignment of struggling students to other teachers was seen as an important and successful strategy in helping pre-referral or referred students to overcome academic and behavior difficulties. With extended deliberation, School D finally agreed that this practice could be viable in overall student achievement, since students perform differently both academically and behaviorally, across settings and across teachers. Additionally, a correlation was found between academic performance and behavior. Generally, misbehavior negatively impacts positive academic performance. This correlate speaks volumes in the explanation of the number
of African-American males in special education arrangements for behavior remediation. School B noted that learning styles, and often typical-boy behaviors, account for some of the problems that African-American males encounter in relation to schooling.

This study determined further that behavior problems were referred to Student Support Teams and subsequently In-School Teams with greater frequency than academic problems, especially for boys. Whenever either group discussed a particular student with a behavior problem it was always a male and an African-American male. The research findings broaden our understanding of how teachers perceive behavior in relation to academics. The findings demand new methods of assessing students’ learning styles and cultural idiosyncrasies that may appear problematic in classrooms.

The Focus Groups indicated that time constraints, general teacher demands, and responsibilities preclude the amount of time and attention necessary to completely individualize instruction for students at-risk of being referred or previously referred. The need to individualize instruction for at-risk students has been recognized by the district. Supplemental programs have been initiated to alleviate these concerns. However, the success of these programs was questioned. Often the individuals assigned to these supplemental programs were in need of additional training, training necessary to adequately assist students assigned to these programs. Another issue was with the usage of supplemental program individuals. These individuals were often required to perform other duties that removed them from the supplemental program. Therefore, these supplemental programs were inconsistently or sparsely implemented, thereby, rendering individualization of instruction unchanged. Educators needed help on a predetermined and consistent basis in order to plan and effectively deliver instructions. The need to hire
and utilize specialized individuals to combat problems outside of the purview of the
general education teacher’s scope was critical.

This study found that raising expectations or challenging students might be used
to enhance academic success and curtail behavior problems. Educators spoke of class
size in relation to time as being extremely burdensome in the attempt to reach all
students. Educators felt that all students deserved and should be given every opportunity
to succeed. District and state assessments and mandates consume excessive amounts of
teacher and student time. This was time spent attempting to have a set percentage of
students meet or exceed standards. However, this time was not consumed with students
who were not expected to meet or exceed standards. Therefore, the need to monitor
closely classroom instructions and climate are incumbent upon teachers, administrators,
support, and supplemental personnel.

Further, as it relates to working with parents, it was determined that educators
were willing to do all that they could possibly do to make parental involvement a reality.
However, parents were described as “coming in on the offensive.” Several possible
reasons were given for parents’ attitudes. Parents need to know what the suspected
problems are according to the school and be willing to work with the school to solve
those problems. Training in this area is indicated for educators and parents.

Another significant conclusion of this research is that it reflects a heightened
understanding of educators’ experiences and perceptions relative to the Special Education
Process in elementary schools within this urban school district. Educators responded
honestly and openly regarding this important phenomenon that impacts the education of
both general and special education students.
Considering the fact that this district's enrollment is predominately African American, other races did not have considerable impact on percentages related to race. Overrepresentation was not found based on race. However, a related finding was that gender was significant in this district. Gender calculations indicated that males were equal to or greater than females in three of the four schools under study. Males were minimally fewer in the fourth school, however, the percentage of males in cited categories exceeded females in all schools. Males were referred to and placed in special education classes more frequently than females. More males than females were also retained (within grade levels) in each school. Based on gender alone African-American males are overrepresented in soft or high-incidence disability categories in these schools. Table 7 illustrates this concern (J. McKerson, personal communication, October 14, 2004).
Table 7

Gender Specific Statistics By School 2001-2002

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<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Special Ed Placements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referrals to Special Ed</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Grade Level Retentions</td>
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<tr>
<th>School B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Population</td>
<td>521</td>
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<td>49.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Ed Placements</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Referrals to Special Ed</td>
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<td>86.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<td>Grade Level Retentions</td>
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<td>68.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>337</td>
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<td>50.0</td>
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<td>Special Ed Placements</td>
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<td>Grade Level Retentions</td>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>28.0</td>
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<td>18.0</td>
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<td>Referrals to Special Ed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level Retentions</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications

The findings and conclusions of this study contained significant implications. These implications are replete with suggestions from the various focus groups, individual interviewees, and parents of students with disabilities; these individuals understand and implement the Special Education Process often through trial and error.

1. The data collection process used in this study may be a model for administrators in obtaining information relating to students, teachers, and parents as they maneuver special education processes within this district. This study shows that parents must receive thorough and sensitive explanations of their children’s suspected disabilities. Concomitantly, additional training of all elementary school personnel is warranted in order to assure that this sensitivity is understood and implemented.

2. The district may consider the research finding that suggests that the reassignment of students to different teachers (same grade level) before referral to SST and In-School Teams is a force for the reduction of referrals and subsequently the need for special education services. The re-engineering of early intervention programs designed to assist students on the positive side of referral is indicated.

3. This study determined that different teaching models such as collaborative or team teaching vs. pull-out models yielded improved student performance in both academics and behavior.

4. This research forms some basis for the consideration of the impact of district and state testing mandates on classroom instruction and climate.
5. Information from this research serves as a basis for the formation of school commissions to study and explore the importance of learning styles and culturally based idiosyncrasies in the development of African-American males (on an ongoing basis). Review and study of previous referrals and placements of African-American males to determine the effects of behavior that might have been typical boy or culturally based behaviors is warranted.

6. This research forms some basis for the hiring and utilization of specialized personnel to combat problems outside of the purview of the general education teacher's scope.

Recommendations

Further research involving the Special Education Process as it relates to the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education referrals and placements is needed, particularly in urban elementary schools. Further research should focus on ways in which gender influences the process beginning with referral. The present study did not find that overrepresentation was racially motivated in this district. However, there is a need to consider gender as a contributing factor in this phenomenon. These studies may consider referring teachers' knowledge of gender related concerns and/or issues.

It is also recommended that school commissions or leadership teams be formed in order to disseminate information to educators and parents regarding this process. This information should be disseminated with the intent of involving and informing faculty, staff, and affected parents. This will be particularly useful for elementary schools that must implement the Special Education Process.
Further, a compilation of the snares and pits of Special Education and the Special Education Process should be shared with departments of education of colleges and universities to be used in the preparation of elementary and special educators. This practice will provide meaningful data to assist in the preparation of college course curricula relating to the following dimensions: (1) administrative concerns, policies, and constraints, (2) teaching practices, (3) policies and procedures, and (4) parents and schooling all within the purview of elementary schools.

It is recommended that additional special education experts be hired in order to assist general educators with at-risk students. Finally, it is my recommendation that EIP teachers and other specialty personnel remain with those specified students and not be used to complete other or competing assignments.

Summary

The findings were based on the responses of four focus groups, individuals, and parents to five research questions, showed that there is a relationship between perceptions of the special education process and the number of students referred for special education services. The perceptions that educators had pertaining to special education, referral, and placement of students in alternate settings were based on past experiences with these educational concepts. Teacher tolerance and teacher expectations dictate how each teacher is likely to implement the process. This implementation may be favorable or unfavorable for African-American males. Actually, the teacher becomes the perfect test in referral and placement decisions. This holds true especially for referrals that result from behavior concerns, an area in which males always outnumber females.
The implications of this research may be instrumental in training school administrators, both general and special education teachers, referral officials, and parents. A thorough understanding of this process and how the process may contribute to the overrepresentation of African-American males in high-incidence disability classes is essential for education professionals.
## STUDENT DATA

### Total Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-5:</td>
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<td>354</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK:</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Enrollment in Selected Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Programs (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced-price Lunches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>45,339</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dropout Rate *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - Dropouts are not reported for grades PK-5.

### Enrollment in Compensatory Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education (Grades K-12) (PK)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Program (EIP) (Grades K-5)</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I (Grades K-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This School has a Schoolwide Title I Program.

### Retained Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data Source

Data provided by the School A for the years 2001-2002.
## APPENDIX B

School B's Demographics

2001-2002

### STUDENT DATA

#### Total Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enrollment in Selected Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Programs (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced-price Lunches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>48,333</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Dropout Rate *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - Dropouts are not reported for grades PK-5.

#### Enrollment in Compensatory Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(PK)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Language Program (ESOL)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grades K-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Program (EIP)</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grades K-6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Retarded Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

School C's Demographics

2001-2002

### STUDENT DATA

#### Total Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-5:</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enrollment in Selected Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Programs (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced-price Lunches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>335</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>45,339</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enrollment in Compensatory Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(PK)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Program (EIP) (Grades K-6)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I (Grades K-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This School has a Schoolwide Title I Program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Dropout Rate *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - Dropouts are not reported for grades PK-5.

#### Retained Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D

School D’s Demographics

2001-2002

### STUDENT DATA

#### Total Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-5:</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>274</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK:</td>
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<td>76</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enrollment in Selected Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Programs (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enrollment in Compensatory Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education (Grades K-12) (PK)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Grades K-12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Program (EIP) (Grades K-5)</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I (Grades K-12) This School has a Schoolwide Title I Program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced-price Lunches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>803</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>45,339</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Dropout Rate *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

System | N/A    | N/A

* - Dropouts are not reported for grades PK-5.

#### Retained Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Multi-Racial</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding the Special Education Process

An Overview for Parents

The chart below offers an overview of the special education process. It is not designed to show all steps or the specific details. It shows what happens from the time a child is referred for evaluation and is identified as having a disability, through the development of an individualized education program (IEP).

The process begins when someone (school staff, parents, etc.) makes a referral for an initial evaluation. An explanation of each numbered area follows the chart.

1. Parents or school district staff or others request an evaluation; parents agree in writing.

   Evaluation completed. Eligibility decision. (2)
   
   Eligible for services. (4)

   a) IEP developed. b) Placement determined. (May be two meetings.) (5)

   Parents agree. (7)

   Annual IEP meeting. (8)

   Parents agree. (10)

   Not eligible. (3)

   Parents disagree. (6)

   Parents disagree. (9)
APPENDIX E

(continued)

How the process works

1. Parents, school personnel, students, or others may make a request for evaluation. If you request an evaluation to determine whether your child has a disability and needs special education, the school district must complete a full and individual evaluation. If it refuses to conduct the evaluation, it must give you appropriate notice and let you know your rights. You must give permission in writing for an initial (first-time) evaluation and for any tests that are completed as part of a reevaluation.

2. A team of qualified professionals and you will review the results of the evaluation, and determine if your child is eligible for special education services.

3. If your child is not eligible, you will be appropriately notified and the process stops. However, you have a right to disagree with the results of the evaluation or the eligibility decision. If you disagree with the results of an evaluation, you have a right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). Someone who does not work for the school district completes the IEE. The school district must pay for the IEE or show at an impartial due process hearing (see box on next page) that its evaluation is appropriate.

4. If you and the school district agree that your child is eligible for services, you and the school staff will plan your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), at an IEP team meeting. You are an equal member of this team. Some states may have a different name for the IEP team meeting.

5. The IEP lists any special services your child needs, including goals your child is expected to achieve in one year, and objectives or benchmarks to note progress. The team determines what services are in the IEP, as well as the location where those services and modifications. At times, the IEP and placement decisions will take place at one meeting. At other times, placement may be made at a separate meeting (usually called a placement meeting.) Placement for your child must be in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) appropriate to your child's needs. He or she will be placed in the regular classroom to receive services unless the IEP team determines that, even with special additional aids and services, the child cannot be successful there. You are part of any group that decides what services your child will receive and where they will be provided.

6. If you disagree with the IEP and/or the proposed placement, you should first try to work out an agreement with your child's IEP team. If you still disagree, you can use your due process rights. (See box on last page.)

7. If you agree with the IEP and placement, your child will receive the services that are written into the IEP. You will receive reports on your child's progress at least as often as parents are given reports on their children who do not have disabilities. You can request that the IEP team meet if reports show that changes need to be made in the IEP.

8. The IEP team meets at least once per year to discuss progress and write any new goals or services into the IEP. As a parent, you can agree or disagree with the proposed changes. If you disagree, you should do so in writing.

9. If you disagree with any changes in the IEP, your child will continue to receive the services listed in the previous IEP until you and school staff reach agreement. You should discuss your concerns with the other members of the IEP team. If you continue to disagree with the IEP, you have several options, including asking for additional testing or an independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), or resolving the disagreement using due process. (See last page.)

10. Your child will continue to receive special education services if the team agrees that the services are needed. A reevaluation is completed at least once every three years to see if your child continues to be eligible for special education services and to decide what services he or she needs.
Due process protects the right of parents to have input into their child's educational program and to take steps to resolve disagreements. When parents and school districts disagree with one another, they may ask for an impartial hearing to resolve issues. Mediation must also be available.

Mediation is a meeting between parents and the school district with an impartial person, called a mediator, who helps both sides come to an agreement that each finds acceptable.

An impartial due process hearing is a meeting between parents and the school district. Each side presents its position, and a hearing officer decides what the appropriate educational program is, based on requirements in law.

School districts must give parents a written copy of special education procedural safeguards. This document outlines the steps for due process hearings and mediation. Parents must be given a copy when their child is first referred for an evaluation and each time they are notified of an IEP meeting for their child.
APPENDIX F
(pps. 151-171)

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

1. Initial Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility
   A. Provide PWN, PSN, and Meeting Notice as appropriate
   B. Review existing data by MET/IEP team members

2. IEP Development
   A. Provide Meeting Notice and Procedural Safeguards Notice
   B. Complete IEP
   C. Determine levels of service and LRE
   D. Provide PWN*, (PSN), and copy of IEP

3. Initial Placement
   A. Obtain written parental consent
   B. Provide PWN* (PSN)

4. IEP Implementation in the Least Restrictive Environment
   A. Inform teachers of IEP responsibilities and provide IEP access
   B. Provide services
   C. Prepare progress reports and submit to parent

5. Review and Revision of IEP
   A. Provide Meeting Notice and Procedural Safeguards Notice
   B. Review/revise IEP
   C. Determine levels of service and LRE
   D. Provide PWN*, (PSN), and copy of IEP

6. Reevaluation and Determination of Eligibility
   A. Provide PWN, PSN, and Meeting Notice as appropriate
   B. Review existing data by MET/IEP team members

7. Review and Revision of IEP OR Dismiss from Special Education
   A. Provide reevaluation report and eligibility determination
   B. Provide PWN* (PSN)
The Special Education Process as Mandated
by Federal and State Law

Pre-Referral, Child-Find, and Identification (Process+)

All public educational agencies (hereafter referred to as the "school") must have in place an effective method of locating and identifying children birth through 21 who may be in need of a special education evaluation. For example, school districts have a responsibility to ensure that children suspected of having a disability, who reside within their respective school district boundaries, are located and identified. Charter schools have a responsibility to locate and identify children suspected of having a disability that are enrolled in their respective charter school. This includes the following:

- Providing information to parents regarding early intervention services for children aged birth through 2 years
- Providing information to parents regarding preschool special education services for children at least three years of age but who have not reached the required age for kindergarten
- Screenings for all kindergarten students and newly enrolled students who do not have records of screening, evaluation, and progress in school within 45 calendar days after entry
- School initiated referrals for a possible special education evaluation
- A procedure to accept and follow up on parent referrals

A. Review Records: All newly enrolled students (grades 1 through 12) will have their records reviewed by school personnel. Information will support
continuing growth in the general curriculum or that the student has already been through a screening process.

B. Conduct Screening: If there is inadequate information, a school will begin a 45-day screening that considers all aspects of a student's abilities including academics, communication, social/emotional, psychomotor skills, vision, and hearing. All kindergarten students must be screened in the same areas noted above within the first 45 days of entry.

C. Conduct and document pre-referral activities: When the screening indicates an area of concern, there will be follow up by designated school personnel to consider modifications, accommodations and alternative strategies to assist the student. The school should be in touch with the parent to inform them of the decision to engage in these activities. Schools may ask the parent to participate with them at this point or may keep the parent informed by other means. Documentation is to be maintained of all efforts made to accommodate individual differences.

A parent may also inform the school of concerns regarding their child. They may request in writing that the school conduct an evaluation of the child's abilities. It should be noted that the parent's request for an evaluation does not automatically trigger the obligation of the school to conduct the evaluation. The school must conduct the evaluation without undue delay only if the school suspects that the child has a disability and is in need of special education related services. This provision provides parents with safeguards and protection under current laws. Parents may use this provision in order to establish the need for additional assistance as well as the need for evaluation.
D. Provide information to parent: The parent must be informed on the final decision concerning the need to evaluate or to provide other appropriate services. This information is shared with the parent in writing.

E. Make referral for evaluation: If the designated school personnel feels it is appropriate, a referral will be made for the child to undergo a full individual evaluation of all areas necessary to determine levels of need and to support special education eligibility.

It is at this point in the process that a surrogate parent would be required if a child’s parent(s) cannot be identified, the public agency cannot determine the whereabouts of the parent(s), or the child is a ward of the state.

Step 1: Initial Evaluation and Eligibility Determination (Process)

A. Provide Prior Written Notice, Procedural Safeguards Notice, and Meeting Notice as appropriate. The parent must be provided Prior Written Notice [PWN] 1) explaining the actions to be taken and Procedural Safeguards Notice [PSN] 2) explaining the rights and protections of children and parents under the law. If there is to be a formal meeting, the school will send a Meeting Notice.

Prior Written Notice will be given to the parent explaining why the school is proposing to conduct an evaluation. A Prior Written Notice must be provided to the parent when the school proposes to initiate or change; or refuses to initiate or change; the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the provision of a free appropriate public education [FAPE] to the child.

The Prior Written Notice will contain:
A description of what the school proposes to do;

An explanation of why the school has made this decision;

A description of other options that were considered in making the decision and the reasons why those options were rejected;

A description of other factors considered in deciding on an action;

A statement of parent protections under procedural safeguards and, if this notice is not an initial referral for evaluation, the means by which a copy of a description of the procedural safeguards can be obtained; and

Sources for parents to contact to obtain assistance in understanding their rights.

The Procedural Safeguards Notice is a complete explanation of parents’ rights and protections for children under special education requirements. The Procedural Safeguards Notice must be provided to the parent upon initial referral for evaluation, upon each notification of an Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting, upon reevaluation of the child, and upon registration of a due process complaint.

If there is to be a formal meeting, the school will send a Meeting Notice. The Meeting Notice will state the purpose of the meeting, the positions of the people who will be in attendance, the location, and the time of the meeting. A Procedural Safeguards Notice will be attached.

B. Review existing data: A review of all existing data on the child will be done by the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET)/Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team and other qualified individuals with knowledge of the
child. This team is made up of appropriate qualified professionals and the
parent. The team will decide if additional data are needed in order to
determine if a child is eligible for special education services. This review of
data by all team members does not have to be done in a formal meeting.

C1. If no additional data are needed

- Determine eligibility: Based upon the existing information, the team will
determine eligibility.

- Develop evaluation report: The evaluation report will summarize the
  information reviewed, the basis on which eligibility was established, and
  the area(s) of eligibility.

- Provide Prior Written Notice: Prior Written Notice will document the
decisions made by the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be
made available to the parent. School personnel will review parental rights
regarding initial evaluation.

D. A copy of the evaluation report, which includes documentation of the eligibility
determination, must be given to the parent.

C2. If additional data are needed—

A decision may be made by the MET/IEP team (including the parent) that there is
insufficient information to determine eligibility and that an evaluation plan needs to
be designed to gather additional data.
Provide Prior Written Notice: The Prior Written Notice will document the decisions made by the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

Obtain parent consent: It is the responsibility of the school to secure the parent’s permission before conducting the initial evaluation. The school will inform the parent of all types of testing instruments to be used. This is done to gain informed parental consent. It should be noted that parental consent is not required before reviewing existing data as part of an evaluation. Secondly, parental consent is voluntary and may be revoked at anytime. When a parent revokes consent, that revocation is not retroactive, meaning, it does not negate an action that has occurred after the consent was given and before the consent was revoked. If a parent refuses to provide consent, then a school may consider using mediation or due process as an avenue to pursue the evaluation of the child.

Gather additional data: There are guidelines for conducting the formal evaluation. Tests, materials, and procedures used for evaluation must be selected and administered so there is no racial or cultural discrimination. Tests must be given in the child’s native language or other system of communication, unless it is not feasible to do so. No single test can be used to determine eligibility or an appropriate program for a child. Testing needs to be done in all areas related to the suspected disability including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional
status, general intelligence, academic performance, communication and motor abilities.

- Determine eligibility and prepare evaluation report: Once consent is given, the school must complete the evaluation and meet to determine eligibility within 60 calendar days. The Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET)/Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team will use information gained through formal and informal evaluations to determine eligibility. The team is made up of qualified individuals including the parent, at least one of the child’s general education teachers, one of the child’s special education teachers, a representative of the school, an individual to interpret the instructional implications of test results, the child, if appropriate, and at the discretion of the parent or school, other persons with knowledge or special expertise about the child. Determining a child’s eligibility for special education and related services is actually a two-step process. First of all, based upon the evaluation results, the MET/IEP team must determine if the child has one or more of the following disabilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disability</td>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>Speech/Language Impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities-Severe</td>
<td>Preschool (Moderate Delay, Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory Impairment</td>
<td>Delay, Speech/Language Delay)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Retardation (Mild, Moderate, or Severe) Visual Impairment 
Other Health Impairments

Secondly, as a result of having one or more of the disabilities noted above, the MET/IEP team must determine that the child requires special education services (i.e., specially designed instruction) and related services in order to benefit from their educational program. A child may not be determined eligible if the greatest factor is lack of instruction in reading or math or limited English proficiency.

The evaluation report must include, but is not limited to:

- A review of current evaluations, including types of tests and the results of those tests;
- Information provided by the parents, including medical and developmental information and history;
- Educational history, including the reason for the referral, current classroom based assessments and observations by teachers and related service providers;
- Determination of whether the child’s educational problems are related to or resulting primarily from limited English proficiency or a lack of instruction in reading and math;
- Documentation of whether the child’s educational problems are related to or resulting primarily from reasons of educational disadvantage;
- The child was assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability (including behavior, assistive technology, current vision and hearing...
status) and, for a preschool child, Comprehensive Developmental Assessment was completed;

- A determination of whether the child has a category of disability (as defined by State law);
- The child’s present levels of academic performance and current educational needs;
- A determination of whether the child needs special education and related services;
- A determination of whether any additions or modifications are needed to allow the child to progress in the general curriculum; and
- Team findings on eligibility determination.

- Provide parent Prior Written Notice: The school will provide a Prior Written Notice that will document the decisions made by the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

D. The parent will be provided a copy of the evaluation report, which will include documentation of the eligibility determination.

**Step 2: IEP Development (Process)**

Once a child has been found eligible for special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed by a team. The IEP team must convene within 30 calendar days of eligibility determination to develop an IEP. No services can be provided prior to the development of the IEP.
The IEP team must include the following:

- The parent;
- At least one of the child’s regular education teachers;
- At least one special education teacher of the child, or if appropriate, at least one special education provider of the child;
- A representative of the school that is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of instruction that is designed specifically for children with disabilities who is knowledgeable about the general curriculum and the availability of resources;
- A person who can interpret the instructional implication of the evaluation results;
- The child, if appropriate; and
- At the discretion of the parent or school, other persons with knowledge of special expertise about the child.

It should be noted that a team member may serve in more than one of the above listed roles.

A. Provide Meeting Notices and Procedural Safeguards Notice: The parent will be given a Meeting Notice and a Procedural Safeguards Notice early enough to ensure they will have an opportunity to attend. The meeting should be scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient to the people who will be participating. If the school is unable to convince the parent to attend and this
has been fully documented; the school may conduct the meeting without the parent in attendance.

B. Complete IEP: There are two main parts of the IEP requirement. The first is the meeting(s) where parent and school personnel jointly make decisions about an educational program for a child. The other is the IEP, a document that is a written record of the decisions reached at the meeting concerning the type of program that will meet the needs of the student.

The IEP document must include:

- The date of the meeting and documentation of participants;
- A statement of the child’s present levels of educational performance including how the child’s disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general curriculum;
- A statement of measurable annual goals including the way they will be evaluated;
- Short term objectives or benchmarks that support each annual goal;
- A statement of special education, related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child;
- A statement of program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child;
- A description of the projected initiation date, frequency, location and duration of the services and supports;
• An explanation of the extent that the child will not participate with non-disabled peers;

• Documentation as to how the child will participate in state and district-wide assessments or, as appropriate, explain why the child will not participate and how the child will be assessed;

• A consideration of communication needs and the need for assistive technology;

• A consideration of the need for extended school year services;

• A statement of the course of studies beginning at age 14 and a comprehensive plan for transition services by the age of 16;

• A statement of any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs; and

• A statement of how the child’s progress will be reported to the parent.

In addition to these IEP components, there is a need to address the following as appropriate:

• Consideration of the need for Braille instruction;

• Documentation of exit criteria for students placed in private residential facilities;

• A plan outlining the opportunities for student’s reintegration from private residential facilities;
• For a student with limited English proficiency, consideration of his/her language needs; and

• Consideration of strategies/supports to address behavior that impedes a child’s learning or that of others, regardless of disability.

C. Determine levels of service and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): As the team writes the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a student, the level of service will be decided. A child with a disability must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Removal from the general educational environment occurs if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Every school must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of a child who requires special education and related services. These include instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions.

Educational placement must be determined by a group of persons who are knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data and the placement options. The child’s placement shall be based on the service needs outlined in the child’s IEP. Placement must be considered at least once each year. The child shall be placed in the school that he/she would attend if nondisabled, unless the IEP requires some other arrangement. The team must also consider any potential harmful effects on the child or on the quality of services needed and document this consideration.
Schools must provide all children an equal opportunity to participate in nonacademic services, extracurricular activities such as recreational activities and counseling services, lunch, recess, and school sponsored clubs and teams.

D. Provide Prior Written Notice: Prior Written Notice must be provided before the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is implemented. Along with the Prior Written Notice, the school will make the Procedural Safeguards Notice available to the parent. The parent must be provided a copy of the completed IEP document.

**Step 3: Initial Placement (Process)**

A. Obtain parental consent: Written parental consent must be obtained prior to child’s initial special education placement. If a parent is not available to participate in the meeting to determine placement, the school will in other ways allow parents to participate, including individual or conference telephone calls and/or video conferencing.

B. Provide Prior Written Notice: Prior Written Notice must reflect the decisions that have been made regarding the student’s placement. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to parents.

**Step 4: IEP Implementation (Process)**

A. Inform teachers of IEP responsibilities and provide IEP access: Special education teachers, related service providers, and general education teachers need to be informed of their responsibilities for services specified within the IEP.
B. Provide services: The IEP is to be implemented as soon as possible following initial consent for placement.

C. Report progress to parent: The parent is to be informed of the student’s progress toward the IEP goals. This report must be provided at least as often as non-disabled children receive reports of progress. The report must also indicate if progress towards the goals is sufficient for the goals to be accomplished by the annual review date of the IEP.

Step 5: Review and Revision of IEP (Process)

There is a requirement of the IEP to be reviewed periodically but not less than once a year. It is possible for any team member, including the parent, to request additional IEP meetings. When the IEP team reconvenes, all team members should be prepared to discuss concerns for present programming, additional student needs, program options, including instructional or classroom adaptations, supports for staff, and supplementary aids and services.

A. Provide Meeting Notice and Procedural Safeguards Notice: A written Meeting Notice, with Procedural Safeguards Notice attached, should be given in enough time to ensure the participation of the parent.

B. Review/revise IEP: The IEP should be reviewed to address progress or lack of progress toward annual goals, results of any reevaluation conducted, information provided by the team members including the parent, the present needs of the child and other educationally related issues.
C. Determine level of service and LRE: As the team writes the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for a student, the level of service will be reviewed. The team will consider the extent to which the child is to be involved in the regular education classroom. A child with a disability must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Removal from the general classroom occurs only when the severity of the disability interferes with the child’s ability to achieve satisfactorily even with the use of supports and adaptations.

D. Provide Prior Written Notice: After the IEP has been developed, reviewed, or revised; a Prior Written Notice will specify the decisions made by the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent. The parent will also receive a copy of the IEP. Implementation of the new IEP will take place as soon as possible.

Step 6: Reevaluation and Determination of Eligibility (Process)

Every student who qualifies for special education services must be reevaluated every three years to determine continued eligibility for services. If conditions warrant or a parent or teacher makes a request, a reevaluation may take place at any time.

A. Provide Prior Written Notice, Procedural Safeguards Notice, and Meeting Notice (as appropriate): The parent will be provided with Prior Written Notice indicating that a reevaluation will occur and the parent will be given a copy of the Procedural Safeguards Notice. If there is to
be a formal meeting, the school will send a Meeting Notice with the procedural Safeguards Notice attached.

B. Review Existing Data: The MET/IEP team will collect and review current data on the student. This may include, but is not limited to, previous evaluations, classroom-based observations, state-wide and district-wide testing results, progress toward goals, teacher observations, and information from the parent. This review of data by all team members does not have to be done in a formal meeting; however, if there is to be a formal meeting, the school will send a Meeting Notice and a Procedural Safeguards Notice.

C. 1. If No Additional Data Is Needed:

- Notify parents of the right to request additional data. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

- Determine continued eligibility. If the team agrees that continued eligibility is supported by existing data, there is no obligation to conduct further testing unless requested by parent.

- Develop reevaluation report. There must be a clear statement of continued eligibility and the basis on which eligibility was determined. The report will include a summary of existing data and also indicate the levels of educational performance and needs of the student. In addition, a statement will be made as to whether any additions or modifications to the special education and related services are needed to enable the child to meet the
goals set out in the IEP and to participate, as appropriate, in the general curriculum. This information will assist the team in the review and revision of the IEP document.

- **Provide Prior Written Notice:** A Prior Written Notice must be given to the parent that states the reasons why additional data will not be gathered and the basis upon which eligibility was determined. The parent must be informed of their right to request an assessment to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

D. A copy of the reevaluation report, which includes documentation of the eligibility determination, must be given to the parent.

C. **2. If Additional Data Is Needed:**

A decision may be made by the MET/IEP team (which includes the parent) that there is insufficient information to determine continued eligibility and that a reevaluation plan needs to be designed to gather additional data.

- **Provide Prior Written Notice:** Prior Written Notice must be given to the parent explaining the decision of the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

- **Obtain Parental Consent:** Informed consent must be received from the parent before additional data can be gathered. However, a reevaluation may proceed if there is documentation of reasonable attempts to obtain consent prior to reevaluation. If the parent refuses to provide consent, the
school may consider using mediation or due process as an avenue to pursue the reevaluation of the child. It should be noted that parental consent is not required in order for the MET/IEP team to review existing data.

- Gather additional data: The appropriate individuals will gather the agreed upon additional data.

- Determine Continued Eligibility: The MET/IEP team will determine if the child continues to be eligible for special education and related services. The reevaluation must be completed before the current eligibility expires or within a reasonable time if a reevaluation is requested by an IEP team member. In Georgia sixty calendar days would be considered a reasonable amount of time.

- Develop reevaluation report: The reevaluation report will include the summary of existing data, the results of the additional data gathered, and document eligibility and the basis on which it was determined. The report will indicate the levels of educational performance and needs of the student. In addition, a statement will be made as to whether any additions or modifications to the special education and related services are needed to enable the child to meet the goals set out in the IEP and to participate, as appropriate, in the general curriculum. This information will assist the team in the review and revision of the IEP document.
Provide Prior Written Notice: Prior Written Notice will document the decisions made by the team. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.

D. A copy of the reevaluation report, which includes documentation of eligibility determination, must be given to the parent.

Step 7: Review and Revision of IEP or Dismiss From Special Education (Process)

Review and Revision of IEP: All documentation as presented in Step 5 must be provided. The IEP should be reviewed and updated to reflect the present levels of educational performance and appropriate levels of service. If this does not apply, then the following must be in place:

Dismiss From Special Education:

A. Provide reevaluation report and eligibility determination: The reevaluation report, which includes documentation of eligibility determination, is to be maintained in the student’s file to document the process that occurred in making this decision and a copy of this documentation is to be given to the parent.

Provide Prior Written Notice: If the reevaluation and eligibility determination no longer supports the need for special education services, the parent must be notified through Prior Written Notice. The Procedural Safeguards Notice will be made available to the parent.
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