THE IMPACT OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS’ PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The research study sought to understand the impact of certain stakeholders’ input in education policies and implementation practices affecting students with Learning Disabilities (LD). The study examines policies and procedures in regard to public participation and actual levels of parental and community participation in three school districts; teachers’ perceptions of parental and community engagement and the learning environment of students with LD; and the role of organizations providing education services to students in the school districts’ service areas.

A mixed approach was employed. The qualitative methods permitted the investigation and analysis of school districts’ governing bodies by (1) comparing their school boards of trustees’ public participatory policies and processes and board meeting minutes, and (2) conducting semi-structured interviews with board of trustee members and leaders of local organizations who provide educational services to students with or without a disability.

The quantitative methods were employed (1) to compare data containing academic performance outcomes for students with disabilities (SDs) and the school districts’ state assessment results, (2) to examine the level of, and opportunity for, public participation in education policy decisions at board meetings and parental involvement in the implementation of education programs, and (3) to better understand whether the levels of public and parental participation impact teachers’ perceptions of students with LD.

The findings demonstrate that the level of public participation in education policies for students with LD varied and there was no evidence that the school district with the higher academic performance had greater overall public participation. The findings confirmed the evidence present in the literature in terms of the positive impact of parental involvement in policy and program decisions that affect their child’s education. The final findings showed a
need for advocacy by parents of students with LD; training for all teachers in effective teaching techniques for students with LD; and a need for additional organizations and volunteers to provide education services for students with LD because these organizations provide a level of individualized assistance that school classroom teachers struggle to offer due to class sizes.

Given the continual academic lag of SDs, and the demonstrated gaps in the learning environments for students with LD, a model Learning Disability Partnership Framework that aimed specifically to benefit students with LD, offers communities a collaborative approach to mitigate the needs of this vulnerable population of students.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<td>ALC</td>
<td>Academic Learning Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Asperger’s Syndrome</td>
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<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMBG</td>
<td>Carver Model of Board Governance</td>
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<td>DE</td>
<td>United States Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>End of Course Assessments</td>
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<td>ELA</td>
<td>English/Language/Art</td>
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<td>ESEA</td>
<td>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPB</td>
<td>For-Profit Business</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
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<td>GT</td>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
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<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDOE</td>
<td>Indiana Department of Education</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Individual Development Plan</td>
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<td>IMAST</td>
<td>Indiana Modified Standard Achievement Test</td>
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<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
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<td>ISTAR</td>
<td>Indiana Standards Tool for Alternative Reporting</td>
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<td>ISTEP</td>
<td>Indiana State Testing for Educational Progress</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>LD</td>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
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<td>LDPF</td>
<td>Learning Disability Partnership Framework</td>
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<td>LMC</td>
<td>Landmark College</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act</td>
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<td>NIH</td>
<td>National Institutes of Health</td>
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<td>NLTS-2</td>
<td>National Longitudinal Transition Study-2</td>
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<td>NPO</td>
<td>Non-Profit Organization</td>
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<td>PCDS</td>
<td>Parents of Children with Disability Survey</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Student with Disabilities</td>
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<td>SM</td>
<td>Survey Monkey</td>
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### LIST OF ACRONYMS, CONT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBP</td>
<td>University Based Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Education provides the foundation for good citizenship, skilled workers, college level students, and future leaders. Students’ grade point averages (GPA) are one of few criteria used to determine eligibility for higher education and entry-level professional employment opportunities. Students with lower GPAs are at a disadvantage, in that they are less likely to gain admission to top universities and colleges or to be offered the most sought after entry-level positions.

One of the most urgent educational issues in the nation involves the academic performance gap between students with disabilities (SDs) and students in the general population. According to the most comprehensive study of students with disabilities, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) (Department of Education, 2012), in the 2010/2011 school year, 6.4 million SDs are enrolled in public schools. The NLTS-2 provided the first holistic national view of the learning environment for SDs, revealing significant academic achievement gaps between SDs and students without disabilities. On average, SDs had lower grade point averages (GPA) than students without disabilities (2.3 and 2.7, respectively). Only 6% of SDs had a GPA 3.5 or higher, compared to 20% of students without disabilities, and 66% of SDs failed at least one high school course, compared to 47% of students without disabilities (Snyder & Dilow, 2013). Although achievement gaps are often a criterion by which students are identified as LD, appropriate intervention should be available to close the gap, and thus these data point to unmet educational needs of such students.

Of the 6.4 million SDs, 2.4 million have specific learning disabilities (LD), and these students receive over 40% of all services offered under special education programs (Snyder & Dilow, 2013). These statistics most likely do not reflect the universe of students with LD. Many SDs show no physical signs of a disability, therefore, their disability could remain undetected by
parents and schools (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2014a). The statistics in the NLTS-2 report only capture students with identified disabilities who are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ("IDEA," 2004), or who have individual education plans under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Snyder & Dilow, 2013).

IDEA’s primary goals and intended outcomes are to (1) ensure access to a quality education for SDs through creating essential service requirements and by addressing unmet needs, (2) improve and enhance educational outcomes and learning environments of SDs, and (3) deliver funding assistance to states and local entities to help defray the cost for special education and related services. Yet every day, it is possible that public school students identified with LD are denied the services prescribed in the IDEA and made to feel like a burden to the teachers and the schools (Brantlinger, 2004). Increasingly, because of a mandate to serve students in the least restrictive environment, students with LD are placed in general education classrooms (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson, 2011). However, students nonetheless are often underserved and do not receive evidence-based interventions that are available (Crockett, Filippi, & Morgan, 2012). What is the best approach to address these concerns? The U.S. Department of Education (ED) and other IDEA partners assert that public participation through stakeholder interaction and dialogue are essential to address the complexities and nuances of ensuring that students with disabilities, including students with LD, are provided an excellent education (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005). Studying the impact of the various stakeholders’ engagement on policies that prescribe curriculum, classroom integration, services and accommodations, and standardized testing requirements for SDs (including LD) may illuminate whether current policies are yielding less than acceptable educational outcomes for SDs.
Research Purpose

My project has two goals. One is to develop a framework for learning disability partnerships to improve the academic performance and vocational and life skills outcomes for students with learning disabilities. The other goal is to evaluate the relationship between LD students’ academic achievement and (a) the structure of public participation, and (b) teachers’ perceptions. The framework is based on Burton’s theory that broader public participation yields better policies and implementing practices (Burton, 2004). In order to achieve these goals, we must understand certain aspects of the student’s learning environment and the impact of various stakeholders’ input in policy development and implementation.

My research seeks to answer three questions: (1) Do school systems with high academic performing learning-disabled students have greater parental and public participation in local education policy development and implementation processes, (2) Does parental and community participation in the implementation of education policies influence educators’ and teachers’ perceptions of students with learning disabilities, and (3) What kind of public/private framework may be developed to benefit students with learning disabilities, with or without a school district’s involvement? Understanding the educational environment and impact of key stakeholders’ input will help shape the new learning disability partnership model.

What is a Learning Disability?

A learning disability is a neurological condition that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, respond to, and communicate information (National Institute of Neurological Disorders, 2014). IDEA defines a learning disability as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” ("IDEA," 2004). A person may have one or more
Learning disabilities and the disability is often discovered early in a child’s education, after the student displays difficulty with certain subjects.

Learning disabilities should not be confused with intellectual (formerly referred to as mental retardation) and developmental disabilities or emotional, vision, or hearing problems. Persons with one or more learning disabilities can have normal intellect, however, they process information differently and often require alternative instructional and teaching techniques and approaches (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2014b). There are some inconsistencies in the literature with regard to the definition of learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities of Association of New York State, 2015; National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2015). For example, IDEA’s definition of LD specifically mentions a disorder in one or more “basic psychological processes,” and notes conditions such as, dyslexia, minimal brain dysfunction, and perceptual disabilities ("IDEA," 2004). The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities’ (NJCLD) definition of LD mentions that the disorder is related to the “nervous system”, and that the disorder may span throughout one’s life (LD Online - The educators' guide to learning disabilities and ADHD, 2015). The NJCLD’s definition does not mention any specific condition. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) identifies the conditions listed in Table 1.1 as the most common learning disabilities.

Other conditions, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) have been confused with learning disabilities. These neurobehavioral conditions have characteristics that are similar to learning disabilities but they are separate conditions. They may lead to problems with learning and achievement, but not always do so. A significant proportion of children with such conditions also have a learning disability, e.g., 30% of students with ADHD also have a learning disability (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2014b).
According to the literature, in particular from the NIH, the most common treatment for learning disabilities involves providing assistance that helps the students cope with their disability. An assessment or evaluation of the student’s intellectual abilities will facilitate applying teaching approaches that capitalize on the student’s strengths and provide support to correct the weaknesses (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2014; National Institute of Neurological Disorders, 2014).

**History of Distinguishing Students with Disabilities from other Students**

In the early 1900s, Alfred Binet, credited as the “Father of the IQ Test” was appointed to France’s Commission for the Retarded Children where he focused his research on understanding and measuring the intellectual difference of individuals (Siegler, 1992). During the first year of his appointment, Binet with the assistance of a medical student, Theodore Simon, developed the first IQ test (Imhoff, 2000). Binet served as an advocate for children’s interests, yet according to Adah Maurer (1972), he was commissioned in 1911 to find a method to identify students who were unable to learn so that educators would not be held accountable for the students’ lack of achievement (Maurer, 1972). Binet’s contribution to the measurement of intellect is vast but he observed that there were limitations to IQ testing. He noted that there are numerous factors that impact the performance on the tests, such as, the “unnaturalness of the testing situation and its potential for intimidating young children” (Siegler, 1992). These particular limitations are especially relevant to students with learning disabilities (Dolan, Hall, Banerjee, Chun, & Strangman, 2005; Lufi, Okasha, & Cohen, 2004).

In 1908, Henry Goddard, Director of Research at the Training School for the Retarded at Vineland, New Jersey received, translated, and distributed 22,000 copies of the Binet and Simon’s 1908 version of the IQ test in the United States. Binet’s intent for the IQ test was to provide for a means of objectively measuring students’ general intellectual abilities. However,
Lewis Terman, the publisher of the first Stanford-Binet IQ test (an expanded version of the Binet-Simon Test) in 1916 for use in America believed that the test could serve a very different purpose. He stated that, "This will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble-mindedness and in the elimination of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism, and industrial inefficiency" (White, 2000). The concept of testing and isolation of students labeled as retarded to free teachers to focus their efforts on students deemed normal had already been practiced in the United States. Separating such students with special needs was not followed by specialized and appropriate education for them (Hendrick & MacMillan, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 2015), instead, the special needs programs of the time usually employed practices used in general classes, focused on “activities,” and were found to lack supervision, and teachers skilled in addressing the needs of students with disabilities (Hendrick & MacMillan, 1989). Vinnie Hicks demonstrated one example of this practice in 1911. She established a clinic in the Oakland, California school district to test “abnormal” students, and found 365 problematic students and categorized them as, “unruly”, “high school subnormal”, “feebleminded”, and “idiots.” Hicks believed that these students should be isolated from the normal students to permit the teacher more time with normal students. However, parents, communities, and legislators became increasingly aware of the need for reforming special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Winzer, 2007). This led to legislative remedies to change the learning environment for these students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Area of Difficulty</th>
<th>Symptoms include trouble with</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
<td>Processing language</td>
<td>Reading, Writing, Spelling</td>
<td>Confusing letters, names and sounds, difficulties blending sounds into words, slow rate of reading, remembering after reading text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyscalculia</td>
<td>Math skills</td>
<td>Computation, Remembering math facts, Concepts of time and money</td>
<td>Difficulty learning to count by 2s, 3s, 4s, poor mental math skills, problems with spatial directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysgraphia</td>
<td>Written expression</td>
<td>Handwriting, Spelling, Composition</td>
<td>Illegible handwriting, difficulty organizing ideas for writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyspraxia</td>
<td>Fine motor tasks</td>
<td>Coordination, Manual dexterity</td>
<td>Trouble with scissors, buttons, and drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apraxia of speech</td>
<td>Verbal skills</td>
<td>Speaking, Manual dexterity</td>
<td>Trouble with consistently saying what is intended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central auditory processing disorder</td>
<td>Interpreting sounds</td>
<td>Confusing words, Easily distracted</td>
<td>Difficulties explaining things, remembering directions and understanding jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal learning disorders</td>
<td>Interpreting nonverbal skills</td>
<td>Difficulty following multiple step directions</td>
<td>Difficulties interpreting facial expressions and body language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Institutes of Health
IDEA, No Child Left Behind Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Specific laws or policies might not cause lagging academic performance of students with LD, but there is concern as to whether the existing federal statutes adequately address their educational needs (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2011; Yale University, 2014). The two primary federal statutes that govern K-12 students include the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and IDEA. ESEA was enacted in 1965 after Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act, as the first federal policy to ensure that the states and local governments facilitate educational programs consistent with the US Constitution. In 2001, ESEA was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and its purpose was to provide for the most disadvantaged students and schools. The enactment of NCLB began a national dialogue about students’ academic results. The NCLB requirements spurred the development of accommodations and services policies for SDs that were enacted in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (Advocacy Institute, 2007).

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC) that primarily focused on providing support to states and local entities for the protection of the rights of children with disabilities, and to provide for their individual needs. EAHC became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), most recently reauthorized in 2004. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA included requirements for schools and agencies to provide certain accommodations and services as specified in the Act.

The goal of NCLB was to provide adequate education to all children. However, the practices that were put in place as part of the Act have increasingly been criticized by experts, including those who were involved in developing the Act, such as the National Council on Disability, and data collected on outcomes point to the fact that it resulted in negative outcomes
for many children (National Council on Disability, 2004, 2008). Such outcomes have included states lowering overall standards and expectations; emphasis placed on “pushing failure over rewarding success”; fixation on test scores, instead of measuring and rewarding gradual progress; and the concept of “a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that missed their goals” (The White House, 2014). The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA did not address these outcomes. Consequently, in 2010 President Obama proposed amendments to the Act to address academic standards and gaps.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. The law protects qualified individuals with disabilities, and applies to all employers and organizations that receive financial assistance (funding or grants) from a federal agency. A qualified disability is a “physical and mental impairment that limits one or more major life activity”.

**Literature Review**

The literature can be grouped into two categories. One part of the literature focuses on the learning environment of SDs and the community involvement in implementing, delivering, and augmenting education programs and activities for SDs. The other category of the literature focuses on the public’s participation in shaping policies that govern education programs and activities for all SDs. I found there is no distinction between education policies for students with LD and broader policies for SDs; general special education policies address all disabilities. The only distinction is found in interventions for students with LD, which are typically targeted to the specific condition.

When trying to understand the impact of the public’s participation in education policies for SDs, there are various categories of “the public,” and there must be a systematic and deliberate approach to maximize the public’s impact on the decision-making processes (Public
Burton argues that public participation may take place at the policy decision-making level and in the implementation of programs and the delivery of services (Burton, 2009). The literature lacked studies that specifically focused on the public’s participation in the development of public policies for students with learning disabilities.

**School-based community involvement.** The term “school-based community” in the literature is defined as educators, school administrators, teachers, pre-service teachers (student teachers under guided training), and the families and caretakers of SDs (National Center for Education Statistics). This community theoretical framework is centered on the premise that the success of interventions and programs that contribute to improved academic and other outcomes for SDs depends largely on educators’, administrators’, and teachers’ perceptions of SDs as well as their support and implementation of interventions made available by IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, NCLB, and state and local statutes and policies (National Council on Disability, 2004; Ritter & Gottfried, 2002).

Foster’s label theory applies to this topic because it helps to understand educators’ perceptions of students as being based in part on how the student is labeled (Foster, 1976). Labeling theory asserts that a label placed on students, such as “learning disabled,” is sufficient to generate negative expectations and perceptions of those students (Foster, 1976). One study sought to assess the attitudes of principals toward the students with learning disabilities (LD), intellectual disabilities (ID), and students without a known disability (normal students), and principals’ views on work-study programs. The researchers’ theoretical framework centered on the label theory, specifically that teachers and educators’ perceptions of students are linked to the label placed on the students, that the label “learning disability” was adequate to yield a negative perception from the principals. The researchers predicted that the students with IDs and the students with LD would be perceived less favorably than students without disability. The
researchers did find that students with LD were perceived more positively than students with IDs. However, the students with LD were perceived to be more like students with IDs than like the normal students (Foster, 1976; Reid & Knight, 2006; Shifrer, 2013; Smith, Flexer, & Sigelman, 1980).

The history of education legislation has demonstrated a growing awareness and consideration of the needs of students with disabilities. However, studies of educators’, administrators’, and teachers’ perceptions of SDs revealed a slower acceptance of the need to adjust teaching methods, curriculum, and programs; to mainstream SDs; integrate family in classroom teaching; and to understand the challenges faced by SDs’ families (Brantlinger, 2004; Foster, 1976; Lusk, Thompson, & Daane, 2008; Stoddard, Braun, & Koorland, 2011). The findings in the Foster study demonstrated the challenges of implementing intervention strategies when school administrators’ views toward students with disabilities are far less favorable than their views of students without disabilities.

Teachers’ perceptions are based on other factors as well, particularly pre-service teachers (student teachers under direct guidance and supervision). Teachers play a vital role in creating a positive learning environment for all students, especially SDs who are often targets of negative treatment from other students, and they require adaptive instructions, technologies, and services to level the playing field with students with no disabilities. The Stoddard, Braun and Koorland study (2011) of the Support Network for Kids in the Community Program revealed that teachers’ classroom approaches are based on their pre-service training and their individual family and school experiences. Teachers begin their professional experiences with concepts and assumptions about the educational environment (Stoddard et al., 2011). Elizabeth Graue’s and Christopher Brown’s study of pre-service teachers’ perspectives on family involvement and working with SDs is useful in understanding that perceptions may be formed based on family
and pre-service training experiences. The study was guided by Epstein’s framework for parent involvement, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration (Graue & Brown, 2003).

Some teacher/student classroom interactions and approaches yield less than positive outcomes for students with SDs. Teachers’ “unintended cruelties” (Brantlinger, 2004) have resulted in very different relationships with SDs, and the students reported an impact long after they left the schools. Students have written to former teachers to express how their lack of sensitivity, and resistance to adapt instructions, classroom settings, and other aspects of the learning environment, created lasting feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, and anger (Brantlinger, 2004). These perceptions may be changed through community efforts and family participation. In one pilot program that involved university pre-service teachers, parents, and school officials, students with disabilities were successfully integrated into after school and community recreational programs. The pilot program yielded unexpected outcomes that were more significant than the project goal. The pre-service teachers forged strong relationships with the families of the students with disabilities. They reported their prior misconceptions of students with disabilities were erased; they gained a better understanding of the families’ challenges. One pre-service teacher noted that her doubts about pursuing special education were removed (Stoddard et al., 2011).

The Graue and Brown study findings are similar to other study findings that support relationship building as a means to change perceptions. Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers argue that teachers’ negative perceptions of students of color have led to ineffective teaching practices, but that teachers’ perceptions may be changed through the development of positive “new relationships” (Oakes & Rogers, 2005).
Numerous studies have found that family involvement improves communications between the schools and families, and academic and other outcomes for students (U.S. Department of Education, 1996), yet few pre-service teachers have a content course of family involvement (Joyce L Epstein, 2001). A partnership in the United Kingdom attempted to elevate parental status in schools by having parents serve as school advisors. The parent serving as civic engager is an effective approach for garnering broader public participation (Russell, 2008).

**Family-school-community-business collaboration.** The concept of the community and business partnership (profit or not-for-profit) with schools and families is based on using a broader reach of collaborators to fill the unmet needs of students or the community. The definition of community here differs from the school-based community in that it can include all members of the community mainly because it is viewed as having “shared values” (Warren, Mapp, & The Community Organizing and School Reform Project, 2011). Here, the community is defined by shared values, extends beyond the immediate neighborhood, and can bridge common values from across races, religions, and ethnic differences.

School-business partnerships date back to 1835 with vocational opportunities offered to students from the California School of Mechanical Arts. Societal changes and events have influenced the evolution of, and need for, collaborations (Ritter & Gottfried, 2002). Regulatory requirements, resources, and breadth of knowledge often limit schools and families. Business collaborations are seen as potential solutions to bridge the gaps. Business partnerships can be instrumental in navigating IDEA and implementing many of the new technologies for SDs. For example, certain schools have made minimal progress in delivering adaptive technologies because teachers are not trained on the use of the technologies (Indiana Center for Assessable Materials, 2010). Part 3 of IDEA – Supports to Improve Results for the Children with Disabilities clearly supports funding at the state and local levels for information technology (IT)
training. Yet, teachers remain untrained (DeNisco, 2014). Grants and special funding may be available to supplement training needs, but school districts and school personnel may lack the expertise or time, or other resources necessary for grant writing or navigating the funding process. Local business partnerships may fill the need gaps through volunteer services for IT training and grant writing. Several case studies and other research have revealed that collaborations between businesses, schools and families reflect positive outcomes of public participation in the implementation of education policies (Ritter & Gottfried, 2002; Warren et al., 2011). Businesses offer a unique opportunity to partner with schools and school districts, but a recent study revealed an “odd disconnect” between school districts and businesses (Allan, Grossman, Rivkin, & Vaduganathan, 2013). Businesses tend to contribute by offering funding for libraries and volunteer teachers, yet school administrators are not seeking libraries and more volunteer teachers (Allan et al., 2013).

**Community specific teaching approaches.** There is some evidence from a research study of high schools, which showed that high schools that produce good outcomes for students with LD might be fundamentally different in their program solutions, and those solutions may not be immediately evident. These concepts are based on the premises that schools’ teaching approaches are closely related to the communities they serve and that SDs of different communities may have very different needs (Morocco, Aguilar, Clay, Brigham, & Zigmond, 2006). This study revealed that three high schools selected for the study differed historically and culturally, but they shared a common strategy: the theory of action for educating all students. The theory involves multiple strategies focused on academic achievements and personal growth, such as providing students a menu of academic opportunities as opposed to a singular track. Other strategies include mentorship, relationship development, flexible support options, and responsive leadership (Morocco et al., 2006). The findings revealed varied actions for each
school, based on their communities. This study presented successful practices that could serve to generate a national dialogue among all stakeholders. One weakness of the study is the lack of comparison to schools with lower achievements to determine whether they employed the same “theory of action” but with less favorable outcomes.

The impact of public participation on public policy. The level and impact of public participation have been the subject of many debates. In the U.S., the democratic approach to government is often applied to other governmental institutions such as educational institutions. When we view public participation in education from a democratic perspective, we perceive that it provides an opportunity for the minority to have a voice on matters that are determined for the majority. Paul Burton’s three core principles on public participation are especially useful when examining civic engagement in education policies. Burton theorizes that public participation provides for better policies, fosters greater social cohesion, and permits the public partners to achieve greater social respect (Burton, 2004). However, two studies suggest that public participation might have minimal impact on policy decision-making (Konisky & Beierle, 2001; Riddington, Mansell, & Beadle-Brown, 2008).

David Konisky and Thomas Beierle examined public participation and environmental decision-making. They assert that there are several types of participatory groups. The social circle groups that are designed or intended to educate the public and exchange information and ideas, would likely have little impact on policy decisions. For example, the British government developed learning disability public-private partnership boards throughout England to strategically address the delivery of services specific to persons with LD. The boards’ memberships consisted of at least two persons with a LD or persons serving as caregivers of persons with LD. While all representatives on the board shared responsibilities for making executive level decisions, and the LD or their caregivers often served as co-chairs, their
involvement was found to be superficial. Though this study focused on adults with learning disabilities, the public-private learning disability partnership concept may be transferable to considerations for children with disabilities (Riddington et al., 2008).

In contrast, the collaborative watershed management groups located throughout the United States moved from information sharing to co-authority in implementing and managing policy decisions. Konisky and Beierle noted that there were over 2000 such groups that provided essential assistance to local organizations. An example is the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Initiative that resulted in a collaborative decision-making partnership. Its membership included private citizens, governments (local, state, federal and tribal), business, organizations, and other stakeholders (Konisky & Beierle, 2001; M. Konisky, 2001).

Sherry Arnstein’s “ladder of participation” assumptions offer a different perspective on the impact of public participation. Her assumptions are grounded in the idea of a balance between those with power and those without power in the public and private relationship. She argues that public-private partnerships take various forms based on the balance of power (Arnstein, 1969). The higher participation levels, higher steps on the ladder, are more effective in negotiating and decision-making. These participants may be described, as a “mini-public” comprised of activists and scholars collaborating with government officials and the public. Mini-publics have been described as effective problem solvers for community related issues such as environmental “degradation, failing schools, and community safety” (Fung, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2001).

Gap in the literature. There were multiple theories or concepts that emerged from the literature on public participation, which have some support in empirical studies. Fung and Arnstein described degrees of participation that will be useful for developing a model partnership
with the school, community, SDs and families of SDs, to address any unmet needs of students with disabilities.

Studying the impact of the various stakeholders’ engagement on policies that prescribe education programs and activities for SDs (including LD) may provide insight on the degree to which current policies have improved or failed to improve educational outcomes for SDs. To gain maximum public participation on education policies for SDs, there must be a strategic approach so that mini-publics can be an effective means for solving prevailing problems in education programs for SDs. The impact of public participation on education policies for SDs varies by stakeholders, and while members of the local community often have little impact on policy decision-making, they can have significant impact on policy implementation. Well-established and accomplished mini-publics may have unique insight into the community and political environments and may serve as a knowledgeable and informed voice for members of the local community. The above reviewed literature points to the need for stakeholder participation at all stages of the educational process, from the federal and state levels of policy development and decision-making, to the local schools where the policies are implemented (Joyce L Epstein, 2001; Joyce Levy Epstein, 2009; Michigan Department of Education, 2002).

The scholarship is rich on the public’s participation in a gamut of community policy development issues (e.g., school reforms to environmental), teachers’ perceptions of the learning environment, and pre-service teachers’ perceptions of students with disabilities. However, there is need to focus further research on various stakeholders’ participation in the development and implementation of public policies specifically for students with learning disabilities.

This thesis study aims to contribute in multiple ways to the literature on students with learning disabilities. First, the study examined school boards’ participatory processes to understand their efforts in soliciting parental, teacher and community engagement, whether these
stakeholders actually engaged, and the reception to their input. Second, the literature captured a few studies based on the label theory and teachers’ perceptions but those studies did not seek to understand possible relationships between teachers’ perceptions, student outcomes, and parental and community participation. This study seeks to examine these factors to understand whether correlations may exist. Finally, the literature on partnerships provides effective models for addressing community issues; this study will apply elements of those models to offer a learning disability partnership model that may serve to address unmet needs of students with learning disabilities.
Chapter 2

Methodology

Research Design

The goal of the study is to examine and gain a better understanding of the impact of various participants on education policies and implementation practices for secondary education students with LD. I used multiple data sources, including data on the entire district, which was based on data collected from students, data from teachers, parents, and from educationally focused organizations that provide services to students in each district, and data from the governing bodies of the district, i.e., the school board of trustees, which is an elected or appointed governing body whose function is to serve as local education policy decision-makers. I employed a mixed approach using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative methods permitted the investigation and analysis of school districts’ governing bodies by (1) comparing their school board of trustees’ public participatory policies and processes, and board meeting minutes, and (2) conducting semi-structured interviews with board of trustee members and leaders of local organizations that provide educational services to students with or without a disability. Qualitative approaches are effective in understanding issues, problems, or phenomena and to inform policy decisions (Richards & Morse, 2012).

The quantitative methods were employed (1) to compare data containing academic performance outcomes for SDs and the school districts’ state assessment results, (2) to examine the level of, and opportunity for, public participation in education policy decisions at board meetings and parental involvement in the implementation of education programs (results of parental engagement survey), and (3) to better understand whether the levels of public and parental participation impact teachers’ perceptions of students with LD. Quantitative approaches are effective in identifying issues that may require additional research or explaining (Balnaves,
The results of the descriptive comparisons may yield valuable insights that can shape policy recommendations.

The study was defined by three research questions, (1) do school systems where students with LD show high academic performance have greater parental and public participation in local education policy development and implementation processes than systems where students with LD show low academic performance, (2) does parental and community participation in the implementation of education policies influence educators’ and teachers’ perceptions of students with LD, and (3) what kind of public/private framework may be developed to benefit students with learning disabilities, with or without a school district’s involvement? The following discussion describes the data collection approaches, measures and variables, and data analysis for each research question.

**Research question 1.** Do school systems where students with LD show high academic performance have greater parental and public participation in local education policy development and implementation processes than systems where students with LD show low academic performance?

**Sample population.** The sample population for this question included three school districts with different levels of students’ academic outcomes and district assessment grades. The school districts are identified in this study as District 1, District 2, and District 3 (Table 2.1). The districts were selected based on their proximity to each other, required adherence to the same state assessment and evaluation criteria, assessment results for the 2013/2014 school-year (range from A-C), and performance outcomes for SDs (range from exceeding statewide performance goals to not meeting those goals as described below).

Indiana’s Public Law 221 was enacted in 1999 and it instituted a comprehensive system for grades K-12 that holds school corporations and schools accountable for students’
performance. The law requires testing of middle school and high school students to assess their mastery of “benchmark” courses including Mathematics, English, and Biology (Indiana Department of Education, 2015). The state assessment framework measures school districts’ performance (math and English/language arts), students’ improvement in the performance areas, graduation rates, and college and career readiness. Indiana statewide accountability grades were used to narrow the selection of the school districts based on the selection criteria. The A-F accountability assessment measures the performance of schools and corporations and offers stakeholders (students, parents, educators, and the community) succinct and well-defined evaluation criteria to determine the health or efficaciousness of each school system (Indiana Department of Education, 2014a).

Table 2.1. School Districts Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities as percentage of school population</th>
<th>Secondary Education Schools in District*</th>
<th>State Assessment Grade</th>
<th>Student with Disabilities Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District 1</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Exceeded – 3 PGs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 2</td>
<td>5,068</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Exceeded - 2 PGs Did not Meet - 1 PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 3</td>
<td>19,308</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Did not Meet - 3 PGs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(PG – Performance Goals in English/Language/Art (ELA), Math, and Graduation Rates)

(*High schools with populations >1000)
School systems receive scores for the following measures:

- **Performance** – Scores based on the percentage of students that pass statewide assessments in English/Language/Art (ELA), Math, and End of Course Assessments (ECA).
- **Improvement** – Assessment grades may or may not fluctuate based on the students’ improvement from grades 8 to 10 and grades 10 to 12.
- **Graduation Rate** – Scores based on a four-year graduation rate
- **College and Career Readiness** - Scores based on the overall percentage of graduating students receiving a passing score on an advanced placement exam, an international baccalaureate exam, an industry certification exam, or college credits (3) (Indiana Department of Education, 2014a).

The IDOE’s performance and graduation goals for students with disabilities are ELA – 54%, Math – 61%, and Graduation Rate – 64% (Indiana Department of Education, 2014b).

There are four assessments that represent the performance outcomes for the goals: Indiana State Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP), Indiana Modified Standard Achievement Test (IMAST), Indiana Standards Tool for Alternative Reporting (ISTAR) and ECA (Indiana Department of Education, 2014b). Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) reports SDs’ performance result as an aggregate, not by specific disabilities. The data are still relevant to answering the research question because over one-third of SDs are students with LD (Snyder & Dilow, 2013) and it is expected that the proportion of LD within SD is similar across districts, and differences for SD between districts can thus serve as a proxy for differences for LD.

After identifying school districts with varying assessment grades and performance goals outcomes, I selected the three districts based on access to and availability of school board of trustee members.
**Data collection and analysis.** The study used four key data sources to answer the first research question, (1) school districts’ performance data from the IDOE, (2) IDOE’s 2011/2012 survey of parents of children with disability, (3) the school districts’ board of trustee documents, and (4) interviews with school board of trustee members. IDOE’s COMPASS served as a primary data source for school district level statistics, including demographics, aggregated student academic performance results from standardized assessment tests, aggregated improvement results, and the districts’ evaluation and assessments scores and their accountability report card grades. IDOE COMPASS is a central repository for statewide data collected from each school district and made publicly available at the IDOE COMPASS website. The school districts’ assessment grades and performance goals outcomes distinguished the high performing school districts from the low performing districts.

The second data source is IDOE’s Survey Services – Parents of Children with Disabilities 2011-2012 Survey Report used to analyze parents’ perception of their involvement (planning and implementation) in their child’s education program. IDOE publishes a summary report of the survey findings and the district level data was provided upon written request to WestEd, the research organization that conducted the survey on behalf of IDOE. The survey data offers parental perspectives on the school districts’ efforts and success in engaging parents of students with disabilities in local education program implementation. (Appendix A – Parents of Children with Disabilities Survey Questions).

School districts’ performance data and the parental survey data were collected and placed in Excel spreadsheets for descriptive analysis and comparison. The spreadsheets serve as a repository for all collected data and the basis for electronic analysis. The files are maintained on the researcher’s laptop and downloaded to an external drive nightly. The data were collected from publicly available websites, thus removing any privacy or confidentiality concerns.
Each school district is governed by an appointed or elected board of trustees to serve as local education policy decision-makers. In the three selected districts, the board members were elected by the residents, or at-large, or appointed by a majority of the Board to fill a vacancy or an unexpired term. The boards’ sizes range from five to seven trustees. The third data source are the school board of trustees’ documents that codifies the boards’ operational and administrative policies, public participation procedures and processes, and board meeting minutes that details boards proceedings. I accessed the board of trustees’ policies and procedures and meeting minutes (2010 -2013) from their respective websites. The three boards convened a total of 353 meetings (open and closed meetings) with most meetings open for public participation (Figure 2.1). Board procedures and meeting minutes were uploaded to Nvivo and Dedoose, coded using descriptive coding (See Appendix B – Codebook), and analyzed using descriptive analysis.
The school boards’ participatory processes and procedures describe the ease of public participation and Board minutes measure the level of public participation. I compared the school districts’ board policies on the public’s participatory processes for consistency, ease of public participation, and compliance with Indiana Code - Title 5 - Article 14 - Chapter 1.5 - Public Meetings.

The fourth data source came from semi-structured interviews with boards of trustees’ members from the three school districts, to gain their perspective on the public’s participation in education policy decision-making and to fill in any gaps found in the board documents or minutes. I contacted 19 trustees for participation in the study using email solicitation or through telephone solicitation. Three trustees agreed to participate in a recorded telephone interview with 11 interview questions (one trustee from District 2, and two trustees from District 3). A fourth trustee from District 1 was unable to participate in a telephone interview due to scheduling conflicts, but agreed to participate by responding in writing to the interview questions and by
providing additional written comments relevant to the research topic (Appendix C – School Board Of Trustee Interview Questions). Unsigned consent forms were emailed to the participants prior to the interviews or written response. The recorded telephone interviews ranged from 22 to 42 minutes and were transcribed by Fivver/Week020 transcription service, uploaded in Nvivo, analyzed, and coded with descriptive coding (See Appendix B - Codebook). All files are password protected and downloaded to an external drive that is secured in a safe. Due to the small number of interview participants, I will not identify the trustees’ school district when discussing the results.

**Research question 2.** Does parental and community participation in the implementation of education policies influence educators’ and teachers’ perceptions of students with learning disabilities?

**Sample population.** The sample population for this question consisted of 62 secondary education teachers employed by the three school districts (Table 2.2). The total population of secondary teachers employed by the districts was 791 (Indiana Department of Education, 2014b) at the time of the study, but only 460 had valid email addresses publicly available on the websites of the high schools within the districts. Recruitment email was sent to these 460 teachers to participate in an electronic survey to measure teachers’ perceptions of parental and community involvement in the development and implementation of education policies, and the learning environment of students with LD. The recruitment email included an unsigned consent form. I received 78 responses, but three respondents indicated that they were not teachers, and 13 respondents only answered demographic questions.

**Measures and variables.** Teachers’ perceptions of parental and community involvement in the development and implementation of education policies, and the learning environment of students with LD are the primary measures.
Table 2.2. Teacher Survey Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=Number of teachers that participated in the electronic survey
Source: SurveyMonkey

Data collection and analysis. The teacher survey was designed using SurveyMonkey tools (SM) and contained 6 questions or multiple level statements (Appendix D – Teacher Survey). The recruitment email to the participants included a link to the survey housed on the SM website. SM collects survey responses and permitted the researcher to conduct descriptive analysis to compare the responses by school district. The survey data was also imported to SPSS statistical software to conduct a chi-square test to evaluate statistical associations between the teachers’ perceptions of the value of public and parental participation in education policies and implementation practices for students with LD, LD learning environment, and the value of a public/private partnership. I compared the school district performance data and the parents of students with disability survey data analysis to the chi-square test results to determine whether there might be a relationship between parental and public participation, and teachers’ perceptions. All files are password protected on the researcher’s laptop and downloaded to an external drive that is secured in a safe.

Research question 3. What kind of public/private framework may be developed to benefit students with learning disabilities, with or without a school district’s involvement?

Sample Population. The sample population for this question consisted of two educationally focused organizations that provide services to students in the communities in this study, the four school boards of trustee members discussed under the first research question, 62
teachers who completed the teacher’s perception survey, and the parents who completed the state’s parents of children with disabilities survey. The two community-based non-profit organizations were selected because one organization serves as the primary source of services to students with a specific learning disabilities and the other organization offers math services to any student from those experiencing challenges to those with high math achievements. The first organization offers after school services at no cost to students on a first come first serve basis, and training for teachers and potential tutors in the Orton-Gillingham approach. The second organization also offers after school services at no cost to students, in-school services or workshops designed for professional development of teachers, and custom training institutes for educators from across the country. The school trustees could share school district perspectives on existing collaborations and experiences with external organizations that may serve to meet unmet needs of students with learning disabilities. Teachers could give their perceptions on the value of educational assistance available from outside organizations. Parents of SDs could share their perspectives on schools effort at encouraging parental engagement with planning for the child’s education needs, and their engagement with external organizations.

Data collection and analysis. The organizational participants were solicited using email recruitment, followed by a telephone call. They were sent an email of an unsigned consent form. The participants agreed to recorded telephone interviews that lasted 20 to 40 minutes. The audio recordings were transcribed by Fiverr/Week020 transcription service, uploaded to Nvivo, and coded using descriptive coding (See Appendix B – Codebook). The leaders in the two community based organizations responded to 11 interview questions about the educational services provided, services that are needed but not provided, and their relationships with schools, teachers and parents of SDs (Appendix E – Organization Interview Questions).
Boards of Trustees provided data through two interview questions that discussed relationships and partnerships with outside organizations that offer educational services to students. The teachers’ survey produced data from three questions that gauge teachers’ perceptions of external organizations as a means of providing external services to students with LD. The parents’ survey conducted by the state included two questions that provided data on engagement of parents of SDs with outside agencies and organizations.

I calculated descriptive statistics of the teachers’ survey data using Excel. The files are maintained on the study’s laptop. All files are password protected and downloaded to an external drive that is secured in a safe.

**Limitations**

The study has limitations regarding random sampling and access to secondary datasets for the Parents of Children with Disability Survey. The trustees and organization leaders who participated in interviews may not represent all of the perspectives in the population of trustees from the three school boards of trustees and directors of organizations that provide education services to students in the school districts’ geographical area. The participants were recruited based on availability of contact information. The dataset for the IDOE’s 2011/2012 Parents of Children with Disability Survey was not publically available, therefore, I was unable to segregate data responses specifically from parents with students with LD from all other responses, or conduct a chi-square test to evaluate statistical associations between the districts’ responses. Future research is need that focuses specifically on parents of students with LD, and students with LD to better understand the students with LD learning environments.
Ethical Considerations

Data were stored on a laptop and downloaded nightly to an external drive with password protection. Only the researcher on this study had access the information and no reports or publications will use information that can identify any individual as being part of this project. A coding system using a random computer-generated 9-digit number was assigned to protect the identity of all interview participants. No documents or recordings included any information that identifies the participants.

The codebook and recordings are maintained on an external hard drive that is stored nightly in a locked home safe. The audio recordings will be destroyed once my thesis has been accepted, defended, and approved. All electronic files are maintained on an external drive and stored in a locked safe.

All data were either from publicly available data sets or were collected with consent from the participants and thus met all requirements for research involving human subjects.
Chapter 3
Results and Discussion

The three contiguous school districts serve communities that are linked geographically and that share many public and other services (e.g., hospitals, universities and colleges, shopping). District 1 serves an affluent population with a low percentage of minorities (11%) and low-income families. The median income in 2011 was $91,600 and there are 15 schools in the district (City-Data, 2015b). District 2 is the smallest district of the three cases with 11 schools. The district serves a community with a low percentage of minorities (18%). Its 2011 median income was $33,986, much lower than the median income for the District 1 population (City-Data, 2015a). District 3 is one of the largest school districts in the state with 39 schools. The community is a diverse population composed of over 46% minorities, with a 2011 median income of $32,439 (City-Data, 2015b).

Parental Participation

Survey results: Parents of children with disability. The IDOE’s 2011/2012 Parents of Children with Disability Survey (PCDS) was used to gauge the parents of SDs’ perceptions of the district’s efforts to engage them and to self-report the parents’ efforts to participate in planning and implementing programs for their children. The PCDS had 10,753 respondents, a response rate of 6.3%. The survey consisted of 11 yes/no questions and 20 statements with the following ordinal scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree (Appendix A). The three school districts that are the focus of this study had 319 parents to participate in the survey, 13% of whom were parents who have children with a specific learning disability (See Table 3.2). District 3 had the lowest academic performance level of the three districts, almost three times as many students with disabilities, and a larger percentage of parents of children with
LD participating in the study when compared to District 1. Yet, over 50% more parents of SDs in District 1 participated in the survey.

Table 3.1. School Districts Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Revenue (R) and Expenditures (E) per Student</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities’ Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>$11,143 (R) $10,144 (E)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Exceeded - 3 PGs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,068</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>$16,246 (R) $14,602 (E)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Exceeded - 2 PGs Did not Meet - 1 PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19,308</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>$15,540 (R) $13,621 (E)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Did not Meet - 3 PGs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Indiana Department of Education, 2014b)

(PG – Performance Goals in English/Language/Art (ELA), Math, and Graduation Rates)

Table 3.2. IDOE Survey - Parents of Children with Disability – for Districts 1, 2, and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th># of Parents Participated in Survey</th>
<th>Participant to SD ratio</th>
<th>% of the Survey Respondents with Students with LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over 70% (on average) of the participants responded positively to the yes/no questions. The greatest percentage of positive responses were on questions relating to discussions of options for least restrictive environments (92.7%), engagement in the planning of accommodations and modifications (90.8), and receiving reports on progress in meeting the goals outlined in the child’s Individual Development Plan (IDP) (91.2%). Parents responded less positively to questions relating to receiving information about organizations that may assist parents of SDs (59.9%), participation in school-sponsored activities (68.2%), and participation in training sessions relating to their child’s disability (33.1%). The questions with at least a 10% difference in responses between any two districts related to discussing and planning accommodations and modifications, extended school year options, information on agencies that can assist a student with transitioning, and parents participating in school related activities (Table 3.3). The variable related to information about agencies that can assist students with transitioning had the greatest percentage of differences between the districts, 16.7% between Districts 1 and 2, and 12.4% between Districts 2 and 3. The variable related to parents attending training sessions about their child’s disability had the least positive responses.

Over 90% of the participants (on average) from the three school districts responded positively (Agree or Strongly Agree) to the survey’s 20 statements about their school’s efforts to engage parents in planning and implementing their child’s education program (Appendix A). Thirty percent of the statements had at least a 10-percentage point’s difference in responses between any two districts (See Table 3.3). The statement that related to whether schools’ staff understands their role in implementing the child’s IDP had the greatest percentage point differences between the districts, 16 percentage points difference between Districts 1 and 3 (lower), and 15.8 percentage points difference between Districts 2 and 3 (lower). Greater proportions of parents in District 1 and 2 reported that school staff understood their role in
implementing their child’s IDP than in District 3. Overall, although on some items the districts were very similar, a pattern of lower scores for District 3 compared to Districts 1 and 2 can be seen and is particularly apparent for those questions that are specific to special education. (See Table 3.3.).

**Boards of trustees’ perspectives on parental participation: Parents of children with disability.** Four boards of trustees members participated in interviews that consisted of 11 research questions pertaining to the learning environment for students with LD, and parental, community, and organizational participation in local education policies and implementation processes. While the trustees represented three districts that vary significantly in their demographics, their perspectives on the various stakeholders’ impact were unexpectedly similar. Each board of trustees is empowered to represent all citizens of the Corporation and to function as a policy decision-making body (Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, 215; School City of Mishawaka, 2015; South Bend Community School Corporation, 2015). Two themes emerged from the interviews, (1) parental participation is essential to the success of all students, and (2) greater community and parental engagement is needed at the school district policy development level, but that parental engagement is most impactful at the school level.

All interviewees emphasized the importance of parental engagement in some, if not all, aspects of their child’s education, whether at the strategic planning and policy development level with the board of trustees, engaging at the case conference to plan IDPs and accommodations for SDs, or participating in school programs relevant to their student’s needs. One trustee proclaimed “higher level of parent and community involvement [equals] higher academic outcomes, and lower participation [equals] lower academic outcomes.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>District 1</th>
<th>District 2</th>
<th>District 3</th>
<th>Aggregated Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Options for least restrictive environments</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>92.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Child’s participation in statewide assessments</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Planning accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Justification for child not receiving services in general classroom</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Extended school year options</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Progress reports on goals outlined in IDP</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Options for handing issues not resolved in Case Conferences</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Information on agencies that may assist students in transition</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Information on organizations that assist parents of SDs</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Participation in school-sponsored activities</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Participation in training related to child’s disability Statement</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Treated as an equal partner in planning education needs and goals</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Consideration given when planning Case Conferences</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>91.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 School officials ensure parents understand Procedural Safeguards</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 General education staff provide accommodations as noted in IDP</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Special education staff provide accommodations as noted in IDP</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 All staff understand child’s needs and their role in implementing the IDP</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Child receives all support and services as noted in IDP</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 IDP outlines how progress toward goals are measured</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Progress reports are written in plain English</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 School staff communicate to parents using various media</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 School shows sensitivity to SDs and their families</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Written information is understandable</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 School staff respect child’s cultural heritage</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Knowledge of persons to contact for special education issues</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Teachers are knowledgeable about child’s disability</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 School principal appropriate special education services</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Special and general education staff work collaboratively to implement child’s IDP</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 School encourages student involvement in Case Conferences</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Knowledgeable about federal and state laws on special education</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Special education services have helped to understand the special education system</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three trustees acknowledged that parental and community participation is lower than desired but perceived it as consistent with other school districts, and that greater participation would lend a broader range of community perspectives. Two trustees speculated that the low level of parental engagement in their school districts, particularly at the board of trustees level, might be due to feeling intimidated, and that some parents do not understand the laws and regulations that provide requirements that protect the rights of their children. Two trustees acknowledged that boards of trustees must do a better job at “welcoming” parents and the public into the board’s deliberative processes, that board and school meetings should be adjusted to accommodate working parents, and that boards might engage in collaborative efforts (school, parents, external experts, community) to address individual student level or school-wide concerns that might be presented by a parent or a member of the public. A trustee shared how their school district implemented a technological solution for parents to obtain current information specific to their child, such as, academic performance data, missed assignments, missed classes, and other pertinent information about the students’ learning environment, at the recommendation of board-established committees. Another trustee noted that the district’s success is based on a committed partnership consisting of students, parents and teachers. One trustee captured most, if not all, trustees’ views about the impact of parental participation when he noted that participation or inclusion “happens at the building level, not at the corporation level.”
Community Participation

School boards of trustees meetings. One means of measuring the communities’ participation at the school district’s policy level was by examining public input at boards of trustees meetings. All three school districts’ school boards of trustees have established policies and procedures for public participation consistent with the provisions of Indiana Code - Title 5 - Article 14 - Chapter 1.5 - Public Meetings, and permit the public to participate for at least three minutes during all meetings except during executive sessions. Sections 1.5-6.1 of the Code permit school boards to convene executive sessions for such matters as, but not limited to, security, personnel, collective bargaining, purchase or lease of real estate, and interviews of prospective employees or commercial agents. The boards are required to give the public notice of all executive sessions including the subject matters for discussion.

I examined board meeting minutes from 2010 to 2013 for all three districts. The three districts held over 354 meetings during this period, with the majority of the meetings offering a specified time on the agenda for public participation. The level of participation varied significantly across the districts. While District 3 had the lowest level of academic performance among the three districts during the 2011/2012 school-year, it had the greatest number of meetings and the highest percentage public participation during the four-year review period (Figure 3.1 and Table 3.4). Perhaps surprisingly, District 1 had the highest level of academic performance, yet a lower percentage of meetings with public engagement and the number of individuals participating, when compared to District 3.
Table 3.4. Board of Trustees Meetings and Number and Percentage of Public Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Meetings</th>
<th>Number of Public Participants</th>
<th>% of Meetings with Public Comment Periods</th>
<th>% of Meetings with Public Commenters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District 1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>88.63</td>
<td>20.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 2</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>96.36</td>
<td>16.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 3</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>61.53</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each district had unique methods for engaging certain sectors of the public and the education community. District 1 board meeting agendas included a standing item for a student representative to report on student activities. District 2 has standing items for Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) communications and an employee representative. District 3 permits the public two opportunities to participate during their meetings, first on scheduled agenda items and later on unscheduled topics.
Education policies are derived from federal and state laws and school Boards of Trustees are charged with codifying and implementing those policies at the local level. I found few instances where the public offered comments on the impact of federal or state laws or implementation practices specifically targeted to students with LD or any other type of disability or special need. All districts offered public hearings on certain policy discussions, generally policies that are operational in nature (e.g. campus security, safety, student use of the Internet). The districts employed different approaches to policy development, District 1 employed a leading law firm to conduct the legal analysis on statutory and regulatory changes, and then a board policy committee made recommendations to the board. District 2 used public hearings, and District 3 held discussions of federal or state policy changes in executive sessions before bringing discussions to a public meeting. All districts used their Board of Trustees meetings to celebrate the academic, athletic, and other accomplishments of high achievers. District 3 Board of Trustee meetings were the most robust, and the only board that publically addressed failing schools and low academic performance.

**Boards of trustees’ perspectives on community participation.** All Trustees concur that community participation is essential and that the community serves as a partner in establishing the strategic plan and direction of the board of trustees. Two trustees discussed how the boards invited a broad range of stakeholders to the table to partner in shaping and developing priorities and the strategic plan. Their partnerships included the community, parents, teachers, administrators, businesses, professionals within the school corporation, and other educational stakeholders. One trustee noted that the board plans two meetings a month to better engage the community, one meeting is held in the district’s administration building, and the other meeting is held at one of the schools within the district. However, the trustees also expressed that while community suggestions on education programs are all welcomed, recommendations based on
emerging concepts must be balanced with the likelihood of success, if implemented. Another trustee indicated during his/her tenure with the board of trustees that no member of the community has provided comment on a policy during the policy development stages but that the community has given feedback once the policy has been finalized.

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

Sixty-two teachers participated in the teacher survey that sought to understand whether participation by parents of LD students impacts teachers’ perceptions of students with LD. The survey included three sets of questions or statements. The first two questions sought demographic data, the second set of questions or were multi-level statements pertaining to teachers’ perceptions of parental involvement, and the third set pertained to teachers’ perceptions of the learning environment for students with learning disabilities. The survey included three statements about the teachers’ perceptions of organizations outside of the school corporation that provide services to students with LD.
Table 3.5. Teachers Survey Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>School Districts</th>
<th>Aggregated Average</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  School district encourages parental and community engagement</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Parental involvement is critical to student’s success</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Business and non-profits have contributed to meeting students with LD unmet learning needs</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Parental interaction inside and outside the classroom helps educators understand students with LD academic challenges</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Parental interaction inside and outside the classroom helps educators understand students with LD academic and social strengths</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Frequently recommends organizations that support students with LD</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Comfort with collaborating with parents of SDs about student’s learning needs</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Comfort with collaborating with outside organizations to provide services to students with LD</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of learning environment for students with LD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Students with LD lose negative stigma when placed with general education classes</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Teacher has adequate time to plan for the needs of students with LD in their classroom</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 General education teachers have sufficient skills and knowledge to teach students with LD</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Spends too much time on behavior management problems of students with LD</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Uncomfortable implementing Individual Learning Plans for students with LD</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Teacher has less time to devote to curriculum goals when students with LD are placed in general education classrooms</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Teacher has primary responsibility for all students (with or without a disability)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*24% of participants responded N/A
**Parental involvement.** Only 60% of all participants agreed that their school’s Board of Trustees encourage parental, community and teachers’ participation in the board’s decision-making processes. A vast majority (87%) agreed that parental involvement in developing policies and implementation practices is critical to students’ success. When teachers were asked whether parental interactions inside and outside of the classroom aided in their understanding of the students with disabilities’ academic challenges, and academic and social strengths, 91% responded that the parental interaction influenced their perceptions. Ninety-two percent of the teachers responded that they are at ease collaborating with parents of SDs concerning their students’ learning needs.

**Learning environment for students with LD.** IDEA and other education legislation require schools across the country to blend the classrooms for students with disabilities with students in the general population. When teachers were asked about their perceptions of the blended classroom helping to remove the stigma associated with the learning disability label, only 35% of the teachers believed that students with LD lose the stigma when those students are integrated or blended into general classroom settings. The participants had an equally low perception (34%) that teachers in the general population have sufficient skills and knowledge to teach students with LD. Only 29% of the teachers agreed that they are comfortable with implementing an IDP.

While 92% of the teachers agreed that they have primary responsibilities for the achievement of all students, only 21% of the teachers agreed that they have sufficient time to plan for the needs of students with LD, 56% believe that their time devoted to curriculum goals has decreased with LD students in the classroom, and 55% responded that they spend too much time on behavior management issues related to students with LD.
I conducted a chi square test to determine whether the responses of teachers from a district with higher levels of participation (board of trustee level or parental survey) differed significantly from teachers in a district with lower levels of participation. I found no statistical significance for all variables except one: *I spend too much time on the behavior management problems of students with learning disabilities* \( (p=0.011) \). Teachers for District 2 had the highest score (73%) and District 1 the lowest (15%) with District 3 nearer to District 2 (62%). This indicates that it is likely that the perceptions related to the time spent on behavior management among students with an LD are related to the attributes of that particular school district (See Table 3.5). Overall, the districts were not systematically different from each other.

**Organizations Providing Educational Services**

**Directors of organizations.** Two organizations participated in the study. One organization offers a range of services specifically for students with language disabilities, and the other organization provides services in technology (to all students, including students with disabilities). Both organizations offer tutoring services to students, training for parents (teaching methods for specific learning disabilities), and professional development opportunities to teachers and administrators. The director of one organization interacts with the school districts through teacher training, and student referrals. All student services are available at the organization’s facility. The director of the other organization partners with schools in the districts to assist with integrating certain subjects into classroom instruction, and offers professional development. The instructional guidance serves to assist the students rather than the teachers. Student services from this organization are offered through programs at the organization’s facility and at a local eatery.

Neither of the participating organizations incorporates parents in their service programs. One organization requires that parents are present during the tutoring sessions for safety and
security purposes but the parents do not engage in the lesson. The other organization conducted a program many years ago that was centered on parents working with the students. Most of the parents who participated in that program were from middle to upper class socioeconomic backgrounds, and the enrollment of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds was less than desired because the parents of those students could not participate, even though the programs themselves were at no cost. This program was discontinued because it failed to generate a diverse group of students.

I asked the organizations about unmet needs, specifically, what services their organizations are unable to offer students with LD. One organization asserted the need to develop an interactive relationship with public and private schools to bring effective and proven training techniques for students with LD to all teachers, and eliminate the need for institutions such as theirs. The other organization expressed the need to bring individualized services to students and indicated that they have insufficient resources to dedicate the necessary time to individual students.

Both organizations spoke of relationships with universities for teaching opportunities, internships, or volunteer services. The organizations differ significantly with respect to their role in education policy decision-making. The director of one organization indicated that the organization’s governing board has embraced the concept of a neutral policy, which means that the organization does not advocate for certain education policy positions. In contrast, the director of the other organization believes her organization has a role in educating policymakers so that they truly understand the impact of their policy decisions.

**Boards of Trustees.** All trustees emphasized the importance of community-based organizations that offer education services or opportunities for students with disabilities, noting that a few of the organizations in the local geographical area have serviced the community for
many years. Most trustees were unable to speak with specificity about their district’s relationships with the organizations but they were aware that one existed.

**Surveys – teachers and parents of children with disabilities.** The teachers’ survey included three statements to measure the teachers’ perceptions of external organizations that offer services to students with LD. In general, the teachers did not have a high perception of these organizations or they did not have knowledge of the organizations. While 42% of the teachers indicated that they recommend external organizations to parents of SDs, 18% of the participants did not respond to the statement. Over forty percent of teachers agreed that community organizations help to meet the unmet needs of students with LD, but almost a quarter of the participants did not respond to the statement. While 92% of the teachers indicated that they are comfortable collaborating with parents regarding the students’ needs, only 66% of the teachers agreed that they are comfortable with collaborating with organizations (See Table 3.5).

**State survey of parents of children with disability.** The survey included two questions about the dissemination of information to parents on agencies and organizations that support SDs and parents. Seventy percent of the participants responded positively about receiving information about agencies that might assist with their child’s transition, and 60% responded positively about receiving information about organizations that support parents of SDs (See Table 3.3).

**Discussion**

My research sought to answer three questions to better understand the impact of certain stakeholders’ input on education policies and implementation practices for students with learning disabilities, and to compare districts that varied in performance on these factors. Parents and the community have varied opportunities for participating in education policies. This study examined participation using the Parents of Children with Disability Survey (PCDS) results and
public input as recorded in the minutes of school districts’ boards of trustees meetings. The PCDS was used in this study to measure participation because the survey was designed specifically to understand engagement efforts between the parents of SDs, including parents of students with LD, and schools within each district, and to understand how parents feel about the special education services their schools provide. Parents that participated in the survey provided vital feedback to the IDOE that may serve to shape service delivery. I conducted a survey to better understand teacher’s perceptions of parental involvement in education policy decision-making and implementation practices, as well as their perceptions of the learning environment for students with LD to ascertain whether parental involvement influences teachers’ perceptions of students with LD. Interviews with school Boards of Trustees members added insight about the school districts’ challenges and successes with public participation efforts, information not found in the boards’ public participation policies and procedures. The interviews with directors of organizations that provide services to students from the school districts offered insight on the organizations’ missions, structures, and types of services available to students from the three school districts. These sources of data represent two levels of participation: implementation versus policy decision-making.

The findings demonstrated that the level of public participation in education policies for students with LD varied by the level of decision-making. However, differences among districts were generally absent despite the differences in overall performance; there was no evidence that the school district with the higher academic performance had greater overall public participation. The findings confirmed the literature in terms of the positive impact of parental involvement in policies and programs decisions that affect their child’s education. Lastly, the findings provided evidence that students with LD may not be served adequately in the current systems; the data showed (1) that feelings of intimidation might serve as a barrier for some parents that stifles
parental engagement and prevents parents from advocating for the needs of their disabled children; (2) a need for training for all teachers in effective teaching techniques for students with LD; and (3) a need for additional organizations and volunteers to provide education services for students with LD.

First research question. The first research question asked whether school systems with high academic performing learning-disabled students have greater parental and public participation in local education policy development and implementation practices. The findings revealed that the school system with the higher academic performance had greater participation at the implementation level (the school level), but lower participation at the local policy development and decision-making level (board of trustees level) when compared to the district with the lowest academic performance. District 1 had the best level of academic performance when compared to the other two districts; the largest number of participants in the PCDS, and the lowest respondent to SD ratio. The respondent to SD ratio indicates that each survey participant from District 1 represented 2.06 SDs (154 participants/318 SDs), compared to District 3, with a respondent to SD ratio of 8.76 (100 participants/876 SDs). However, the effects did not always favor District 1. One question asked about participating in training specific to their child’s disability. Fewer parents in District 1 reported taking the training when compared to the number of parents in District 3 who reported taking the training (32.4% and 37.4% respectively).

When examining the Boards of Trustees’ meeting minutes, participation was noted for every meeting or hearing that included a public comment period, and for each instance a parent, student, or a member of the community offered comments on a scheduled or unscheduled board issue. Student participation was not included if a student provided a routine update on school social and athletic activities. District 1 had fewer Boards of Trustee meetings than the other two districts, and far fewer community members participating during the public comment periods at
the meetings. Given that District 1 has outstanding academic performance outcomes, these findings seem to challenge the Burton theory of participation, which argues that broader civic participation on policy decisions produces better policy outcomes.

However, the low level of community participation at the Board of Trustees meetings may not necessarily reflect a lack of public input on policy decisions. Low participation may indicate that the board uses other means to garner input from parents and the community. A District 1 Board of Trustees member interviewed in this study stated that the board employs portions of the Carver Model of Board Governance (CMBG). CMBG is grounded in the concept that authority equals accountability, and that no authority is released without careful deliberation, and the appropriate delegation of authority (footnote A). This Board did not detail which aspects of CMBG the board had or had not incorporated. Since this information was provided by the participant who provided responses via email, I was unable to ask follow-up questions. District 1’s Board of Trustees meetings are formal and could serve as a best practice in board decorum, with trustees and community members exercising the utmost diplomacy when addressing board matters from the approval of local policies that implement federal requirements to operational matters relating to safety and security. This trustee explained the Board’s success in their partnership with students, teachers, and parents. It is also possible that in a lower performing district, parents may be motivated to attend public hearings because of high levels of concerns that they cannot otherwise resolve at the school level, whereas in high performing districts parents may not have as many issues they wish to bring to the attention of the board. Future research is needed to examine the nature of the public comments and parents’ motivation and perception of effectiveness of their comments to understand if participation is a sign of active and constructive engagement on the district level or a sign of frustration with lack of ability to effect change on the school level.
Given the scope of the research project, I was unable to examine the other means by which the Boards of Trustees may or may not garner parental and community input of policy decisions. These results raise at least two questions for further research: Does participation at the implementation level produce better academic outcomes than participation at the policy decision level? Are there other attributes of the school district that contribute to the districts’ success (e.g., the economic and education background of the majority of the parents)? Burton argued that public participation matters, but there is so much unknown about the impact of participation (Burton, 2009). The findings revealed different levels of parental and community participation among the three school districts. Burton would describe the school district policy level of decision-making as strategic and the school implementation level as individual. The strategic decisions have global impact and tend to draw the broader levels of participation. The individual level, affecting fewer people, has less participation (Burton, 2009). The results from two school districts are consistent with Burton’s theory, but the results from the highest performing school district challenge the theory. The questions resulting from the findings are consistent with Burton’s argument that more research is needed to add to the body of knowledge on public participation (Burton, 2009).

Second research question. The second question asked whether parental and community participation in the implementation of education policies influence educators’ and teachers’ perceptions of students with learning disabilities. The survey results demonstrate that parental participation influences teachers’ perceptions of students with disabilities, including those students with a specific learning disability. The respondents across the three districts agreed at a greater than 90% rate that parental participation in all aspects of an SDs learning environment is critical to the SDs success.
While the findings revealed that parental participation influenced teachers’ perceptions of students with LD, the study also found that teachers’ have low perceptions of students with LD in their general education classrooms, as evident from the teachers’ survey. Only 35% of the teachers believed that placement of students with LD in the general education classrooms would remove stigma, 21% believed they have sufficient time to plan for the needs of students with LD, and 24% indicated that general education teachers have appropriate training to teach students with LD. Further research on teachers’ perception of the learning environment for students with LD is vital to understanding how best to address the deficiencies revealed in the study.

The findings prompted several questions to consider for future research with more in-depth data on these factors: Do teachers’ low perceptions of the impact of students with LD in general education class impact their perceptions and academic outcomes of students with LD? What are the actual levels of parental participation in the three school districts? Do general education teachers’ trained in effective teaching methods for students with LD have more positive perceptions of the learning environment than teachers’ without the specialized training?

**Research question 3.** The third research question asked what kind of public/private framework might be developed to benefit students with learning disabilities, with or without a school district’s involvement. The analysis identified several areas where there are deficiencies in the learning environment for students with LD and when a public/private framework may serve to fill the gap. The deficiencies relate to training for teachers, parents, and students; advocacy for parents and students with LD; tutors for students with LD; and relationship building with local schools.

The results revealed that the majority of the respondents believe that the integration of students with LD into the general classroom creates a burden on teachers who do not have sufficient skills to adequately provide for the needs of the students and to appropriately manage
their behavioral issues. The directors of community organizations interviewed in this study expressed a similar concern: many teachers are ill-prepared to teach and provide for the needs of many students with LD.

The PCDS revealed a very low percentage of parents engaging in training specific to their child’s disability. The reason for the low engagement is not clear but trustee interviewees expressed the need for greater effort to schedule parent meetings and activities after normal business hours to increase parental engagement. Students with LD will continue to struggle if teachers and parents are unable to meet their needs. This study revealed a void in policy discussions about training students with LD on their specific disability, and on learning strategies that will improve their academic, vocational, and life skills outcomes.

The Trustee interviews revealed low parental engagement in Board of Trustees’ deliberations may be due to parental intimidation. Parents who are intimidated by school boards of trustees, school administrators, and teachers are not effective advocates for their child’s needs. The intimidation may result from a lack of understanding of the laws and policies, their personal level of education, or a lack of resources to challenge the bureaucracy.

The PCDS and the teachers’ survey indicated a lack of knowledge about the organizations outside of the school corporations and less than half of the study participants engaging these entities. With respect to tutors, the directors of the community organizations interviewed suggested more tutors for organizations like theirs would allow them to offer additional individualized sessions, to assist students in the classrooms, and to reduce the sometimes year-long waitlist for students seeking assistance.

The CHI Test revealed statistical significance on one teacher survey question: I spend too much time on the behavior management problems of students with learning disabilities (p=0.011). The teachers in District 2 (73%) and District 3 (62%) had similar percentages of
positive responses, and District 1 (15%) clearly had a much lower. The demographics of the
student population and communities vary, but Districts 2 and 3 residents’ mean income is much
lower than the residents of District 1, and Districts 1 and 2 are similar in percentage of minority
population. Additional research is necessary to better understand the behavior issues. Are the
issues related to the poverty affect on behavior, and/or related to teachers’ perception of low-
income and minority students? In 2014, District 3 was examined for a discipline disparity;
African American students received approximately two-third of all out-of-school suspension yet
they comprise of almost one-third of the student population.
Chapter 4

Recommendations and Conclusions

**Recommendation: Learning Disability Partnership Framework**

Given the continual academic lag of SDs, and demonstrated gaps in the learning environments for students with LD, the time is ripe for a model Learning Disability Partnership Framework (LDPF) that aims specifically to benefit students with LD. Notwithstanding the statutory provisions of IDEA and NCLB that promise all students a free quality education, there are still significant numbers of students with disabilities who are not afforded sufficient resources and support to reach their full achievement potential and to successfully transition to colleges and universities or vocational opportunities. This study examined the extent of the impact of various stakeholders’ participation on education policies and programs for students with LD, and found gaps that lose this vulnerable population of students in systems that are measured by standardized test results, significant numbers of teachers who are ill prepared to address LD students’ needs, noticeable proportions of parents who are likely intimidated by the bureaucracy, and too few organizations that provide student support. The LDPF presents an opportunity for local communities to create a learning environment that embraces individual learning styles and personalized teaching techniques and tools. This will address the currently unmet needs of students with LD and their parents, through community collaboration, empowerment, and motivation.

**Existing models.** Over 120 independent elementary and secondary education schools throughout the United States offer education programs for students with learning disabilities (Dylexia Help, 2015). All of the schools seek to provide a learning environment that embraces students who have different learning styles, offer individualized learning programs, and promote
self-advocacy and resiliency. These schools have incorporated concepts found in Landmark College’s approach to providing higher education to students with LD. Landmark College, the University of Georgia, and the Georgia Institute of Technology have developed and implemented positive higher education learning environments and programs for students with disabilities that could serve as models for a proposed learning disability partnership framework appropriate for implementation in communities across the nation. These approaches were developed in the context of college education of students with LD, but the features and processes apply to students with LD in general, thus the approaches taken by the three colleges can be adapted and applied to a secondary education setting such as the high schools examined in this study. Generally, colleges serve students as the stakeholders, rather than the parents; however, programs focused on students with LD generally integrate parental involvement as these students often do need additional help before reaching independence, therefore, the models can be applied to high schools where parental engagement plays a significant role. These models also do not limit their approach to students’ functioning in college; rather, they integrate components that involve preparation for college and thus integrate approaches for students of all ages.

**Landmark College.** LMC is located in Vermont and it is one of a couple of schools in the United States with a mission to educate students who have learning disabilities. LMC, established in 1985, has become an international leader in transitioning, and educating students with LD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The college began by creating an institution of higher learning for students with dyslexia. Over the past 30 years they have expanded their mission to include a broader range of students with disabilities (Landmark College, 2014d). A core element of LMC’s mission is to empower students to utilize learning techniques that are most effective for their needs because no two students with LD are the same (National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2015).
LMC offers summer programs to high school students with LD, ADHD and ASD, to help the students better understand their disabilities, teach them learning techniques that will assist them when they return to their schools, and educate the students on how to advocate for their individual needs. The college also offers transitioning programs for students entering their first year of college or for current college students. LMC does not require students to show evidence of a disability; their focus is to empower students needing their level of services. LMC also holds LD summer seminars and symposiums for educators, on researched and proven teaching techniques that produce positive academic outcomes for students.

Landmark features centers for student support that are appropriate models for the LDPF. LMC’s Drake Center for Academic Support is a hub for students seeking assistance with reading and writing, and the development of effective study skills and positive study habits (Landmark College, 2014b). The college Math Support Center offers individual and group tutoring services to meet all of the students’ math needs (Landmark College, 2014a). The Science Support Center provides individual services and a location for science students to study and collaborate (Landmark College, 2014c).

**University of Georgia and Georgia Institute of Technology.** The University of Georgia (UGA) and Georgia Institute of Technology (GT) developed and implemented the BreakThru e-mentoring island in Second Life; a 3D virtual world where users can connect for a host of purposes (e.g. socializing, artistic expression, and education). The UGA program links students with SD with mentors who are secondary education teachers, graduate students and faculty in the science, technology, engineering, and math (commonly known as STEM) curriculums. The concern is that many students with SD would not consider STEM-related degrees or careers which provide significant opportunities for future employment and success, so the goal is to increase the level of interest with the use of BreakThru, which connects SDs, via smartphones
and texts, directly to mentors with whom they would not otherwise have access. Mentors are recruited and trained using the BreakThru mentoring island (University of Georgia, 2015).

The BreakThru project was developed with the intent to effect change by increasing students with disabilities’ interest, participation, and success in STEM programs at all levels of higher education, through recruitment, mentoring and support efforts. UGA, GT, and LMC embrace similar core concepts and expected outcomes: classroom support, self-advocacy, self-determination, and reduced anxiety with math and science programs (BreakThru, 2015).

**Major goals and objectives.** LDPF’s success is predicated on establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with a given community (students, parents, schools and universities, and businesses). The LDPF major goals and objectives are framed to capture the LMC, UGA, and GT core concepts, and to address the learning environment deficiencies revealed in the study. The LDPF is intended to augment services provided by existing school corporations. The major goals are established to meet the needs of the community by focusing on collaboration, empowerment, and motivation. The objectives provide an outline of measurable strategies necessary to achieve the goals (Figure 4.1).
**Major goals.**

**Goal 1.** Collaborate with students, parents, schools and universities, businesses, and the community to create a learning environment that kindles students’ interest in learning, nurtures individual intellectual capacity, and build determination and resilience.

**Goal 2.** Empower students with self-understanding of their specific disability and unique learning style, self-advocacy, and evidence-based effective educational tools and services.

**Goal 3.** Motivate students through mentorships designed to foster students’ interests in specific academic and vocational disciplines.
Objectives.

To Reach Out. Establish relationships with local schools, parents, colleges and universities, the community, and the information technology industry to support the LDPF’s goals (volunteerism, funding, and referrals). (Goal 1)

To Train and Tutor. Educate students about their disabilities, self advocacy, learning and testing strategies and techniques that are effective for their specific disability, and on the use of technology and other resources to augment other learning tools. (Goal 1 and 2)

Provide parents of students with disabilities with information on federal, state, and local laws governing their child’s education, their child’s specific disability, techniques effective for their child’s learning style, to enable them to navigate the bureaucracy, and become stronger advocates for their disabled child. (Goal 1)

Professional development for teachers on evidence-based teaching techniques for students with LD. (Goal 1)

Tutoring service for students provided by tutors trained in teaching techniques shown to benefit LD. (Goal 2)

To Mentor. Facilitate mentoring relationships between secondary education students with college students and professionals to increase the number of students with LD who successfully transition to colleges and universities. (Goal 3)

To Inform. Establish a repository of information (online and paper) about research, teaching strategies, emerging technologies, and universities’ programs designed for students with LD (Goal 1 and 2)

Strategies.

Academic learning center (ALC). Enhancing students’ knowledge and understanding about their disability and teaching them effective learning techniques is the key to success for
many students with LD. Providing a learning center to offer daily academic tutoring support in math, reading, writing and science helps to level the playing field for LD students. Tutoring services would be available for students of all ages. LMC has developed winning approaches and concepts that empower students to face and manage their disabilities, which should be replicated around the country, to benefit students who are rising to the ninth grade and beyond. LDPF would partner with LMC to employ affordable, web-based technologies to bring LMC’s best practices and successful strategies to communities around the country.

**Teaching center.** Education statutes have failed to include provisions that require schools to employ teachers who specialize in teaching techniques that have been successful for students with LD. Yet, evidence-based intervention for different types of LD exist, and many educators access training when resources and training courses are available, to better prepare themselves with teaching methods that may be effective for students with various learning disabilities. As revealed in the study, one area organization offers training to local teachers but believes that the training should be made available to all educators. Students with LD are one of the largest groups of SDs. The LDPF would partner with local and national organizations that provide training in teaching techniques such as multi-sensory techniques, universal design for learning approaches, and with LMC to bring their training to a broader audience. LMC has developed affordable webinars that offer training in “researched-based practices” effective for students with LD, ADHD and ASD (Landmark College, 2015). Parents would benefit from the learning center by availing themselves of any webinar available for the teachers, and by participating in LDPF training of federal education statutes, e.g., IDEA, ESEA, and NCLB.

**Center for outreach.** A mentoring program would employ a controlled virtual environment to link high school students to college students and professionals in the LD students’ chosen field of interest. The mentors will serve to provide subject matter knowledge to
students that may guide their academic course selections, motivate students during challenging courses, and provide insight on college options.

Community outreach is critical to the LDPF success. Outreach to schools is necessary to ensure teachers gain the necessary training to refer students needing assistance, and to refer parents seeking support to understand their child’s disabilities. Businesses would supply tutors, technology, and technology training.

**Potential organizational leadership structures**

*University based partnership (UBP).* A university based LDPF offers an optimal leadership approach because it brings the vast resources of a college or university (e.g. faculty, students, and alumni) to the hosting community, and it promotes reciprocity with the community and university. UBPs have been effective in encouraging reciprocity with universities and low-income communities throughout the United States, focused mainly on economic revitalization, transitioning youth to adulthood, and developing built environments (Reardon, 2006). A UBP offers the opportunity for the university to test educational and partnership theories and concepts using community as a willing study population, it is a center of empowerment and inspiration, and presents a body of experts begging to impart their subject matter specific knowledge and leadership abilities (Reardon, 2006; UCLA - Office of Instructional Development, 2015).

UBP offers broad networking power through other partnerships the university might have with corporations and companies for developing talent through student internships, work-study opportunities, and permanent placement after graduation for long-term sustainability in most disciplines. Many universities have offices that manage the schools’ research projects and sponsored programs, an invaluable resource for securing funding through grants and corporate sources. Lastly, in most instances, a UBP has the immediate trust from the community if the university has been apart of that community for a number of years.
Non-profit organization (NPO). The non-profit option is a viable leadership approach and there are endless examples of successful organizations that provide educational and other community services throughout the US. An NPO may represent the philanthropic arm of a for-profit entity or it might operate as an independent organization. Affiliation with a corporation or other for-profit organization provides fiscal security, an instant pool of potential volunteers, a body of experts (e.g., grant writer and mentor) and potential trainers, and trust from the community if the affiliated organization has a positive reputation in the community.

The independent NPO will have at least two establishment requirements (if the organization does not currently exist), articles of incorporation and bylaws, and IRS exemption status (Internal Revenue Services, 2015). Building trust, capacity, funding, and a positive reputation in the community will take time to achieve. Leadership is critical, and having a reputable member of the community leading the establishment, relationship building, and recruitment of resources efforts is a positive step toward building community trust. Funding is a challenge for most independent NPOs because grant writing and fundraising skills are essential, and the organization is completely dependent on grants and donors’ generosity.

For-profit Business (FPB). The for-profit business is a viable option but many students with LD might never benefit because the services are fee based. The primary purpose of the LDP is to support the expressed intent of the IDEA and NCLB, that every child must be afforded a free quality education. The LDP should be viewed as an extension of any school district or corporation, established to assist with meeting the requirements of the IDEA and NCLB.

Conclusion

The research study sought to understand the impact of certain stakeholders’ input in education policies and implementation practices affecting students with LD by examining public participation policies and procedures and levels of parental and community participation in three
school districts; teachers' perceptions of parental and community engagement and the learning environment of students with LD; and organizations providing education services to students in the school districts’ service areas.

The findings demonstrated that the level of public participation in education policies for students with LD varied and there was no evidence that the school district with the higher academic performance had greater overall public participation. The findings confirmed the literature in terms of the positive impact of parental involvement in policies and programs decisions that affect their child’s education. The final findings showed a need for advocacy for parents of students with LD; training for all teachers in effective teaching techniques for students with LD; and additional organizations and volunteers to provide education services for students with LD.

The deficiencies found in the learning environments for students with LD and the persistent lag in their academic performance are sufficient reasons to support the development of a learning disability partnership framework with three major goals. First, to create a learning environment that nurtures, empowers, and motivates students with LD with the collaboration of parents of LD, schools and universities, businesses and the community. Secondly, to empower students with LD with knowledge about their disabilities, and self-advocacy skills, and with learning techniques and tools that complement their learning style. Last, to motivate and inspire students with LD interest in learning, and academic and vocational disciplines.

The Boards of Trustees meeting minutes revealed a significant lack of discussion relating to students with any disabilities. In over 300 meetings of policy decision-makers, the minutes revealed no advocates championing policies, practices, or any matter related to the educational needs of students with disabilities. The LDPF can build advocacy capacity among students and
parents, and then perhaps their voices will impact decisions that lead to improved academic outcomes for students with LD.

My research adds to the body of knowledge in several ways. The study focuses specifically on the impact of the public participation process on education policies to students with LD, and my literature review revealed very few studies on the subject. The study cases are neighboring school districts in the Midwest; studies that might have included cases from the Northeast or far West may have very different findings. And, one finding challenges the public participation theory that greater participation yields greater outcomes.

Studying factors that affect LD students’ academic outcomes is a vital step toward understanding whether existing federal and state statutes are sufficient for ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, receive a quality free education. The lagging academic outcomes for SDs are an indicator that there are weaknesses in education systems. Further research is necessary to determine whether public and parental participation at certain levels of decision-making are more impactful on LD students’ academic outcomes than other levels of decision-making (e.g. school district level or school level). Understanding these students’ perceptions, perspectives of parental engagement, teachers’ attitudes toward them, and the impact those attitudes have on the students’ academic outcomes is critical to making necessary improvements and changes to the learning environments. A comparative study that examines general education teachers’ perceptions (teachers with and without training on teaching techniques for the students with LD) of the learning environment is necessary to determine whether their perceptions differ, and if training might impact overall perception.
Appendices

Appendix A: IDOE Parents of Children with Disabilities with Disabilities

ENGLISH VERSION [ID Code]

This is a survey for parents of students receiving special education services. Your responses will help guide efforts to improve services and results for children and families. For each statement below, please select one response choice by placing a 5 in the appropriate box. In responding to each statement, think about your experience and your child’s experience with special education throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. Parents with Internet access are encouraged to complete the survey online at http://survey.surveymonkey.com/s/idios. Parents with more than one child receiving special education services should complete one survey per child.

Question

1. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed options concerning services in the Least Restrictive Environment.
2. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed how my child would participate in state-wide assessments (DSEF, IAR).
3. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed and planned for accommodations and modifications that my child would need (i.e., test modality, preferential seating, oral, strategies to deal with behavior).
4. Written justification was given for the extent that my child would not receive services in the general classroom.
5. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed extended school year options.
6. I received reports about my child’s progress toward goals as outlined in his or her Individualized Education Program.
7. The child’s teacher explains what options I have if a base course cannot be reached in the Case Conference Committee meeting.
8. The school provides information on agencies that can assist my child in transition.
9. I was given information about organizations that offer support for parents of students with disabilities.
10. I participate in school sponsored activities.
11. I attended meetings regarding the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Questions

1. I am treated like an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child’s special education needs and goals.
2. When scheduling the Case Conference Committee meeting, consideration was given to my availability.
3. Teachers and administrators ensure that I have fully understood the Procedural Safeguards (the rules in place to keep the rights of parents).
4. General education personnel make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child’s Individualized Education Program.
5. Special education personnel make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child’s Individualized Education Program.
6. All staff understand my child’s needs and their role in implementing my child’s Individualized Education Program.

Appendix B

Indiana Department of Education
Supporting Student Success

Parent Survey 2011-2012

The survey is designed to gather feedback from parents of students receiving special education services. Your responses will help improve the services and results for children and families. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey online at http://survey.surveymonkey.com/s/idios. Parents with more than one child receiving special education services should complete one survey per child.

Question

1. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed options concerning services in the Least Restrictive Environment.
2. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed how my child would participate in state-wide assessments (DSEF, IAR).
3. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed and planned for accommodations and modifications that my child would need (i.e., test modality, preferential seating, oral, strategies to deal with behavior).
4. Written justification was given for the extent that my child would not receive services in the general classroom.
5. At the Case Conference Committee meeting, we discussed extended school year options.
6. I received reports about my child’s progress toward goals as outlined in his or her Individualized Education Program.
7. The child’s teacher explains what options I have if a base course cannot be reached in the Case Conference Committee meeting.
8. The school provides information on agencies that can assist my child in transition.
9. I was given information about organizations that offer support for parents of students with disabilities.
10. I participate in school sponsored activities.
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Questions

1. I am treated like an equal partner with teachers and other professionals in planning my child’s special education needs and goals.
2. When scheduling the Case Conference Committee meeting, consideration was given to my availability.
3. Teachers and administrators ensure that I have fully understood the Procedural Safeguards (the rules in place to keep the rights of parents).
4. General education personnel make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child’s Individualized Education Program.
5. Special education personnel make accommodations and modifications as indicated on my child’s Individualized Education Program.
6. All staff understand my child’s needs and their role in implementing my child’s Individualized Education Program.
# Appendix B: Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codebooks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Board of Trustee Policies, Procedures, and Meetings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Improvement Needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achievement Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistive Services or Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closed Meeting or No opportunity to Comment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborations with organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborations with teachers and administrators</td>
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<td>Communications to the public</td>
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<td>Community Efforts or Projects</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community effort - donation of funds</td>
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<td>Diminishing Returns</td>
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<td>Diversity - In class rooms</td>
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<td>Ease of participation</td>
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<td>Education Improvement efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings - During Business Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>No public comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Revisions and Development Process</td>
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<td>Public Comments</td>
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<td>Public Hearings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response to Public input</td>
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<td>School Board visits</td>
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<td>School district Recognition of achievements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education and Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Meeting - No public forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title 1 - Low income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value of Public participation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: School Board of Trustees Interview Questions

1. Who has a role in establishing the school board strategic plan, policies, and the implementation approaches relating to students with learning disabilities?

2. Describe some of the things your district does to engage the community, parents, teachers, and students?

3. How does the school system build public support on its strategic plan, policies and other guidance decisions?

4. How would you categorize the level of parental and community engagement on policy decisions?
   a. Poor
   b. Average
   c. Good

   If poor, what actions has the school board taken to increase participation?
   If good, what actions does the school board take to have such good engagement?

5. Has your board specifically addressed the lagging academic outcome for students with disabilities?

6. What types of services does your district provide specifically for students with learning disabilities?

7. Does your school board partner with community or business organizations that provide extended or unmet services for students with learning disabilities? (Example, the Masonic Learning Center.)

8. Do you find that schools within your district with higher academic outcomes have a higher level of parental and community participation in the development and implementation
of local education policies than the schools with lower participation? Why do you think that is?

9. In what ways do you think you could strengthen your public participatory process?

10. What are the most significant benefits or detriments that broader participation has on student outcomes?

11. Can you provide an example or two of community partnerships that have produced positive results for students with learning disabilities?
## Survey of Secondary Education Teachers’ Perceptions of Parental and Public ...

1. I am a secondary education school teacher.
   - Yes
   - No

2. I teach in the following school district:
   - South Bend Community Schools
   - Penn-Harris Madison School Corporation
   - School City of Mishawaka
   - Not Sure
   - Other (please specify)
Tell me to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

3. My school district encourages parental and public participation (including teachers) in its school board decision-making process.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

4. I am interested in your perceptions of parental involvement in policy development and policy implementation processes. Please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental involvement in the development and implementation of education policies for student with disabilities is critical to the students’ success.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Businesses and non-profit organizations (e.g. Masonic Learning Center, Robertson Community Learning Center) have contributed to meeting the unmet needs of students with learning disabilities.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction with parents of students with learning disabilities inside and outside the classroom helps me to understand the students’ academic challenges.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction with parents of students with learning disabilities inside and outside the classroom helps me to understand the students’ academic and social strengths.</td>
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<td>I frequently recommend that parents of students with disabilities contact local organizations that provide support services for the parents of and students with disabilities.</td>
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<td>I feel comfortable collaborating with parents of students with disabilities about students’ learning needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable collaborating with organizations that provide education services specifically for students with learning disabilities about students’ learning needs.</td>
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</table>
5. I am interested in your perceptions of the learning environment for students with learning disabilities. Please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with learning disabilities lose the stigma of being viewed as &quot;different&quot; or &quot;failures&quot; when placed full time in general education classrooms.</td>
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<td>I have adequate time to plan for meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities in my classroom.</td>
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<td>General education teachers have sufficient skills and knowledge to teach students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.</td>
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<td>I spend too much time on the behavior management problems of students with learning disabilities.</td>
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<td>I do not feel comfortable implementing personalized learning plans when students with learning disabilities are placed full time in my classroom.</td>
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<td>When students with learning disabilities are placed full time in the general education classroom, the time I can devote to curriculum goals decreases.</td>
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<td>I have primary responsibility for the achievement of all students (with and without learning disabilities) in my classroom.</td>
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Please use the comment box to clarify any of your responses.

6. Comment Box.
Appendix E: Organizations Interview Questions

1. Do you work in partnership with local school districts? If so, which ones?

2. What type of support services do you provide for all students?

3. Are there services specifically designed for students with learning disabilities? If so, for which learning disabilities?

4. What is the range, in terms of percentages, of students seeking assistance from your organization has a learning disability?

5. Are students referred to your organization by school administrators or teachers? If not, how are your students referred to you?

6. How do you market services provided by your organization?

7. Are parents actively engaged with students during the support sessions? Why or why not?

8. What additional services provided by your organization or another partnership do you believe will aid students with learning disabilities?

9. Does your organization offer in-classroom services to local schools?

10. Does your organization have a partnership with a local university to offer internship credit hours for tutoring services provided to your organization?

11. Does your organization participate in policy decision-making at the state level with the Indiana Department of Education or at the local levels with the school boards? If so, describe the last time you did that.
# Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Approval

## Notification of IRB Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>December 18, 2014</th>
<th>IRB #:</th>
<th>CPS14-12-03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator(s):</td>
<td>Neenah Estrella-Luna Elaine Baker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department:</td>
<td>Doctor of Law and Policy College of Professional Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>20 Belvidere Northeastern University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Project:</td>
<td>Understanding the Impact of Various Stakeholders' Participation in the Development and Implementation of Education Policies for Students with Learning Disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Sites:</td>
<td>Permission Pending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent:</td>
<td>One (1) unsigned consent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per CFR 45.46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DHHS Review Category:</th>
<th>Expedited #6, #7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Interval:</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Approval Expiration Date:** DECEMBER 17, 2015

**Investigator’s Responsibilities:**

1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

**Signature:**

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

**Signature:**

Jan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
References


http://www.advocacyinstitute.org/ESEA/AIWhySWDsNeedNCLB.pdf


Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*: ERIC.


Michigan Department of Education. (2002). What Research Say About Parental Involvement in Children's Education
In Relation to Academic Achievement. Retrieved June 1, 2015, from


