

July 12, 1999

**PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS HAVING CHILDREN ENROLLED
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**Prepared by
Department of Educational Accountability
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions of parents having children enrolled in Special Education in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Of particular interest was parents' perceptions of the quality of service climate and the academic instruction of special education programs; the entry process and/or annual review meeting of special education; the extent parents reported being involved in discussions of their children's Special Education; and the extent parents were satisfied with their children's program meeting the goals of the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and with their children's academic and socio-emotional progress.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method

To obtain the perceptions of parents having children enrolled in Special Education, a random sample of parents was chosen. Students who received Special Education services through MCPS during the school year 1997-98 served as the sampling frame or universe from which parents having children enrolled in Special Education were chosen.

Three groups of students were excluded from the sampling frame:

- Students who had graduated during the 1997-98 school year or during the summer of 1998 (N = 698);
- Students whose parents had brought proceedings against MCPS special education and were included in a parallel telephone survey (N = 266); (These parents were surveyed in a separate study.)
- Households having more than one student receiving Special Education services (N = 1,652). (Interest was in achieving household estimates. Having more than one

survey completed by one household would unduly influence estimates, as attitudes of parents would be expected to be inter-related.)

Of particular interest was to describe perceptions of parents having children in each of the Special Education disability categories. Some disability categories had very few cases. Therefore, a simple random sample of the entire Special Education student population would yield too few cases from which to describe parent perceptions in each of the disability categories. To provide for larger sample sizes in each of the disability categories, a stratified-random sampling method was used in which disability categories served as the strata.

To do this, students in the Special Education population (or sampling frame) were aggregated by disability categories (see Table 1). Students were then sampled from each of the eleven disability categories. Category sample sizes were calculated so that resulting sample sizes would yield a precision of $\pm 5\%$ for any given percentage from the survey. Because the total number of cases in each category varied, the “finite population correction”¹ equation was used to determine the sample size that would achieve an error of $\pm 5\%$ for any given survey responses percentage from each of the disability categories.

Oversampling for Nonresponse. Assuming not every sampled parent would respond to the survey, each category was oversampled to achieve a final sample size that would yield a $\pm 5\%$ error rate for any given survey response percentage from each of the disability categories. Expecting a completion rate of 66%, each disability category was oversampled by 50% to achieve a final survey sample with a precision of $\pm 5\%$ for each disability category. (For example, if 100 parents were selected in the original sample, then an additional 50 were oversampled to yield a total sample of 150; an assumed 66% completion rate would yield 100 which is the sample size needed for $\pm 5\%$ error rate.)

Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed collaboratively by members of several committees and MCPS departments. These included: the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee; Dr. Margaret McLaughlin, Chair of the Board of Education Classical Program Review of Special Education; Ms. Margaret Flagg, Parent Educator, MCPS Parent Information and Training Center; the Superintendent's Advisory Committee for Special Education which includes representatives from all the major special education advocacy and parent groups in Montgomery County; and staff from the Department of Special Education and the Department of Educational Accountability.

¹ Narins, P. (1994). The finite population correction. Keywords, Vol. 55., pp. 4-5. Keywords is a quarterly magazine published by SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL.

The questionnaire consisted of 60 items. Parents responded to survey items relating to: (1) the quality of service climate and the academic instruction of special education programs; (2) the entry process and/or annual review meeting of special education; (3) the extent parents reported being involved in discussions about their children's Special Education were considered; and (4) the extent parents were satisfied with their children's program meeting the goals of the IEP and with their children's academic and socio-emotional progress. Appendix A contains a copy of the complete questionnaire.

Much of the questionnaire content was taken from previous surveys of MCPS parents. Thus, comparisons could to be made among various parent groups, for example, parents of elementary school Special Education students compared to parents of elementary school general education students.

Survey Administration

Mail Survey. Initially, selected parents were mailed a survey packet containing an introductory letter, questionnaire, and Business Reply Envelope. The introductory letter explained the purpose of the survey and how parent responses would be analyzed and reported. Parents were instructed to complete the questionnaires and return them in pre-addressed, postage-paid envelopes. Of 2,929 parents, 522 parents completed and returned questionnaires in the initial mailing, representing 17.8% completion rate.

A few months later, parents who had not completed and returned questionnaires were telephoned and told to expect another survey packet and were requested to complete and return questionnaires. In the second mailing, 387 parents completed and returned questionnaires, and when combined with the first mailing, represented a 31.0% completion rate (909 / 2,929). Because the completion was relatively low, a sample of parents who had not completed the mail survey was sampled to be followed-up in a telephone survey.

Telephone Survey. To achieve a higher completion rate, 600 parents who had not responded to the mail survey were randomly selected and telephoned. The mail survey was adapted for a telephone interview. Of the 600 parents, 38 refused and 122 telephone numbers were nonworking and new telephone numbers were not available through Directory Assistance. Three hundred parents completed the telephone survey, representing a 62.8% completion rate (or 300 completed interviews / 600 parents in the sample – 122 parents who were judged as “ineligibles,” or parents who could not be reached).

When the mail and telephone surveys were combined, the overall completion rate was 46.0%, or 1,348 / 2,929. Completion rates for parents having children in the various disability categories ranged from 45% to 57% (see Table 1). The two exceptions were the categories, Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (32%) and Traumatic Brain Injury (17%). However, the latter category had very few cases in the population and sample,

and thus, is heavily influenced by few parents who may or may not have responded to the survey.

Weighting

Students were disproportionately sampled from each of the disability categories. In other words, the rates of sampling from the categories were not the same. In order to achieve sample sizes yielding an error rate of +/-5% (see above discussion), disability categories with smaller numbers of students were sampled at much higher rates than categories with larger numbers of students.

To derive a final sample that combined responses obtained from parents of students from all disability categories, sample data were weighted so that each disability category reflected its proportion in the MCPS Special Education population. That is, disability categories having lower sampling rates than others had to be “inflated.” To do this, the inverse of the sampling fraction was applied to each stratum, i.e., the inverse of proportion of responding parents having children in the disability category divided by the proportion of students in the disability category in Special Education student population.² Table 1 displays the percentage of students in each of the disability categories for the Special Education population, the initial sample, and parent respondent sample, in addition to weights for the various disability categories.

RESULTS

Representativeness of the Sample

The sample of responding parents (weighted sample) appeared to be representative of all parents having children enrolled in Special Education. Table 2 reports the demographic characteristics of students in the Special Education population. Additionally, demographic characteristics of students whose parents had responded to the survey are reported.

Only slight variations (< 5%) in the background characteristics were observed between students in the Special Education population and students of parents who had responded to the survey (weighted sample). Background characteristics included race/ethnic group, gender, intensity level of Special Education services, Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and grade level (see Table 2). There were, however, slightly fewer African American (- 6.5%) and more white (+7.9%) parents who had responded to the survey than were in the Special Education population.

² Wright, S. R. (1978). Quantitative methods and statistics: A guide to social research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 24-27.

Comparison of Parents Who Completed the Mail Survey and Telephone Survey

To detect possible differences between parents who had completed the mail survey and those who had completed the telephone survey, background characteristics and survey responses between the two groups were compared using multiple *t*-tests. (A multiple statistical comparison was not possible (e.g., multiple analysis of variance), as many parents on several survey items had responded “not applicable,” resulting in a very low analytic sample size in analyses including all survey items.)

Parents who completed the survey over the telephone were more favorable toward Special Education than parents who had completed the survey by mail. The mail and telephone survey groups differed significantly on 21 of 51 survey items. On all but 2 of the 19 survey items, mean responses of parents who completed the telephone survey were higher than mean responses of parents who completed the survey by mail. These results may be, in part, explained by greater percentages of African American and Hispanic parents who responded to the telephone survey (30.1% and 12.9%, respectively) than to the mail survey (16.1% and 10.1%, respectively). In other parent surveys, these two racial/ethnic groups responded with higher levels of satisfaction than other racial/ethnic groups.³

Results here when combined with the fact 63% of the parents completed the telephone survey compared to 31% of the parents who responded by mail, suggest that parents who had not responded to either the mail survey or telephone survey would be at least as satisfied, and perhaps, even more satisfied as parents who had responded.

Perceptions of Parents Having Children in Special Education: Comparison among Disability Categories, Intensity Levels, and Other Student Demographic Characteristics

Using parent responses to the survey questionnaire, perceptions of parents having children in Special Education were organized by the following content areas:

- the quality of service climate,
- the quality of academic instruction of Special Education programs,
- parent involvement in their children’s education,
- the entry process and/or annual review meeting in Special Education,
- the extent parents reported being involved in discussions about their children’s Special Education were considered, and

³ Parent and Student Satisfaction with Elementary Schools in Montgomery County (October, 1998) and Parent and Student Satisfaction with Middle and High Schools in Montgomery County (January, 1997). Rockville, MD: Department of Educational Accountability, Montgomery County Public Schools.

- the extent parents were satisfied with their children’s program meeting the goals of their IEPs and with their children’s academic and socio-emotional progress.

Additionally, there was interest in describing perceptions of parents having children in Special Education by:

- Disability category,
- Intensity level,
- Whether students received Special Education services for the first time,
- Student enrollment in an MCPS or non-MCPS program,
- Race/ethnic group,
- FARMS, and
- ESOL.

Tables 3 through 6 display percentages of parents who were satisfied with various aspects of Special Education, namely, Special Education service climate, academic instruction, entry process and/or annual review meeting, parent involvement in discussions about their children’s special education services, and general satisfaction. Results relating to each area are discussed more fully below.

Special Education Service Climate

About 85% or more of the parents were either very satisfied or satisfied with nearly all aspects of the Special Education service climate (see Table 3). Two areas that slightly fewer parents rated satisfactorily were staff informing parents of ways to help in school (81.7%) and supervision of students on the school bus (78.2%). Even so, over three-quarters of the parents were satisfied with these areas.

Differences in Satisfaction with Service Climate

By Disability Category and Intensity Level. Comparisons of the responses of parents having children in various disability categories and intensity levels revealed some differences in their perceptions.

- Parents of students with speech and language impairments were more satisfied with several of the items, particularly questions relating to staff communication, their child feeling safe, and welcome at school.
- Parents of students with other health impairments felt less satisfied with some of the communication from staff and cooperation from the principal.
- Parents of students receiving intensity level 2 services were more likely to report that staff kept them informed of ways to help, and that their child feels welcome and a part of the school.

By First-time versus Continuing Program Participation. Perceptions of parents whose children were receiving Special Education services for the first time did not differ from parents of continuing students.

By MCPS versus non-MCPS Program Participation. Parents of students enrolled in MCPS programs did not differ from parents of students in non-MCPS programs on survey items relating to service climate.

By Race/Ethnic Identification, FARMS Participation, and ESOL Participation. A few differences in responses were observed when findings were grouped by race/ethnic identification, by FARMS participation, and by ESOL participation.

- Parents of Asian students agreed more frequently that the principal and the counselor were interested and cooperative, that staff effectively handled students who misbehaved, and that their child felt safe at school.
- Parents of students participating in FARMS and parents of students in ESOL were less satisfied with staff keeping them informed of school rules and policies, but were more satisfied that staff effectively handled students who misbehave.
- In addition, parents of students in ESOL reported that their child feels safe and welcome and a part of the school.
- Parents of students participating in FARMS were more likely to report that the counselor is interested and cooperative when discussing their child.

Academic Instruction

About 85% or more of the parents were satisfied with their children's academic instruction (see Table 4). Areas that received the most parent satisfaction were teachers expecting the child to do well (93.7%) and teachers being interested and cooperative when the parent discussed his(her) child (93.5%).

Differences in Satisfaction with Academic Instruction

By Disability Category and Intensity Level. Comparisons of the responses of parents having children in various disability categories and intensity levels revealed some differences in their perceptions.

- In general, parents of children with speech impairments, parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and parents of children with autism expressed higher levels of satisfaction with academic instruction. These groups of parents were

more satisfied with teachers providing extra help and being interested and cooperative than parents in some of the other groups.

- Parents of children who are seriously emotionally disturbed, parents of children with other health impairments, and parents of children who are orthopedically impaired were less satisfied with some aspects of academic instruction, namely, their perceptions that their child is receiving a good education at this school, that staff recognizes students for their best efforts, and that staff helps their child learn how to resolve problems with other students.
- Parents of children receiving different intensity levels of service did not differ in their evaluation of academic instruction.

By First-time versus Continuing Program Participation. Parents of first year Special Education students were more likely than parents of continuing students to express satisfaction with academic instruction, in particular with survey items regarding appropriate schoolwork, teachers providing extra help, teachers expecting their child to do well, and staff helping their child learn how to resolve problems.

By MCPS versus non-MCPS Program Participation. Parents of students in MCPS programs and parents of students in non-MCPS programs did not differ in their perceptions of academic instruction.

By Race/Ethnic Identification, FARMS, and ESOL Participation. Parent perceptions of academic instruction also did not differ by race/ethnic group, FARMS participation, or ESOL participation.

Parent Participation in Their Children's Education

Parents reported being very involved in their children's education. Nearly all parents helped their children with homework (96.9%) and attended back-to-school nights and other school events (90.1%). Fewer parents volunteered to help with school activities (69.4%) and attended PTA meetings (64.1%).

Differences in Parent Participation

By Disability Category and Intensity Level. Parents of students with speech and language disabilities and parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing were most likely to report volunteering at school activities. Parents of students with speech and language disabilities, parents of students with concomitant impairments and parents of students who are orthopedically impaired were most likely to report helping with homework and projects.

Parents of students receiving intensity levels 1 and 2 services reported more school participation, in particular, volunteering to help with school activities, attending back-to-school nights, and helping with homework and projects.

By First-time versus Continuing Program Participation. Parents of continuing students reported more school participation than parents of students enrolled for the first time in special education.

By MCPS versus non-MCPS Program Participation. Parents of students in MCPS programs and parents of students in non-MCPS programs did not differ in their report of school participation.

By Race/Ethnic Identification, FARMS Participation, and ESOL Participation. Comparisons by other demographic characteristics showed some differences in participation.

- Parents of white students reported volunteering and helping with homework more frequently.
- Parents of Hispanic students reported attending PTA meetings more often.
- Parents of students in FARMS reported less frequently participating in school activities.
- Parents of students in ESOL reported less frequently volunteering and helping with homework, but more frequently attending PTA meetings.

Entry Process and the ARD Meeting in Special Education

Most parents (80% and higher) were satisfied with various aspects of the entry process and/ ARD meeting of Special Education (see Table 5).

In particular, parents were satisfied with: information regarding why an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee meeting was being held (90.0%); feeling comfortable about talking about their concerns (93.6%); understanding the terms and technical language at the ARD meeting (93.6%); understanding the written reports and other materials at the ARD meeting (94.8%); school staff's listening to their concerns at the ARD meeting (95.2%); and the ease of asking questions when they didn't understand at the ARD meeting (96.2%).

Areas rated by fewer parents as satisfactory were whether the ARD committee discussed ESY services (76.2%), transition services (71.4%), related Special Education services (67.2%), and participation in countywide and statewide testing programs (54.3%). Only 66.0% of the parents for whom the survey item was applicable reported having been told an interpreter would be made available if needed. Additionally, 74.4%

of the parents said that they were given alternative meeting dates if they were unable to make the scheduled meeting.

Differences in Satisfaction with the Entry Process and the ARD Meeting

By Disability Category and Intensity Level. Some differences among parents of students in different disability categories were observed. Specifically, parents of students who are seriously emotionally disabled were less likely to agree that staff had listened to their ideas and concerns, that it was easy to ask questions, that they felt like an equal partner, and that they were satisfied with decisions made by the ARD committee about their child's special education program. Appendix B displays the percentages of parents satisfied with the entry process and the ARD meeting. Percentages are displayed by disability category and intensity level.

Parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and parents of students who are visually impaired were more likely to report that the ARD committee discussed participation in the general education curriculum, participation in countywide and statewide testing programs, and related Special Education services. Parents' perceptions of the entry process and the ARD committee meeting did not differ by their children's intensity level of service.

By First-time versus Continuing Program Participation. Parents' perceptions of the entry process and the ARD committee meeting did not differ by their children's first-time involvement in special education.

By MCPS versus non-MCPS Program Participation. Parents of students in non-MCPS programs were more likely to report that ESY services were discussed at the ARD committee meeting.

By Race/Ethnic Identification, FARMS Participation, and ESOL Participation. Perceptions of the entry process and the ARD meeting varied when survey data were analyzed by the children's race/ethnic identification.

- Parents of white students were more likely to report that they understood the terminology and the reports.
- Parents of African American students were less likely to agree that they felt comfortable talking about their concerns.
- Student participation in FARMS or ESOL was not associated with parents' perceptions of the special education entry process.

Parent Involvement in Discussions of Special Education Services

Generally, parents felt school staff had involved them in discussions of their children's Special Education services (see Table 6). Parents agreed that their ideas were considered by school staff (88.4%), that parents were informed of appropriate program options (79.4%), that school staff discussed ways their children could receive instruction with general education students (82.8%), that parents knew who to go to with problems concerning their children's education (78.5%), and that parents were informed on how to make changes to their children's Special Education services (78.0%).

Differences in Satisfaction with Involvement in Discussions

By Disability Category and Intensity Level. Parents of students with speech impairments were more likely to agree that staff considered their ideas, and parents of students with concomitant impairments were less likely to agree that staff discussed ways their children could receive instruction with all students.

Parents of children receiving intensity level 1 services were more likely to report that their ideas were considered by the school staff, that staff told them how to make changes, that they know who to go to with a problem, and that they were informed of appropriate program options.

Parents' perceptions of their involvement in discussions of Special Education did not differ by first-time involvement in special education or by MCPS/non-MCPS program setting. Race/ethnic identification, participation in FARMS, and participation in ESOL also were not associated with parents' perceptions in this area.

General Satisfaction

Overall, three-quarters (73.5%) of the parents were satisfied with Special Education services (see Table 6). Eighty-two percent of the parents stated that their children were receiving all the Special Education services listed on their children's IEPs, and 83.2% were satisfied that all of the IEP goals had been met. Parents tended to be more satisfied with their children's academic progress (78.7%) than with their children's emotional and social progress (75.6%).

Among parents of students in the different disability groups, those expressing the most satisfaction overall were parents of children with speech and language disabilities, deafness or hard of hearing, or visually impaired. These groups of parents were most likely to express satisfaction with their child's progress and with Special Education services overall.

Parents of students receiving intensity level 2 services expressed the greatest satisfaction with their child's academic progress, emotional-social progress, and with Special Education services overall. General satisfaction did not differ between parents of

first-year and continuing students, between parents of students in programs in MCPS and non-MCPS settings, or between parents of students in different race/ethnic groups. Parents of students receiving FARMS were more likely than other parents to report that their child was receiving all of the special education services contained in their child's IEP. Parents of students receiving ESOL services expressed more satisfaction with their child's emotional-social progress at school, with special education services overall, and that their child was receiving all of the special education services listed on their child's IEP.

Perceptions of Parents Having Children in Special Education Compared to Perceptions of Parents Having Children in General Education

One interest of the study was to compare the perceptions of parents having children enrolled in Special Education to perceptions of parents having children enrolled in general education. To do this, responses for parents in the current survey were summarized by three school levels based on the grade level of their children who were receiving Special Education services (see Table 7). Data from county-wide surveys of parents having children enrolled in general education were reported for survey items similar to those in the current survey.⁴ An absolute difference of about 6% was needed in order for differences between percentages of parents having children in Special Education and percentages of parents having children in general education to be statistically reliable.⁵

School Service Climate and Academic Instruction. In both the Special Education and general education parent groups, levels of satisfaction with the school service climate and academic instruction were generally quite high. For both groups, the level of satisfaction across many of the survey items was high in elementary school but progressively decreased in middle school and in high school.

Parents having children in Special Education were more satisfied with being kept informed of their children's academic progress than were parents having children in general education. Parents having children in Special Education were more likely to report that school staff kept them informed of their children's academic progress than parents having children in general education. This difference was evident at the elementary school, middle school, and high school levels.

⁴ Parent and Student Satisfaction with Elementary Schools in Montgomery County (October, 1998) and Parent and Student Satisfaction with Middle and High Schools in Montgomery County (January, 1997). Rockville, MD: Department of Educational Accountability, Montgomery County Public Schools.

⁵ The expected error is based on maximum variability of a proportion where expected error = square root of $[(p_1)(q_1) / N_1 + (p_2)(q_2) / N_2] \times 1.96$ (z-value when $p < .01$, two-tailed) $\times 100$ (to convert to percentage); p_s and q_s are assumed to be 0.50.

On the other hand, parents having children in Special Education appeared less informed about ways to help out in school and were less satisfied with their children getting a good education than parents of general education students. Even so, 70.4% and 78.0% respectively, of the parents of Special Education students still agreed with these items.

Parent Involvement in school activities. The involvement of parents having children in Special Education was considerably higher than that of parents having children in general education. Parents of students in Special Education were likely to volunteer to help out with school activities, to attend PTA meetings, and to help with their children's homework than parents of students in general education.

School Level Differences Not Having General Education Comparison Data

There were several survey items unique to Special Education services, and thus, no comparison data were available. However, there was interest in how parents of Special Education students enrolled in different school levels answered survey items. Tables 8 and 9 display percentages for parents of Special Education students enrolled at elementary school, middle school, and high school.

Entry Process and the ARD Meeting in Special Education

Table 8 displays percentage of parents of elementary school, middle school, and high school students in Special Education who were satisfied with various aspects of the entry process and ARD meeting into Special Education. Parents of elementary school students in Special Education expressed the most satisfaction with feeling comfortable about talking about their concerns (96.5%) and with decisions made by the ARD committee(90.6%). On the other hand, these same parents were least satisfied with the ARD committee's discussion of countywide and statewide testing programs (52.2%). Parents of middle school students in Special Education were least satisfied with the ARD committee's discussions regarding transition services (64.9%) and ESY services (71.9%).

Parent Involvement in Discussions of Special Education Services

Table 9 displays percentage of parents having elementary school, middle school, and high school students in Special Education who were satisfied with their involvement in discussions of their children's special education services and Special Education overall. Parents having elementary school students in Special Education were most satisfied with the school staff considering their ideas (92.5%), with the school staff informing them on how to make changes to their children's services (80.0%), and with the school staff informing them of who to go to with problems concerning their children (89.2%).

General Satisfaction

Parents having high school students in Special Education were least satisfied in most areas. Specifically, they were less satisfied with their children's emotional and social progress (66.6%), with Special Education services overall (61.8%), with their children receiving all of the services listed in their children's IEPs (72.5%), and with their children meeting their IEP goals (78.2%). In these areas, parents of elementary school students in Special Education were most satisfied and parents of middle school students in Special Education generally fell in between.

Parent Comments

Parents responded to several open-ended questions about aspects of their children's Special Education services. Comments pertained to areas that parents were most satisfied with and those they felt needed improvement and/or change.

Areas of Most Satisfaction. Parents commented that they were generally pleased with their children's Special Education program and, in particular, with speech and language services and occupational therapy services. Parents liked the fact that Special Education classes usually were small and that their children received the special attention he/she needed.

As was reflected in the survey data, parents commented that they were satisfied with their children's teacher(s) and, in particular, with teachers providing the necessary classroom accommodations and educational supports their child needed. Further, parents felt that school staff worked closely with them and provided support to them.

Parents also commented that they were pleased with their children's school leadership and follow-through. Parents felt it was very helpful to have the resource teacher review their children's class schedule and that teachers provided extra help when their child needed it, especially, after-school help.

Areas for Improvement and/or Change. Parents felt that general education classroom teachers should receive more training on the needs of Special Education students, and more efforts should be made to help students with disabilities become more socially integrated in general education programs, that is, to feel apart of the school community.

Parents remarked that the special education process took too long. The evaluation for special education services should occur at a younger age so that "learning time" is not lost. Parents also remarked that there should be a more integrated approach between ESOL teachers and Special Education teachers.

Parents suggested that more professionals were needed to meet the many and diverse individual needs of special education students. Also, school administrators should provide more support to classroom teachers who are already over-burdened with many demands.

Other comments suggested that, in general, parents should be provided with more information about special education services and the process and terminology used; and descriptions of Special Education programs should be given to parents so they can make informed decisions about their children's placement. In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that students with disabilities have a smoother transition between middle school and high school.

TABLE 1. Special Education Students in the Population, Disproportionate Sample, and Parent Respondent Sample

Disability Category	Student Special Education Population		Student Special Education Disproportionate Sample		Parent Respondent Sample		Completion Rate	Wtg.
	%	N	%	N	%	N		
Mentally Retarded	1.6	265	8.0	213	7.8	95	44.6	.21
Hearing Impaired	1.2	205	6.7	180	8.1	98	54.4	.15
Speech/Language Impaired	38.9	6,496	18.0	480	18.4	224	46.7	2.11
Visually Impaired	0.4	69	2.3	62	2.6	30	51.6	.16
Seriously Emotionally Disturbed	7.3	1,222	13.3	354	9.2	112	31.6	.78
Orthopedic Impaired	0.4	71	2.4	65	3.1	37	56.9	.13
Other Health Impaired	2.6	427	10.0	267	10.9	132	49.4	.23
Learning Disability	32.6	5,440	17.9	477	17.4	211	44.2	1.87
Multiple Handicapped	14.3	2,382	17.7	472	19.1	231	48.9	.74
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.2	28	0.9	24	0.3	4	16.7	.67
Autistic	0.5	77	2.8	75	3.0	36	48.0	.17
Other ^a				(260)		(136)	(52.3)	
TOTAL		16,682		2,669	100.0	1,212	100.0	

^a Total number of parent respondents equaled 1,348. Some cases (N = 136) did not have assigned disability codes, e.g., awaiting assessment; received Special Education on non-handicapped basis. The Student Special Education Population had no percentage of such cases; therefore, weights could not be derived for these cases. These cases were not included in either the column number total nor percentage total for the Student Special Education Sample and Parent Respondent Sample.

TABLE 2. Comparison of Demographic Characteristics in the Student Special Education Population and Weighted Parent Respondent Sample

	Student Special Education Population (N = 16,682)		Weighted Parent Respondent Sample (N = 1,209)	
	%	N	%	N
RACE/ETHNIC GROUP				
African American	26.7	4,451	20.2	259
Asian American	5.0	827	6.4	82
Hispanic	14.1	2,347	11.2	144
White	54.0	9,014	61.9	794
American Indian	0.3	43	0.3	3
GENDER				
Male	67.5	11,264	68.2	875
Female	32.5	5,418	31.8	408
INTENSITY LEVEL				
1	5.0	842	4.2	51
2	34.5	5,750	36.3	442
3	18.3	3,045	19.3	236
4	23.7	3,952	23.7	289
5+	18.5	3,093	16.5	201
FARMS (Prior)				
(Now)	13.8	2,458	8.8	118
	31.5	5,605	21.5	289
ESOL (Prior)				
(Now)	10.5	1,859	6.3	85
	4.1	734	2.9	39
GRADE LEVEL				
Elementary school	43.4	7,235	39.2	506
Middle school	23.1	3,847	24.9	319
High school	19.7	3,287	24.3	312
Other (e.g. ungraded, Preschool, itinerant services)	13.9	2,313	11.4	146