



March 2006

SLIIDEA: Increasing Involvement of Parents of Children with Disabilities

Synthesized by Sunil Misra

When Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, it authorized an evaluation to track progress at the state and local levels on the legislative goals of IDEA. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) commissioned a national longitudinal study, the Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SLIIDEA), toward that end. SLIIDEA was tasked with investigating the following nine topics of congressional interest:

- improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments;
- providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum;
- helping children with disabilities make effective transitions from preschool to school and from school to work;
- increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment;
- decreasing the numbers of children with disabilities who drop out of school;
- increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities;
- improving coordination of the services provided under the reauthorization with other pupil services and with health and social services;
- reducing the number of disagreements between educational personnel and parents; and
- increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities.

This document synthesizes information from the SLIIDEA study pertaining to the increased involvement of parents of children with disabilities in their child's education. This synthesis brief was completed by Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education Directors (NASDSE) as part of its cooperative agreement with OSEP.¹

¹ Project Forum extends its thanks to Abt Associates staff, including Julie Fritts and Ellen Schiller, Senior Associate of SLIIDEA, for reviewing a previous draft of this document.

Methodology of SLIIDEA Study

In the 2002-03 school year, surveys were sent to key personnel responsible for, or familiar with, special education issues in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and a nationally representative sample of 959 districts and 4,448 elementary, middle and high schools. Project Forum's document synthesizes the SLIIDEA chapter, "Increasing Involvement of Parents of Children with Disabilities," (Schiller, Bobronnikov, O'Reilly, Price & St. Pierre, 2005).

Background

Involving families in students' education benefits students with disabilities as well as those who are not disabled. Students with disabilities whose parents were more involved in their education missed fewer days of school and were much less likely to fail courses than students whose parents were less involved. Research has demonstrated that the earlier this involvement takes place, the greater the benefits for the child and the family (Bailey, et al., 1998; Dunst, 2002).

Federal policy as it pertains to students with disabilities has long recognized the importance of parental involvement in the schools. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), now known as IDEA, established procedural safeguards and an important role for parents to ensure that their children had access to a free and appropriate public education. The 1997 amendments to IDEA strengthened the parental role and improved the way parents, teachers and administrators went about the important work of ensuring quality education for close to 6.1 million children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Descriptive Profile for the 2002-2003 School Year

At both the state and district level, actions were taken to foster parental engagement. Almost all districts either provided *written guidelines* on parental involvement or were located in states that provided them. Very few states and districts used *rewards* or *sanctions* to increase parental involvement of any kind and even fewer focused on parental involvement of students with disabilities. However, most states did provide *resources* to districts and schools to increase the participation of parents of students with disabilities, although the types of resources varied. Most states provided resources in the form of statewide training, almost three-fourths provided state-supported personnel, and just over one-fourth provided resources in the form of competitive grants.

- Slightly more than one-third of states provided written guidelines on the provision of services such as babysitting, transportation or translation to parents to aid in their participation in individualized education program (IEP) meetings.
- One-half of the states provided support to districts, including contracts or grants, to help parents participate in IEP meetings.
- Almost three-fourths of states offered or sponsored initiatives to evaluate the involvement of parents of students with disabilities in their children's education.

As part of their effort to foster parental involvement, about three-fourths of districts developed, revised or adapted written materials for parents of students with disabilities on at least one topic. The most common topics addressed in these materials were: understanding the law and parental legal rights under IDEA; developing and implementing the IEP; and participating in state- or district-wide assessments, including the use of accommodations and alternate assessments. Other topics included: understanding their child's disability; behavioral interventions; and strategies for successful early childhood and secondary transitions. Although schools made these written materials available, they were not always distributed to all parents. Parents most often received materials on understanding the law and least often received materials on behavioral interventions and early childhood transitions. Almost all districts offered workshops or discussion and support groups on many of the same topics as the written materials.

Schools also undertook initiatives to foster parental involvement. It is possible that districts and schools shared responsibility for providing written materials and holding workshops. Just less than one-half of the schools and districts collected data on parental involvement. Less than one-half of districts and schools reported using such data to evaluate programs and only a few reported using the data for planning professional development.

Few schools reported that all or most of their general education teachers participated in professional development activities related to increasing parental engagement in the education of their children. There was more participation by special education teachers, but still just under one-half of schools reported that special educators participated in professional development on increasing parental involvement. Moreover, only about one-half of schools reported that most of their special education teachers were well prepared in using strategies designed to increase parental participation. An additional 44% of schools said that most special educators are somewhat prepared.

Demographic Profiles of Districts and Schools That Took Action

Larger districts and districts in urban areas were more likely to develop or adapt written materials to support parental involvement of students with disabilities. Larger districts were much more likely than medium-sized or small districts to hold workshops or discussion groups to support parents of students with disabilities. Poverty level, percentage of minorities, percentage of students with IEPs and grade level were not significant factors in district actions.

School demographics were related to having a staff member responsible for improving parental involvement and to teacher preparedness. High poverty, high minority and urban schools were more likely to have a staff member dedicated to parental involvement activities. High poverty and high minority schools were less likely to report their teachers were well prepared in this area.

Relationships Between Actions and Outcomes

Several district and school outcomes were used as indicators for determining whether parents of children with IEPs were involved in their child's education including whether districts offered

workshops and revised or developed written materials to assist parents of children with disabilities, and whether schools reported that their general and special education teachers were well prepared to use strategies to increase participation of parents of children with IEPs in their children's education.

District Provision of Written Materials

Districts located in states that provided resources to increase participation of parents of students with IEPs in the education of their children were more than twice as likely as districts that did not provide such resources to offer workshops to parents of students with disabilities.

Districts located in states that had written guidelines on parent involvement were somewhat more likely to develop or adapt written materials for parents than districts that did not provide such written guidelines. Similarly, districts that themselves had written guidelines on involvement of parents of students with IEPs in their children's education were more likely to develop or adapt written materials for parents than districts that had no such written guidelines.

School Report on Teacher Preparedness

Schools located in districts that received state financial assistance for increasing parent involvement were somewhat more likely to rate most of their general education teachers as well-prepared in strategies to increase parental involvement than schools located in districts that did not receive such state financial assistance. In addition, general educators were more often considered well-prepared in schools that had designated staff responsible for increasing parent participation as compared to schools that did not have a designated staff person. Schools that used professional development resources to increase involvement of parents of students with IEPs also reported higher levels of preparedness among their general education teachers.

Schools with higher levels of special education teacher involvement in professional development designed to increase parent participation were more likely to report that their special education teachers were well prepared in this area. Schools located in states that provided statewide training designed to increase parent participation were less likely to rate their special education teachers as well prepared in strategies to increase parental participation.

District and school level parent workshops

Schools located in districts that offered workshops to parents of students with IEPs were more likely to also offer their own workshops. However, schools located in states that had written guidelines on provision of services to parents to aid in their participation in IEP meetings were less likely to offer workshops for parents of students with IEPs. Schools that reported a higher level of special education teacher involvement in professional development related to increasing parental involvement were more likely to offer workshops for parents.

Other school actions associated with the percentage of schools that offered workshops for parents of students with IEPs include:

- Schools that used funds to increase parental involvement reported offering workshops more often than schools that did not use funds for this purpose.
- Schools that received technical assistance to increase the level of involvement of parents reported offering workshops more often than schools that did not receive technical assistance.
- Schools that had a staff person with specific responsibility for increasing the level of involvement of parents reported offering workshops more often than schools that did not have a staff person.
- Schools that reported that their special education teachers were prepared in strategies to increase parental participation reported offering workshops than schools that reported their special education teachers were not prepared in these strategies.
- About three-fourths of schools with high levels of teacher involvement in professional development reported that they offered workshops. In contrast, only about one-half of the schools reporting that none of their special education teachers participated in professional development and nearly one-half of schools with low levels of involvement, reported offering workshops.

Summary

Public Law 94-142 established an important role for parents of children with disabilities. Successive reauthorizations of the law have supported and strengthened the parental role. States, districts and schools have taken actions such as providing written guidelines, allocating resources and offering workshops to increase parental participation in the education of their children with IEPs. Special education teachers are generally better prepared than general education teachers to use strategies to enable parental participation among parents of students with disabilities.

However, with only one-half of schools reporting that their special education teachers are well prepared to increase parental involvement and even fewer reporting that general educators are well prepared, there is much room for improvement at the state, district and school levels.

Primary Reference

Schiller, E., Bobronnikov, E., O'Reilly, F., Price, C., & St. Pierre, R. (2005, March). Increasing involvement of parents of children with disabilities. In *The Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Final 2nd Interim Report (2002-2003 School Year)*. Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates.

Secondary References

Bailey, D., McWilliams, R., Darkes, L., Hebbeler, K., Simeonsson, R., Spiker, D., & Wagner, M. (1998). Family outcomes in early intervention: A framework for program evaluation and efficacy research. *Exceptional Children*, 64, 313-328.

Dunst, C. J. (2002). Family-centered practices: Birth through high school. *Journal of Special Education*, 36(3), 139-147.

U. S. Department of Education (2001). Family involvement in the education of elementary and middle school students receiving special education. In the *Twenty-third annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: Author.

This report was supported by the U.S. Department of Education (Cooperative Agreement No. H326F000001). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

Note: There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of federal funds when copying all or part of this material.



This document, along with many other Forum publications, can be downloaded from the Project Forum at NASDSE web address:

<http://www.nasdse.org> > Publications

To order a hard copy of this document or any other Forum publications, please contact Carla Burgman at NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Ph: 703-519-3800 ext. 312 or Email: carla.burgman@nasdse.org