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## What special needs programs are available?

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## RUNNING HEAD: **Special needs programs**

### **What special needs programs are available?**

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#### Abstract

Have you ever looked for an answer and found more questions than answers? This is how millions of parents, who have special needs children feel every day. This paper looks at how parents are informed about support programs that are available for their child. The first part of this paper looks at what happens after you receive the information that a child has a learning disability. The second part of the paper looks at how parents are informed about the programs available to help their child. To gather information, I interviewed parents who have a child in special education. The information gathered was used to make a pamphlet. This pamphlet has a list of support services available to special needs students. The pamphlet was given to parents of special needs children.

## What special needs programs are available?

Many parents have to fight to get their children with disabilities the help that they need. Mrs. Smith's<sup>1</sup> story is an example of how hard this can be. Mrs. Smith's son, Jeff<sup>2</sup>, was excited to enter school. He wanted to go to school and be like his sisters. For the first couple of months, Jeff was happy. He was ready to go to school and learn. Then, one day he came home and did not want to go to school anymore. Mrs. Smith talked to her son and found out that he was "in trouble for not writing his name" (personal communication). Going to the school she found out that her son was behind in kindergarten. The school thought that he was just too young and that he would learn next year. Mrs. Smith decided to have her son re-enter kindergarten again. At the time they were moving to a new school overseas. They were hoping that the extra time would help Jeff.

During the next year Jeff was tested to see if he had a learning disability. His testing took five months and came back inconclusive. Jeff was getting one-on-one help each day, because they did not know what type of learning disability he might have, or if he even had one. Jeff's one-on-one time was spent mostly drawing. When the tests came back inconclusive the Special Education teacher wanted to stop working with Jeff. Jeff started to have trouble in class. He was throwing fits and acting out.

Mrs. Smith went to the principal to see what she could do to help. The principal felt that all students should receive the best education that was available to them. The principal put pressure on the special education teacher to help Jeff any way possible. They started to use different tools to help Jeff to learn. Mrs. Smith started to work at the school to be closer to her son. When Jeff started to have a meltdown, Mrs. Smith would pull him out of class and have Jeff work with her.

Jeff had to change schools when the Smith family moved back to the States. Jeff seemed to do better in the new school. For a few months, Mrs. Smith was grateful that Jeff seemed to do better. Then she noticed that Jeff would come home from school and go straight to his room. Mrs.

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<sup>1</sup> All Names are Pseudonyms

Smith did a drop in at the school and found out that Jeff was being sent to the first grade reading class. At the time Jeff was in the fourth grade. She had never been informed of this arrangement by the school.

Mrs. Smith tried to get Jeff tested again. The school district felt that Jeff did not need testing again and that he could be transferred to a new school. They did agree to give Jeff reading assistance five days a week. Mrs. Smith decided that it was time to get a lawyer. Once she told the school district that she was going to get a lawyer, they agreed to give him an oral and written test. He scored high on the oral test, but failed the written part. Mrs. Smith was told “that he was smart and just didn’t want to learn” (personal communication). This time Mrs. Smith did get a lawyer to have Jeff fully tested. In the sixth grade it was found out that Jeff had dyslexia, no short term memory skills and no sorting skills.

When Jeff’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) was written up, Mrs. Smith made them put in that Jeff had to be taught by someone who understands dyslexia. The school district did not have any special education teachers who understood dyslexia. Two teachers were sent to classes to learn about dyslexia and how to teach students. It took constant monitoring of his classes and frequent trips to the school to make sure that he was getting the help he needed. Mrs. Smith’s hard worked paid off in the end, and Jeff learned how to read and graduated from high school.

**What is the Issue?** Have you ever tried to find answers to questions that no one seems to know? Many parents of special needs students feel this way every day. My parents had to fight to get information about support services when I was in Special Education. Other parents had the same problem. At the time there was no internet access. Even today with all the information over the web it is hard to find information about what your school can do for you. This means that students may not get the services they need. They will struggle through school when there is help for them. The problem is that the parents do not know what to ask for when requesting special education for their child.

Many times the “schools will give you a paper or flyer, that gives you the laws and a little information about your Child’s right” (personal communication). During my research many parents expressed how disappointed they were with the school and the information that they were given. One went on to state that “they felt that the school was purposefully trying to deceive them”

(personal communication). If it is not on that flyer or paper then where do parents look for the information that they need? How do children receive the services that would most benefit them?

To find this information I will be looking at different websites, books and interviewing parents of special needs children. Looking at websites I was unable to find information to help me understand what is available to parents about support programs. Some of the sites that I looked at were the California Department of Education State website ([www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)) and the Schwab Learning website ([www.schwablearning.org/](http://www.schwablearning.org/)).

## Literature Review

Over the years, special education has become better and better. As new laws are passed and put into action, the education system changes. Sometimes, the changes are for the good, still other times, the changes can hurt the whole system. One of the better changes was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, otherwise known as IDEA. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “the purpose of *IDEA* include(s) ensuring all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE)”.

(<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C17%2C>). This definition has one word that has caused some debate. What is an “appropriate” education? The Schwab learning website states that FAPE has been defined as a “basic floor of opportunity.” (<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=625>). In other words, while IDEA guarantees equal opportunity, it does not guarantee a specific level of achievement or even a regular high school diploma

The school is responsible for making sure that a child with a learning disability receives an education, this does not include making sure that they get the best education available. To make sure your child gets a good education, you need to make sure that your child’s IEP is fully developed. IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. An IEP is a “...written document that is developed for each public school child who is eligible for special education” (<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=73> 2007). After a child is tested an IEP is written. The IEP is a contact between the school, the parents, and the child. The IEP will state all of the information about the child’s education. This includes the type of support services offered

to the child and how often the IEP team will meet. The IEP can include “support for the student, in the form of accommodation, and Modifications” (Amundson, 2000). The first step in finding out about your child’s learning disability is to have him/her tested. Testing for a learning disability will let the school; you and your child know what type of disability s/he has. To have your child tested you need to have a compelling reason. A compelling reason is not just having bad grades, but not being able to learn to write your name or being in the fourth grade and reading at a kindergarten level. Talking to parents about what happens after they were told; many stated that “A parent needs to gather information from the teachers and any other personnel that come in contact with their child. Once the school is on board, your child will be tested” (personal communication). When the test comes back, the school’s special education department will go over the scores and explain what they mean. A parent should get a clear understanding of what type of learning disability their child has. This meeting will only tell a parent about their child’s disability, it will not give out any information on what the disability is. Most parents will walk away with a little information about the parents' rights and responsibilities. Before the IEP meeting, parents need to research their child’s learning disability. Parents can gather information by going on the web, reading books, and talking to other parents. There is information about different learning disabilities, but not a lot of information about what services are out there. If parents do not do the research before the IEP, they will be relying on what the IEP team recommends for their child. The IEP team will not tell you about all of the services available for your child. They will only tell you about the ones that they think your child needs. This can cause many different problems. Because the IEP is a contract, the child’s education will be based on it. If you feel that your child is not getting all the help that she or he needs, you have to contact the IEP team and make changes to your contract.

Some of the support services that will be mentioned will be classroom aides, extra time on tests, reading comprehension, and mainstreaming. Many school districts are going to mainstreaming or inclusive teaching. This is where the student will spend time in an everyday classroom and will either be pulled out for special needs classes, or has a special education teacher work with them in the classroom. Most people want the best for their child, but some will look at the overall effects on the school and the child.

Who will be at the IEP meeting? The child will only be at the meeting if the parents want him/her there, or if the school feels that she/he should be there. A general education teacher and

a special education teacher will be there, a person who can interpret the results from the test, a person representing the school system, and anyone who has knowledge about the child. This person will either be invited by the parents or the school district. The last person who will be there is the parent(s). There is no one person who will make all of the decisions about the IEP. As a group, “everyone will put in their information about different aspects of the placement” (<http://idea.ed.gov/> 2007).

What happens if someone disagrees with the team? If a parent disagrees with the placement, then they are able to ask for mediation. The mediator will be someone who does not know the child or work for the school district. This person would review the placement and try to get the parents and other officials to work together. If a teacher or other official does not agree with the placement they can file “dissenting opinions” (Amundson, 2000).

Once the IEP process is completed the school has to follow the contact. It is up to the parent to make sure that it is being followed. If, at any time, the parent wants to change the IEP they can ask for a meeting with the special education teacher.

I had a difficult time finding information on the types of services available for special education children. There are many different sites to help parents understand their child’s disability, but not many sites that listed services or programs that are available for children with special needs in schools. Many sites talk about what can be done at home. One site that a parent could look at is [schwablearning.org](http://schwablearning.org). SchwabLearning.org explained that each state has different programs available for students. You need to know what laws your state has. You have to remember that when you are looking at all of the information, there are some programs that might be unavailable in your state. A person needs to know what laws their state has.

Everything that I read has a lot of information about laws that protect the child. Almost all the information that I found was in legal terms. Going to the California’s state website (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/>) I felt like I was going in circles. The site is set-up in a way that you have to know exactly what you are looking for. You also need to know the correct spelling of the words you are searching for. I had to do research to understand some of the information that I found. I could find information about this code and that code, but I would then have to find the information on the code to fully understand it.

All of the information that I found had sections about IDEA. IDEA was the basis to almost all of the sites that I found. Many quoted the law behind IDEA, some explained the

different court cases that helped bring about IDEA, and some broke down the meanings behind the words in IDEA. [Http://idea.ed.gov/](http://idea.ed.gov/) is the government's main site for information about IDEA. Another site that has a lot of information is SchwabLearning.org. It did not matter what state website I went to or what book I picked up, there was a lot of information about how IDEA can help your child.

One book that I found did give a type of list of services that need to be included in an IDEA. *The New IDEA: Survival Guide* (Amundson, E., Holcomb, S., Ralabate, P., (2000) was written to help teachers and staff to understand the IEP process. The book does not list any specific support services that could be included. It mainly states what types of changes could be made to help the child. The book also helps the teacher to understand their role in the IDEA process. An example is "if certain accommodations or modifications need to be in place in your classroom, you have to be notified" (Amundson, E., Holcomb, S., Ralabate, P., (2000).

Throughout my research, I felt that I was unable to find the information that I needed about the types of special education services available. I could imagine how parents feel when they are trying to find the information that could help their child. I did find a lot of information about the IDEA process and state laws throughout my research. This information will be helpful to me later in my career.

## Methodology

**School Demographics.** When driving up to Oakdale Elementary school it looks like an inviting school. This school is an outside school. This means that there is not one building, but many small buildings that makeup the school. There are also no indoor connecting hallways. The students have to go outside to change classrooms. The school sits in the middle of a neighborhood. There are a couple of trees on campus, playground equipment, and a large field. The school day starts at 8:05 a.m. and ends at 2:15 p.m. There is no gym but a cafeteria, which is used for indoor actives when raining, lunch, and school events. One thing that I did see wrong with the school is the trash. If you get to school early in the morning, you will see trash all over the school yard. When I asked the principal about this she stated that, "every night the neighborhood residents leave

their trash around. We have tried to leave out trash cans, but they will knock them over, creating a bigger mess” (personal communication).

**Who Goes to this School?** Oakdale Elementary School has kindergarten through fifth grades with a preschool on site. The following chart shows the school ethnic background, ratio of teacher vs. students, and what percentage of students come from a lower income family.

### *Demographic Classroom*

Students Per Teacher	20.9
Enrollment	397
Economically Disadvantaged	70.5%
Breakdown by Ethnicity	
White	19.1%
Black	10.6%
Hispanic	43.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5%
Multi-Racial	1.5%

(<http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sp/sid=85603> 2007)

The school has a high rate of low income families. Looking at the California Department of Education I found that “70.33%”

(<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Cbeds4.asp?classsize=on&FreeLunch=on&cSelect=MARINA%5EVISTA%5EELEMENT--MONTEREY%5EPENINS--2766092-6026314&cChoice=SchProf1&cYear=2006->

[07&cLevel=School&cTopic=Profile&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit](http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Cbeds4.asp?classsize=on&FreeLunch=on&cSelect=MARINA%5EVISTA%5EELEMENT--MONTEREY%5EPENINS--2766092-6026314&cChoice=SchProf1&cYear=2006-07&cLevel=School&cTopic=Profile&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit) of the students 2007)

of the students are in a free-lunch program. If you compare that to the amount of low income students, you will see that almost all these students are enrolled in the free lunch program.

Out of the 397 students only 41 students are enrolled with a learning disability. The following chart shows how many and what types of disabilities they have:

California Department of Education  
 Special Education Division  
**Special Education Enrollment by Age and Disability**

**Oakdale Elementary**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Mental Retardation</u> (MR)	<u>Speech or Language Impairment</u> (SLI)	<u>Emotional Disturbance</u> (ED)	<u>Other Health Impairment</u> (OHI)	<u>Specific Learning Disability</u> (SLD)	<u>Deaf-Blindness</u> (DB)	<u>Multiple Disability</u> (MD)	<u>Autism</u> (AUT)	<u>Traumatic Brain Injury</u> (TBI)	<b>Total</b>
3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
6	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
8	1	2	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	8
9	1	5	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	10
10	0	2	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	7
11	0	1	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>41</b>
<u>District Total</u>	36	346	38	40	686	1	9	39	1	1,219
<u>County Total</u>	529	1,996	147	191	3,292	23	53	211	19	6,694
<u>State Total</u>	43,522	178,599	27,081	43,498	306,950	207	5,673	39,711	1,798	679,648

<http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/SpecEd/SpecEd4.asp?cSelect=MARINA%5EVISTA%5EELEMENT--MONTEREY%5EPENINS--2766092-6026314&cChoice=SpecEd4&cYear=2006-07&cLevel=School&cTopic=SpecEd&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit&ReptCycle=December>

**Participants:** All parents who have a student with special needs were invited to participate in this study. This group of perspective participants was invited to participate because they have a child with special needs in a mainstreamed classroom. In all, twenty people were invited to participate in this study.

To contact participants for my research, I went to the school and met with the principal. We devised a plan to send home the consent forms. Once I had my letter of approval, I went back to the school and dropped off the consent forms. These forms were sent home with the students. In all, I sent out eighteen forms. I received six forms back from the school. Once I had the forms, I called the parents to set-up interviews. Five of the parents could meet in person; the sixth interview was done over the phone. I was able to interview my mother and a fellow classmate through e-mail. Out of the eight participants that I did interview, two were male and five were female. Out of the eight participants, four were Hispanic, three were Caucasian and one was Asian

**Semi-Structured Interview:** A semi-structured interview was used for the one-on-one interviews. I used this format to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. The following questions were asked to everyone:

- What do you see as the main problem with how parents are informed about programs for special needs students?
- In what ways were you informed about the programs that are in place for your child?
- What do you see as problems with how parents are informed about programs for special needs students?
- What do you think should be done to better inform parents about programs for students with special needs?
- What do you think are the obstacles, drawbacks, or disadvantages to changing how parents are informed?
- What programs or type of support is your child in?
- Is there anything else that you would like to say about programs for special needs students and how parents are informed?

**Procedure.** When it was not possible to interview participants in person, I interviewed participants by phone or through e-mail. With the e-mails, I e-mailed the questions to them and waited for them to get back to me. One-on-One interviews were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and took place at Oakdale Elementary School<sup>3</sup>. One-on-One interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Along with the interviews, I tried to contact the Redcliff School Board. I was hoping that they would be able to give me information about the different programs and services that are set-up to help students. After three weeks, I received an e-mail referring me to the school district's website. On the site it tells you to e-mail the school personnel to receive additional information. I felt like I was getting the run around from them. The site also states that more information is coming soon.

**Data Analysis.** With the interviews, I had tapes of data that I needed to go through. This data would help me to understand what parents are going through and what types of programs their students are in. I listened to the tapes and wrote down all of the information. The information was written down by theme and topic. The main categories that I used to organize the data that I collected are: Types of programs, what the parents felt should be done, what worked for the parents, and what did not work for the parents.

I also looked at what types of experience the parents had. I wanted to make sure that both sides were represented. There was only one interviewee that had a good experience with the school district. I compared their experience with the other seven interviewees. I also looked at the middle class families vs. the lower class families.

## Results

During my interviews, the most common problem that I found was the lack of information available to parents. Many parents were not given information about what services were available to them. The information that they were given was the legal code and they could not understand it. There were parents who were given so much information that they did not know where to start. The information that they were given was in legal language and hard to understand. The

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information was also for every type of learning disability. Parents had to sort through all the information to find some that was relevant to their child. One parent stated that “My child did not have a visual, reading, or hearing impairment. On many of the sites that I found these were the three main disabilities that were talked about (personal communication).

Most participants had to do their own research to understand what was given to them. Information was gathered either by talking to other people or searching on-line. The information that they gathered on the internet was what their child’s disability was, how they should work at home with their child, what the disability meant for their child’s education and what they should do for their child’s IEP. Some of the participants went to group counseling. In group counseling, many found out what support services there are available through the school district and what types of services their child might need. Many felt that it was hard to find the information on the web. You have to know what you are looking for. Most school web pages are not that helpful. There are many sites that advocate for special education.

Some participants felt that they were given the information at the wrong time. Eric<sup>4</sup>, one of the participants, felt overwhelmed with stress, sadness, and uneducated. Eric stated that, “When all the counselors contacted me to explain what they were going to do and their goals, I did not hear most of what they said” (personal communication). Eric’s child was diagnosed with a severe learning disability. Many of the participants were given information to look over in the same meeting that they found out what their child’s test scores were. Parents were trying to understand what the test scores meant when they were given a handout about their child’s disability. The information that they were given was filled with wording that most felt was written more for an overall information guide and not in a language that everyone could read.

Some participants felt that the school did not want to give out information. One of the participants, Elvira<sup>5</sup>, stated that “[...] teachers, teacher’s aides, and therapists, at a risk of losing their job, informed me of services my daughter could benefit from” (personal communication). Another participant, Tess<sup>6</sup>, stated that “[...] teachers feared that they might lose funding for special education. The school needs to cut their budgets and special education was one place to start” (personal communication). The feeling that many participants had is that the school district was putting pressure on the schools to only give out as little information that they could. Parents can get

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a listing of different services available for their child. They have to write up a request for information. One problem that kept coming up was that you need to know what type of information you want. If you do not ask for information on a specific service, you will not be given it. Because many parents did not know what information they needed, they could not get the information they wanted. I, myself, tried to get information about what type of programs or services were available. I was not given any information, but told to go to the school district's website. As I stated earlier in this paper, the school district's site only gives names of people to contact and a list of disabilities. I had to wait three weeks to get this response back.

Out of eight participants, only one felt that the school district was doing their job. Jessica<sup>7</sup> stated that "she has not encountered any problems thus far" (personal communication). She was given information through the Redcliff Regional Center<sup>8</sup>. She felt that the information that she received informed her of all the programs and services available for her child. Most of the information that she received was from teachers. Jessica's interview felt a little like she did not want to get anyone in trouble. When asked if she know anyone in the school district, Jessica stated that she did, but that was not why she was given the information that she received (personal communication).

**What could be done about the problem?** Information seems to be the biggest problem. If schools were willing to give out more information about what could be done for the students, one of the main problems would be fixed. There is a lot of information that parents are given. Having information that is specialized to the child's needs would help the parents understand what their child's needs are. It would also be helpful if the information is written in such a way that everyone can understand it. Just telling the parents what legal rights they have is not enough. They need to be informed about the services that are available to help them and their child. Most of the parents I talked to stated that a brochure or flyer listing and explaining the services would be extremely beneficial.

Another problem is that teachers are not trained to teach students with special needs. More and more school districts are placing special needs students into regular classrooms. This can cause a problem if the teacher has not been trained to handle the needs of the student. Students are pulled out of their classroom, so that they can get the help that they need. Many times they are missing an

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activity that they like. Jeff was pulled out of painting every day. It does not sound like an activity that is important to learn, but it was a part of school that he loved, a part of school that helps children become creative in life. The child can come to resent being pulled out of an activity that they really like. This can lead to them becoming uncooperative. This would be solved if the children were in a classroom with a teacher trained in special needs. It can be a mainstreamed classroom, but the teacher needs to be trained in how to help all of his/her students.

### **Challenges that need to be addressed.**

There are a couple of challenges that would come up. One of the main challenges would be money. With budget cuts, school districts are looking at ways to cut costs and how to keep costs down. If every teacher received the training to learn how to teach special education children, it would be a costly endeavor. However, teachers would also learn the signs of a student who has a learning disability. These signs would let teachers recognize signs of a learning problem earlier. This would mean that the child gets help earlier and could cut down on problems in the classroom.

The next challenge would be a detailed list of all the support services. This could cause a problem within the school district. Again, money would become a factor. Each time a child has a need for a different type of support service, time and room has to be available for that service. One of the interviewee's brought up the fact that if everyone was given a detailed list of all of the support services, parents would want all of the services included in their child's IEP. Many students do not need all of the support services available. If they are in the IEP, the school would have to provide the services. If the school does not have the services available to the student, then the parents can go to court. If the parents were to be provided with a list that had the services that would help their child, it would cut down on the confusion. It would also help the school, they would no longer have the feeling that they would get into trouble if they released the information.

## **Justification of Action**

For my action, I handed out a pamphlet to all participants and to the school. I decided to make a pamphlet to make it easier for parents to be informed about the different support programs available. The only place I was able to find any information listed was in a book for teachers. One book stated that it had a list of "accommodations and modifications" (Amundson, 2000), but it did not list any type of accommodations that were available for students. Talking to

the interviewees, I did not feel like that they received much information about the programs available. I did not want to give out something that looked like a hand out from the school.

After I collected all the data, I was able to look at the different support services listed. I went back to the Radcliff School District's website. It still said that more information was coming. Most participants were given a handout when they were informed about their child's learning disability. This handout was a list of the laws and responsibilities of the parents. Most stated that the information on this handout was only two pages long. The pamphlet was not made as a replacement for what the school gives to parents, but just a little more information for parents.

## Action Documentation

For my action, I handed out a pamphlet at the Oakdale Elementary School. I first had to make sure that the pamphlet was acceptable with the principal. I did not want to step on anyone's toes at the school. The principal did not want me to give out a pamphlet to everyone. She just wanted me to give the participants of the study a pamphlet. I did leave a pamphlet with her to use at a further date. Some of the pamphlets were sent home with the students.

I have not received any feedback on the usefulness of the pamphlet. The feedback that I have received is mainly on how it looks. Tess stated that "this pamphlet does not look like anything the school would give out" (personal communication). She was looking at the use of color and how easy it was to read. I tried not to use many legal terms that would be hard to understand. Some of the participants stated that most of what they read uses terms that are hard to understand. A good example is the California Department of Education website.

Not having made a pamphlet before, I had to find a program that would help me. Looking on the internet I did find some programs but, some of them were a little confusing. One site pointed me to Microsoft publisher. The Microsoft publisher program lets you pick out a design to use. Once I picked out a design, I followed the guide on where to put my information. The last step was to print out the pamphlet and take it to the school.

The principal was impressed with the design of the pamphlet. She wanted to know how the pamphlet was made. I told her about Microsoft Publisher and how easy it was to use. I do not know if she will use this pamphlet at a later date. A pamphlet is included at the end of this paper.

## Critical Reflection

### On Action Taken

Having to decide what to do for my action was the hardest part. I wanted something that could be used by both the school district and parents. I knew that anything that I made would have to be approved by the principal before it could be handed out. I decided to make a pamphlet because it was something that would be easy to read and something I have never done before.

The easiest part of the action was talking to the principal. When I first meet with her, we discussed me handing out some type of information to the parents. I did not know what I wanted to do at the time. She did suggest making a pamphlet or a flyer. She felt that these two would be something that the parents would be able to easily read.

The one thing I would have liked to change was how the information was handed out to the participants. I would have liked to give all the participants the pamphlet in person. But because of time problems with both the parents and myself, I was not able to give out all of the pamphlets in person. I do not know if the ones that were sent home with the students even reached them.

For me the next step would be to try to get the school district to make a pamphlet for special education. I do understand that they would have to look over the legal aspects of giving out information in a new way. Having the school district give out information that is easy to read would help solve some of the problems that the parents are facing. Even if the pamphlet has laws written in both legal wording and everyday wording, this would help. It would ease a lot of the frustrations that parents are dealing with when trying to get help for their child. They would know what services are available and where to go to get the help. When they sat down to do the IEP, they would be able to put all of the services available for their child on it.

### On lessons learned

When I first started this study, looking at all parts of the project was daunting. I have never had to do a project that was longer than seven pages. That paper was a research paper with group work. Having the knowledge that I could do a project on this scale is something new for me. I learned that I am able to walk into a school at seven o'clock in the morning and meet with someone that I do not know. I am a very shy person that has trouble talking with new adults. I

can talk to children without any type of problem. Walking into a setting where I know that there is someone I will have to talk to without knowing who they are is terrifying to me. I did not know how I would handle having to talk to the principal. The first couple of minutes were rough, but I got through it. After the first meeting I was able to go back to the school and talk with her. I also learned that I have a great deal of patience. Having to wait for the letter from the principal and then waiting for the approval letter was getting a little scary for me. I did not stress out as much as I thought I would when the principal had not given me the letter before fall break. I then had to wait for parents to get back to me about the interviews. Worrying that no one was calling me back was a little stressful. Once I got through the interviews, I was able to get my paper done.

The next time I have a project like this due I would start earlier. I did not go right out and talk to a school. I did not understand that it would take a long time to get a hold of the principal and talk to her about the projects. One of the problems was the fact that she was new to the school and working on learning her way around. At first every time that I called her I was told that she could not meet with me this week. After three weeks, I was able to meet with her. If I had started the project sooner, I would have been able to see her earlier and get my letter before their fall break.

Many people are not willing to change something that they know. It is human nature to stick with something that is familiar to us. Interviewing participants, I observed how frustrated parents could get because the system has not changed. One of the interviewees had a child thirteen years after their first. They were frustrated with how much the system has stayed the same regarding giving out information to parents. They felt that they were fighting the same battle that they were fighting thirteen years ago.

When emotions run high, you have to be able to analyze what they are really saying. Having to analyze what people are saying is complicated. You have to listen to not only what they are saying, but also the emotion behind what is going on. When people are frustrated there is a lot of emotion in their words. They might say something that they did not mean to say. They also see problems and difficulties that might not be there. You have to get past the impression that everyone is against them and see what the real problems are.

There was a lot of data that I had to analyze for this project. One of the hardest parts was listening to what the participants were saying. I know that the information that I was getting from them was information that they did not want to talk about. Having to tell the story of what they

went through to get their child the education that they need was hard. It brought up many emotions that they did not want to express to me. Having watched my parents go through this process with my brother and myself, I can understand why they do not want to talk about some parts of this process. To this day if you bring up special education to my mother she will still get angry about the problems that she faced.

I did not talk to any teachers for this project. Through my research I did find out a lot of information about teaching special needs students. One of the main things was learning why those teachers are involved in the IEP process. They are there to give their expertise on what can really happen in the classroom. The teacher is also there because they know how the child is acting in a school setting. These experts help all members to understand what can be done in the classroom. They are also there to help decide what subject can be missed in the school day. When a child is pulled out of the classroom, they are going to miss some type of activity. Having the teacher there also lets them understand what is being done to help this child.

The way parents are given information was an eye opener for me. I knew that they were not given all the information they needed to understand what is being done for their child. The amount of research a parent has to do is astounding. You can not just go to any one website to receive this information. Many of the times you have to put information together that has been gathered from many different sources, before a person could start to understand what could and needs to be done for a child. The best way to gather information on special education is to talk to people who have children in the system and to teachers. They are able to give you an insight that you can not find in any book or online.

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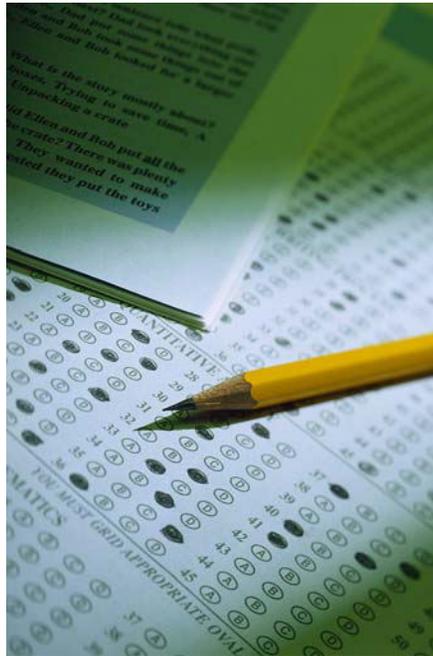
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# The rights of you Child.

*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that requires schools to provide a free and appropriate public education.*

*IDEA requires schools to conduct "activities" to locate and identify students with learning disabilities and other types of disabilities.*

*An IEP must be developed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability who requires special education services to benefit from the general education program.*



Do you  
know  
What  
Programs  
Are  
Available  
For your  
Child?



This pamphlet was created by;  
Wendy Nath

## Who is eligible?

Everyone between the ages of three and twenty-two is eligible to receive an educational evaluation to determine their eligibility for special education services. Once your child or you have been found to have a learning disability, what happens?

- A meeting is set up to meet with the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team.
- The Individualized Education Program is a contract between the school district and the parents.
- Before the IEP meeting, a parent needs to research the support services that can be included in the IEP.

## What support services are available?

**Staff training:** all staff that is working with the child has to receive appropriate training to deal with the child's learning disability.

**Classroom aids:** trained staff who work with the child to provide necessary academic support.

**Co-teaching:** a special education teacher who works along side a general education teacher.

**Speech Therapy:** helps children with speech disorders and communication disorders. Can also be known as visualizing therapy.

**Reading Comprehension:** helps students to understand the meaning of what they are reading.

**Visual Therapy:** helps with any type of visual problems.

**One-on-One therapy:** students meet with a therapist to work individually.

**Group therapy:** a small group of students (3 to 5) meet with a therapist to work special needs.

**Adaptive physical education:** adjust physical activities. Classes are taught by staff who have a background in physical therapy.

**Occupational therapy:** is to help students to achieve independence throughout their lives.

**Social skills Integration:** therapy that helps with low social skills.

**Behavior therapy:** therapy that helps with extreme disobedience or negative attitudes

**Hand-Eye coordination:** therapy to help improve the information from the eyes to the hands.