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# Relationships between Reading Level of Parents, Readability of Special Education Documents/Forms, Knowledge of *IEP* Contents, and Parental Involvement.

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Relationships Between Reading Level of Parents, Readability of Special Education  
Documents/Forms, Knowledge of *IEP* Contents, and Parental Involvement

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A dissertation

presented to the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor in Education

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by

Melinda Douthat Pruitt

August 2003

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Dr. Louise MacKay  
Dr. Lori Marks  
Dr. Terry Tollefson

Keywords: Reading Level, Readability Level, Parental Involvement,  
Special Education

## ABSTRACT

### Relationships Between Reading Level of Parents, Readability of Special Education Documents/Forms, Knowledge of *IEP* Contents, and Parental Involvement

by

Melinda Douthat Pruitt

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between the reading level of parents of students in special education and the readability level of special education documents/forms. A related purpose was to determine whether a difference between reading level and the readability of documents/forms was related to parental involvement. The sample consisted of 30 parents of students in special education who were enrolled at Mosheim Elementary School in 2002. Parents were tested using the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Part Two-Tests of Achievement, developed by Richard W. Woodcock and M. Bonner Johnson. Subtest 13, 14, and 15 were administered to parents. Subtest 13 is a Letter-Word Identification subtest, Subtest 14 is a Word Attack subtest, and Subtest 15 is a comprehension subtest. Parents were asked to complete a short survey that elicited information on education level, actual years of school completed, annual household income, work schedule, and household members. Parents were also asked five questions concerning their knowledge of their child's *IEP*. At the conclusion of the session, parents were interviewed concerning their feelings about attending IEP Team Meetings at the school.

The findings from this study showed the average reading level of parents was at the 9.0 grade level. Special education documents/forms had readability levels that ranged from 9.9 to 12.0 grade levels. These scores showed parents were generally reading three grade levels lower than the reading level required to read the special education documents/forms. Parents also demonstrated a limited understanding of their children's *IEP*. Only 13.3% answered all five questions correctly and 26.7% answered four questions correctly. Sixty percent of the parents could only answer one, two, or three questions correctly. The study also showed that 93.3% of the parents surveyed attended their child's IEP Team Meeting at the school during the year. Only two of the 30 parents in the sample did not attend their child's IEP Team Meeting. The results highlight the difficulty that many parents have in reading the various forms used in special education, including the *Individual Education Program* for their child/children.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate my pursuit of this doctorate to my blessed mother and father,

J.P. and Grace Imogene Douthat.

My deepest wish is that I have pleased them  
and now they can call their daughter “doctor”.

I cannot put into words the gratitude I owe them for their support,  
encouragement, and dedication in helping me reach this goal.

I dedicate my hours of work to a very special man.

My husband, Jeff, has earned my endless love for his constant support  
throughout my school career and many endless nights of fending for himself,  
while I worked on my dissertation. The twenty years we have spent together shows our  
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Karen Baxley.

She was my strength and hope.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Recent research has emphasized the importance of parent involvement in education. Parent involvement is ranked high among components of effective schools. Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded that the evidence is now beyond dispute: parent involvement is the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed into law by President Bill Clinton on March 31, 1994, included a new national goal that called on schools to encourage parental involvement (Goals 2000, 1994). An article written by then Secretary of Education Richard Riley (1994) suggested that schools needed to engage and involve parents if every student was to be provided a world-class education. Riley stated that a good parent was a national treasure and that we needed to make parents and families partners with their children's teachers and principals in the education process.

Belief in the benefits of parent participation has led to legislative mandates requiring federal and state programs to include parental involvement components. One of the six major principles of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and more recently IDEA Amendments of 1997 (Turnbull, 1983) dealt with parent participation. Parents must be included as a member of the Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team) and help develop the *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* for a student with disabilities. Parents are also encouraged to participate in public hearings, serve on advisory panels, and belong to advocacy groups (Cone, Delawyer, & Wolfe, 1985).

The IDEA Amendments of 1997 greatly improved the role of parents in the special education process. In a document titled *IDEA 1997: Let's Make It Work* published by The Council for Exceptional Children, the role of the parent was explained with the following quote: "More than 20 years of research and experience demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities is made more effective by strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participation in the education of these children at school and at home" (p.7). Parental involvement was expanded throughout the Act. Specifically, parent involvement roles were expanded in areas of evaluation/re-evaluation, private school placements, individualized education programs (*IEPs*), mediation, procedural safeguards, and behavior and discipline (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1988). This national movement for education reform "depends in large measure upon parent's involvement in their children's education" (Bennett, 1985, p.12).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Parental involvement in the special education process is very important in developing an appropriate and meaningful *Individual Education Program (IEP)* for special needs students. The problem is special education involves a great deal of paperwork for parents. The paperwork is often a problem for parents with lower educational levels. The documents/forms that are sent home to these parents with lower educational levels are not low-literacy written materials. Forms are sent home to invite parents to meetings to discuss their child's special education program, but parents are not aware of the purpose of the forms because of the difficulty in reading level.

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationships between the reading level of parents, readability of special education documents/forms, knowledge of *IEP* contents, and parental involvement among parents with children in special education.

### *Significance*

One of the most significant variables found in the research on effective schools is the involvement of parents in the educational process. When parents are involved, student achievement increases (Epstein, 1987). Henderson (1987) observed from reviewing 49 studies that everyone benefits when parents are involved, especially students.

This study also adds to the existing body of research in which studies were conducted dealing with patient reading ability and the readability of patient education materials (Davis, et al., 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994; Jackson, et al., 1991; Powers, 1988). The medical studies showed a high prevalence of adults with marginal reading skills and a need for low-literacy written materials.

It is often assumed that many of the parents of special education students have some difficulty with reading. Given these lower levels of reading ability, they may have a lack of understanding of the written documents/forms sent home. This lack of understanding may cause them uneasiness in participating in IEP Team Meetings and involvement in their child's special education program. Several parents may not have completed a high level of education, served as special education students themselves in school, or may have had learning difficulties that went undiagnosed. One of these factors, or a combination of factors, contributes to parents not being involved with the school in the special education process. This study will test these often held assumptions by examining the relationship between parent reading level, readability of special

education documents/forms, knowledge of the *IEP* contents, and the extent of involvement in school.

### *Research Questions*

If schools are to improve parent involvement in IEP Team Meetings dealing with special education students it is important that the readability of state and local documents/forms need to closely match the reading level of the parents. Currently there is very little information on the readability of these forms or the reading levels of parents of children in special education programs.

The following research questions will provide the focus for this study:

#### *Question # 1*

What were the characteristics of parents who participated in the study?

#### *Question # 2*

What is the readability level of the most common documents/forms provided to parents who have children in special education?

#### *Question # 3*

What is the general reading level of parents who have children in special education?

#### *Question # 4*

What gaps exist between the reading levels of parents and the readability of selected forms?

*Question # 5*

To what extent do parents participate in school activities and what is the relationship between the reading level of parents and the extent of involvement in their child's special education program?

*Question # 6*

How much information do parents know about their child's *IEP* and to what extent is that knowledge associated with their contact, education, income, educational level, and grade score?

*Question # 7*

Is there a relationship between parent's reading deficiency and knowledge of the *IEP*?

*Question # 8*

How do parents feel about their involvement in the special education process?

*Null Hypotheses*

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no relationship between the reading level of parents' of special education students and their involvement in the special education process.

H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no difference in the reading level of parents and the readability level of special education forms/documents.

*Limitations of the Study*

Important limitations of this study are that parents were tested in only one locale even though the sample size was large. All parents were located in Greene County, Tennessee and their child/children attended Mosheim Elementary School. These results may not apply to parent populations in other areas of the nation. However, southern literacy and educational rankings,

along with regional poverty rates outlined in *The Report of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South*, indicated that public clinics in the south probably have large numbers of patients with low reading ability (1988 Southern Growth Policies Board: *Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go*, 1988). If the South has a large number of patients with low reading ability, the South would have a large number of parents with low reading ability.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following terms will be used according to the given definitions.

#### *Special Education Student*

Students with mental retardation, speech or language impairments, learning disabilities, gifted and creative abilities, behavioral disorders, visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and health impairments; children who are multicultural and bilingual may have special education needs (Smith & Luckasson, 1995).

#### *IEP*

Individualized education program is a management tool designed to ensure that school-age children who have special needs receive the special education and related services appropriate to their needs. The *IEP* must include: the child's present level of educational performance, annual goals and short-term instructional objectives, specific educational services to be provided, the extent to which the child will participate in regular education, projected date for initiation of services, expected duration of those services, and objective criteria and evaluation procedures (Smith & Luckasson, 1995).

### *IEP Team Meeting*

An IEP Team Meeting is a meeting of a team composed of a qualified representative of the local education agency, proposed special education teacher, the child's current teacher, the parents of the child, and the child, to develop a specifically tailored program to meet the individualized needs of the student with disabilities (Smith & Luckasson, 1995).

### *Parental Involvement*

Parent involvement involves providing success for all children, serving the whole child, and sharing responsibility (Davies, 1991). Parent involvement in special education is the extent to which parents are involved in their child's special education program (Cone et al., 1985). In this study, parent involvement is measured by the number of contacts the parent had with the school during a school year and whether they participated in their child's IEP Team Meeting.

### *Reading Level*

In this study, reading level was assessed using the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Part Two: Tests of Achievement Subtests 13, 14, and 15. The score is reported in years and months. The grade level score reflected the parent's performance in terms of the grade level in the norming sample at which the average score is the same as the subject's score.

### *Readability*

Readability refers to the ease with which a text can be read and understood based on an author's style of writing and the organization of his ideas (Dale & Chall, 1948; Doak, Doak, & Root, 1985) and is related to comprehension and inclination of the reader to continue reading (Fry, 1989). In this study, readability was assessed using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score obtained through Microsoft Word readability scores. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is obtained using a formula to calculate the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is:  $(.39 \times \text{ASL}) + (11.8 \times \text{ASW}) - 15.59$  where: ASL = average sentence length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences) and ASW = average number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words).

### *Ceiling*

The ceiling is a set number of items on a test that the subject has virtually zero percent chance of getting all items correct (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977). Certain questions on a test are arranged to be outside a subject's range of ability. For example, when the subject misses five items in a row, that is his/her ceiling level. Each test gives you the number for the ceiling of that particular subtest.

### *Basal*

The basal is a set number of items that the subject has essentially a 100% chance of getting all the items correct (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977). Certain questions are arranged as easy compared to estimated subject's range of operation or skill. These items would be at the

beginning of the test. For example, the subject starts with number one and correctly answers the first five questions. This is the subject's basal level. All tests identify which question to start with for the grade level or age of the subject and tell the number of questions that have to be answered correctly to obtain the basal for that particular test

### *Organization of the Study*

The first chapter was devoted to establishing the basis and the need for this study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of related literature pertaining to readability of documents/forms and parental involvement. Chapter 3 contains the methodologies and procedures that were used to obtain data in reference to the research questions, the population and the sample, instrumentation, and the data collection. Chapter 4 presents statistical analyses of the results collected from the data. A summary of results, conclusions, recommendations for further study, and implications of the study are presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### *Parental Involvement*

Teachers and administrators have known for some time that parents play a vital role in their children's academic success. Evidence continues to show active parental involvement is a critical factor in a child's educational success at all grade levels (Epstein, 1987). Even with this knowledge, schools have noted a decline rather than an increase in parental involvement (Coleman, 1991). Much of the focus on parental involvement in special education has become a narrow concern: how to get the appropriate form by the appropriate date (Shevin, 1983).

Researchers have begun to look at the role schools might play in facilitating parents' positive roles in children's academic success. The relationship that develops among schools, parents, and communities is critical to this role. Increasing evidence supports the notion that the quality of these links, which the schools may have to initiate, does influence students' success.

#### *Theoretical Perspectives*

Three distinct perspectives existed in reference to the relationship between families and schools. The perspectives were separate responsibilities, sequential responsibilities, and shared responsibilities (Elliott, 1996).

The first perspective assumed that schools and families possessed separate responsibilities for the education of children and that both the school and the family operated most efficiently and effectively when parents and teachers maintained independent goals,

standards, and activities (Epstein, 1986). Seeley's Delegation Model (Seeley, 1989) suggested that a fundamental gap existed between families and schools. The specialization that has emerged in our society has caused many parents to delegate the responsibility of children's education to the schools.

The second perspective, sequencing of responsibilities, maintained that parents and teachers contributed to children's development at different critical stages. This perspective was based on the belief that the early years of a child's life were critical for later success. When the child entered formal schooling, at approximately age five or six, the child's personality and attitudes toward learning were well established. During the early years, families had the primary responsibility of educating their children. When children entered formal school, teachers assumed the primary responsibility for the children's education.

The third perspective, shared responsibilities of schools and families, stressed the coordination and cooperation of schools and families while encouraging communication and collaboration (Epstein, 1986). This perspective conveyed that families and schools share responsibilities for the education and socialization of children. It is assumed that families and schools are more effective when information, advice, and experiences are shared on a continuing basis among members of the school, family, and community. The child's achievement, development, and success are the main reasons for family-school partnerships. Parents, schools, and communities share an interest in and responsibility for children across the school years, and that a major reason that schools, parents, and communities should interact is to assist students to succeed in school and in life. Productive connections may contribute to improved academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitudes toward learning, independence, and other behaviors characteristic of successful individuals (Epstein & Connors, 1992). Epstein and Connors stated

that students are the main actors in their own success in school, yet, when schools and families work in partnership, thus allowing for the influence of overlapping spheres, students value school as important and perceive that caring people in both environments are investing and coordinating time and resources to help them succeed.

### *Historical Perspective*

Coleman (1991) suggested that during the past two centuries, society has been transformed from a set of communities where families were the central building blocks to a social system in which the central organizations are business firms, with families at the periphery. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, production was carried out in the household and children were involved in these activities to learn skills they would need as adults. As employment moved away from the home, the family was less involved in training and instilling work habits into young adults.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a transformation of the household when women began to enter the paid labor market. The movement of mothers into the work force placed more demands on the school: the school had to provide child care at an earlier age, provide earlier hours in the morning at school, lengthen the school day until parents arrived home from work, and a program in the summer to care for children (Coleman, 1991). All of these demands pointed to the school as an organization that needed to complement the family in child rearing. As the family unit has weakened in its capacity to raise its young, the school has picked up the job of bringing children into adulthood (Coleman).

### *Importance and Effects of Parental Involvement*

Research has shown the importance of family environments and the beneficial effects parent involvement can have on students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Research has shown that children have advantages when their parents support and encourage school activities. Studies on family influences and cognitive development show that (1) a child's knowledge and understanding grow from the interactions with other people, (2) the entire family system is important, and (3) a child's behavior and attitudes may influence the parents as well as the reverse (Scott-Jones, 1984).

Many studies have shown that families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) and education are more committed and involved in the education of their children and that their children achieve more. But, many studies also indicate that parents' practices of involvement compensate for less education and less income. Stevenson and Baker (1987) concluded that mothers with less formal education could have as much positive impact as did highly educated mothers if they became highly involved in school activities.

Research continues to show that students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved. Becher (1984) examined a wide range of educational research documenting the critical role of parents in the development and education of children and the ways parents can be trained to improve their children's academic achievement. Becher (1984), in his examination of how the effects of parent involvement influence the child, found several key family process variables, or ways of behaving, that were clearly related to student achievement. He found that children with high achievement scores had parents who had high expectations for them, who responded to and

interacted with them frequently, and who saw themselves as “teachers” of their children. He also found that parents of high-scoring children also used more complex language, provided problem-solving strategies, acted as models of learning and achievement, and reinforced what their children were learning in school.

Becher (1984) also found that parent-education programs, especially those training low-income parents to work with their children, were effective in improving how well children used language skills, performed on tests, and behaved in school. According to Becher, the most effective programs shared the following points of view:

1. All parents have strengths and should know that they are valued.
2. All parents can make contributions to their child’s education and the school program.
3. All parents have the capacity to learn developmental and educational techniques to help their children.
4. All parents have perspectives on their children that can be important and useful to teachers.
5. Parents should be consulted in decisions about how to involve parents (p.6).

Student achievement was only one important outcome of parent involvement.

Parents developed positive attitudes about school, helped gather support in the community for programs, became more active in community affairs, developed increased self-confidence, and enrolled in other educational programs; teachers became more proficient in their professional activities, devoted more time to teaching, experimented more, and developed a more student-oriented approach (Becher, 1984).

Becher (1984) summarized the research on parent involvement and concluded that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggested that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children.

Parent involvement research reached its peak in 1994 with Henderson and Berla's report titled *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* (Henderson & Berla, 1994). In this report, many studies, reviews, reports, analyses, and books on relevant research concerning parent involvement were discussed. The report presented important findings indicating that the family makes critical contributions to student achievement from childhood years through high school. The report also suggested that actively involved families were more effective in improving children's outcomes.

Henderson and Berla's (1994) extensive analysis concluded that a student's achievement is most accurately predicted by the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- (1) Create a home environment that encourages learning.
- (2) Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers.
- (3) Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (p. 1).

The studies suggested that children from low-income families and diverse cultural backgrounds can achieve at levels expected from middle-class children when schools support families in addressing the above three conditions. Henderson and Berla summarized the benefits from parent involvement as affecting students, families, and schools. Some of the benefits to students included higher grade and test scores, better attendance and more completed homework, fewer placements in special education, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates,

and greater enrollment in post-secondary education. Families benefited as parents developed more confidence in the school. In turn, the teachers they worked with had higher opinions of them as parents and had higher expectations of their children. Involved parents developed more confidence not only about helping their children learn at home but also about themselves as parents. Some parents enrolled in continuing education to advance their own schooling. Schools benefited as well through improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teacher by parents, more support from families, higher student achievement, and better reputations in the community (Henderson & Berla).

#### *Parent Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement*

Socioeconomic status (SES) and student achievement are highly correlated in a positive direction. Children's grades, test scores, graduation rates, and enrollment in post-secondary education tend to increase with each additional level of education that their mothers have completed (Baker & Stevenson, 1986). Sattes (1985) suggested that the positive relationship between family SES and school achievement does not mean that rich kids are born smarter, but that children are more likely to be exposed to experiences that stimulate intellectual development. Eagle (1989) concluded that regardless of SES parents who provide a quiet place to study, emphasize family reading, and stay involved in their children's education have students who are more likely to enroll in and complete post-secondary education. Similarly, Ziegler (1987) emphasized that parent encouragement at home and participation in school activities were the key factors related to children's achievement, more significant than either student ability or SES. Another study showed that regardless of the income and/or educational level of the home, the home was effective in helping the child achieve (Watson, Brown, & Swick, 1983). In

summarizing the research on family background and student achievement, Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom (1993) concluded that the socioeconomic level or cultural background of a home need not determine how a child does at school. Kellaghan et al., pointed out that parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with different levels of education, income or occupational status can and do provide stimulating home environments that support and encourage the learning of their children. “It is what parents do in the home rather their status that is important” (Kellaghan et al., p. 144). Unfortunately, many low-income families often place a lot of trust in the school and other institutions and do not become involved or give input into their child’s education (Sullivan, 1980).

### *Family Interactions*

Several researchers have studied family interactions and identified behaviors that are associated with high-achieving students. Clark (1990) pointed out that high-achieving children from all backgrounds tend to spend approximately 20 hours a week in constructive learning activities outside of school and that supportive guidance from adults is a critical factor in whether such opportunities are available. Clark also suggested that because of the great amount of time, approximately 70%, spent outside of school, the way the time is spent could be very influential on how much children learn.

Researchers have identified other family behaviors that are important in the learning process. The first behavior was establishing a daily family routine to provide time and a quiet place to study, assigning responsibility such as chores, being firm about bed times, and family meals together (Benson, Buckley, & Medrich, 1980; Clark, 1993; Eagle, 1989; Kellaghan, et al., 1993; Walberg, Bole, & Waxman, 1980).

The second behavior was monitoring out-of-school activities such as setting limits on television watching and arranging for after-school activities (Benson et al., 1980).

The third behavior was modeling the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work by communicating with questions and conversation; demonstrating that achievement comes from working hard; using reference material and the library (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Clark, 1993; Rumburger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990; Snow, et al., 1991; Steinbeurg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1989).

The fourth distinguishing set of family behavior involved expressing high but realistic expectations for achievement: setting goals and standards that are appropriate for children's age and maturity; recognizing and encouraging special talents; informing friends and family about success (Bloom, 1985; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Hagemann, & Bezruczko, 1993; Schiamberg & Chun, 1986; Scott-Jones, 1984; Snow et al., 1991).

The fifth set of behavior included encouraging children to develop and progress in school: maintaining a warm and supportive home; showing interest in children's progress at school; helping with homework; discussing the value of a good education and possible career options; staying in touch with teachers and school staff (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eagle, 1989; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Melnick & Fiene, 1990; Mitrsoomwang & Hawley, 1992; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Snow et al., 1991; Ziegler, 1987).

The sixth set of behavior included reading, writing, and initiating discussions among family members. Activities included reading, listening to children read, and talking about what was being read; discussing the day over dinner; telling stories and sharing problems; writing

letters, lists, and messages (Becher, 1984; Epstein, 1991; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Scott-Jones, 1987; Snow et al., 1991; Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982; Ziegler, 1987).

The seventh and last set of behavior included using community resources for family needs such as enrolling in sports programs or lessons, introducing children to role models and mentors, and using community services (Beane, 1990; Benson et al., 1980; Chavkin, 1993; Nettles, 1991).

### *Government Programs and Parent Involvement*

Over the years researchers have debated whether schools or families were more important in educating children and preparing them for life. Eventually, the contribution of both families and school were acknowledged. Students are advantaged or disadvantaged by the economic and educational resources and guidance offered by their families, yet they are also advantaged or disadvantaged by the quality of their experiences in schools (Epstein, 1995). It appears that neither schools nor parents alone can do the job of educating and socializing children and preparing them for life. Schools, parents, and communities share responsibilities for children and each influence them simultaneously (Epstein).

In the 1960s, federal Head Start and Follow-Through programs were implemented. The implementation of these programs increased awareness of the importance of parent involvement, especially in preschools and early elementary grades. A basic component of these programs was legislated parent involvement, which was directed towards low-income parents. The programs were to help parents prepare their children for successful entry to school.

Other mandates in federal programs, such as amendments to Title I, created parent advisory councils to assure that parents would participate in school and district policies

supported by the federal funds of Title I that affected their children (as cited in Epstein, 1984). Chapter I of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) of 1981, continued the official federal recognition of the importance of close cooperation between the home and school (Epstein, 1984). Early efforts to increase parent involvement were largely unsystematic, with few measures of the effects of specific practices of involvement (Epstein, 1995). First attempts at parent involvement focused mainly on the roles parents were to play but not the roles schools were to play in actively seeking the involvement of parents in their child's education.

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, also known as Public Law 94-142, required teachers and parents to cooperate in setting educational and developmental goals for the child (Epstein, 1984). The premise upon which Public Law 94-142 was based was that all children could be educated to some extent (Boone & Smith, 1981). According to Boone and Smith, the promise of Public Law 94-142 was that all children would be educated to whatever extent possible regardless of handicapping conditions and that each handicapped child would receive a free appropriate education in the least restrictive setting. Legislative mandate is not, by itself, sufficient to guarantee this. Full implementation of any law is dependent on public support and public awareness of its specific directives.

The most vital directive made by Public Law 94-142 was the requirement that parents of handicapped children be included and actively involved in any decisions or processes that would affect the education of their offspring (Boone & Smith, 1981). Several studies have shown that parents are not being actively involved in the special education process. Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980) found that other team members viewed the purpose of the conference as informing parents of the nature of the already developed *IEP*, obtaining suggestions from them for modification, and receiving their signature. Parents were expected to provide

information to the planning team, but they were not expected to participate actively in making decisions about their child's program (Yoshida et al., 1978).

In the 1970s, the effective school movement brought attention to teachers and school administration concerning students who were at risk of failing (Edmonds, 1979). Parent involvement was added to the list of elements that research and practice suggested would improve schools and increase student achievement. Research showed more than half of the children with disabilities were not receiving appropriate educational services as was noted in a 1971 report from the D. C. Public Schools (Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, & Hall, 1994). “The report estimated that 12, 340 handicapped children were not going to be served in the 1971-72 school year” (Johnson et al., p.263). One can see why Public Law 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), was such an important legislative action in 1975.

By the mid-1980s, the report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, 1983) directed attention to the need to improve all schools, not just those for students from economically distressed homes and communities (Epstein, 1995). Schools began to focus on curriculum, instruction, and connections with families.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed in 1992. The purpose of IDEA was to make available to all children with disabilities a free appropriate public education and encouraged employees to hire individuals with disabilities, to address ethnic diversity and limited English proficiency, and fund educational programs for disabled children.

In 1990, the nation's governors adopted a national agenda for education reform resulting in “America 2000”. This agenda was expanded under the Clinton administration with a new name “Goals 2000”. Goals 2000 included an additional goal that focused on the importance of

parental involvement (Goals 2000, 1994). The goal was that every school would promote partnerships that would increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. The parental involvement goal suggested that communities must take responsibility for the education of their children and they must be willing to help schools get students ready to be educated. Schools have to encourage and accept community involvement, believe that all students can be educated, and begin adapting education to the learning styles of these students, rather than expecting the students to adapt to a traditional school teaching style. The trend in special education toward inclusive schools would seem to indicate that parents and educators would have increased opportunities for partnerships (Moore & Littlejohn, 1992).

According to Morrissey (1998), "On June 4, 1997, President Clinton signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, PL 105-17"(p.5). IDEA reaffirmed the constitutional right of children with disabilities to a free appropriate public education. The primary goal of IDEA '97 was to ensure that children with disabilities received a quality education. The Act aimed to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.4 million children with disabilities and to bridge the gap that existed between what children with disabilities learn and the regular curriculum (OSERS, 2001). "The new IDEA shifts the focus of the previous law from providing access to education to improving results for children with disabilities" (Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, 2003). This law had been on the books since 1975 with parental involvement being one of the original principles (Kozub, 1998; Royster & McLaughlin, 1996). The IDEA Amendments of 1997 significantly enhanced the role of parents in the special education process. In *IDEA 1997: Let's Make It Work*, The Council of Exceptional Children explained how the prior 20 years of research and

experience demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities was made more effective by strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children had meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home. The Council outlined specific requirements related to parental involvement (p.7-8):

1. Parents play a vital role in the evaluation/re-evaluation and eligibility process.  
During an initial evaluation, the parents of the child provide evaluations and other information as well as input to help determine what additional information, if any, are needed. Information provided by the parent must be used. A team of qualified professionals and the parent of the child make the determination of whether a child is disabled. Informed consent must be obtained from the parent before the evaluation is conducted. Consent must also be obtained for a re-evaluation.
2. IDEA ensures parental input in the development of state and local special education policy and procedures. Each state must ensure there are public hearings and an opportunity for comment from individuals with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities must be included on the school-based standing panel for any school that has been permitted to implement a school-based improvement plan.
3. The parent is a member of the IEP Team. The team must consider the concerns of the parent for enhancing the education of the child. The parents of a child with a disability must be a member of any group that makes decisions on the educational placement of their child.

Morrissey (1998) stated that PL 105-17 (IDEA '97) was going to change the way some administrators, teachers, and parents of students with disabilities spend their time and interact with each other. He stated that for other administrators, teachers, and parents of such students, the words in this statute describe what they were already doing. "PL 105-17 reflects good public policy" (Morrissey, 1998, p.11).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002 (NASDSE, 2002). The NCLB act of 2001 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. "The NCLB act of 2001 is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools" (No Child Left Behind Introduction and Overview, 2003). George W. Bush described this law as the "cornerstone of my administration", and he also stated one of the reasons for the act was that "Too many of our neediest children are being left behind" (No Child Left Behind Introduction and Overview). The law is built around four major structures: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility (No Child Left Behind Introduction and Overview).

The NCLB Act of 2001 clearly states benefits to parents and children. The U.S. Government document *No Child Left Behind Introduction and Overview* (No Child Left Behind Introduction and Overview, 2003) outlines the benefits of the Act:

1. Supports learning in the early years, thereby preventing many learning difficulties that may arise.
2. Provides more information for parents about their child's progress.

3. Alerts parents to important information on the performance of their child's school.
4. Gives children and parents a lifeline.
5. Improves teaching and learning by providing better information to teachers and principals.
6. Ensures that teacher quality is a high priority.
7. Gives more resources to schools.
8. Allows more flexibility.
9. Focuses on what works.

The NCLB Act 2001 does have implications for special education. Many places in the law reference IDEA specifically or include a reference to students with disabilities. One clear implication outlined is students with disabilities need to be included in a state's new accountability system and data have to be disaggregated for students with disabilities (NASDSE, 2002). Many of the implications are subject to various interpretations and state directors of special education are waiting for guidance from the Department of Education.

On March 19, 2003, the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the U.S. House of Representatives published a proposed bill to reauthorize IDEA. As outlined in *The Special Ed Advocate Newsletter* (Wrightslaw, 2003) dated March 20, 2003, the "Improving Education Results for Children with Disabilities Act" would propose the following changes:

1. Increase accountability and improved results; align IDEA with NCLB.
2. Reduce paperwork burden.
3. Allow 3 year *IEPs* if parent and district agree.
4. Eliminate benchmarks and short-term objectives from *IEPs*.

5. Allow *IEP* to be amended without convening entire IEP Team if parent and district agree.
6. Improve early intervention.
7. Reduce overidentification/misidentification of nondisabled children, including minority youth.
8. Eliminate “IQ-discrepancy” Model that relies on a “wait to fail” approach for identification of specific learning disabilities.
9. Introduce a “response to intervention” model that identifies students with specific learning disabilities before child fails.
10. Encourage use of positive behavioral intervention and supports.
11. Increase professional development and training of general education and special education teachers.
12. Restore trust and reduce litigation (mediation allowed at any time; binding arbitration).
13. Pre-referral interventions to children not yet IDEA eligible to address reading and behavior.
14. Allow districts to have one discipline policy for all children.

On April 30, 2003, the House of Representatives voted 251-171 to approve the bill to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Wrightslaw, 2003). The Senate introduced a bipartisan bill that was passed in June 2003. Senate members will meet with members of the House of Representatives and attempt to reconcile the differences between the two versions of the IDEA.

If IDEA' 03 remains as outlined in the combined version, it would have significant impact on special education, students, and parents. The optional 3-year *IEP* would greatly reduce the interaction between the school, teacher, and special education teacher. The bill also removes short-term objectives and benchmarks from the *IEP*. This change would not help parent involvement. The parent must be a member of the IEP Team and help to develop the *IEP*, short-term objectives, and benchmarks. If the *IEP* changes to once every three years, this will significantly reduce the involvement of the parent in the special education process.

### *Types of Parent Involvement*

The term “parent involvement” can refer to a wide range of activities. Some literature focuses on programs designed to teach effective parenting and child-rearing skills (Gamson, Hornstein, & Borden, 1989). Others focus on the appropriate role of parents in normal developmental processes (Vartuli & Winter, 1989). Epstein (1987) divided parent involvement into six categories: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each type of parental involvement labeled by Epstein will be explained and discussed.

The first type of involvement includes basic obligations of parents. Basic obligations of parents refer to responsibilities of families to ensure a child’s health and safety; to the parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school; to the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children at each age level; and to the need to build positive home conditions that support school learning and foster positive attitudes toward the importance of education. The research of Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraieigh (1987) suggested that these

basic obligations are a more powerful predictor of student achievement than parent education, ethnicity, or family structure.

The second type of involvement includes the basic obligations of schools. The most significant obligation of the school is communication. Parent-teacher conferences, open houses, phone calls, report cards, calendars, news letters, three-week interim reports, and standardized test results are typical examples of this type of parent involvement. Barth (1979) concluded that teacher-parent communications focusing on reinforcing positive school behavior resulted in improved academic performance. Herman and Yeh (1980) found a positive connection between student achievement and the amount of communication between schools and parents, although parents revealed that they felt school should initiate such communications. Communication, then, appears to be an important aspect of parent involvement activities and schools should strive to provide effective means of communication in order to improve student achievement.

Teachers and other educational personnel need to establish more effective oral and written communication with parents. Teachers need to be clear and understandable in oral and written communication. The teacher must be able to assess the level of parent understanding and reading ability to make appropriate modifications in communication with parents. Several suggestions have been offered for establishing effective oral and written communication with parents:

- (1) Know, if possible, the education level of the parents before sending out written communication. This information will help determine the wording of the message (Marion, 1977).
- (2) Use the titles Mr. and Mrs. when addressing parents and in all written communication (Baruth & Manning, 1992; Marion, 1977).

- (3) Use a tone of voice that expresses respect and courtesy (Baruth & Manning; Marion, 1979).
- (4) Be brief but clear in oral and written communication (Marion, 1977).
- (5) Use language that can be understood by the parent but don't be condescending (Baruth & Manning; Marion, 1977).
- (6) Be positive in your approach and begin with some of the child's positive attributes (Marion, 1977).
- (7) Ask parents to repeat parts of the discussion where clear understanding is essential (Marion, 1977).
- (8) Listen to parents (Olion, 1988).
- (9) Respond to parents (Olion).
- (10) Treat parents as individuals (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1992).

The third type of involvement is parent involvement at school. This type of parent involvement is exhibited through volunteering. Bennett (1986) concluded that a strong relationship exists between student achievement and the extent to which parents volunteer at the school. Volunteering may refer to parent volunteers who assist teachers or children in the classroom or support student performances, sports, or other events. Becher (1984) noted that bringing parents into the schools as volunteers and as audiences improved student achievement, children improved their language skills, test performance, and school behavior. VanDevender (1988) suggested that parents could set a good example by never missing a conference or school function; their presence at all school meetings shows the child that they place value on education and are willing to contribute to the child's education. Mortimore and Sammons (1987) stated that schools with an informal open door policy are very effective in involving parents because

such a policy allows parents to visit the classroom and see the way their child is being taught. It makes them feel welcome and gives them ideas on what they can do at home to help the child.

The fourth type of involvement includes parent involvement in learning activities at home. The learning activities at home include homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions. Benson, et al., (1980) found that children whose parents spent time with them in educational activities within the home achieved more in school regardless of SES. Additional studies support that a strong learning environment at home, high expectations of success, and positive attitudes toward education affect student achievement positively. Coleman (1966) suggested that the key to achievement may lie in students' positive attitudes about themselves and their control over the environment; these attitudes are largely formed at home. When parents showed an interest in the education of their children and maintained high expectations for their performance, they were promoting attitudes that were crucial to achievement—attitudes that could be formed independently of social class or other external circumstances (Henderson, 1988).

The fifth type of involvement includes parent involvement in governance and advocacy. The involvement includes decision-making, which refers to those activities in which parents take an active role in the decision-making processes in parent teacher organizations, parent advisory councils, or school committees and other groups in the school, district, or state level. Becher (1986) found several principles that propelled success, including involvement of parents in decision-making and the explanation to parents of administrative decisions. Leier (1983) found that educators, parents, administrators, and school board members would like more parent impact in decision making.

Decision-making opportunities are given to parents through Public Law 94-142. The federally mandated *Individual Education Program (IEP)* for handicapped children gave the parent the right to approve or disapprove the plan and placement for the child; adaptation of the IEP to nonhandicapped (especially low-income) children, often in the form of a home-school “contract;” and the 1987 federal provision known as the Hatch Amendment gave parents the right to challenge activities in the schools that might be classified as “secular humanism,” such as psychological testing of attitudes or values clarification curricula (Davies, 1987).

The sixth type of involvement is based on collaboration. Collaborating with the community included providing opportunities for children to interact with the community and connect those interactions with learning activities. Collaborating with the community might have included coordinating work and resources of community businesses, agencies, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen schools programs, family practices, and student learning and development. From his research findings, Gordon (1978) suggested that children of parents who provide for their direct interaction with the community in the framework of learning experiences score higher on achievement tests than other children.

Cone, et al., (1985) organized a list of types of involvement for parents to be involved in special education programs. Twelve categories resulted:

- (1) Contact with teacher.
- (2) Participation in the special education process.
- (3) Transportation.
- (4) Observations at school.
- (5) Educational activities at home.
- (6) Attending parent education/consultation meetings.

- (7) Classroom volunteering.
- (8) Parent-parent contact and support.
- (9) Involvement with administration.
- (10) Involvement in fund raising activities.
- (11) Involvement in advocacy groups.
- (12) Disseminating information (Cone, et al.).

### *Barriers to Parent Involvement*

Studies have been conducted on barriers involving parents of handicapped students. Frequently cited barriers were inconvenient meeting schedules (Cassidy, 1988), lack of transportation (Cassidy; Lynch & Stein, 1982), and lack of understanding of the process (Cassidy; Lynch & Stein), especially knowledge of the *IEP* process. Other barriers given by parents were work (Boone & Smith, 1981) and communication problems (Davies, 1998; Lynch & Stein). Schools made little attempt to schedule meetings at times when parents were not working. Evening meetings may be poorly attended because parents are tired, they may be doing household chores, or they may prefer to spend time at home with their children (Kroth, 1980). Parents' low participation in and awareness of the *IEP* planning process may be explained by the lateness of the invitation (Harry, 1992). Harry explained that by the time the *IEP* is to be developed, professionals have already established power and legitimacy by excluding parents from the assessment process.

There is a large group of parents who may feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of providing for the appropriate care, support, and special needs of handicapped children and youth (Sullivan, 1980). Parents find themselves struggling for survival and economically challenged to

the point they may not have the time and energy to devote to home-school relationships (Voltz, 1994). Teachers should not forget that parents have a range of family, vocational, and personal responsibilities and needs that can make it impossible to devote significant amounts of time and energy to one child (Klein & Schleifer, 1990).

### *Parental Involvement Summary*

Research on parental involvement provided extensive and convincing evidence suggesting that parent involvement plays a crucial role in facilitating student achievement (Becher, 1984). Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded, “To those who ask whether involving parents will really make a difference, we can safely say that the case is closed” (p.x). This substantial amount of knowledge can enable schools to support families and help them to develop and maintain an environment that encourages learning, to keep them informed about their child’s progress, and to help them manage their children’s advancement through the system. Neither families nor schools can do the job alone (Henderson & Berla). “If there was one thing for professionals to remember, it would be that participation cannot be forced, it must be warmly welcomed and reinforced” (Royster & McLaughlin, 1996, p.31).

### *Readability of Written Documents/Forms in Special Education*

Readability formulas have been used to measure the readability of written materials since the 1940s (Dale & Chall, 1948; Davis, et al., 1990; Flesch, 1948; Meade & Smith, 1991). In the past, some teachers, librarians, and publishers used readability formulas. The time to apply the formula took too much time and therefore was not used to a large degree. With electronic software, this dilemma has changed in recent years. Several studies have been conducted to

assess the readability level of informed-consent forms used in exercise and sport psychology research, consent forms in medical research, patient education materials, and hospital forms (Doak et al., 1985; Hammerschmidt & Keane, 1992; Powers, 1988; Spadero, 1983). This concern stemmed from statistics reported by the United States Government, which stated that more than 20 million American adults couldn't read. More than 25 million US adults (10% of the US population) lack basic reading skills (as cited in Weiss, 1993). The study released in 1986 from the US Department of Education reported that those who were illiterate had some formal education, 70% did not finish high school, 42% were unemployed, and 35% were under the age of 40 (as cited in Powers, 1988). Patient educational status and reading ability were emerging as important factors in health care and clinical research (Grundner, 1980; Hammerschmidt & Keane, 1992; Powers, 1988; Taub, Baker, & Sturr, 1986; Weiss, Hart, & Pust, 1991). In the health area, in particular, an improper fit between reader and reading materials could have unfortunate consequences (Meade & Smith, 1991). This concern brought about studies on the literacy of patient populations and ultimately resulted in calls to adjust the reading level of written material (Powers). The opportunity to function independently in our society rests partly on the ability to comprehend everyday documents (Meyer, Marsiske, & Willis, 1993).

Federal regulations (NSF, 1994) state that informed-consent forms should be easily understood. One way to measure the potential for understanding is by assessing the readability of forms in question (Handelsman et al., 1986). Readability refers to the ease with which a text can be read and understood (Doak et al., 1985) and is related to comprehension and the inclination of the reader to continue reading (Fry, 1989). Although readable forms do not guarantee understanding, they do enhance the potential for understanding (Handelsman et al.).

Cardinal, Martin, and Sachs (1996) discovered more than 85% of the informed-consent forms used in exercise and sport psychology research obtained for their study were written at a “Difficult” to “Very Difficult” reading level. Three readability scores were produced for each document: Flesch reading-ease score, Flesch reading grade level, and Flesch-Kincaid reading grade level. Each provided a valid and reliable measure of a document’s readability level (Fry, 1989; Rush, 1985) and had been recommended for use by psychologists (Grundner, 1978). The Flesch reading-ease score (Flesch, 1948) yielded a raw score that ranged from 0 (hardest) to 100 (easiest). Scores in the range of 60 to 70 were considered to indicate plain English and the standard reading range for the general population (Baker & Taub, 1983). Baker and Taub acknowledged this level of difficulty was found in daily newspapers such as the *New York Daily News* and general interest magazines such as the *Reader’s Digest* and *Sports Illustrated*. The 60 to 70 readability scores were considered to be appropriate for the eighth- to ninth- grade reading levels (Baker & Taub). The Flesch reading grade level (Flesch, 1974) was a conversion of the Flesch reading-ease score into an equivalent level of educational attainment. The Flesch-Kincaid reading grade level (Flesch, 1974) also provided an equivalent level of educational attainment; however, it is an unstable measure with short passages. Hartley (1990) warned that other factors such as content familiarity, cultural relevances, format, legibility, length, print size, and use of graphics may offset some of the negative outcomes associated with documents that rate poorly on readability. Hammerschmidt and Keane (1992) estimated that only 37% of U.S. adults would be able to comprehend 70% or more of the material presented because many documents were being made complete and clear for an educated reader but were being left inaccessible to less-educated subjects. Morrow (1980) discovered a substantial portion of subjects for whom the informed consent documents were written do not have enough education to be able to

comprehend the documents. Jackson et al., (1991) tested 528 patients and discovered the mean reading comprehension of all patients was 5.4 grade level. The mean reading ability of all patients was far below the readability level of almost all written materials tested: written material used in these clinics tested at or above 11<sup>th</sup> grade level (77%), only 5% had a readability level below 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and only two brochures had a readability level near the mean reading ability of all patients (Jackson et al.). In the study conducted by Tarnowski, Allen, Mayhall, and Kelly (1990), pediatric biomedical consent forms were written at graduate school reading level. Grundner (1980) also showed surgical consent forms were approximately equivalent to material written for advanced undergraduates or graduate students. Studies have shown that informed-consent forms written at lower reading levels are easier to comprehend (Young, Hooker, & Freeberg, 1990). In an effort to help researchers to develop more readable informed-consent forms, Cardinal et al., (1996) assembled a list of 11 specific strategies for improving the readability of informed consent forms:

- (1) Attempt to identify the reading ability of the target audience (e.g., have members of the target audience, not just professional colleagues, review the informed-consent form). In cases where doubt exists, it is better to underestimate than overestimate the target audience's reading ability.
- (2) Use language that is concise, straightforward, and familiar to potential participants.
- (3) Try to identify simple word alternatives for complex, polysyllabic words (Cardinal & Sachs, 1992).
- (4) Avoid or simplify technical language.
- (5) Use adequate lettering (e.g., serif type, 12-point font).

- (6) Use headers like descriptive road signs, sufficient spacing, and lots of open or white space.
- (7) Present key information in the most succinct manner possible.
- (8) Use short and concise paragraphs with adequate spacing between paragraphs.
- (9) Write in an active voice.
- (10) Pretest the form's readability level. If the form is written at an inappropriate reading level, rewrite the form to a lower level using the aforementioned strategies.
- (11) Because students are likely to emulate their advisors, faculty should comply with ethical and professional standards in this area of practice and encourage students to do the same.

### *Readability Formulas*

The Fry Readability Scale was developed by Edward Fry (Fry, 1968) and yields a grade-level equivalency. Four steps were followed in applying the Fry Scale. This formula requires approximately two pages of print. Grundner (1978) explained the directions as follows:

- (1) Select three 100-word passages from the consent form, either from the beginning, middle, and end of the document or from specific important segments (e.g., the purpose, procedure, and risk/discomforts sections). If the form is less than 300 words, you may collect fewer samples, but be sure you are taking enough to make a fair test. Skip all proper nouns.
- (2) Count the total number of sentences in each 100-word passage, estimating to the nearest tenth of a sentence. Average these numbers.
- (3) Count the total number of syllables in each 100-word sample and average.

(4) Turn to the graph shown in Figure 1. Plot the average number of sentences per 100 words along the axis and the average number of syllables per 100 words along the abscissa. The approximate grade-level equivalency can then be read off the curved line. Fry (1968) discussed the problem of validity being difficult because of no standards of just what is fourth grade difficulty as opposed to fifth grade difficulty. The graph ranks books on a hard-to-easy continuum.

The Dale-Chall formula requires 18 printed pages to use the formula. The Dale-Chall gives two grade designations such as 5-6 or 7-8. This formula was developed in the later part of the 1940s. The Dale-Chall formula involves a list of 3,000 words against which the text to be assessed is checked (Dale & Chall, 1948). The list is composed of words that were familiar to fourth-graders (Dale & Chall). Words in adult materials are probably not on the list; therefore, the Dale-Chall formula could present problems if used to judge the comprehensibility of adult material (Pichert & Elam, 1985).

The Spache formula was designed specifically to judge materials for elementary school use, so it should be avoided in assessing material written for literate adults (as cited in Pichert & Elam, 1985; Spache, 1953).

The SMOG formula requires no extra tables, word lists, or arithmetic beyond what a calculator with a square-root key can do (Pichert & Elam, 1985). Pichert and Elam reported that the SMOG formula is probably as good as any other formula for assessing patient-education materials, although its validation only on healthy college students suggests caution should be used when the intended audience is different.

The Flesch Readability Formula (Flesch, 1948) has four steps as described by Grundner (1978, p. 773):

- (1) Collect three 100-word samples from the consent form either from the beginning, middle, and end of the document or from specific important segments (e.g., the purpose, procedure, and risk/discomfort sections). If the form is less than 300 words you may collect fewer samples, but be sure you are collecting enough to make a fair test. Each sample should start at the beginning of a paragraph if possible. Count contraction and hyphenated words as one word. Count as words numbers or letters separated by spaces.
- (2) Count the total syllables in each of your 100-word sample. Count the number of syllables in symbols and figures the way they are read aloud (e.g., 1977 would be “nineteen seventy-seven”). If there are numerous or lengthy figures in your passage, your estimate will be more accurate if you don’t include them. Any good dictionary, of course, will provide syllabication rules if you are in doubt.
- (3) Figure the average sentence length of your passage. Find the sentence that ends nearest the 100-word mark (e.g., this could be the 94<sup>th</sup> word or might be the 109<sup>th</sup> word). Count the sentences up to that point and divide the number of words in those sentences by the number of sentences.
- (4) Insert the number of syllables per 100 words (i.e., word length) into the  $wl$  term, and the average sentence length into the  $sl$  term, of the following formula and compute:  
$$RE \text{ (Reading Ease)} = 206.835 - .846 wl - 1.015 sl$$
The results will be a number between 0 and 100. Flesch (1948) described his formula and the reading ease scores. The Flesch Readability Formula is very sensitive to all levels of reading ease: however, it is slightly more difficult to use and will not yield grade equivalencies

beyond the seventh-grade level (Grundner, 1978). The Reading Ease Scores are as follows:

0 to 30	Very Difficult
30 to 50	Difficult
50 to 60	Fairly difficult
60 to 70	Standard
70 to 80	Fairly easy
80 to 90	Easy
90 to 100	Very easy

Singer (1975) developed an “eyeball technique” to visually compare paragraphs of unknown readability to a scale of paragraphs of known difficulty. The non-computational procedure has been called the “Singer Eyeball Estimate of Readability,” which makes up the acronym, SEER (Singer). The results of the study conducted by Singer revealed the average discrepancy in readability levels established by the SEER technique and those computed by readability formulae (Spache & Dale-Chall) was less than one grade level. Singer noted that the SEER technique was as valid as the Fry graphed procedure but took much less time. In summarizing, Singer proclaimed the SEER technique to be not only a valid but also a highly efficient procedure for estimating readability levels.

The Flesch-Kincaid approach classifies documents as meeting a specific grade level if only 50% of persons reading at a given grade level can comprehend the document (Davis et al., 1994). For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score is:  $(.39 \times \text{ASL}) + (11.8 \times \text{ASW}) - 15.59$  where: ASL= average sentence length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences) and ASW= average number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words) (Microsoft Office 2000). The chief advantage of the Flesch-Kincaid is that it

is built into major word processing applications, which allows for quick and complete analysis of any document stored electronically (Microsoft Office 2000). It also offers the added advantage as serving as a common reporting language amongst document handlers if it is widely used among individuals using word processing as their means of document/form development. This is the reason the Flesch-Kincaid was used in this study.

Caution should to be used when using readability formulas. Often criteria for using readability formulas have been violated. Pichert and Elam (1984) have made suggestions for proper use of readability formulas:

- (1) Readability formulas should be supplemented by other means of judging the quality of patient-education materials.
- (2) The readers for whom the text is intended should be similar to those on whom the selected readability formula was validated.
- (3) The text to be assessed should have been written without readability formulas in mind.

### *Reading Assessments*

The Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised is a wide range measure of achievement in reading, mathematics, spelling, and general information (as cited in Davis et al., 1991). The PIAT-R is used in schools, institutions, and community agencies. Each subtest covers a wide range of achievement levels, from preschool to post high school. Reading recognition, reading comprehension, and total reading raw scores may be converted into specific grade levels (expressed in years and months). The PIAT-R takes a well-trained paraprofessional between 30 and 40 minutes to administer and score (Anastasi, 1988). Davis et al. (1993)

commented that the PIAT-R was well received by clinic patients, but its booklet format, lengthy administration time, and high cost limit its practicality for use in busy clinic settings.

The Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised (WRAT-R) is a reading test to evaluate an individual's ability to pronounce words in ascending order of difficulty (Davis et al., 1993). The WRAT-R is a nationally standardized achievement test that takes 3 to 5 minutes to administer and score (Davis et al., 1994). The WRAT-R does not score below third-grade level, and almost one third of its words are above a ninth-grade reading level (Davis et al., 1993). Davis et al. (1993) clearly stated that the WRAT-R would not be the instrument of choice for screening for patient literacy levels below ninth grade.

Another test used to test high school, college students, and adults is the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The test is a two-part test, which measures vocabulary development, comprehension, and reading rate (Brown, Fisco, & Hanna, 2003). Part I covers vocabulary, which is a 15-minute timed test. Part II covers comprehension and rate of reading, which takes approximately 20 minutes to administer. The test takes approximately 45 minutes to administer both parts. One of the benefits of this test is that the 1993 edition has extended-time administration to meet the needs of special populations, such as students with English as a second language, foreign language students, and returning adults (Brown et al.).

The Test of Adult Basic Education, TABE, is the assessment instrument for adult basic and secondary education programs. The TABE is a norm-references test designed to measure academic achievement in reading, mathematics, language, and spelling (Texas Center for Adult Literacy & Learning, 2003). The scores are reported according to grade-level equivalency in reading, mathematics, and language. The test is also available in software form and comes in English and Spanish. Often the TABE scores of adult studies students are used to place them

into academic programs that closely match their current academic level. Many schools and professions require passing scores on TABE such as vocational, technical, colleges, pharmaceutical, dental, EMT, police, firefighters, and nursing (Test of Adult Basic Education, 2003).

The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery is divided into three parts. Part One is a Test of Cognitive Ability. Part Two-Tests of Achievement consists of 10 subtests that measure achievement in reading, math, written language, science, social studies, and humanities. Part Three-Tests of Interest Level consists of five subtests measuring a subject's level of preference for participating in various scholastic and non-scholastic forms of activities. Using the Subtests 13, 14, and 15 yields a reading grade score. The test reports grade level in reading for subjects starting at an age of 3-0 up to the age of 80+ (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977). A report on the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery is in more detail in Chapter 3. Due to the availability of this test, training for administering the test, and acceptable use for subjects up to 80+ ages, this test was used in this study.

### *Readability Summary*

Several approaches are suggested to remedy the problem involving illiterate adults and written material. One approach is to develop special written materials for individuals with low-literacy skills and to make those materials available to persons with poor reading skills (Weiss, 1993). Another strategy involves rewriting excessively difficult forms so that they reach the average reading level of the general public (Grundner, 1980). Grundner stated the final form should be at the seventh or eighth-grade level at the highest. All necessary rewriting can be done in a few hours with no sacrifice in content (Grundner). One commonly recommended strategy is

to develop nonwritten means of communication for use with individuals with low literacy skills by using audio, video, and interactive computer technologies (Weiss, 1993).

Pichert and Elam (1985) stated that while adult readability formulas have legitimate uses, the criteria for their proper use have often been violated. They outlined three criteria for the proper use of readability formulas:

- (1) Readability formulas should be supplemented by other means of judging the quality of patient-education materials.
- (2) The readers for whom the text is intended should be similar to those on whom the selected readability formula was validated.
- (3) The text to be assessed should have been written without readability formulas in mind.

### *Summary*

Parent involvement seems to be a very important element in the education of children. Many researchers have shown a significant impact on student academic work and a child's education related to parent involvement (Epstein, 1987, Becher, 1984, Henderson & Berla, 1994). Legislation has focused on the importance of parent involvement as included in Public Law 94-142, IDEA Amendments of 1997, Goals 2000, and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Public Law 94-142 required that parents be actively involved and included in any decisions (Boone & Smith, 1981). Goals 2000 focused on parent involvement. All schools would work to increase parent involvement and promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. IDEA Amendments of 1997 enhanced the role of parents in the special education process. It

involved parents as a member of the IEP Team and to be involved in any decisions about their child. It also included the parent in developing goals and objectives for the *IEP*.

Stevenson and Baker (1987) concluded mothers with less education could have as much impact as do highly educated mothers if they became highly involved. Becher (1984) showed how parent involvement influenced the child and how parent involvement clearly related to the child's achievement. The study also reported many other benefits not just to the child, but to between the parents and the school because of parent involvement. Becher concluded that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggested that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environment with respect to development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children. Ziegler (1987) concluded that parent participation in school activities related to the child's achievement even more than SES. With research showing the significance of parent involvement, current legislation has made parent involvement a major component as seen in IDEA Amendments of 1997. This Act promoted parent involvement and made the parent an important part of decision making for students with disabilities. Parents were included in the IEP Team and the IEP Team's decisions. Unfortunately, research has shown that many low income families often place a lot of trust in their child's teacher, school, and other institutions and do not become involved in their child's education (Sullivan, 1980).

Many parents do not become involved in the school due to their low education level. Parents with low education levels have low reading grade levels. Many adults cannot read (Weiss, 1993). Weiss stated that in order to get parents involved, schools must make an effort to match the average readability level of letters, memos, etc. to their reading level. Documents/Forms written at high levels would present difficulty to these parents and cause problems to the parents trying to make informed decisions concerning their child's education.

Because of the importance of readable documents/forms, and the evidence suggesting that state and local education agencies use forms with a high reading levels, this study was designed to assess the readability level of special education documents/forms used in special education departments and the reading level of parents, and if there was a relationship between the reading level of parents and their involvement in their child's special education program.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the readability of special education documents/forms, the reading level of parents of special education students, parents' knowledge of the *IEP* contents, and parent involvement in the special education process. This chapter includes a discussion of the population, a description of the instrument, the hypotheses tested, the procedures used, and the analysis of data.

#### *Sample*

After securing central office administration and school board approval, letters were given to each special education student in grades K-12 at Mosheim Elementary School. The letter explained the study and provided information to the parents. The letter explained that phone calls would follow to schedule appointments for administering the reading subtests. Parents were assured that their scores would be confidential and involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. A copy of the information letter appears in Appendix C; the request for central office and school board permission appears in Appendix B.

Parents who were unable to keep their appointment were contacted by phone to reschedule an appointment in an effort to test as many parents as possible. Parents were attempted to be contacted a minimum of three times before deleting their name from the possible subject list. The number of parents to be tested was set at 30.

The sample consisted of the parents of special education students in grades K through 8 ( $N=30$ ) who attend Mosheim Elementary School in Greene County, Tennessee. This school system was chosen because of its location and access to information, which facilitated data retrieval, and its size in terms of providing a relatively large sample. To begin the study, a census report was obtained with student information for Mosheim Elementary School from the special education secretary at Central Office dated 2/14/02. The census report showed 206 names. All parents were sent home a letter describing the study and the major components of the study. The letter explained that random parents would be chosen and called to set up times for the interviews and testing. The letter also explained that parent participation was strictly on a voluntary basis. The names of students were numbered and then subjects were circled if their number came up on the Ten Thousand Random Numbers Table. Parents were called and appointments were scheduled during the day and during the evening to accommodate schedules. Parents were asked to come to the school for the testing and the interview. Using the random number chart, 137 names were placed on the potential list. Four parent names were listed twice due to more than one child listed on the special education census. Thirty-five numbers were duplicates. After eliminating all the duplicates, the list consisted of 98 names. I called parents going straight down the list according to the random sampling. Many parents called resulted in no contact. Several phone numbers were not in service or out of order. Parents who were reached were scheduled an appointment if they volunteered to participate. All parents contacted did volunteer except for three. Of the three, two had scheduling problems with work and one just stated that she would rather not participate.

### *Procedures*

Parents who volunteered to help in the study were welcomed and greeted by me in my office. I tested the parents in my office and also conducted the interview in my office. After a few minutes of explaining the study and talking about the reasons for the study, I proceeded with reading the informed consent form and asking them to sign the form. After receiving signed consent, I gave the reading test. Parents were asked to complete the three subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Part Two: Tests of Achievement. After completing the tests, parents were asked survey questions concerning education, income, family, etc. The survey was read to the each individual and answer choices were also read aloud. The next section of the interview was to read a list of school activities and ask whether the individual had attended that event at the school and if they did attend, how many times they participated in that particular activity. Next, parents were asked five questions about their child's *IEP* to check for knowledge of the *IEP* contents. Last, parents were interviewed with three questions dealing with their feelings about attending IEP Team Meetings at the school. The three interview questions were tape recorded and transcribed for the analysis part of the study.

### *Assessment of Parent Reading Level*

The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Part Two-Tests of Achievement, developed by Richard W. Woodcock and M. Bonner Johnson, is a wide-range comprehensive set of tests for measuring cognitive ability, achievement, and interests. The tests are individually administered, and norms are provided from preschool to the geriatric level (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977).

Part Two of the instrument consists of a set of 10 subtests measuring several aspects of scholastic achievement. Seven of the subtests provide information regarding a subject's skill in reading, mathematics, and written language. The remaining subtests provide information regarding the subject's knowledge of science, social studies, and humanities.

For purposes of this study, Subtest 13, 14, and 15 were administered to all parent volunteers. Subtest 13 is a Letter-Word Identification subtest that tests the subject's ability to identify isolated letters and words. The Letter-Word Identification subtest consists of 54 items. The basal is five consecutive correct and the ceiling is five consecutive failed. Subtest 14 is a Word Attack test that tests the subject's ability to read made-up words, which requires the application of phonic and structural analysis skills. The Word Attack subtest consists of 26 items. The basal is item one and the ceiling is five consecutive failed. Subtest 15 is a Passage Comprehension test that tests the subject's ability to study a short passage that has a key word missing from the passage. The subject must select a word that would be appropriate in the context of the passage, which requires a variety of comprehension and vocabulary skills. The Passage Comprehension subtest consists of 26 items with a basal of five consecutive correct and a basal of five consecutive failed (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977).

The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery clusters subtests to provide the basis for test interpretation. This clustering is used in order to minimize the danger in generalizing from the score for a single narrow skill such as comprehension to a broad ability such as reading. Thus, for purposes of test performance on this Battery, reading ability is a combination of scores from three subtests: Subtest 13-Letter Word Identification, Subtest 14-Word Attack, and Subtest 15-Passage Comprehension. These three subtests scores are combined into a single composite score known as the Reading Cluster Score. Using this procedure of combining three subtests

results in having a higher validity according to test interpretations in the manual (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977).

The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery manual (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977) stated that their normative data were collected from a stratified random sample balanced in terms of the national distributions of sex, race, occupation, geographic location, and type of community. The age of the norming subjects ranged from three to over 80 years. Those subjects came from more than 40 communities widely distributed throughout the United States. All data in the school-age sample were gathered throughout a one-school year period extending from April 1976 to March 1977. Adult Data were gathered from April 1976 until May 1977.

Upon completing the subtests, the “Summary of Scores” section of the Response Booklet is completed to help in looking at or interpreting the subject’s performance on the tests. A raw score is calculated for each subtest by counting up the number of correct responses. By using a table in the manual, a part score is given for each raw score. The part scores are added up to determine the cluster score. The cluster score is a score that reflects a subject’s combined performance on the subtests that make up a cluster. Subtests 13,14, and 15 make up the reading cluster. In the reading cluster, a value of 500 represents a level of performance approximately equal to the beginning fifth grade level (Woodcock & Johnson, 1977).

Following the reading cluster score, a grade equivalent score is determined using the tables in the manual. A grade score reflects the subject’s performance in terms of the grade level in the norming sample at which the average score is the same as the subject’s score.

### *Assessment of Parent Involvement in Special Education*

Parent involvement in the special education process was based on the parent's attendance at their child's IEP Team Meeting. One of the activities listed on the *Parental Involvement Worksheet*, as shown in Appendix F, was IEP Team Meeting. He/She was read the item and asked if he/she attended an IEP Team Meeting during the last school year and to respond with a yes or no response. If the parent responded yes, he/she was asked how many IEP Team Meetings he/she attended during the last school year.

### *Assessment of Parental Involvement in Total School*

Parental Involvement in the total school program was assessed based on the number of school activities or events attended in a year. The activities and events were listed on a page titled *Parental Involvement Worksheet* as shown in Appendix F, and the parent responded to yes or no if he/she attended the event. A number was written down beside the event to denote how many times he/she attended certain events such as ballgames, meetings, etc. Total contacts were grouped for each activity and reported as 0, 1-2, and 3 or more.

### *Assessment of IEP Knowledge*

As part of the study, a portion of the interview dealt with parent's knowledge of *IEP* contents. Parents were asked five specific questions about their child's *IEP*. The *IEP* knowledge questions are shown in Appendix G titled *IEP Knowledge Questions*. Question 1 dealt with modifications listed on the *IEP*. Question 2 asked if the student was taking the state/district mandated assessment or the state mandated alternate assessment. Question 3 asked for special education or related services the student was receiving. Question 4 dealt with stating

one annual goal. Question 5 was special factors listed on the *IEP* for consideration. Parent's responses were checked using the child's *IEP* and marked right or wrong. If the parent answered all five questions correctly, he/she was given a score of 5. Four correct questions merited a score of 4 and so forth. If the parent answered no questions correctly, he/she scored a 0. The results were shown in Table 44.

### *Assessment of Document Readability*

Special education documents/forms were analyzed to provide a summary of readability statistics. The selected forms that were analyzed were: *Consent for Initial Assessment*, *Invitation to a Meeting*, *Consent for Re-Evaluation*, *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*, *Prior Written Notice*, and the *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*. These forms were selected because of their wide usage in the special education program.

The *Consent for Initial Assessment* is the first form sent to a parent when a child has been referred for testing to the special education department. This form is required before a student can be tested for determination of eligibility and need of special education services. A copy is provided in Appendix I. The *Prior Written Notice* is the second form sent home to the parent. It must be sent along with the first form as an explanation of the proposed actions the school system is outlining. A copy is provided in Appendix O. Along with these two forms is the third form to be sent home to the parent known as *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights* brochure. A copy is found in Appendix S. This document explains rights to parents about every aspect of special education. It must be sent home with every request for testing and every invitation to the parent to attend a meeting.

The *Consent for Re-Evaluation* is another form asking parents for permission to retest a student after three years from the initial evaluation. A meeting is scheduled to go over progress and to determine if the re-evaluation is to be completed through a meeting or through additional testing. A copy of this form is provided in Appendix K.

The *Tennessee's Individual Education Program* or the *IEP* is the most important document in special education. The *IEP* is a legal document that explains the total educational program for a special needs student in the regular program and the special education program. A copy of this form is provided in Appendix Q.

The selected documents/forms were analyzed to see whether or not an adult reader could easily understand them. The documents/forms were electronically analyzed using the Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level using the reading statistics program embedded in the word processing program in *Microsoft Office 2000* software.

The Flesch Reading Ease is an index based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence. Scores range from 0 to 100. Standard writing averages 60 to 70. The higher the score, the greater the number of people who can readily understand the document (Microsoft Office, 2000).

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is an index based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence. This score indicates a grade-school level. For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader would understand the document. Standard writing averages seventh to eighth grade. The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is:

$$(.39 \times ASL) + (11.8 \times ASW) - 15.59$$

ASL is the average sentence length determined by taking the number of words divided by the number of sentences. ASW is the average number of syllables per word determined by taking the number of syllables divided by the number of words (Microsoft Office, 2000).

### *Pilot Study*

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate the reading test instrument, survey questions, parental involvement worksheet, interview questions, and questions to check *IEP* knowledge. Sample interview questions were used to gather information about subjects' characteristics including education level, income, family, etc. A worksheet was used to gather total contacts the parent had with the school in a year. Questions were asked about the *IEP* for his/her child, and three interview questions were asked and taped on how he/she felt about attending IEP Team Meetings. This provided an opportunity to delete certain questions from the questionnaire and/or add additional questions to retrieve information needed to complete the study.

Five parents were involved in the pilot study. The parents were asked to participate based on my long relationship working with these parents as a teacher. Several of the parents worked in the school as educational support professionals, some were related to me, and some were considered friends. All of the pilot study parents had a child in the special education program. Parents were asked to sign a consent form after the form was read to them. The parents were tested individually in a quiet setting at the school. The examiner read the items on the survey, activity worksheet, *IEP* content questions, and the interview questions. Upon completion of the testing for the five subjects, all of the pilot study components were examined for appropriateness or missing questions where information was needed. Adjustments were made based on the analysis of data and relevancy of the questions to information needed for the

study. After careful study, the survey was changed to address not only education level, but to add a question about actual number of years of education. Income levels were adjusted more evenly across the choices. No further changes were made.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

As a first step in the data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to show the readability level of the most common documents/forms provided to parents who have children in special education programs. In addressing the second question, descriptive profiles were presented to show the reading level of parents by demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistics were also used to show the gap between the reading levels of parents and the readability of selected forms. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and Spearman rho were used to describe the extent to which the reading level of parents and the involvement in their child's special education program were related. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and Spearman rho were also used to describe the extent to which the reading level of parents and their involvement in the total school program were related. Descriptive profiles were also presented to show the amount of knowledge parents had of their child's *IEP*. Paired Sample Statistics was used to describe gaps between reading levels of parents and readability level of documents/forms using a 2 tailed T-test. Significance level was  $<.05$  for all t-tests. Question 8 was analyzed by qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions asked in the structures interview to each parent. An inductive approach was taken in the analysis of the open-ended questions, and themes were identified across the interviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The findings of the study are addressed in this chapter. The purpose of the study was to describe the relationships between the reading level of parents of special education students and the readability level of special education local and state documents/forms and whether the difference between reading level and the readability of documents/forms was related to parental involvement. The reading level of 30 parents was compared to six special education documents/forms readability level. The parent's participation in school activities was calculated as total contacts and compared to their reading levels. Parents were also asked questions about the content of their child's *IEP* to assess knowledge. Finally, parents were asked three interview questions concerning their feelings about attending IEP Team Meetings.

#### *Research Question # 1*

What are the demographic characteristics of the parents whose children received special education services and participated in this study?

Characteristics of the parents whose children received special education services were gathered during the survey portion of the interview sessions. Parents were asked about his/her education level as to some elementary school, some high school, completed high school, or some college or training (Table 1). Parents reported their actual years of education completed (Table 2). The survey also asked the parents to report on household members residing in the student's home (Table 3). The annual household income of parents in the study was reported in categories

ranging from below \$10,000 to \$80,000 and above (Table 4). One of the questions on the survey asked the parent their relationship to the student in special education (Table 5). This information was to help in the identification of who attends IEP Team Meetings. Parents identified whether he/she were employed and if he/she were employed reported the work schedule according to day shift or evening/night shift (Table 6). The last characteristic obtained was the age of the parent in the study. The age was calculated to obtain reading levels from the Woodcock-Johnson scoring tables. This information was put into categories ranging from 20-29 years to 50-59 years (Table 7).

Table 1

*Frequency Table: Education Level of Parents in the Study*

Parent's Education Level	<i>f</i>	%
Some Elementary School	1	3.3
Some High School	8	26.7
Completed High School	15	50.0
Some College or Training	<u>6</u>	<u>20.0</u>
Total	30	100.0

Table 1 shows that one parent did not attend high school and eight parents did not complete high school. Fifteen parents or half of the parents in the study completed high school and received a high school diploma. Six parents had some college or training, but only one had completed a two-year degree.

Table 2

*Frequency Table: Actual Years of Education of Parents in the Study*

Actual Years of Education	<i>f</i>	%
7	1	3.3
9	2	6.7
10	3	10.0
11	2	6.7
12	21	70.0
14	<u>1</u>	<u>3.3</u>
Total	30	100.0

Table 2 shows the actual years of education completed by each parent in the study. Twenty-seven percent of the parents in the study completed 11 years or less of education. Seventy percent of the parents completed 12 years of school. Only one parent had completed two years of college and received an associate's degree.

Table 3

*Frequency Table: Household Members Residing in Student's Home*

Household Members	<i>f</i>	%
Mother in Home		
No	2	6.7
Yes	<u>28</u>	<u>93.3</u>
Total	30	100.0

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Table 3 continued

Household Members	<i>f</i>	%
Father in Home		
No	8	26.7
Yes	<u>22</u>	<u>73.3</u>
Total	30	100.0
Brother(s) in Home		
No	17	56.7
Yes	<u>13</u>	<u>43.3</u>
Total	30	100.0
Sister(s) in Home		
No	15	50.0
Yes	<u>15</u>	<u>50.0</u>
Total	30	100.0
Grandparent(s) in Home		
No	30	100.0
Yes	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	30	100.0
Aunt(s)/Uncle(s) in Home		
No	28	93.3
Yes	<u>2</u>	<u>6.7</u>
Total	30	100.0

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Table 3 continued

Household Members	<i>f</i>	%
Stepbrother(s) in Home		
No	28	93.3
Yes	<u>2</u>	<u>6.7</u>
Total	30	100.0
Stepsister(s) in Home		
No	29	96.7
Yes	<u>1</u>	<u>3.3</u>
Total	30	100.0
Stepparent in Home		
No	25	83.3
Yes	<u>5</u>	<u>16.7</u>
Total	30	100.0
Other People in Home		
No	27	90.0
Yes	<u>3</u>	<u>10.0</u>
Total	30	100.0

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Table 3 shows, of the students randomly selected from the special education census, 93.3% have their mother at home and 73% of them have their dad at home. Approximately half of the students have other siblings living in the home. Not one home had a grandparent living in

the home. Two families had an aunt or uncle living in the home. Three families reported other people in the home being a cousin, boyfriend, and foster parent.

Table 4

*Frequency Table: Annual Household Income of Parents in the Study*

Annual Household Income	<i>f</i>	%
Below \$10,000	7	23.3
\$10,000-19,999	6	20.0
\$20,000-29,999	4	13.3
\$30,000-39,999	6	20.0
\$40,000-49,999	1	3.3
\$50,000-59,999	1	3.3
\$70,000-79,999	1	3.3
\$80,000 and Above	2	6.7
Not Sure	<u>2</u>	<u>6.7</u>
Total	30	100.0

As shown in Table 4, 23.3 % of the parents reported an annual household income below \$10,000. An annual income above \$80,000 was reported by 6.7%. Income levels between \$20,000 to 49,999 were reported by 36.7% of the parents. Two parents did not report their income and stated they were not sure what the annual household income was for their family.

Table 5

*Frequency Table: Relationship of Interviewees to Student in Special Education*

Relationship of Interviewee	<i>f</i>	%
Mother	28	93.3
Stepmother	1	3.3
Foster Parent	<u>1</u>	<u>3.3</u>
Total	30	100.0

Table 5 shows the relationship of the parent who participated in the study to the student on the census receiving special education services. The data show that 93.3% of the parents involved in the study were the mothers of the student. One parent was the stepmother and one was the foster mother. One hundred percent of the parents involved in the study, essentially, were the “mother” figure in the family. There were no fathers involved in the study. These data seemed to indicate that decisions about education were basically left up to the female head of the household.

Table 6

*Frequency Table: Work Schedule of Parents in the Study*

Work Schedule	<i>f</i>	%
Day Shift	20	66.7
Evening/Night Shift	1	3.3
No Job	<u>9</u>	<u>30.0</u>
Total	30	100.0

Table 6 shows the work schedule of the parents who participated in the study. Seventy percent of the parents involved in the study had a job. Thirty percent of the parents did not have a job and stayed home. A total of 96.7% of the parents would be at home in the evenings to help with homework or other related school activities.

Table 7:

*Frequency Table: Age of Parents in the Study*

Age	<i>f</i>	%
20-29 years old	3	10.0
30-39 years old	15	50.0
40-49 years old	9	30.0
50-59 years old	<u>3</u>	<u>10.0</u>
Total	30	100.0

Table 7 shows the ages of the parents who participated in the study. Only three parents were below the age of 30. Three parents were 50 years old or older. Half of the parents were in the 30-39 years range.

*Research Question # 2*

What is the readability level of the most common documents/forms provided to parents who have children in special education?

The population studied consisted of 30 parents who had a child or children in the special education program at Mosheim Elementary School. The most common forms used in the special

education program were analyzed using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Statistics from *Microsoft Office 2000*. The readability statistics of the forms are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Readability Levels for Special Education Documents/Forms*

Special Education Form	Words	Characters	Paragraphs	Sentences	Average Sentences Per Paragraph	Average Words Per Sentence	Average Characters Per Word	Passive Sentences	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level
<i>Consent for Initial Assessment</i>	399	2888	64	13	2.6	17.7	5.2	38	37.5	12.0
<i>Consent for Re-Evaluation</i>	249	1908	44	6	1.5	18.8	5.2	83	35.7	12.0
<i>Invitation to a Meeting</i>	352	2404	34	17	1.5	17.2	5.0	11	46.8	10.7
<i>Prior Written Notice</i>	328	3428	39	10	1.4	19.1	5.1	20	35.5	12.0
<i>Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)</i>	2901	25860	545	82	2.0	11.3	5.3	13	43.5	9.9
<i>The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights</i>	4016	20838	160	91	1.5	32.0	4.9	28	32.2	12.0

As shown in Table 8, all forms were written at a 9.9 or higher-grade level. The documents/forms *Consent for Initial Assessment*, *Consent for Re-evaluation*, *Prior Written Notice*, and *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights* scored 12.0 grade level. This is the highest grade level obtainable using the Flesch-Kincaid instrument. It is interesting to note that two of the forms containing the fewest sentences, *Consent for Re-evaluation* and *Prior Written Notice*, scored at the highest readability level. The *IEP* is a form with many blanks to be filled in

by the special education teacher during the IEP Team Meeting. This form contains the most blanks and is the one form that scored the lowest readability level.

*Research Question # 3*

What is the general reading level of parents who have children in special education? The population consisted of 30 parents who had children in special education at Mosheim Elementary School. The parents were randomly selected from the student census list and asked to volunteer. Parents who volunteered were tested using the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Part Two-Tests of Achievement Subtests 13,14, and 15. Subtests 13, 14, and 15 are the reading components. Reading levels of parents are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

*Woodcock-Johnson Reading Levels of Parents by Highest Grade Level Completed*

Reading Levels	Elementary			Some HS			High School			College			Total		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Grade Scores	1	3.6	.	8	8.2	2.5	15	9.2	2.9	6	10.4	2.82	30	9.0	2.9
Scale Scores	1	74.0	.	8	85.6	3.4	15	87.2	5.7	6	90.3	4.76	30	87.0	5.6
Stanine Scores	1	1.0	.	8	3.1	.64	15	3.2	.78	6	3.5	.6	30	3.2	.8
NCE Scores	1	13.0	.	8	29.6	4.8	15	32.2	8.4	6	36.3	6.7	30	31.7	8.1

As shown in Table 9, parents with higher-grade level scores had higher scale scores, higher stanine scores, and higher NCE scores. The one parent who completed only some

elementary had a mean reading level of 3.6. The mean for the 30 parents in the study was 9.0, giving the one parent approximately 5.3 grades reading below the average of the parents in the study. The mean reading level for parents having completed high school was 9.2 and parents with some college scoring a mean reading level of 10.4.

#### *Research Question # 4*

What gaps exist between the reading levels of parents and the readability of selected documents/forms? The null hypotheses associated with this research question were as follows:

Ho4<sub>1</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Consent for Initial Assessment*.

Ho4<sub>2</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Consent for Re-evaluation*.

Ho4<sub>3</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Invitation to a Meeting*.

Ho4<sub>4</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Prior Written Notice*.

Ho4<sub>5</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*.

Ho4<sub>6</sub>: There is no gap between parents reading level and the readability level on *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*.

The mean level of gaps between the reading level of parents and the readability level of special education forms is shown in Table 10.

Table 10

*Mean Difference Between Reading Levels of Parents and Readability Levels of Document/Forms*

Forms	Form Readability (Flesch-Kincaid)	Mean Parent Reading Level	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Consent for Initial Assessment</i>	12.0	9.0	-3.00	5.60	.00*
<i>Consent for Re-Evaluation</i>	12.0	9.0	-3.00	5.60	.00*
<i>Invitation to a Meeting</i>	10.7	9.0	-1.70	3.17	.00*
<i>Prior Written Notice</i>	12.0	9.0	-3.00	5.60	.00*
<i>Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)</i>	9.9	9.0	-.90	1.68	.10
<i>The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights</i>	12.0	9.0	-3.00	5.60	.00*

\* $p < .05$ 

This table shows the largest mean difference or gap between parents reading level and the readability of special education forms to be a -3.00. Four forms are written at least three years above the parents reading ability. The majority of special education documents/forms are written above the reading level of parents. State and local education agencies should be aware that many parents will struggle to read and comprehend the documents/forms being sent home to parents due to the difference in the readability of the documents/forms compared to the reading level of the parents. Upon reviewing the data, the following hypotheses were retained or rejected:

Ho4<sub>1</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Consent for Initial Assessment*. The hypothesis was rejected due to a p value of .00 obtained on this form.

Ho4<sub>2</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Consent for Re-evaluation*. The hypothesis was rejected due to a p value of .00 obtained on this form.

Ho4<sub>3</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Invitation to a Meeting*. The hypothesis was rejected due to a p value of .00 obtained on this form.

Ho4<sub>4</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Prior Written Notice*. The hypothesis was rejected due to a p value of .00 obtained on this form.

Ho4<sub>5</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on the *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*. The hypothesis was retained due to a p value of .10 obtained on this form.

Ho4<sub>6</sub>: There is no difference between parents reading level and the readability level on *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*. The hypothesis was rejected due to a p value of .00 obtained on this document.

All of the documents/forms obtained a *p* value of .00 except for the *IEP*. All of the documents/forms did show a difference between the reading levels of parents and the readability of the document/form except for the *IEP*.

*Research Question # 5*

To what extent do parents participate in school activities and what is the relationship between the reading level of parents and the extent of involvement in their child’s special education program? Parents were rated as to how many activities they participated in at school during a school year. Parents were also asked if they attended an IEP Team Meeting any time during the school year. The null hypotheses associated with this research question was as follows:

H5<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between parents reading level the number of IEP Team Meetings attended in a year.

H5<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between parents reading level and the number of other contacts they had with the school in a year.

Spearman rho Correlations and Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlations were conducted to determine if relationships existed between parents participation in the special education process or other contacts with the school and their reading grade level. The results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

*Correlation of Parent’s Reading Level with Number of IEP Team Meetings Attended in a Year and Number of Other Contacts in a Year*

Variable	Pearson r	Spearman rho
Number of IEP Team Meetings Attended in A Year	.13	.16
Other Contacts	.18	.05

The Spearman rho correlation shows the relationship between grade score and attendance at IEP Team Meetings is .16, which is a weak correlation. The relationship between grade score and other contacts is .05 and is also very weak. The correlations showed there was not a relationship between parents with higher reading levels attending more IEP Team Meetings or other contacts with the school in a year.

H5<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between parents reading level the number of IEP Team Meetings attended in a year. The hypothesis was retained due to the p value was not significant.

H5<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between parents reading level and the number of other contacts they had with the school in a year. The hypothesis was retained due to the p value was not significant. Both null hypotheses were retained.

Parents reported attendance and frequency at specific events at the school using the *Parent Involvement Worksheet*. The following frequency table (Table 12) shows a summary of the activities that were conducted during the year at the school and the attendance of the parents in the study at those specific activities. Parents reported no attendance at the event, 1-2 attendances at that specific event, or 3 or more attendances at that specific event.

Table 12

*Frequency Table: Parent Attendance at School Events*

School Event	<i>f</i> =0	%	<i>f</i> =1-2	%	<i>f</i> =3 or More	%
Parent Conference	12	40.0	10	33.3	8	26.7
IEP Team Meetings	2	6.7	25	83.3	3	10.0
PTA Meetings	13	43.3	11	36.7	6	20.0
Football Games	25	83.3	1	3.3	4	13.3

Table 12 continued						
School Event	<i>f</i> =0	%	<i>f</i> =1-2	%	<i>f</i> =3 or More	%
Basketball Games	20	66.7	4	13.3	6	20.0
Volleyball Games	30	100.0	0	0	0	0
Softball Games	29	96.7	0	0	1	3.3
Baseball Games	30	100.0	0	0	0	0
VIP Days	17	56.7	10	33.3	3	10.0
Grade Level Meetings	23	76.7	7	23.3	0	0
Special Programs	19	63.3	7	23.3	4	13.3
Awards Programs	9	30.0	20	66.7	1	3.3
Special Class Activities	25	83.3	5	16.7	0	0
Appointments with Administration	14	46.7	14	46.7	2	6.7
Booster Club Meetings	27	90.0	1	3.3	2	6.7
Registration Days	6	20.0	24	80.0	0	0
Days Volunteered to Work	22	73.3	2	6.7	6	20.0
Book Fair Days	14	46.7	15	50.0	1	3.3
Club Meetings	28	93.3	0	0	2	6.7
Field Trips	21	70.0	8	26.7	1	3.3
Parties	20	66.7	6	20.0	4	13.3
Homecoming	27	90.0	3	10.0	0	0
Open House	14	46.7	16	53.3	0	0

Table 12 continued						
School Event	<i>f</i> =0	%	<i>f</i> =1-2	%	<i>f</i> =3 or More	%
Heritage Days	19	63.3	11	36.7	0	0
Committee Meetings	29	96.7	1	3.3	0	0
Talent Shows	22	73.3	8	26.7	0	0
Fall Decoration Contest Work Sessions	29	96.7	1	3.3	0	0
Speech Contests	30	100.0	0	0	0	0
Spelling Bee Contests	30	100.0	0	0	0	0
Round Robin Contests	30	100.0	0	0	0	0
Veterans Day Program	25	83.3	5	16.7	0	0
9/11 Memory March	<u>27</u>	<u>90.0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6.7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3.3</u>
Total	688	71.7	217	22.6	55	5.7

Table 12 shows more parents attended parent conferences than did not attend a parent conference. Sixty percent of the parents in this study attended at least one parent conference. Attendance at IEP Team Meeting showed 93.3% of the parents in this study attended at least one IEP Team Meeting at the school. Only two parents did not attend their child's IEP Team Meeting. It is interesting to note that 10% of the parents attended three or more IEP Team Meetings in a year. Also shown in Table 12, 56.7 percent of the parents in this study attended at least one PTA Meeting at the school and 43.3% of the parents did not attend a PTA Meeting during the school year.

Twenty-five out of 30 parents did not attend a football game at the school. Only 16.6% of the parents did attend at least one football game. Table 12 shows that 66.7% of the parents in this study did not attend a basketball game at the school and 33.3% of the parents did attend a basketball game. All 30 parents involved in this study did not attend a volleyball game at the school and 96.7% of the parents involved in this study did not attend a softball game at the school. One parent did attend three or more softball games. One hundred percent of the parents involved in this study did not attend a baseball game at the school.

Table 12 show that 56.7% of the parents involved in this study did not attend any VIP Days at the school. Thirteen parents did come to school and participate in the VIP Day activities. Twenty-three parents out of 30 or 76.7% of the parents did not attend a grade level meeting at the school. Seven parents did attend the grade level meeting.

Table 12 shows 63.3% of parents in this study did not attend any special programs in the school during the year. Seven parents attended at least one program and four parents attended three or more programs during the year. Thirty percent of the parents in this study did not attend their child's awards program. Seventy percent of the parents did attend the awards program at the end of the year. Table 12 also shows that 83.3% of the parents in the study did not attend any special class activities and 16.7% of the parents did attend a special activity that was being conducted by the class.

Table 12 shows that 46.7% of the parents in the study did not come into the school to talk to the administration for any reason during the school year and 53.4% of the parents did come to talk to the administration about concerns or problems.

Ninety percent of the parents in the study did not attend a Booster Club Meeting. Ten percent of the parents did attend a Booster Club Meeting at the school.

Table 12 shows 20% of the parents in the study did not come to school to register their child on the first day of school. Eighty percent of the parents did come to school to register their child. Mosheim Elementary School conducts registration for different grades during a three day period.

Table 12 shows 73.3% of the parents in this study did not volunteer to work in the school during the year, 6.7% of the parents did volunteer at least one to two days, and 20% of the parents volunteered to work three or more days during the school year. Table 12 shows 46.7% of the parents in this study did not attend the Book Fair or Family Event with their child and 53.3% of the parents did attend the Book Fair or Family Event with their child.

Table 12 shows 93.3% of the parents in this study did not attend any club meetings at the school within the year. Only 6.7% of the parents did attend a club meeting. Seventy percent of the parents in the study did not attend a field trip with their child during the school year. Thirty percent of the parents did attend a field trip with their child.

Table 12 shows that 66.7% of the parents in this study did not attend a party in their child's classroom during the school year and 33.3% of the parents did attend a party in their child's classroom.

Ninety percent of the parents in the study did not attend Homecoming at the school. Three parents out of the thirty did attend Homecoming. Table 12 shows that 46.7% of the parent in the study did not attend Open House at the beginning of the school year and 53.3% of the parents did attend Open House.

Table 12 shows 63.3% of the parents did not attend Heritage Days and 36.7% of the parents did participate in this event. Table 12 also shows 96.7% of the parents in this study did

not participate in any committee meetings at the school. Only one parent attended one or more committee meetings during the school year.

Table 12 shows that 73.3% of the parents in the study did not attend the Talent Show sponsored by the PTA and 26.7% of the parents did attend the Talent Show. Table 12 shows that 96.7% of the parents in the study did not participate in the Fall Decorations Contest for Keep Greene Clean and 3.3% of the parents did participate and help with the decorating contest.

All 30 parents in the study did not attend one of the school's speech contests during the year nor did they attend any of the County Spelling Bee contests. One hundred percent of the parents in this study did not attend any Round Robin Competitions. Students in special education would probably not be on the round robin team and therefore, parents would not attend the matches. Speech contests and spelling bee contests are also academically orientated and most students in special education would not be involved in these types of activities.

Table 12 shows that 83.3% of the parents in this study did not attend the school's Veteran's Day Program and 16.7 % of the parents did attend the program. Ninety percent of the parents in the study did not attend the 9/11 Memory March conducted at the school. Ten percent of the parents did attend the event.

The *Parental Involvement Worksheet* had 32 events listed for the parent to respond if attended and how often he/she attended a particular event. In summary, parents responded no attendance at the listed events a total of 688 times with a 71.7% of no involvement. Parents responded attendance 1-2 times at listed events a total of 217 times with a 22.6% attendance rate. Parents responded 3 or more attendances at the specific events a total of 55 times with a 5.7% attendance rate. This data show parental involvement is very minimal.

*Research Question # 6*

How much information do parents know about their child's *IEP* and to what extent is that knowledge associated with their reading level, education level, actual years of education, annual household income, and total school contacts?

The first part of the question deals with the parent's knowledge of the *IEP* contents. Parents were asked five questions about their child's *IEP* for the current school year. The results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

*Frequency Table: Questions Correct on IEP Knowledge*

<i>IEP Knowledge</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1	1	3.3
2	8	26.7
3	9	30.0
4	8	26.7
5	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 13 shows that 60% of the parents answered three or fewer questions correct. Forty percent of the parents answered four or five questions correct. There were no parents in the study who could not answer at least one question correctly.

The second part of the questions dealt with if there was a relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* and grade score, parent's educational level, actual years of education, annual household income, and total contacts with the school in a year. This information is reported in Table 14. The null hypotheses associated with these questions are as follows:

$H_{06_1}$ : There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parents reading level.

Ho6<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's educational level.

Ho6<sub>3</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's actual years of education.

Ho6<sub>4</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's annual household income.

Ho6<sub>5</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's total contacts with the school in a year.

Table 14

*Correlation of Knowledge of IEP with Parents Reading Level, Educational Level, Actual Years of Education, Annual Household Income, and Other Contacts*

Variable	<i>Pearson r</i>	<i>Spearman rho</i>
Grade Score	.18	.19
Parent's Education Level	.29	.27
Actual Years of Education	.20	.22
Annual Household Income	.16	.28
Total Contacts	.34	.41*

Table 14 shows the correlations between the variables. All of the correlation coefficients except for one were not significant.

Ho6<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parents reading level. This hypothesis was retained because the correlation coefficient was .18 for Pearson r and .19 for Spearman rho.

Ho6<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's educational level. The correlation coefficient for the Pearson r was .29 and for the Spearman rho was 2.7, therefore the hypothesis was retained.

Ho6<sub>3</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's actual years of education. The hypothesis was retained because the Pearson *r* and the Spearman rho correlation coefficients were not significant.

Ho6<sub>4</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's annual household income. The hypothesis was retained because there was no relationship. The Pearson *r* was .16 and the Spearman rho was .28, both above the significant level.

Ho6<sub>5</sub>: There is no relationship between the knowledge of the *IEP* contents and the parent's total contacts with the school in a year. The hypothesis was retained in this correlation because both the Pearson *r* and the Spearman rho, both above the .05 significant level. The Pearson *r* was .34 and the Spearman rho was .41, both above the significant level.

Table 14 shows on the Spearman's rho correlation a strong relationship between the total contacts a parent had with the school during a school year and the parent's knowledge of the *IEP*. In this question, we failed to reject the null hypotheses, but there was a significant relationship at the .41 level between knowledge on the *IEP* and the total contacts with the school in a year. The correlation coefficient of .41 is too high to be something that just happened by chance.

#### *Research Question # 7*

Is there a relationship between parents' reading deficiency and knowledge of the *IEP*? A Person Product-Moment Correlation and a Spearman rho were used to see if there was a relationship between the parent's reading deficiency between their reading level and the readability level of the *IEP* and knowledge of the *IEP*. The reading deficiency was calculated as

the difference in the reading level of the parent and readability level of the *IEP* form. The null hypothesis for this question is:

H7<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between the parent's reading deficiency and knowledge of the *IEP*.

The Pearson *r* correlation coefficient was .18 and the Spearman rho correlation coefficient was .19 in this analysis. The correlation coefficients were very similar and did not show a relationship between the parent's reading level and their knowledge of their child's *IEP*. The null hypothesis was retained. There was not a relationship between the parent's reading level and the knowledge of the *IEP*.

#### *Research Question # 8*

How do parents feel about their involvement in the special education process? Parents related their feelings to three questions during an interview. All of the parents had attended an IEP Team Meeting with me during the time their child attended school at Mosheim Elementary School. I tried to make the parents at ease during the interview and assured them the tape recorder was just to help me take notes of their answers.

Question 1: How do you feel when you come to school to attend an IEP Team Meeting? Many parents related feelings of nervousness, apprehension, and being scared. Several parents stated they were nervous and worried about their child not being on grade level. Many parents related feeling nervous about coming to the IEP Team Meeting. One parent stated, "Usually a little scared, nervous. Because I'm wondering how the outcome is going to be, how the student's doing if they're doing better." Another parent stated, "I was nervous because I wasn't sure what it was about." Others reported being nervous and afraid of what the report was going to say or

what the teacher was going to tell them about their child. One parent stated, “It was scary. Well, you know, when you have a child you hope that the child is perfect and when you go in and find out that they have problems, it is scary because you want your child to be perfect, of course, no child is perfect”. Several parents related fear concerning not knowing what was going to be told. For example one parent stated, “I was nervous. I was always afraid of what she might tell me. I didn’t know how to read those, but she talked and told me about it.”

Many parents relayed information on how they felt comfortable when coming to school to attend IEP Team Meetings. One parent stated, “I feel comfortable and I feel like that together we have to work on what is best for him to help him learn”. Other parents stated similar feelings of feeling welcomed and trusting in the teachers at school.

Other parents had slightly different feelings, which they shared. One parent said, “Well, I don’t feel good about them because I’m not proud. It depresses me. That time of the year depresses me. It really does. You know, your children are not doing as well as they should be.” Another parent stated, “Sometimes I feel anxiety because I want to make sure I relay my intent and my ideas correctly”. Several parents related feeling of anxiety. A few of the statements were feelings of apprehension.

One parent specifically stated her feelings around her reading disability. She tearfully stated, “Well, well, I mean, I appreciate you’uns helping him out because I can’t read.” Several parents mentioned helping their child as how they felt when invited to an IEP Team Meeting. Another parent stated, “I felt alright. I felt they were helping (name)”.

The second interview question was: Do you feel that your input at an IEP Team Meeting is needed and listened to by others? Every parent responded positively about her input was

needed at their child's IEP Team Meeting. One parent stated, "Well, definitely needed." Other comments replied that they were listened to and the teachers did consider their input.

One parent stated that she was not listened to at the IEP Team Meetings. She stated concern about her input at the meeting by saying, "Sometimes I sort of feel like maybe it is not listened to as much as I would like for it to be". This was the only parent out of 30 interviewed who stated a negative answer to question two.

The third question in the interview was "When you leave the IEP Team Meeting, do you fully understand everything that was discussed and the program put in place for you child? Or do you leave with unanswered questions". This question brought about the most varied amount of responses ranging from yes, no, and I don't know.

Several parents responded in the affirmative. One of the responses was "I would have asked things before I left, because I felt comfortable enough to ask a question, even if I thought it was a dumb question, and I would have gotten an answer for it."

Several parents responded in the negative about understanding or asking questions. One of the responses was "To be honest, not really. I didn't understand exactly all of it but I'm not qualified. If I needed to ask her anything, she was willing and would tell me to help me out."

The third option to question three dealt with uncertainty. The parent stated, "I don't know. I have problems myself about asking questions". Based on her statement, she probably would not have asked questions at the IEP Team Meeting and would have left with unanswered questions.

In summary, many parents feel nervous about attending IEP Team Meetings. The most common reason is not knowing what is going to happen or what is going to be told at the meeting. The *Prior Written Notice* form is supposed to tell parents the reason for the meeting

and what is being proposed. Unfortunately, many parents stated the form was hard to read and confusing to them. Ninety-seven percent of the parents interviewed stated that her input was needed at the IEP Team Meeting and that she was listened to at the meeting. Only one parent stated that she was not listened to at the meeting to her satisfaction. Parents do have unanswered questions about the *IEP* process and the *IEP* for their child. Many parents stated they would not ask questions for a variety of reasons. Others stated they would ask questions if they did not understand. A problem does exist for the special education teacher as to which parents truly understand the *IEP* process and the plan put into place for the student and which parents are just saying they have no questions because they are embarrassed to ask questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the reading level of parents of special education students, the readability level of special education documents/forms, knowledge of the *IEP* contents, and parental involvement among parents with children in special education. The sample included 30 parents from Mosheim Elementary School in Greene County, Tennessee who had a child in the special education program. All parents were administered the Woodcock-Johnson Educational Battery: Part Two-Test of Achievement Subtests 13, 14, and 15. These subtests were all focused on reading skills to obtain a reading grade level for each parent. The grade level scores were used in the analytical procedures to make comparisons with the readability level of the special education documents/forms.

#### *Summary of Findings*

The analysis centered on eight research questions. The sample consisted of 30 parents who had a child or children in the special education program at Mosheim Elementary School in Greene County, Tennessee. The Woodcock-Johnson Educational Battery measured the reading grade level of each parent: Part Two-Test of Achievement. Six special education documents/forms were analyzed using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Statistics from *Microsoft Office 2000*.

### *Research Question #1*

What were the characteristics of parents who volunteered in this study?

Parents, who participated in this study, ranged in educational level from some elementary school to some college or training. One parent had no high school education and eight parents did not complete high school. Fifteen parents had completed high school and six parents attended some college or training after high school with one completing a degree.

The annual household income for parents in the study ranged from below \$10,000 to above \$80,000. Seven parents stated their household income to be below \$10,000. Sixteen parents identified their household income to be between \$10,000 and 39,999. Five parents ranked their household income above \$40,000. Two parents did not pick a category and stated they were unsure of the total.

The make-up of the family was identified for each special education student identified in the random sampling. Thirty students were identified on the census by random sampling. Looking at those 30 students, 28 had their mother in the home and one had a stepmother. Twenty-two had the father in the home and four had a stepfather. Approximately half of the students had a sibling living in the home. No students had their grandparents living in the home. Only a small percentage of students had aunts, uncles, or cousins living in the home with them.

The frequency table showing the relation of the interviewee to the special education student revealed 28 of the parents were the mothers of the student, one was the stepmother, and one was the foster mother. All participants were essentially the mother figure. No fathers volunteered to participate in the study. Based on past experiences and observations of the attendance at IEP Team Meetings by mothers and not by fathers, it seems to indicate that decisions about education are basically left up to the female head of the household.

The work schedules of the parents participating in the study showed 20 parents worked during the day, one worked at night, and nine did not have a job. This showed that a majority of the parents would be at home in the evenings to help their child with homework or other school related activities.

The age of the parents that participated in the study ranged from 25 to 55. Three parents were in the 20-29 category, 15 parents were in the 30-39 category, 9 parents were in the 40-49 category, and 3 parents were in the 50-59 category. The highest percent fell in the 30-39 category.

#### *Research Question # 2*

What is the readability level of the most common documents/forms provided to parents who have children in special education?

There were six documents/forms selected for the study. These documents/forms are the most commonly used documents/forms that are sent home to parents in a course of a year for variety of purposes related the special education services. The documents/forms analyzed were *Invitation to a Meeting*, *Prior Written Notice*, *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*, *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*, *Consent for Initial Assessment*, and *Consent for Re-evaluation*. The lowest grade level score was 9.9 obtained from the *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*. This form is 11 pages in length and is a form with many blanks to be filled in during the IEP Team Meeting. Without a doubt, an *IEP* with all blanks filled in and completed would obtain a score higher than the 9.9 grade level. The highest grade level score 12.0 was obtained on the *Consent for Initial Assessment*, *Consent for Re-Evaluation*,

*Prior Written Notice*, and *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*. Four of the six forms analyzed obtained a 12.0 grade level.

### *Research Question # 3*

What is the general reading level of parents who have children in special education?

The results showed the higher the education level of the parent the higher the grade scores, stanine scores, and NCE scores. The average grade score for the 30 parents was 9.0 reading level. Of the 30 parents in the study, 1 had some elementary schooling, 8 had some high school, 15 graduated from high school, and six had attended college. One parent had received an associate's degree.

### *Research Question # 4*

What gaps exist between the reading levels of parents and the readability of selected forms?

As evidenced by the results, significant differences existed between the reading grade level of the parents and the readability level of the documents/forms. The average parent grade level was 9.0 and the readability level of the documents/forms ranged from 9.9 to 12.0. The mean difference between the reading level of parents and the readability level of the documents/forms ranged from .90 to 3.0 showing that four of the six forms were written three grade levels above the average reading level of the parents. The study showed several forms used by special education departments are written approximately three grade levels above the reading level of the parents. For one parent in the study, the documents/forms send home for her to read were 8.4 grade levels above her reading level.

### *Research Question # 5*

To what extent do parents participate in school activities and what is the relationship between the reading level of parents and the extent of involvement in their child's special education program?

Parents were asked about the activities and programs they attended at the school during the year. The findings for each activity were grouped as 0, 1-2, and 3 or more. The parents of the special education students were involved with many activities at the school. Parents who attended their child's IEP Team Meeting totaled 93.3% during the school year. The correlation between the parent's reading level with number of IEP Team Meetings attended in a year was a very weak correlation. The correlation of parent's reading level and number of other contacts in a year showed no correlation. The correlations showed there was not a relationship between parent's reading level with number of IEP Team Meetings attended in a year nor a relationship with the number of other school contacts in a year.

### *Research Question # 6*

How much information do parents know about their child's *IEP* and to what extent is that knowledge associated with their contacts, education, income, educational level, and grade score?

Parents were asked five questions about their child's *IEP* to check their knowledge. Only 12 parents answered four or five questions correctly. Eighteen parents answered only one, two, or three questions correctly. The Pearson Correlation between the questions correct on the *IEP* knowledge compared to total contacts at the school was .340. The Pearson Correlation between the *IEP* knowledge and grade score was .184, parent's educational level was .288, actual years of education was .199, annual household income was .164, and total contacts with the school was

.340. Using the Spearman's rho Correlation between the *IEP* knowledge and grade score was .190, parent's educational level was .267, actual years of education was .220, annual household income was .263, and total contacts with the school was .414. Both correlations showed a significant correlation between the knowledge of the *IEP* and total contacts in a year. Total contacts were used as an assessment of the parent's involvement with the school during the year.

#### *Research Question #7*

Is there a relationship between parents' reading deficiency and knowledge of the *IEP*?

The Pearson Correlation between the parent's reading deficiency measured by the difference of their reading level compared to the readability level of the *IEP* and knowledge of the *IEP* measured by the number of questions correctly answered about their child's *IEP* showed no correlation between the two variables. The correlation coefficient was .18 for Pearson  $r$  and .19 for Spearman rho, which showed no relationship between the parent's reading deficiency and knowledge of the *IEP*.

#### *Research Question # 8*

How do parents feel about their involvement in the special education process?

Results of the interview showed most parents feel nervous, scared, or afraid when attending IEP Team Meetings. Many stated fear of not knowing what the meeting was about, what might be said at the meeting, or what they would find out about at the meeting. Most parents reported that their input was needed at the meetings and that their input was listened to at the meeting. Parents, however, do have questions about the *IEP* process and the *IEP* put into place for their child. Many parents stated feelings of not understanding and embarrassed to ask

questions. Others stated they would not ask the questions because they felt unqualified or dumb because they did not know the information at the start. Special education teachers need to be aware of how parents feel when coming to IEP Team Meetings. A phone call before the meeting could ease fears of what is going to be discussed or the reason for the meeting. Even though this information is sent home on a form, many parents cannot read the form.

### *Conclusions*

The study focused on comparisons of reading levels of parents with children in special education programs and the readability levels of state and local forms/documents. Parents' reading grade scores were compared to readability levels of forms/documents and showed significant differences between the two variables. Also the extent of parent involvement was analyzed and compared to the parents' knowledge of the *IEP* in regards to the total school activities the parent attended and the attendance at their child's IEP Team Meeting. Conclusions in those three major areas were developed as a result of the data analysis and interpretation. Each of these is presented.

#### *Conclusion # 1*

Special education documents/forms are written at a reading level that is too high for many parents to comprehend. The readability level of the special education documents/forms does cause many parents not to know why the meeting has been called, the proposed actions of the school, and general information concerning the special education process. Many documents/forms were written at a level three grade levels above the average parents reading

grade level. If state and local education agencies want more parent involvement, we have to address the issue of documents/forms written near the average reading level of the parents.

### *Conclusion # 2*

Many adults do not have a high school education and have below 12.0 reading levels. Documents/Forms written at the 12.0 grade level are too hard for majority of parents. In this study the mean parent reading level was 9.0 grade level.

### *Conclusion # 3*

Parents' reading levels did not have a strong relationship to involvement in the special education process: attending IEP Team Meetings. Twenty-eight out of 30 parents involved in this study did attend their child's IEP Team Meeting. A few of the parents stated that they did not understand the form but came to the meeting for the special education teacher to explain the proposed plan.

### *Conclusion # 4*

Parents' knowledge of *IEP* contents did have a significant correlation with total contacts with the school. Parents attended a variety of activities and events at the school. Insufficient evidence existed to suggest that the reason they come to school to attend so many activities is because of their low reading level. Parents possibly attend the activities and events as a way to find out what is going on with their child at the school. Parents scoring high for total contacts did better answering the questions concerning their child's *IEP*. Contacts included teacher conferences, IEP Team Meetings, visits to administration, etc. The more the parent was in the

school and the more contacts with the school the more questions parents were able to answer correctly about their child's *IEP*.

#### *Conclusion # 5*

These data seemed to indicate that decisions about education were basically left up to the female head of the household. Mothers attended the IEP Team Meetings and fathers did not attend. Reasons are not known as to why fathers did not attend. Their involvement could be through the discussions at home.

#### *Recommendations to Improve Practice*

This study showed support that many special education documents/forms are written on a level that makes it too difficult for many to read. The parents are struggling with the forms and the content of the form. Many parents cannot read the form to ascertain the information being sent to them from the special education teacher. The following recommendations are offered to administrators and teachers who have a duty to help parents understand the *IEP* process and paperwork.

#### *Recommendation # 1*

Special education documents written and developed on the local level should not be written above a 9.0 grade level. This study showed the average parent reads on an average of 9.0 grade level. One should try to write memos, letters, etc. as close to the average reading level of your audience as possible.

### *Recommendation # 2*

Special education teachers should follow up with phone calls to parents after sending home multiple packs of special education documents/forms. An explanation could clear up some of the misunderstanding the parent has about the documents/forms and make meetings go smoother later on in the process. Also a phone call to explain the meeting and what is going to occur could ease the fears of many parents. Parents do not need to come to an IEP Team Meeting afraid or nervous about the reason for the meeting or what they are going to find out about their child. The special education teacher could offer to help the parent fill out the forms by coming by the school without drawing attention to the possibility that the parent cannot read the documents/forms.

### *Recommendation # 3*

After meetings, follow-up with a phone call. The special education teacher can check with the parent for understanding of the plan and actions taken during the meeting. Often people do not have the same ideas of what was agreed to at a meeting. A follow-up call could straighten up any misconceptions.

### *Recommendation # 4*

Invite parents to come to school as often as possible. The study showed the more contacts the parent had with the school the more knowledge the parent had of their child's *IEP*. Involved and knowledgeable parents could be an asset at the IEP Team Meeting when making decisions for the student.

*Recommendation # 5*

Forms need to be interactive so that handwriting is not a problem to the parents. Let teachers type right on the form provided by the state department on their website. The State Department of Special Education should put all special education documents/forms on their website and make them interactive for ease of use and more readable to the parent.

*Recommendation # 6*

The school should set up a reading resource center with a computer adapted with a screen reader. Documents/forms can be scanned into the computer and the screen reader would read the document/form to the parent. This would help with parents having difficulty reading document/forms sent home.

*Recommendation # 7*

Teachers and schools need to have more frequent contact with parents, not less! Based on the new legislation being proposed, every three years for an IEP Team Meeting may not be enough. The results of this study showed the more contacts a parent had with the school, the parent was more knowledgeable about their child's *IEP*.

*Recommendation # 8*

Parents expressed many negative feelings about attending IEP Team Meeting. They stated they were anxious, afraid, nervous, and scared. When setting up IEP Team Meetings, the special education teacher needs to schedule the meeting with enough time to conduct the meeting

and explain all details to the parents. Administrators and teachers need to take time for meetings and make them a priority.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study showed the importance of parent involvement in the school and how it related to the special education process. Further research could enhance the study and recommendations acted upon could make a difference in the life of a child and the involvement of his/her parents in the school.

#### *Recommendation # 1*

The State Department of Special Education and the Federal Government need to address the issue of the readability of documents/forms being printed for special education programs. Much of the information that is printed on the documents/forms is addressed due to law...but if the parent cannot read the information, is it worth the paper it is printed on?

#### *Recommendation # 2*

Expand to other programs and literature as well. Many people must be able to read the state driver's manual in order to study to take the test to obtain a driver's license. Also medical release forms need to be written at a level for patient's to understand what they have read and the consent they are giving to the hospital/doctor .

*Recommendation #3*

Many of the special education forms contain many blanks that are filled out by the special education teacher prior to being sent home to the parents. An analysis of completed forms needs to be conducted. The *IEP* form consists of many pages with lots of blanks. If the form was to be completed and then analyzed for the readability level, the form would probably score higher than when blank.

*Recommendation # 4*

The feelings of parents seem to be an issue overlooked by many educators. A study needs to be conducted to identify some of the variables that could bring about parent comfort. Some variables to be considered could be language, time, and etiquette.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION



**East Tennessee State University**  
Institutional Review Board • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-0565 • (423) 439-6134 • Fax (423) 439-8329

Friday, June 25, 1999

Melinda Pruitt  
Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis  
70,550

**RE: Relationship Between Reading Level of  
parents, Readability of Documents, and Parental  
Involvement in special Education**

**IRBNo: 98-167e**

I reviewed the above-referenced study and find that it qualifies as exempt from coverage under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced as Title 45--Part 46.101. If you feel it is necessary to call further IRB attention to any aspects of this project, please refer to the above-titled project and IRB number. I appreciate your bringing this project before the IRB for its concurrence of exempt status.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Walters".

David N. Walters, M.D., IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT

April 10, 1999

Superintendent Richard Morrison and Greene County School Board  
Greene County School System  
Greeneville, Tennessee

Dear Mr. Morrison and School Board Members:

As a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, I am currently involved in a research project concerning reading ability, readability of forms/documents, and parent involvement in the special education process. My dissertation, *Relationships Between Reading Level of Parents, Readability and Knowledge of Special Education Documents/Forms, and Parental Involvement*, will address these relationships.

I would like your permission to administer three subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery and one teacher developed questionnaire to parents of special education students in grades K-8 who attend Mosheim Elementary School. The instrument was developed by Richard W. Woodcock and M. Bonner Johnson. Subtest 13, 14, and 15 will be administered to the parents to test letter-word identification, word attack, and passage comprehension. Parent participation will be strictly on a voluntary basis. No individual will be identified.

In preparation for the study, I plan to meet with my principal to discuss the most appropriate means of scheduling appointments and to request his permission with regard to the

study. Scheduling appointments and meetings with parents will be conducted in a manner as to limit the disruption of normal school activities.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Melinda D. Pruitt

APPENDIX C  
PARENT LETTER

February 1, 2002

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The Greene County School System is interested in ways that schools and families can become more involved in the special education process. We would like your help in this matter. To do the best job, we need a parent from every family who has a child in special education at Mosheim Elementary School.

You will be contacted by phone to schedule an appointment with Mrs. Melinda Pruitt. During the meeting, Mrs. Pruitt will administer three subtests in reading and one questionnaire to you. The meeting will take approximately thirty minutes. The results from the tests will be kept strictly confidential. No individual will be identified. Parent participation is strictly on a voluntary basis.

This testing is part of a research project to determine the reading level of parents of special education students and the readability of special education forms/documents and its influence on parental involvement. Mrs. Pruitt, a Mosheim Elementary Special Education Teacher and a student at East Tennessee State University will conduct data analysis. Statistical results will be made available upon request. Confidentiality of data will be assured to all participants.

Thank you for your support in this research project. We hope this project would influence the readability of future forms/documents in special education that are sent home to parents. The purpose of special education forms/documents are to inform and invite the parent to

participate in the special education process, not to cause frustration in reading and comprehension of the form/document.

Dr. Joe Parkins  
Greene County Superintendent of Schools

Yhona A. Jones  
Mosheim Elementary School Principal

Melinda D. Pruitt  
Mosheim Elementary School Special Education Teacher

APPENDIX D  
INFORMED PARENT CONSENT FORM

## Informed Parent Consent Form

Researcher: Melinda Douthat Pruitt

Title of Project: *Relationships Between Reading Level of Parents, Readability and Knowledge of Special Education Documents/Forms, and Parental Involvement*

Dear Parent:

You are being asked to participate in a study involving parents of special education students at Mosheim Elementary School. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the reading level of parents of special education students and the readability level of special education local and state forms/documents, and whether this relationship could have an adverse affect on parental involvement in the special education process. This study will be conducted in the Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2002.

You will be completing three reading subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery and participating in an interview. The testing and interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Your participation will be strictly on a voluntary basis. Your individual responses will not be identified and the confidentiality of the data will be assured. If you have any questions about the study, you can call Melinda Pruitt at 422-4123 during the day and 422-7653 in the evening.

I understand the purpose of this study and my role as a participant. I agree to participate.

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
SURVEY

Survey

**Question 1. What is your highest level of education? CHECK ONE**

- (1) Some elementary school
- (2) Completed elementary school
- (3) Some high school      Actual grade level completed \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) Completed high school
- (5) Some college or training
- (6) College degree

**Question 2. What is your relationship to the child in special education? CHECK ONE**

- (1) Mother
- (2) Father
- (3) Grandmother
- (4) Grandfather
- (5) Guardian
- (6) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 3. What is your annual household income? CHECK ONE**

- (1) Below \$10,000
- (2) \$10,000-\$19,999
- (3) \$20,000-\$29,999
- (4) \$30,000-\$39,999
- (5) \$40,000-\$49,999
- (6) \$50,000-\$59,999
- (7) \$60,000-\$69,999
- (8) \$70,000-\$79,999
- (9) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 4. If you work, what is your work schedule? CHECK ONE**

- (1) Day shift
- (2) Evening shift
- (3) Night shift
- (4) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5. What other family or non-family members live in the household.**

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- (1) Brothers
- (2) Sisters
- (3) Grandparents
- (4) Aunts/uncles
- (5) Step-brothers
- (6) Step-sisters
- (7) Step-mother/step-father
- (8) Other \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F  
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WORKSHEET

## Parental Involvement Worksheet

How many times did you come to school for the following during the past school year?

Parent conferences	_____	Book Fair	_____
IEP Team Meetings	_____	Club meetings	_____
PTA meetings	_____	Field Trips	_____
Football games	_____	Parties	_____
Basketball games	_____	SPICE	_____
Volleyball games	_____	Homecoming	_____
Softball games	_____	Open House	_____
Baseball games	_____	Heritage Days	_____
VIP Days	_____	Committee mtg.	_____
Grade level meetings	_____	Talent Show	_____
Special Programs	_____	Fall Decoration	_____
Awards Programs	_____	Speech Contests	_____
Special Class Activities	_____	Spelling Bee	_____
Talk to administration	_____	Round Robin	_____
Booster Club meetings	_____	Veterans Day	_____
Registration	_____	Memory March	_____
Volunteer work	_____	Other	_____

APPENDIX G

*IEP* KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

## *IEP Knowledge Questions*

Question 1: What types of modifications are made for your child in the regular program?

Question 2: Is your child taking the state/district mandated assessment or the state mandated alternate assessment?

Question 3: What special education and related services is your child receiving?

Question 4: State one annual goal and one short objective for your child in reading or math?

Question 5: According to your child's *IEP*, does your child have any special factors to be considered? If yes, what are the factors?

APPENDIX H  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

### Parents feelings about involvement in special education process

Question 1: How do you feel when you come to school to attend an IEP Team Meeting?

Question 2: Do you feel that your input at an IEP Team Meeting is needed and listened to by others?

Question 3: When you leave the IEP Team Meeting, do you fully understand everything that was discussed and the program put in place for your child? Or do you leave with unanswered questions?

APPENDIX I

*CONSENT FOR INITIAL ASSESSMENT*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

On \_\_\_\_\_ (date), \_\_\_\_\_ (child) was referred for a comprehensive assessment for determination of eligibility and need of special educational services. This referral is based upon a review of current classroom performance, past educational records, and/or screening information. We are requesting permission to assess your child in order to provide additional information to help us plan a more effective educational program. Also, as the parent of a child who may be eligible for special education, the *Rights of Children with Disabilities and Parent Responsibility* brochure is being provided for your information.

The reason(s) to request your permission to assess your child is (are):

- ( ) child is working ( ) above grade level or ( ) below grade level in one or more basic skills
- ( ) child's behavior is inconsistent with that expected for children of students' age
- ( ) child's rate of progress has ( ) increased ( ) decreased
- ( ) child's speech/language skills are inconsistent with those expected for children of student's age

The areas/procedures to be considered for your child's assessment are checked below. The extent of the assessment will depend upon the severity of the problem.

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Vision/Hearing Screening     | _____ 9. Audiological Evaluation          |
| _____ 2. Classroom Observation        | _____ 10. Functional Vision Assessment    |
| _____ 3. Academic Achievement         | _____ 11. Personality Assessment          |
| _____ 4. Intellectual Functioning     | _____ 12. Vocational Assessment           |
| _____ 5. Speech/Language Skills       | _____ 13. Assistive Technology Assessment |
| _____ 6. Gross/Fine Motor Skills      | _____ 14. Self Help/Adaptive Behavior     |
| _____ 7. Visual/Auditory Skills       | _____ 15. Functional Behavior Assessment  |
| _____ 8. School and/or Home Behaviors | _____ 16. Other _____                     |

Please sign this form and return it to the school. Your signature shall not be construed as consent for placement in any special education program. When the assessment has been completed, you will be invited to an IEP team meeting in order to discuss the findings, determine your child's eligibility for special education services and, if needed, plan an appropriate educational program for your child. If you have any information you would like to share pertaining to your child's assessment, please forward it to the person named below or bring it to the meeting.

I HAVE REVIEWED THE ENCLOSED BROCHURE CONCERNING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Please check one of the following:

- \_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for an individual assessment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I do not give permission for an individual assessment.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ If you

have any questions, you may contact one of the following:

Name	Department/Position	Telephone Number
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

School \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Date Received from Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX J

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *CONSENT FOR INITIAL ASSESSMENT*

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *Consent for Initial Assessment*

### Counts

---

Words	399
Characters	2888
Paragraphs	64
Sentences	13

### Averages

---

Sentences per Paragraph	2.6
Words per Sentence	17.7
Characters per Word	5.2

### Readability

---

Passive Sentences	38%
Flesch Reading Ease	37.5
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0

APPENDIX K

*CONSENT FOR RE-EVALUATION*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_

Federal and state laws require that each student receiving special education services be re-evaluated at least every three years, or as conditions warrant, to determine if the student continues to meet the state criteria to be eligible for special education services.

On the basis of the IEP/Assessment Team review, the recommendation is that:

\_\_\_\_\_ No additional assessments are needed. Your child continues to be eligible for special education and/or related services.<sup>1</sup>

**OR**

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional assessments are needed in order to determine your child's continued eligibility and/or to assist in determining your child's educational needs. The areas to be assessed are checked below:

<input type="checkbox"/> Vision/Hearing Screening	<input type="checkbox"/> Gross/Fine Motor Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual/Auditory Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistive Technology Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Achievement	<input type="checkbox"/> School and/or Home Behaviors	<input type="checkbox"/> Self Help/Adaptive Behavior
<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual/Cognitive Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Audiological Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Functional Behavior Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Speech/Language Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Functional Vision Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

Check one line only:

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for the assessments marked above to be conducted.<sup>2</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give permission for the following assessments to be conducted: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree no additional assessments are needed at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent or Guardian

Enclosure: *Rights of Children with Disabilities and Parent Responsibilities*

<sup>1</sup> If additional data is not needed, the IEP Team may choose not to re-test, unless requested to do so by the child's parents.

<sup>2</sup> Your (the parents) signature will not be construed as consent for placement.

APPENDIX L

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *CONSENT FOR RE-EVALUATION*

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *Consent for Re-Evaluation*

### Counts

---

Words	249
Characters	1908
Paragraphs	44
Sentences	6

### Averages

---

Sentences per Paragraph	1.5
Words per Sentence	18.8
Characters per Word	5.2

### Readability

---

Passive Sentences	83%
Flesch Reading Ease	35.7
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0

APPENDIX M

*INVITATION TO A MEETING*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Our school system would like to invite you to attend a meeting to discuss the education needs of \_\_\_\_\_ (child). It will be at \_\_\_\_\_ (location and room) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time).

Members of our staff would like to meet with you for the following reasons: *(Check all that apply.)*

- To review your child's educational status and determine what data, if any, are needed to complete your child's evaluation/re-evaluation.
- To review the results of your child's initial evaluation/reevaluation and determine eligibility for special education and related services.
- To review and/or develop your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- To consider a manifestation determination based upon your child's disability prior to a disciplinary action/hearing.
- To consider the need for a functional behavior assessment of your child.
- To consider the need to create or revise a behavior intervention plan.
- To consider the need to develop or revise the student's transition plan. (The student and other agency(s) representative(s) are also receiving this Invitation.)
- To review your child's anticipated date of graduation or exit from special education.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other people, and their titles, who will be invited to attend:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Please plan to participate in this meeting; your input is very important. You are welcome to bring others who you believe can assist the team. If you do bring others, we encourage you to notify us before the meeting so that arrangements can be made to accommodate all the participants. If you need an interpreter or translator, please let us know. If you are unable to attend at the proposed time, but would be able to participate if the meeting was rescheduled (to a mutually agreed upon time and/or place), or conducted by phone, or if you have any questions concerning your rights as outlined in the enclosed brochure, please contact our department by \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (phone number).

Sincerely,

Enclosure

**Rights of Children with Disabilities**

**And Parent Responsibilities**

cc: Meeting participants  
*Documentation of attempts to ensure parental participation*

<b>Types of Contact</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Results</b>
Written Correspondence		
Telephone Calls		
Home Visits		
Other		

APPENDIX N

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *INVITATION TO A MEETING*

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *Invitation to a Meeting*

### Counts

---

Words	352
Characters	2404
Paragraphs	34
Sentences	17

### Averages

---

Sentences per Paragraph	1.5
Words per Sentence	17.2
Characters per Word	5.0

### Readability

---

Passive Sentences	11%
Flesch Reading Ease	46.8
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	10.7

APPENDIX O

*PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE*

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

To: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ has been referred for: an initial evaluation or, a re-evaluation.

OR

On \_\_\_\_\_, an IEP Team meeting was held to discuss a change in your child's education. The following information is presented to you as the notice of the results from this meeting.

The school district:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Proposes to initiate or change areas checked below; AND/OR
- \_\_\_\_\_ Refuses to initiate or change areas checked below.

Actions were proposed in the following areas:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Identification/ Eligibility
- \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluation/Re-Evaluation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review/revise Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Provision of FAPE)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Educational Placement (includes change in educational placement, graduation and termination of eligibility)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

1. Description of the action proposed or refused by the school system: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Explanation of why the school system proposes or refuses to take this action: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Description of any options the school district considered prior to this proposal: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Reasons the above listed options were rejected: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Description of evaluation procedures, tests, records, or reports the school district used as a basis for the proposal or refusal: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Other factors relevant to the action proposed are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

As parents of a child with a disability, you are entitled to certain procedural safeguards as outlined in the enclosed brochure entitled *Rights of Children with Disabilities and Parent Responsibilities*. Your rights include the right to request a Due Process Hearing or to request mediation if you disagree with the services planned for your child.

If you have any questions about the information provided, please call \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. We will be glad to answer any questions that you may have concerning the special education services proposed for your child.

If you disagree with this decision or need additional information concerning your rights, you may contact the Tennessee Department of Education 615-741-2851 (phone) or 615-532-9412 (fax) or your Regional Resource Center.

If the parent was not present at this IEP meeting, a completed Individual Education Program (IEP) for this student must accompany this form.

APPENDIX P

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE*

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *Prior Written Notice*

### Counts

---

Words	328
Characters	3428
Paragraphs	39
Sentences	10

### Averages

---

Sentences per Paragraph	1.4
Words per Sentence	19.1
Characters per Word	5.1

### Readability

---

Passive Sentences	20%
Flesch Reading Ease	35.5
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0

APPENDIX Q

*TENNESSEE'S INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)*



Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)

From \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ to \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_  
Initial \_\_\_ Annual \_\_\_ Interim \_\_\_ Addendum \_\_\_

Student: Last \_\_\_ First \_\_\_ Middle \_\_\_ Birthdate: \_\_\_ Mo/Day/Yr \_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_

Student Social Security/ID#: \_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_ M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_ Ethnic Group: I B A H W \_\_\_ (Specify)

Relationship to Student: (Circle One) Parent Guardian Surrogate

Name: \_\_\_ First \_\_\_ Middle \_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_  
4. Last \_\_\_ First \_\_\_ Middle \_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Residence (if different): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Attending School: \_\_\_\_\_ Home/School (if different): \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Descriptive Information:**

Describe the child's strengths: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe the concerns of the parents regarding their child's education: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe how the child's disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Write "Yes" or "No" under "Exceptional" column for each area assessed. Remember "Exceptional" areas require a completed Goal Sheet.

Area Assessed	Present Levels of Performance Levels of functioning, should, when applicable, include norm referenced and/or criterion referenced data, as well as descriptive information on the student's deficit areas.	Sources of Information	Date	Exceptional Yes/No
Prevocational/Vocational				

**Consideration of Special Factors for IEP Development:**

- ◆ Does the child have limited English proficiency? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, what is his/her primary mode of language? \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ Is the child blind or visually impaired? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, does the child need instruction in Braille? \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ Does the child have communication needs? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_
  - ◆ Is the child deaf or hard of hearing? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, did the IEP Team consider:
    - ◆ the child's language and communication needs; \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
    - ◆ opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode; \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
    - ◆ necessary opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
- ◆ Is assistive technology necessary in order to implement the child's IEP? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, what is needed? \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ Does the child's behavior impede his/her learning or that of others? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, the IEP Team has addressed the child's behavior in the following way(s):  
 \_\_\_ Functional Behavior Assessment, \_\_\_ Behavior Intervention Plan, \_\_\_ Accommodations, \_\_\_ Goals and Objectives, \_\_\_ Other. \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ Where in the IEP is this information located? \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Has a comprehensive vocational evaluation been administered? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

**Transition Services Planning** (Beginning at age 14, or younger)

**Desired Post School Outcomes**

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_ Post-Secondary Education/Training: \_\_\_\_\_

Independent/Supported Living: \_\_\_\_\_ Community Involvement: \_\_\_\_\_

**Transition Service Needs**

Grade:   9   Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade:  10  Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade:  11  Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade:  12  Course of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

**Transition Services** (Beginning at age 16, or younger)

Service Area	Need Yes/No	Activities/Strategies (All activities/strategies that are the responsibility of special education and are to be implemented this year must be reflected in goal sheets.)	Agency/Responsibilities
Instruction:			
Related Services:			
Community Experiences:			
Employment & Post-school Adult Living Objectives:			
Daily Living Objectives: (if appropriate)			
Functional Vocational Evaluation: (if appropriate)			

**Documentation of other agency participation in planning and the person responsible for contacting agency(s) if a representative did not attend:** \_\_\_\_\_

**If the student was not in attendance, how were the student's preferences and interests considered?** (Check all that apply.)

Student interview \_\_\_ Student survey \_\_\_ Student portfolio \_\_\_ Vocational Assessments \_\_\_ Interest Inventory \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

# Measurable Annual Goals and Benchmarks/Short-term Instructional Objectives for IEP and Transition Activities

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Goal \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Area of Need: \_\_\_\_\_ Personnel/Position Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Annual Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Benchmarks/Short-Term Instructional Objectives	Anticipated Beginning Date	Criteria for Mastery	Methods Of Evaluation	Actual Date(s) & Results of Evaluation	Report of Progress						
					1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
1.		Refer to "Codes" Section below									
2.											
3.											
4.											

Supplementary Aids/Services and Support for th _____ _____ _____	<b>Report of Progress</b> 1. No progress made* 2. Very little progress being made towards goal* 3. Some progress being made towards goal, or 4. Goal has been met, <b>And</b> 5. Anticipate meeting goal by IEP end, or 6. Do not anticipate meeting goal by IEP end. N/A Not applicable. Objective not covered during this grading period	*If 1 or 2, due to: (a) Lack of prerequisite skills, (b) more time needed, (c) inadequate assessment, (d) excessive absences/ tardies, or (e) other: _____  <b>Date Progress Report Sent to Parents:</b> 1st Grading Period _____ 2nd Grading Period _____ 3rd Grading Period _____ 4th Grading Period _____ 5th Grading Period _____ 6th Grading Period _____
Program Modifications/Supports for School Personnel: _____ _____ _____		
Criteria for Mastery 1. 100% 2. 90% 3. 80% 4. 70% 5. Other: _____	Methods of Evaluation 1. Standard Tests 2. Teacher-Made Tests 3. Teacher Observations 4. Other: _____	Results of Evaluation M - Objective Met - Proceed to Next Objective C - Continue with same objective - Some progress made, more time needed D - Discontinue objective - Less than expected or no progress made

## Special Education and Related Services:

Service Code and Type of Service	Sessions Per Wk/Mo/Yr	Time Per Session	Hours Per Week	Beginning/Ending Dates	Location of Services
01 Consultation	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___
02 Direct Special Education (For Inclusion, refer to State Instruction Booklet under "Type of Service" section.)	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___
03 Supervision (Option 8 only)	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___	___/___/___
Related Service(s), including Instruction from Specialized Personnel ___/___/___ ___/___/___ ___/___/___ ___/___/___					
Related Service Codes: 04 Psychological Services 05 Social Work Services 06 Occupational Therapy 07 Speech/Language Pathology Services 08 Recreation Services 09 Physical Therapy 10 School Health Services 11 Counseling Services 12 Orientation & Mobility Services 13 Audiology Services 14 Other Services 15 Ancillary - Attendant 16 Ancillary - Interpreter 17 Ancillary - Other 18 Residential 19 Homebound/Hospital					
<b>Total Regular Education hours per week:</b> _____			<b>Total Special Education hours per week:</b> _____		

## Regular Program Participation:

Indicate the appropriate subject area letter beside all modifications that are to be used by the student in the regular program.

Classroom Accommodations/Modifications:	Assignment Accommodations/Modifications:
___ Preferential seating ___ Provide copies of material to be copied from book or board ___ Provide copies of notes (from another student) ___ Peer tutoring ___ Behavior/performance contracting ___ Highlighted textbook (student) ___ Taped materials ___ Other: _____	___ Assignment book ___ Abbreviated assignments ___ Additional time ___ Study guide ___ Extra grade opportunities (Re-do items missed, extra credit) ___ Compacting ___ Other: _____

**Classroom Testing Accommodations/Modifications:** (In order to justify appropriateness of accommodations for any state mandated tests, the testing accommodations listed below should be used consistently within a student's academic program over the previous year.)

\_\_\_ Extended Time  
 \_\_\_ Reading aloud /sign for internal instructions  
 \_\_\_ Reading aloud /sign for test items  
 \_\_\_ Repeating oral directions verbatim  
 \_\_\_ Use of calculator  
 \_\_\_ Word processor with or without talk-text technology  
 \_\_\_ Spelling  
 \_\_\_ Math  
 \_\_\_ Science  
 \_\_\_ English  
 \_\_\_ Health  
 \_\_\_ Physical Education  
 \_\_\_ Music/Art  
 \_\_\_ Economics  
 \_\_\_ Title I  
 \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**State/District Mandated Tests:** (Check either Number 1 or Number 2. When utilizing accommodations 1A, 1B or 2, the appropriate addendum must be attached to this IEP.)

**1. Student will participate in the following state/district mandated assessment(s):**  
 \_\_\_ TCAP Achievement  
 \_\_\_ TCAP Writing  
 \_\_\_ TCAP Competency Test  
 Language/English Score: \_\_\_ Date Passed: \_\_\_ Exit Exam (Specify which test):  
 Math/Algebra I Score: \_\_\_ Date Passed: \_\_\_ Work Keys ACT SAT  
 Biology I Score: \_\_\_ Date Passed: \_\_\_ District Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Check either A and/or B when using accommodations for the TCAP.)**  
 \_\_\_ A. State Mandated Assessment with Allowable State Accommodations  
 \_\_\_ B. State Mandated Assessment includes Special Conditions Accommodations.  
 \_\_\_ A. TCAP-Alt: (ASA) \_\_\_ Achievement Level (Check Accommodations Above)  
 \_\_\_ B. TCAP-Alt: (PA)

**2. Student will participate in State Mandated Alternate Assessment (TCAP-Alt).**  
 \_\_\_

**LRE and General Education:** Explain the extent, if any, in which the student **will not** participate with non-disabled peers in:

- ◆ the regular class: \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ extracurricular and nonacademic activities: \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ his/her LEA Home School: \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Transportation:** Does student require special transportation? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**Extended School Year:** Date ESY program was/will be determined: \_\_\_\_\_. ESY program \_\_\_\_ is not to be provided.

**IEP Participants:** (The following individuals attended the IEP Team and participated in the development of this Individualized Education Program.)

Position	Signature	In Agreement	Date
Parent	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
LEA Representative	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
Special Education Teacher	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
Regular Education Teacher	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
Student (if appropriate)	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
Interpreter of Evaluation Results	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
_____	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____
_____	_____	Yes ___ No ___	_____

**Informed Parental Consent:**

- \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No I certify that I am the legal parent(s) / guardian(s) / surrogate(s) of this child.
- \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No I have been informed of and understand my rights as a parent, and have received a copy of my rights.
- \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No I have been involved in the IEP Team meeting and/or the development of this IEP, and give permission for the proposed program described in this IEP for my child.
- \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No My child and I have been informed of his/her right to represent himself/herself upon his/her eighteenth birthday. (Note: This information must be provided beginning at least one year prior to the student's 18th birthday.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Guardian/Surrogate Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date IEP was given to parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_. If the parent(s) did not attend, the person responsible for forwarding and explaining the contents of the IEP to the parents along with their rights is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Documentation of IEP Review by Other Teachers not in Attendance:**

Signature	_____	Date	_____	Signature	_____	Date	_____
Signature	_____	Date	_____	Signature	_____	Date	_____
Signature	_____	Date	_____	Signature	_____	Date	_____

**ALLOWABLE STATE TEST ACCOMMODATIONS ADDENDUM (to the IEP)**

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Test Accommodation	TCAP Achievement	TCAP Writing	TCAP Competency	TCAP Gateway/EOC Tests
<b>Alternative Test Editions/Revised Format/Presentation</b> Note for TCAP Achievement Test: See Teacher's Notes to Braille Edition for directions Braille (readers for illustrations and graphs—permitted) Large Print (with no extended time allowed) <u>Signing Directions</u>				
All Oral Instructions				
Calculator Use	Allowable on applications section only	Not Applicable	Special Conditions Accommodation	
Flexible Setting				
Individually (student may read silently or aloud)				
Small Group				
Study Carrel				
Front of Room				
Special Education Class				
Home/Out of School (Homebound Students Only)				
<b>Other Allowable Accommodations</b>				
Magnification Equipment				
Templates, Masks, Pointers				
<b>Auditory Aids</b>				
Amplification				
Noise Buffer				
<b>Flexible Scheduling</b>				
Flexible Scheduling of Subtests (within allotted time)				
Flexible Time of Day				
<b>Recording Answers</b>				
Student Marks in Test Booklet				
Recorded by Scribe				

\*Allowable Accommodations are available for all students

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS ACCOMMODATIONS (Addendum to the IEP)**

**Student's Name** \_\_\_\_\_

1/ Accommodations	2/ TCAP Achievement	3/ TCAP Writing	4/ TCAP Competency	5/ TCAP EOC and Gateway Tests	6/ Required Conditions for Accommodations
<b>A.</b> Extended Time	NOT ALLOWED	* See Test Administration Manual Addendum for Extended Time Limits	Test is Untimed	NOT ALLOWED--EOC [Not Applicable for Gateway Assessments]	◆Fine-Motor IEP Goal Verified
<b>B.</b> Extended Time	* See Test Administration Manual for Extended Time Limits ◆No Need to Select with Braille where Extended Time is Standard	* See Test Administration Manual Addendum for Extended Time Limits	Test is Untimed	* See Examiner's Manual for Extended Time Limits [Not Applicable for Gateway Assessments]	◆Only With Verified Visual Impairment
<b>C.</b> Read Aloud/Sign Internal Test Instructions (Includes Audio for Competency Tests)	* See Test Administration Manual for Allowable Subtests	Not Applicable	* May Read Aloud or Use Audio Only or Audio with Test Booklet	* _____	≥ 16 <sup>th</sup> Percentile on Individual Standardized Reading Test (Decoding and Comprehension) —within 2 years of TCAP Test: _____ Date _____ Percentile _____ And / Or Visual and/or Hearing Impairment
<b>D.</b> Read Aloud/Sign Internal Test Items (Includes Audio for Competency Tests)	* See Test Administration Manual for Allowable Subtests	Not Applicable	* May Read Aloud or Use Audio Only or Audio with Test Booklet	* [Not allowable for English I and English II]	≥ 16 <sup>th</sup> Percentile on Individual Standardized Reading Test (Decoding and Comprehension) —within 2 years of TCAP Test: _____ Date _____ Percentile _____ And / Or Visual and/or Hearing Impairment
<b>E.</b> Repeat/Sign Oral Instructions Verbatim (As Needed)	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	*	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	≥ 16 <sup>th</sup> Percentile on Individual Standardized Reading Test (Decoding and Comprehension) —within 2 years of TCAP Test: _____ Date _____ Percentile _____ And / Or Visual and/or Hearing Impairment
<b>F.</b> Calculator	* Allowable Accommodation for All Students On Specified Subsections [Record IEP Documentation if LEA does not allow calculators as an Allowable Accommodation]	Not Applicable	* See Test Administration Manual Addendum for Selected Items	Allowable Accommodation for All Students See Examiner's Manual for Calculator Restrictions [Record IEP Documentation if LEA does not allow calculators as an Allowable Accommodation]	≥ 16 <sup>th</sup> Percentile on Individual Standardized Calculations Test —within 2 years of TCAP Test: _____ Date _____ Percentile _____
<b>G.</b> Talking (with earphones) Or Electronic Device with Braille Display	* All Math Tests	Not Applicable	* All Math Tests	Allowable Accommodation for All Students See Examiner's Manual for Calculator Restrictions	◆Visual Impairment –calculator must be utilized (100%) in all mathematics And will be necessary for post-school success
<b>H.</b> Word Processor with/without Talk-Text Technology	Not Applicable (See Scribe—Below)	*	Not Applicable [See Scribe—Below]	* Not Applicable [See Scribe—Below]	◆ IEP goal in writing where technology is used consistently throughout general education curriculum (grammar, spell-check, and thesaurus not allowed) ◆ Technology used as accommodation is necessary for post-school success
<b>I.</b> Scribe	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	* See Test Administration Manual Addendum for Directions	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	Allowable Accommodation for All Students	◆As indicated on IEP Or ◆Due to short-term physical inability to write

## ELL ACCOMMODATIONS (if required conditions are met)

All students are expected to achieve to the same high standards in Tennessee. There is no blanket exemption of ELL students from state assessments. Any ELL exemption must be **individually determined** based on a student's English language proficiency, as documented by the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT) indicating the level of proficiency. At the end of the first year of enrollment, all ELL students are expected to take all state mandated assessments. Students that are identified with disabilities under IDEA and ELL may use ELL, Allowable and Special Conditions Accommodations as appropriate. School districts must document and determine exemptions and accommodations each year, based on individual needs and abilities.

### First Year Only

ELL students **may be exempt** for the first year from TCAP assessments **if** they:

- a) are identified on the Home Language Survey as speaking a language other than English, **and**
- b) score as limited English proficient on the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT), **and**
- c) are in their first calendar year of attendance in a U.S. school.

Accommodation	TCAP Achievement	TCAP Writing	TCAP Competency	TCAP EOC/Gateway	Required Conditions for Accommodations
<b>Q. Extended Time</b>	Time and a half per subtest	Time and a half	N/A (not a timed test)	End of Course - time and a half Gateway - N/A (not a timed test)	<p>➤ ELL, <b>and</b></p> <p>➤ score as limited English proficient on IPT</p>
<b>R. Bilingual Dictionary</b>	Not allowed for Language Arts, Reading, Spelling, Word Analysis nor Vocabulary subtests	Not allowed	Not allowed for Language Arts	Not allowed for English I or II	<p>➤ ELL, <b>and</b></p> <p>➤ score as limited English proficient on IPT</p>
<b>S. Read Aloud Internal Test Instructions</b>	All subtests	All tests	May read aloud or use audio tape only or audio tape with test book	All tests	<p>➤ ELL, <b>and</b></p> <p>➤ score as limited English proficient on IPT</p>
<b>T. Read Aloud Internal Test Items</b>	Not allowed for Language Arts, Reading, Spelling, Word Analysis nor Vocabulary subtests	All tests	May read aloud or use audio tape only or use audio tape with test booklet	Not allowed for English I or II	<p>➤ ELL, <b>and</b></p> <p>➤ score as limited English proficient on IPT</p>

\*Remember all students are eligible for Allowable Accommodations, as needed, on any state test. See the test manual for guidelines.

# TCAP-ALT Participation Guidelines

(Addendum to the IEP)

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 To participate in the Alternate Assessment, the student shall have a current IEP and documentation to support all of the criteria listed below.

## SECTION I

YES	NO	<b>CHECK YES OR NO AND DOCUMENT BELOW</b>
		<p>The student demonstrates cognitive ability and adaptive skills, which prevent full involvement and completion of the state approved content standards even with program modifications.</p> <p>Cognitive Ability Test: _____ Date _____</p> <p>Total Battery Score: _____ Highest Component Score _____ Lowest Component Score _____</p> <p>Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment: _____</p> <p>Total Battery Score: _____ Highest Component Score _____ Lowest Component Score _____</p> <p>The student requires intensive, frequent individualized instruction in a variety of settings including school, community, home, or the workplace to acquire, maintain, and generalize functional academics and life skills.</p> <p>There are historical data (current and longitudinal across multiple settings) that confirm the individual student criteria listed above.</p> <p>The following conditions have been ruled out as primary justification for not completing the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), even with extensive accommodations and modifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• excessive or extended absences,</li> <li>• sensory impairments,</li> <li>• emotional-behavioral disabilities,</li> <li>• specific learning disabilities,</li> <li>• language impairment,</li> <li>• limited English proficiency, or</li> <li>• social, cultural, and economic differences.</li> </ul>
YES	NO	<b>FOR A STUDENT 14 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER</b>
		<p>The student is unable to complete a state approved high school diploma program, even with extended learning opportunities and/or accommodations.</p>

**If the answer to any Section I question is NO--STOP HERE.**  
**This student does not meet criteria for participation in the Alternate Assessment**

**If ALL the answers to Section I are YES--PROCEED to Section II.**

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION II**

**Guidelines for Determining Participation in TCAP-Alt: ASA or TCAP-Alt: PA**

YES	NO
	<p>Based on criterion-referenced or norm-referenced assessments, the student's <u>instructional reading level</u> measures at fourth grade level or below (K-4).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test: _____ Date _____</li> <li>• Instructional Reading Level: _____</li> </ul>
	<p>The IEP team has determined the student is not expected to experience duress or demonstrate disruptive behaviors under standardized testing conditions.</p>

**IF the answer to both SECTION II questions are YES, the student may participate in the TCAP-Alt Academic Skills Assessment (TCAP-ALT: ASA) option**

**HOWEVER, the IEP team may determine the TCAP-Alt Portfolio Assessment (TCAP-Alt: PA) is the more appropriate assessment.**

The IEP team has determined that the student will participate in: \_\_\_ TCAP-Alt: ASA \_\_\_ TerraNova Grade Level--

**OR**

\_\_\_ TCAP-Alt: PA (Check Content Areas for Assessment)

- English/Language Arts  Mathematics  Science  Social Studies

\_\_\_\_ IEP team Members agree that the student meets participation guidelines for the TN Alternate Assessment and will be excluded from the regular state assessment.

\_\_\_\_ The student's participation in the TN Alternate Assessment is documented and justified annually on the IEP.

**IEP TEAM MEMBERS:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX R

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *TENNESSEE'S INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM*  
(IEP)

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *Tennessee's Individual Education Program (IEP)*

### Counts

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Words	2901
Characters	25860
Paragraphs	545
Sentences	82

### Averages

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Sentences per Paragraph	2.0
Words per Sentence	11.3
Characters per Word	5.3

### Readability

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Passive Sentences	13%
Flesch Reading Ease	43.5
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.9

APPENDIX S

*THE ABCS OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS*

# The ABCs of IDEA:

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS

Dear Parent: Your child has been referred for or is currently receiving special education services to provide for his or her individual educational needs. This document is a brief overview of a parent's procedural rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is meant to be a resource guide, but it does not cover all provisions of IDEA. For a more detailed and specific explanation of your rights and responsibilities, please consult the law (IDEA). The Tennessee Department of Education/Division of Special Education, also publishes a more complete Parents' Rights Brochure entitled, *Rights of Children with Disabilities and Parent Responsibilities*, September 2001, which may be found at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/msped.htm>.

### INVITATION TO IEP MEETING

As a parent, you have a right to participate in the development of your child's Individualized Educational Program (IEP). Therefore, all meetings must be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon (by you and the school system) time and place. The school system must notify you at least ten (10) school days before an IEP meeting to ensure that you will have an opportunity to attend. When notifying you of an IEP meeting related to an incident of misconduct, the notification time may be reduced to as few as twenty-four (24) hours.

### YOUR RIGHT TO PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE

You must be given written notice at least ten (10) school days before the school system:

- Proposes to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of your child or the provision of free appropriate public education to your child;
- Refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of your child or the provision of a free appropriate public education to your child; or
- Refuses to amend your child's records or proposes to destroy unneeded records in accordance with the confidentiality requirements of the law.

The ten-day notification time may be reduced if you and the school system agree or in the case of an incident of misconduct.

The content of the notice must include:

- A description of the action proposed or refused;
- An explanation of why the school system proposes or refuses to take the action;
- A description of any options considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;
- A description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report used as a basis for the action;
- A description of any other factors relevant to the local school system's proposed or refused action;

- A statement that you have protections under the procedural safeguards; and
- Sources for you to contact to obtain assistance in understanding the notice.

### INFORMED WRITTEN PARENTAL CONSENT

The school system must get your informed consent before:

- Conducting an initial evaluation or reevaluation of your child;
- Initially placing your child in a special education program;
- Disclosing personally identifiable information to unauthorized persons, except for directory information where reasonable notice of disclosure is provided to you and you have not objected.

**Note:** If you refuse to consent to evaluation or reevaluation the school system may continue to pursue those evaluations by using due process procedures.

Your informed consent is not needed for:

- Reviewing existing data as part of an evaluation or a reevaluation;
- Administering a test or other assessment that is administered to all children unless consent is required of parents of all children; or
- Reevaluation, if the school system documents that it has taken reasonable measures to obtain your consent and you have failed to respond.

### STUDENT RECORDS

IDEA gives you the right to inspect and review any records directly relating to your child which are maintained by the school system or by a party acting for the school system. The school system must comply with your request to inspect and review all education records relating to the identification, evaluation, and placement of your child and the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to your child.

This request must be completed, without unnecessary delay and before any IEP meeting or hearing and in no case, more than forty-five (45) days after the request has been received.

**Your right to inspect and review your child's records includes:**

- The right to a response from the school system if you make a reasonable request for explanations and interpretations of the records;
- The right to request the school system to provide copies of the records, if failure to provide copies would effectively prevent you from exercising your right to inspect and review the records; and
- The right to have your representative (authorized in writing) inspect and review the records.

The school system may presume that you have the authority to inspect and review records relating to your child unless it has been advised that you do not have the authority under applicable Tennessee law governing such matters as guardianship, separation and divorce and has been provided a copy of the applicable document.

If any of your child's education records include information regarding other children, you shall have the right to inspect and review only the information relating to your own child or to be informed of that specific information.

The school system may charge a fee for copies of records which are made for you if the fee does not effectively prevent you from exercising your right to inspect and review those records.

If you believe that information in your child's education records is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or other rights of your child, you may request the school system to amend the information. If you request the school system to amend your child's records, the school system must decide whether to amend the record and respond to you within ten (10) days of receipt of your request. If the school system refuses to amend your child's record, it shall inform you of the refusal and advise you of your right to a hearing conducted by an impartial hearing officer to challenge the information in your child's records. If, as a result of the hearing, it is decided that the information is inaccurate, misleading or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of your child, the school system shall amend the information accordingly and provide written notice to you. If, as a result of the hearing, it is decided that the information is not inaccurate, misleading or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of your child, the school system shall inform you of your right to place in your child's records a statement commenting on the information or setting forth any reasons for disagreeing with the decision of the school system. Any explanation placed in your child's records must be maintained as long as the records or contested portions are maintained by the school system. If your child's records or the contested portions are disclosed by the school system to any party, the explanation must also be disclosed to the party.

Except for the disclosure of directory information (e.g., name, address, dates of attendance, etc.) where reasonable notice of disclosure is provided to you and you have not objected, the school system must get written consent from you before disclosing personally identifiable information from your child's records to unauthorized persons.

## **INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION (IEE)**

If you disagree with the school system's evaluation of your child, you have a right to seek an IEE. Each school system must have a procedure for providing an IEE at the request of parents.

An IEE must be provided to you at public expense and without unnecessary delay unless the school system:

- Initiates a hearing to show its evaluation is appropriate; or
- Demonstrates in a due process hearing that the evaluation presented by you did not meet the school system's evaluation criteria. If this is submitted, you still have the right to an IEE, but not at public expense.

When you request an IEE from the school system, the school system must provide you with information about where an IEE may be obtained and the evaluation criteria to be used.

Whenever you obtain an IEE, the criteria under which the assessment is obtained, including the location of the assessment and the qualifications of the examiner, must be the same as the criteria that the school system uses when it initiates an assessment. If the IEE meets school system criteria, (regardless of whether it is paid for by you or by public funds) the results must be considered by the school system in any decision made with respect to the provisions of FAPE to your child and may be presented as evidence at a due process hearing regarding your child.

**Note:** If a hearing officer requests an IEE as a part of a due process hearing, it shall be at public expense.

## **COMPLAINTS, MEDIATION & DUE PROCESS**

### **Administrative Complaints**

The Tennessee Department of Education encourages you to first attempt to resolve complaints regarding your child's educational program by contacting local school system officials. If you have contacted the principal of your child's school, your school system's Director of Special Education or the Director of Schools for your school system and your complaint is unresolved, you may file an Administrative Complaint with the Tennessee Department of Education/Division of Special Education (Division). To be processed and investigated by the Division, your complaint must allege a violation of a requirement of a state or federal law or regulation governing educational services to a child eligible for special education and provide specific information to support the allegation.

If you file an Administrative Complaint with the Division, a staff member will be assigned to conduct an impartial review of the facts and to recommend an objective resolution of the complaint based on the Division's procedures.

#### **An Administrative Complaint:**

- Must be in writing;
- Should be addressed to the Division;
- Must be signed by you (anonymous complaints will not be processed);
- Should be clear and concise in identifying the concern or the alleged violations; and
- Need not identify the specific law or regulation involved.

The Division must investigate and resolve all Administrative Complaints within sixty (60) calendar days from receipt of the written complaint. The sixty (60) day timeline may be extended by the Division for exceptional circumstances.

### **Mediation**

You and the school system have a right to participate in special education mediation conducted by the Tennessee Department of Education/Division of Special Education (Division) to resolve disputes involving identification, evaluation, or educational placement of your child or the provision of FAPE to your child. Mediation is a method of dispute resolution where both parties sit down with an impartial neutral party who helps them reach an agreement that is set forth in writing.

#### **The mediation process:**

- Is voluntary on the part of you and the school system;
- May not be used to deny or delay your right to a due process hearing, or to deny any of your other rights under IDEA; and
- Is conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator who is trained in effective mediation techniques.

The Division shall maintain a list of individuals who are qualified mediators and knowledgeable in laws and regulations relating to the provision of special education and related services.

If you and the school system agree to mediate a dispute, a "Request for Mediation" form must be completed and signed by you and the school system and forwarded to the Division.

### **Due Process Hearing**

You and the school system have the right to an impartial due process hearing in order to settle disputes regarding the provision of a free appropriate public education to your child if he/she is eligible for special education or is suspected of being eligible for special education.

You or the school system may initiate a hearing on matters relating to the identification, evaluation or educational placement of your child with a disability, or the provision of FAPE for your child.

Reasons for requesting a Due Process Hearing may also include when your child is or is about to be:

- Denied identification, evaluation, entry or continuance in a program of special education appropriate to his/her condition and needs;
- Provided special education or related services which are inappropriate to his/her condition and needs;
- Denied needed special education or related services;
- Provided with special education or other education which is insufficient in quantity to satisfy the requirements of the law;
- Assigned to a program of special education when he/she is not eligible for special education;
- Denied his/her rights by having data collected, maintained or used which you believe to be inaccurate, misleading or otherwise in violation of the privacy rights of the child;
- Denied an evaluation requested by you;
- Improperly identified; or
- Placed in a setting, which is not the least restrictive environment.

When you request a hearing, the school system must inform you of the availability of mediation and of any free or low-cost legal services and other relevant services available in your area.

To request a Due Process Hearing, you must give the school system written notice of your request (there is a state Due Process Hearing request form on the internet at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/msped.htm>). The notice required must be in writing and include:

- The name of your child;
- The address of the residence of your child;
- The name of the school your child is attending;
- A description of the nature of the problem of your child relating to the proposed or refused initiation or change, including facts relating to the problem; and
- A proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to you at the time.

### **Hearing Rights**

During a Due Process Hearing you have the right to:

- Be accompanied and advised by counsel and by individuals with special knowledge or training with respect to the problems of children with disabilities;
- Present evidence and confront, cross-examine, and compel the attendance of witnesses;

The Division of Special Education shall ensure that not later than forty-five (45) days after the receipt of a request for a hearing:

- A final decision is reached in the hearing; and
- A copy of the decision is mailed to the school system, the parents, and the Division.

**Note:** A hearing officer may grant specific extensions of time beyond forty-five (45) days at the request of either party.

At least five (5) business days prior to a Due Process Hearing you and the school system must disclose all evidence that you and/or the school system plan to present at the hearing, including all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on the evaluations.

### **Your Right to Challenge a Due Process Hearing Decision by Civil Action**

If you or the school system disagree with the findings and decision of an impartial Due Process Hearing Officer, you have the right to bring a civil action with respect to the complaint presented. The action may be brought in Chancery Court of Davidson County or in a federal district court of the United States.

### **Attorneys' Fees**

If you are the prevailing party in a Due Process Hearing, a court may subsequently award you attorney's fees. However, the court may limit or refuse your request for an award of attorney's fees under certain circumstances.

### **Your Child's Status During Proceedings**

Except in a case where your child is placed in an interim alternative educational setting for forty-five (45) days for weapons, drugs, or if your child has been determined dangerous to himself/herself and/or others by a hearing officer, your child must remain in his or her current educational placement during the pendency of any Due Process Hearing, unless the State or school system and you agree otherwise. The right to remain in a current educational placement is called "stay put." If the Due Process Hearing involves an application for initial admission to public school, your child, with your consent, must be placed in the public school until the completion of all the proceedings.

### **Expedited Due Process Hearings**

Parents may request an Expedited Due Process Hearing when they disagree with a determination that their child's behavior was not a manifestation of his/her disability or with any decision regarding disciplinary placement.

The school system may request an Expedited Due Process hearing if they consider a child dangerous in his/her current educational placement.

Expedited Due Process Hearings must be conducted by Due Process Hearing officers and written decisions mailed to parties within thirty (30) days of the local school system's receipt of the parent's request for the hearing. The decisions on Expedited Due Process Hearings may be challenged under the same rules as other Due Process Hearings.

## **DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES**

If your child is suspended or expelled from school, the school system must only continue to provide services to your child if the disciplinary removal constitutes a "change of placement."

### **Change of Placement for Disciplinary Removals**

For purposes of removal of a child with a disability from the child's current educational placement, a change of placement occurs if:

1. The removal is for more than ten (10) consecutive school days; or
2. The child is subjected to a series of removals that constitutes a pattern because they cumulate to more than ten (10) school days in a school year, and because of factors such as the length of each removal, the total amount of time the child is removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another.

A local school system need not provide services during periods of removal to a child eligible for special education who has been removed from his/her current educational placement for ten (10) school days or less in that school year if services are not provided to a child without disabilities who has been similarly removed.

If your child has been removed from his/her current placement for more than ten (10) school days in a school year, the local school system, for the remainder of the removals, must provide services to the extent necessary to enable your child to appropriately progress in the general curriculum and advance toward achieving the goals set out in his/her IEP.

Your child's IEP team shall determine the extent to which services are necessary to enable him/her to appropriately progress in the general curriculum and advance toward achieving the goals set out in his/her IEP if the child is removed because of behavior that has been determined not to be a manifestation of his/her disability.

### **Transfer of Special Education Records**

If the local school system initiates disciplinary procedures applicable to all children, the local school system shall ensure that the special education and disciplinary records of your child with a disability are transmitted for consideration by the person or persons making the final determination regarding the disciplinary action.

### **Interim Alternative Educational Settings**

The School System may place your child with a disability in an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for the same amount of time that a child without disabilities would be subject to discipline, but for not more than forty-five (45) days, if:

- Your child possesses a dangerous weapon at school or at a school function under the jurisdiction of the State or a local school system; or
- Your child knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school or at a school function under the jurisdiction of the State or local school system.

A Hearing Officer may order a change in the placement of your child with a disability to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for not more than forty-five (45) days if the Hearing Officer, in an expedited due process hearing:

- Determines that the school system has demonstrated by substantial evidence that maintaining the current placement of your child is substantially likely to result in injury to your child or to others;
- Considers the appropriateness of your child's current placement;
- Considers whether the school system has made reasonable efforts to minimize the risk of harm in your child's current placement, including the use of supplementary aids and services; and
- Determines that the interim alternative educational setting that is proposed by school personnel who have consulted with your child's special education teacher is appropriate for your child.

**Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavioral Intervention Plans**

Within ten (10) business days after either first removing your child for more than ten (10) school days in a school year or commencing a removal that constitutes a change of placement, the school system must conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan. If your child already has a behavioral intervention plan, the IEP team shall meet to review the plan and its implementation, and modify the plan and its implementation as necessary to address your child's behavior.

**Exemption for Gifted Children**

Children identified as intellectually gifted are excluded from the provisions of 0520-1-9-.15 (Special Education Discipline Procedures) of the State Board of Education Rules and Regulations. However, children with a dual diagnosis that includes intellectually gifted shall be considered as children with a disability and may not be excluded from the requirements of 0520-1-9-.15 (Special Education Discipline Procedures) of the State Board of Education Rules and Regulations.

**TRANSFER OF RIGHTS AT AGE 18**

Tennessee law recognizes that a child has reached the age of majority or adulthood upon his/her eighteenth (18<sup>th</sup>) birthday. When your child reaches the age of eighteen (18) unless he/she has been determined to be incompetent under Tennessee law, all rights accorded to you under IDEA and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) transfer to your child.

Beginning at least one year before your child reaches the age of eighteen (18), your child's IEP must include a statement that you and your child have been informed that your child's rights under IDEA, if any, will transfer to your child when he/she reaches the age of eighteen (18).

**PARENTAL PLACEMENT IN PRIVATE SCHOOL**

If the public school system has made FAPE available to your child and you chose to place your child in a private school or facility, the public school system does not have to pay for the cost of education, including special education and related services for your child.

If you decide that the public school is not providing an appropriate education for your child and you wish to remove your child from the public school and enroll him/her in a private school at public expense, you must complete these steps:

• **Notice to the Public School System**

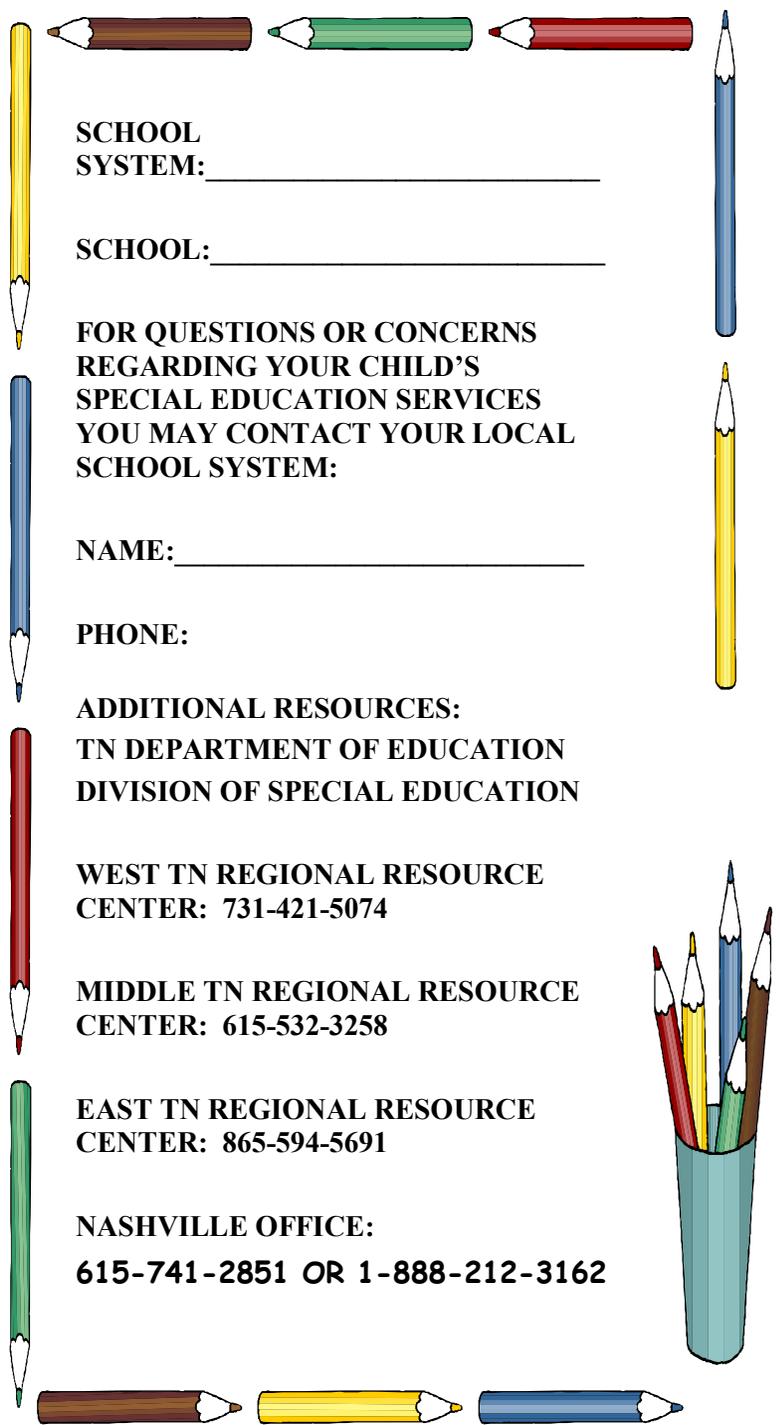
You must notify the public school system before you remove your child from public school. You must notify the public school system either at the most recent IEP meeting before removing your child, or in writing, at least ten (10) business days (including any holidays that occur on a business day) prior to the removal.

You must also tell the public school system why you disagree with the program that the public school has proposed or provided for your child and must state your intention to enroll your child in private school at public expense. If the public school system has informed you prior to your removing your child from public school of their intent to evaluate your child, you must make your child available for the evaluation.

• **Proof of Denial of FAPE to Hearing Officer**

You must prove to a Hearing Officer in a Due Process Hearing that the local school system did not make FAPE available to your child in a timely manner prior to the removal of your child and that the private placement is appropriate.

If you give proper notice to the public school system and prove your case at a Due Process Hearing, the Hearing Officer may require the local school system to reimburse you for the cost of the private school placement.



**SCHOOL SYSTEM:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHOOL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS REGARDING YOUR CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES YOU MAY CONTACT YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM:**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**  
**TN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
**DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**WEST TN REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTER: 731-421-5074**

**MIDDLE TN REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTER: 615-532-3258**

**EAST TN REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTER: 865-594-5691**

**NASHVILLE OFFICE:**  
**615-741-2851 OR 1-888-212-3162**

APPENDIX T

READABILITY STATISTICS ON *THE ABCS OF UNDERSTANDING  
YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS*

## Readability Statistics

Name of Document/Form: *The ABCs of Understanding Your Child's Rights*

Counts	
Words	4016
Characters	20838
Paragraphs	160
Sentences	91
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.5
Words per Sentence	32.0
Characters per Word	4.9
Readability	
Passive Sentences	28%
Flesch Reading Ease	32.2
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0

## VITA

MELINDA D. PRUITT

Personal Data:      Date of Birth:            January 24, 1958  
                                 Place of Birth:            Warner Robins, Georgia  
                                 Marital Status:           Married

Education:            University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN;  
                                 Physical Education, B.S.;  
                                 1980  
                                 University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN;  
                                 Deafness, M.S.;  
                                 1982  
                                 University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN;  
                                 45 hours in Emotionally Disturbed;  
                                 1987  
                                 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
                                 Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed. D.;  
                                 2003

Professional  
Experience:            Ellijay Elementary School  
                                 Title Teacher  
                                 1980-1981  
                                 Jonesborough Middle School  
                                 Special Education Teacher  
                                 1983-1985  
                                 King Springs Elementary School  
                                 Special Education Teacher  
                                 1985  
                                 Mosheim Elementary School  
                                 Special Education Teacher  
                                 1985-1999  
                                 Greene County Schools  
                                 Special Education Coordinator  
                                 1999-Present

Honors and  
Awards:                TEA Distinguished Administrator  
                                 2001-2002  
                                 TEA Distinguished Administrator Nominee  
                                 2000-2001 and 1999-2000  
                                 Who's Who in American Education  
                                 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997  
                                 Career Level III  
                                 Tennessee Department of Education  
                                 1995