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Where do they fit in?  
Perceptions of High School Students, Parents, and Teachers Regarding Appropriate Educational  
Placements for Children with High Incidence Disabilities

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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 of Education

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by  
Annette Marie Tudor  
December 2004

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Dr. Nancy Dishner, Chair  
Dr. Martha Coutinho  
Dr. Louise MacKay  
Dr. Russ West

Keywords: Inclusion, Continuum of Services, Special Education, Least Restrictive  
Environment

## ABSTRACT

Where do they fit in?

Perceptions of High School Students, Parents, and Teachers Regarding Appropriate Educational Placements for Children with High Incidence Disabilities

by

Annette Marie Tudor

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) calls for the education of children with special needs in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Interpretation of what constitutes the Least Restrictive Environment has led to debate about how best to include children with disabilities into regular education environments. The process of inclusion has created an environment in which educators have conflicting feelings about the various types of special education placements. At one extreme are those who advocate all students belong in the general classroom all the time. At the other end of the continuum are those that contend only those students who meet certain standards should be educated in the general curriculum.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school students, parents, and teachers regarding programs and various placements established for children with high incidence disabilities in both public and private school venues. In this phenomenological study, the guided interview approach was used to examine the perceptions of disabled students, their parents, and their teachers regarding special education placements that included receiving special education services less than 21% of the school day, receiving services 21% to 60% of the school day, receiving services 60% or more of the school day, or receiving services in a separate, private school setting.

The findings of this study found that students, parents, and teachers were supportive of the specific learning environments to which they were most closely related. Although students had little specific knowledge of their disabilities and services, they were content with the current services they were receiving. Parents had more knowledge of their children's disabilities and were more vocal about supporting the specific programs their child was involved with. Teachers were naturally very supportive of the environments they taught in. These findings support that there is a perceived need for a continuum of placement options for children with disabilities. Recommendations for further research include expanding the study to other public and private schools in the state to see if similar results are found.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to those family and friends who helped make it all possible. To my husband David, my best friend, for believing in me and supporting me through countless years of effort. You are the inspiration in my life and the one person I will forever look to for guidance. To my children, Lance and the little Tudor I have yet to meet, for your love, patience, and understanding. To my parents, Jayne Caldwell and John Wizorek, who have always been driving forces in my life. Thank you for teaching me to always pursue my dreams. And thank you to my brother, Joe, who though he may not know it, has always inspired me.

I would also like to thank the countless others in my life who made this dream a reality. For without you, it would never have come true. Especially thank you to Carol Tudor, Betty Brindle, Lois Crockett, Lee Ann Tudor, Cathy Keene, Jennifer Younger, and David Burgin. In one-way or another your contribution to this study was greater than you will ever know. And thank you to the rest of my extended family for your constant words of encouragement and support.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the children that have touched my life during my career as a teacher. I would never have reached this point in my career without meeting the truly special individuals that I have met through the last decade. I would particularly like to thank my first students in the private school and the director of that school for introducing me to such diversity as a teacher. Those students showed me what teaching children with disabilities was all about and I have never stopped learning from their lessons.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all those individuals who provided professional and academic expertise in order to make this study a success. It gives me great pleasure to know that so many caring, intelligent, and qualified individuals are working everyday for children.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the efforts of my committee chair, Dr. Nancy Dishner, for her strength of character and her ability to make it all seem so easy. She is truly an inspiration and a role model to me. I would also like to acknowledge the expertise of Dr. Martha Coutinho for her love of children with disabilities and her tireless efforts at preparing future teachers to work with these special individuals. Thank you for guiding my study in the right direction. Thank you to Dr. Louise MacKay for your smile every time I saw you, and for your experience as both a special educator and an administrator. I would like to acknowledge the last minute efforts of Dr. Terry Tollefson, whose comments and suggestions at the end only enhanced my study. And finally, I would like to acknowledge the life and service of Dr. Russ West. As a parent of a child with a disability and an educator himself, he gave my study much needed experience and guidance. But more than that, Dr. West is an inspiration to any individual faced with a challenge and insurmountable odds.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the children in this study, and all other children faced with a disability. For they are unique and special in ways we will never fully understand. I would like to also acknowledge the parents of these children who make it their life's calling to advocate for their children. These parents are the reasons special education will always serve to support disabled children. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the teachers who choose to spend their tiresome careers working day in and day out with these children. They are truly appreciated and admired for their work.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For most of its adult life, special education has viewed itself-and has been viewed from the outside-as sufficiently different from the mainstream of professional education to require special types of training. And yet, its emerging passion is to keep the educational options of exceptional individuals as much in the mainstream as possible. As we shall see, this dichotomy of word and form has not been without tensions. (Haring & McCormick, 1990, p. 9)

One of the most controversial topics in education today is the extent to which students with high incidence disabilities should be educated in the regular education classroom (McLeskey, Henry & Axelrod, 1999). High incidence disabilities include disability categories that occur in more than 100,000 individuals (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The disability categories classified as high incidence include learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, and other health impairments. The issue of educating these students with disabilities in the regular classroom is not a new topic. Questions concerning the best location for special education services have existed in the literature for more than a quarter century (Dorn, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996). Our current society has inherited the question of “place” from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where reformers continuously grapple between the development of new places and the abandonment of old places in the hopes of creating something better (Dorn et al.). Landmark legislation and court decisions have also influenced the education of students with disabilities.

From the earliest decades of the twentieth century until the mid-1970s, students who were different from mainstream society were historically ignored, placed in isolated special classes, or transferred to state institutions (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 1996). Early public school

programs essentially offered two choices to its constituents. Students either benefited from the curriculum-centered instruction in the public school domain or they were placed in special classes. These classes served as preparation for future placement in institutions (Henley et al.).

Several driving forces were instrumental in the changing of special educational practices, including the civil rights movement and the passing of landmark legislation. The *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision in 1954 dramatically changed the national school population by declaring that “separate but equal” school facilities for black and white children were discriminatory and unconstitutional (Henley et al., 1996). While this movement initially addressed the rights of African Americans, it expanded and began to influence the public’s thinking about people with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). In 1975, the federal government passed Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) that was later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990-1991. With this law came the presumption in favor of educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom through the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision (Friend & Bursuck; Henley et al., McLeskey et. al.). Since the time this law was passed, there has been an emerging consensus that students with disabilities should spend most of the school day in general education classrooms alongside non-disabled peers. There has been little collective research conducted on the effectiveness of inclusive classroom settings versus more restrictive settings, including private day schools (Sawyer, McLaughlin & Winglee, 1994).

The federal government took a step in mandating that students with disabilities be educated alongside their same-age peers. This provision requires states to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who do not have disabilities. IDEA also states that removal from the general education classroom should

only occur when the child's disability is so severe that the curriculum and instruction of the general classroom cannot be adapted to achieve satisfactory results (Friend & Bursuck; McLeskey et al., 1999; Pub. L. 105-17).

### Statement of the Problem

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 is “an example of how federal influence can translate social policy into practical alterations of public school procedures at the local level” (Noll, 1999, p. 224). With this act, the social policies of equalizing educational opportunities and ensuring that young people with various disabilities are gainfully served were merged together in a law established to provide persons with disabilities the same services and opportunities as nondisabled persons (Noll). Such controversial legislation does not always ensure success, though. In 1999 the reauthorized version of the law Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) sparked an “inclusive schools movement” (Noll, p. 225), whose supporters advocated for the disbandment of special classrooms and labeling of disabled children without abolishing appropriate supports and services for these individuals (Noll).

P.L. 94-142 calls for the education of children with special needs in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Interpretation of what constitutes the Least Restrictive Environment has led to debate about how best to include children with disabilities into regular education environments. The process of inclusion has created an environment in which educators have conflicting beliefs about the various types of special education placements. At one extreme are those who advocate all students belong in the general education classroom all the time. At the other end of the continuum are those that contend only those students who can meet certain standards should be educated in the general classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). The purpose

of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school students, parents, and teachers regarding programs and various placements established for children with high incidence disabilities in both public and private school venues.

### Research Questions

1. Do perceptions of students with high incidence disabilities in a variety of special education programs differ in regard to individual student achievement, teacher support, parental support, and level of self-concept in the school setting?
2. Do perceptions of parents of students with high incidence disabilities in a variety of special education programs differ in regard to student achievement, teacher and school support, and level of student self-concept in the school setting?
3. Do perceptions of special education teachers of students with high incidence disabilities in a variety of settings differ in regard to student achievement, student self-concept in the school setting, and parent involvement?
4. Why do some parents choose private schools for their children with high incidence disabilities?

### Significance of the Study

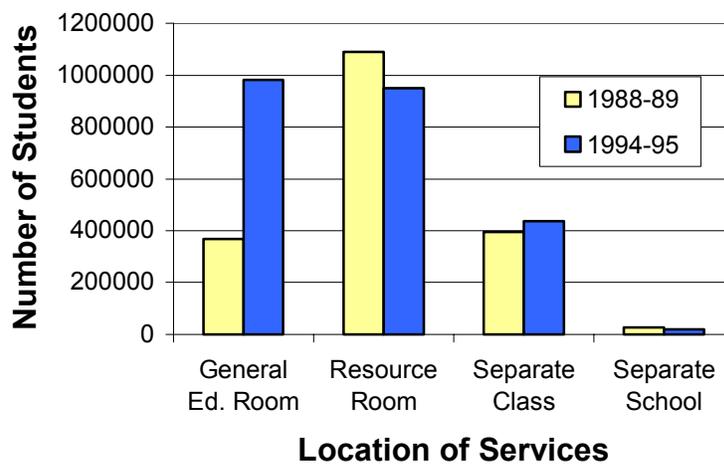
Although there has been extensive discussion in relation to including children with disabilities in a variety of educational settings, there has been little documented research addressing placement trends for these students over time (Sawyer et. al.). One study that did address this issue found that as recently as 1989, there had been little movement toward educating students with learning disabilities in inclusive, general education classroom settings

(McLeskey & Pacchiano, 1994). These investigators found that between 1979 and 1989, the trend was to educate students with learning disabilities in more restrictive settings rather than less restrictive settings. They found that the proportion of students with learning disabilities who were being educated in restrictive, separate class settings almost doubled between 1979 and 1989 (McLeskey & Pacchiano).

Prior to a study conducted by Danielson and Bellamy (1989) there was little documented analysis of the extent to which various placements were actually used. Danielson and Bellamy (1989) disaggregated data that were presented in the U.S. Department of Education's Annual Reports to Congress on the implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act and found there was little change in the use of separate facilities for students with disabilities from the school years 1976-77 to 1985-86. They did find, however, that there was a significant variation in comparing state-to-state placement trends of students with disabilities. This data indicated that some states had been more successful than others in providing services in regular classroom settings. Danielson and Bellamy concluded that potential for improvement in the educating of disabled students in less restrictive environments exists.

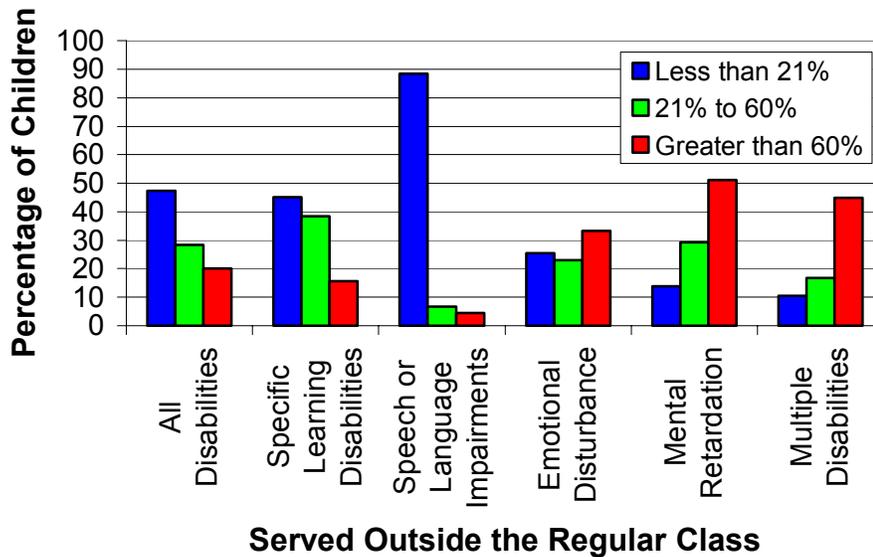
In a later study that analyzed data from the annual *Reports to Congress* prepared by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, a different trend of placements began to emerge. In this study a continuum of services was defined. This continuum explained the placement options available for students with disabilities as defined in reports to Congress. They include: the general education class, resource room, separate class, and separate school. The general education class was described as serving students who receive special education and related services outside of the general classroom for less than 21% of the school day. The resource room included students who received services from 21% to 60% of the school

day. A separate class was available to serve students who receive services for more than 60% of the school day. The separate school served students who received services in a separate day school for more than 50% of the school day, a residential facility for more than 50% of the school day, or homebound/hospital environments (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999; McLeskey et al.). The following graph represents a comparison of statistical data for the school years 1988-1989 and 1994-1995 gathered during this study of student placements in the categories listed.



*Figure A.* A comparison of trends in placement of students with learning disabilities in different settings during the school years 1988-89 and 1994-95.

As can be seen in the graphical representation of the data, there seems to be no doubt that students with learning disabilities were being educated in less restrictive environments (McLeskey et al., 1999). Even the most recent data available supports this trend of educating students in the regular education classroom. The following data shows the percentage of high incidence disabilities served in less restrictive environments during the 1998-99 school year.



*Figure B.* Percentage of Children Ages 6 Through 21 with High-Incidence Disabilities Served in Regular School Buildings During the 1998-99 School Year.

Students with speech or language impairments and specific learning disabilities continue to be predominantly served in the regular classroom for most of the school day. Students with emotional disturbance, mental retardation, and multiple disabilities were more likely to receive services outside the regular classroom for more than 60% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). While these data provide a clear picture of what has happened, they do not provide significant insight into why this movement toward less restrictive placements has occurred and how changes have emerged in some states while others have shown little or no change in practices (McLeskey et al., 1999). Data are collected by the Office of Special Education Programs to “monitor compliance with the least restrictive environment (LRE) clause of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and inform advocates, parents, and researchers of the extent to which students with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled

peers” (U.S. Department of Education, p. III-1). Thus it can be inferred that students are being educated in less restrictive environments due to legislative pressure at the federal and state levels.

This study investigated the perceptions of those most closely related to the issues surrounding special education placements: the students, parents, and teachers. I investigated whether the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers in the field of education are such that more restrictive special education placements are still a necessary and important option or whether its constituents duly support the trend for placement in less restrictive environments.

### Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the following terms are described.

Disability is described as any condition that is characterized by a physical, cognitive, psychological, or social difficulty so severe that it negatively affects student learning. The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as a condition that limits some major life activity (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Emotional Disturbance (ED) is a condition in which an individual has significant difficulty both socially and emotionally, so much so that it interferes with the student’s ability to learn (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Full Inclusion refers to the placement of a student, regardless of the level of his or her disability, into an age-appropriate regular education classroom in the child’s local community school (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999; Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

High incidence disabilities are classified as disabilities that occur in more than 100,000 individuals. According to the Office of Special Education Programs Twenty-third Annual

Report to Congress on the IDEA, high incidence disabilities include learning disabilities, occurring in 2,871,966 individuals, speech and language impairments, occurring in 1,089,964 individuals, mental retardation, occurring in 614,433 individuals, and emotional disturbances, occurring in 470,111 individuals (p. II-23). For the purposes of this study, other health impairments will also be included in the category of high incidence disabilities due to a dramatic 351% increase in this category during the 9-year period from 1990-91 to 1999-00. This increase has been attributed to a determination that was made in 1991 that permitted students with Attention Deficit Disorder to receive special education services under the disability category of Other Health Impaired (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Together, these disabilities account for more than 90% of the disabilities reported (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

IDEA: Congress renamed P.L. 94-142 from EHA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990-1991. IDEA expanded the definition of disabilities and added new related services. Additionally, the term handicap was replaced by disability (Shanker, 1995). The main purpose IDEA remains to provide a free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Osborne, Jr., Russo & DiMattia, 1999).

Learning Disability (LD): Students with learning disabilities usually have average or above average intelligence but experience significant problems in one or more academic areas. A learning disability is a condition in which a student has dysfunction in processing information, which results in interference with learning (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled. Separate schools, special classes, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes

with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (McLeskey et al., 1999; P.L. 105-17).

Low Incidence Disabilities are those that are rare. They include categories such as severe mental retardation, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, deaf-blindness, autism, and traumatic brain injury (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Mainstreaming describes the placement of a student with a disability in a regular classroom for the purposes of social interaction or academic instruction alongside nondisabled peers (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999).

Mental Retardation (MR) refers to a category of disability for people whose current levels of functioning are well below average intellectual ability and whose adaptive behavior skills are extremely limited in two or more areas. Deficient cognitive ability and sub average adaptive behavior skills adversely affect educational and life functioning (Henley et al., 1996).

Mild to moderate disabilities are those that are typically classified as learning disabled, mild mentally retarded, or behavior disordered. The term is used to describe these categories because their characteristics overlap and they can be educated in regular classrooms (Henley et al., 1996). This definition correlates closely to that of high incidence disabilities.

Other Health Impairments (OHI) include medical diseases or disorders so significant that they affect the student's ability to learn. Examples could include ADHD (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), sickle-cell anemia and AIDS (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

P.L. 94-142: Public Law 94-142 was passed as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975. It requires that a free and appropriate education and related

services be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and that an individualized education plan (the IEP) be written for each student (Shanker, 1995).

Private Schools are schools that are supported by tuition payments for the students they serve. Private schools encompass religiously affiliated schools, charter schools, independent schools, and others that are not funded by the federal government, state department or local communities.

Public Schools are schools that are fully funded by the federal government, individual state departments of education, and local school communities.

Severe or profound disabilities are those that occur in a small percentage of the total population of disabled individuals. Students with severe or profound disabilities are less frequently educated in the regular classroom setting than those with mild or moderate disabilities (Henley et al., 1996). This definition closely correlates that of low incidence disabilities.

Speech and Language Impairment is a condition in which a student has difficulties in communicating with others due to causes other than maturation and that interferes with his/her learning (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

### Delimitations and Limitations

The data in this study were collected from interviews of different students in each of the following categories: served outside the regular class less than 21% of the school day, 21 to 60% of the school day, and more than 60% of the school day from one public school setting.

Additionally, two students who were attending a separate private school were also interviewed.

At least one of the parents of these children and their special education teacher(s) were also interviewed. For students being served less than 21% of the school day outside the regular class,

one regular classroom teacher was interviewed as well. The data collected may not reflect the views of all students with disabilities, their parents, or teachers. Additionally, only children whose parents agreed to be contacted and then subsequently agreed to participate in the study were interviewed.

In designing this study, I took my own interests and personal background into account. As a special education teacher for 10 years, I understand full well the impact of educating disabled students alongside their nondisabled peers and a continuum of service options for students with disabilities. Furthermore, I have taught a variety of age groups in a variety of educational environments, including private schools for children with disabilities and co-teaching in inclusive classroom settings. Even though I have a personal opinion concerning the inclusion and continuum of services debate, I believe my variety of experiences has assisted me in fully investigating both ends of the spectrum with a degree of objectivity.

### Overview of the Paper

Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of the research study and the context for conducting the study. Chapter 2 imparts the reader with a review of current literature to provide information surrounding the various topics inherent in this study. This is followed, in Chapter 3, with a discussion of the methodology used for this research. Chapter 4 covers the results of the research and highlights the major categories that emerged from data analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 conveys the conclusions generated from the research as well as suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate concerning appropriate placements for children with disabilities has long been an issue of controversy in the educational arena. At the forefront of this debate is the issue of including students with disabilities in the general education environment. From the earliest days of schooling in the United States, children with disabilities were historically excluded from equal educational opportunities. Not until the federal government took a stand in mandating certain civil rights for children with disabilities did the trend in educating these individuals shift toward a more equal and inclusive education.

#### Educating Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classroom:

##### A Historical Perspective

The education system in the United States can be traced back to early colonial days. The first schools were generally sponsored by churches and were established to serve a limited portion of the population, primarily white, male children of upper class families (Henley et al., 1996). Thomas Jefferson attempted to establish the first state-supported school as early as 1779 that would educate the poor of Virginia. His proposal was quickly dismissed, generally purported as due to a lack of interest on the part of the upper class to pay taxes for the education of the poor (Villa & Thousand, 1995).

Public support of schools through local taxation did not gain support until the nineteenth century. During this time, there was an infiltration of immigrants needing to be “Americanized” during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Taxpayers agreed that it would be in their best interest to

support public education in an effort to maintain their current status of living (Villa & Thousand, 1995). Children who were previously excluded from schooling were now included (Henley et al., 1996).

Beginning with the earliest decades of the twentieth century until the mid-1970s, students who were different from mainstream society were historically ignored, placed in isolated special classes, or transferred to state institutions (Henley et al., 1996). Early public school programs essentially offered two choices to its constituents. Students either benefited from the curriculum-centered instruction in the public school domain or they were placed in special classes. These classes served as preparation for future placement in institutions (Henley et al.). In 1908 E.R. Johnstone expressed the following in a speech to the National Education Association:

(The special education class) must become a clearinghouse. To it will be sent the slightly blind and partially deaf, but also incorrigibles, the mental deficient, and the cripples...The only thing to do is give them the best of care and training possible. Keep them in the special classes until they become too old for further care in school, and then they must be sent to the institutions for safety (Johnstone, 1908, 114-118.)

Special classes in public schools began as the compulsory education movement became more widespread. Compulsory education became a reality in all states by 1918 (Haring & McCormick, 1990; Villa & Thousand, 1995). Initially, special classes were developed as a place for students who were not able to keep up with their peers. In these early years, many students with cognitive or physical disabilities did not attend school, while others were institutionalized. Educators at this time believed these students would learn better in protected settings (Friend &

Bursuck, 1996). Those who did attend school were those with mild to moderate learning or cognitive disabilities. According to Friend and Bursuck (1996) many of these students with mild to moderate disabilities were educated along with other students because their needs were not considered extraordinary.

The time period leading up to the 1960s in special education is known as the Progressive Era (Haring & McCormick, 1990). During this time, public attitudes toward education advanced to the point that most Americans believed education should be for all children, not just the privileged, thus was built the legal foundation of compulsory attendance. It was also during this time that the first theories of learning disorders were developed and applications of interventions based on these theories were effective (Mercer, 1997). By the 1950s, special education programs were available in many school districts, but the benefits of these programs were not always apparent. In some cases, the students in special classes were viewed as not capable of learning. These students spent their days weaving and stringing beads (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Public attitudes during the Progressive Era led to significant changes in the field of special education from 1961-1974. The term learning disabilities was adopted during this period while public school programs expanded, federal involvement increased, organizations grew stronger and larger, and additional assessments and theoretical perspectives were applied (Mercer, 1997). By the late 1960s, many educators agreed that segregated special classes were not the most appropriate educational setting for many students with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

During the 1950s and 1960s, another driving force in the changing of educational practices was the civil rights movement. While this movement initially addressed the rights of African Americans, it expanded and began to influence the public's thinking about people with

disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 1996; Mercer, 1997). The *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision in 1954 dramatically changed the national school population. In this landmark case, the Supreme Court declared the “separate but equal” school facilities for black and white children were discriminatory and unconstitutional. *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* reversed a prior decision rendered in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1894 that legalized such separate schools based on race (Henley et al., 1996; Mercer).

With the influence of civil rights cases and the developments in research questioning special education classes came a torrent of states passing laws to guarantee that students with disabilities would receive an appropriate education (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). One of the outcomes of the civil rights movement was legislation established to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prevents discrimination against all individuals with disabilities in programs that receive federal funds. For school age children, Section 504 ensures equal opportunity for participation in a wide range of school related activities (Friend & Bursuck). In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. ADA was based on Section 504 and further extends the rights of individuals with disabilities. This law protects all disabled individuals from discrimination and requires most employers to make reasonable accommodations for them (Friend & Bursuck).

In 1975, the federal government passed Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) that was later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990-1991. This law outlined the entire foundation on which current special education practice rests. It took into account many of the early court decisions that established the civil rights of students with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). With this law came the presumption in favor of educating children with disabilities in the general education

classroom through the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision (Friend & Bursuck; Henley et al., 1996; McLeskey et al., 1999). By 1976, all 50 states had in place laws that would subsidize public programs for children with disabilities. Additionally, several national associations for regular educators passed resolutions in favor of mainstreaming. Many states also required regular educators to take additional coursework to prepare them for the mainstreaming initiative (Villa & Thousand, 1995).

Since the time P.L. 94-142 was passed, there has been an emerging consensus that students with disabilities should spend most of the school day in general education classrooms alongside non-disabled peers (Sawyer et. al., 1994). By the late 1970s and early 1980s students with mild to moderate disabilities were being educated at least part of the school day in regular education classrooms. Those students who were severely or profoundly disabled and that had been previously served in alternative settings began to receive educational services in their regular neighborhood schools. They were included in such daily environments as the cafeteria, playground, library, halls, buses, and restrooms (Villa & Thousand, 1995).

Despite the push to include students with disabilities in less restrictive environments, there has been little collective research conducted on the effectiveness of placing students with disabilities in general education classroom settings versus more restrictive settings, including private day schools (Sawyer et. al., 1994). The research that has been collected is varied and controversial in its own right. Advocates in favor of placement in the general education setting contend that “special education can’t work” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995, p. 526). Those in favor of a continuum of services for students with disabilities disagree.

## Full Inclusion

The idea of educating students with disabilities along side their nondisabled peers first became prevalent with the least restrictive environment concept during the 1970s. At this time, the LRE for most students meant a part-time or full-time special education class with some integration into regular education settings. These settings ranged from the cafeteria and library to regular education classrooms. This concept of integration was known as mainstreaming (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). More recently, many educators have begun to seriously question the need for more restrictive environments as the best location to provide more intensive services to students with disabilities. These ideas have led to the concept of inclusion. Inclusion is based on the premise that the regular education environment can be used to provide appropriate services to disabled students rather than a more restrictive special classroom (Friend & Bursuck).

As stated previously, until recent years, the interpretation of the least restrictive environment clause mandated in federal law usually meant some kind of special class placement. Advocacy groups, state departments of education, and many parents of students with disabilities are now pushing to have all handicapped children educated in regular classrooms, regardless of the nature or severity of their handicap (Kubicek, 1994; Shanker, 1995). These advocates demanding such change consider themselves “full inclusionists” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994/1995, p. 22; Kubicek, p. 29).

Full inclusionists raise the issue of equity in their debate. Shanker (1995) reported that full inclusionists said “disabled students are burdened with an additional handicap when they are segregated from their nondisabled peers because they are denied the chance to develop the social and academic skills necessary to function in the mainstream of society” (p. 18). Fuchs and Fuchs (1994/1995) stated there were 2 kinds of full inclusionists. Among them are those who argue for

no more special education placements, students, or teachers and those who say special educators should continue to provide services to disabled children but only in regular classroom settings. Both types of these full inclusionists share the same belief that all children with disabilities should be educated in regular education classrooms full time (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994/1995; Staub & Peck, 1994/1995).

There is also a monetary incentive associated with the full inclusion model. Many administrators and legislators see full inclusion as a way to decrease the exorbitant amount of monies spent on special education each year (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994/1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Shanker, 1995). Under IDEA, school districts must pay for appropriate education services for students with disabilities, regardless of the cost to provide such services. In 1985-86, state reported expenditures for special education and related services were just under \$16 billion. The national average per-pupil expenditure averages approximately \$7,800, which is 2.3 times the cost of regular education expenditures (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; McCarthy, 1993).

Not all advocates of inclusion fall under the category of “full inclusionists”. Some supporters of inclusion believe that special education has a place in our educational arena and that students with disabilities have varying degrees of needs that may or may not be met satisfactorily in the regular classroom setting. According to some, what is needed is a continuum of placements that offers a variety of services (O’Neil, 1994/1995).

### A Continuum of Services

Many other advocates for students with disabilities contend that more appropriate placement options for these students are included in a continuum of services. One basis for this argument is the provision set forth in federal law indicating that students with disabilities should

be educated in the least restrictive environment. The most appropriate educational environment according to these advocates ensures that disabled students are educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible and that they receive an appropriate education (McLeskey et al., 1999). According to supporters of a continuum of services, the provision of appropriate education in many cases often overrides the goal of social interaction with nondisabled peers. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) “special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of disabled children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (p. 22).

Congressional sponsors of the IDEA recognized that the mainstream environment may not always be capable of providing an appropriate education to all students, and may even be harmful to some students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). Thus, Congress developed a continuum of alternative placement options to ensure an appropriate education for all students. These alternative placements became a part of the regulations governing the IDEA (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995) and have been subsequently defined in the annual *Reports to Congress*. These placement options include the general education class, the resource room, a separate class, and a separate school. The general education class is used as an option for students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day. Students who are under the resource room placement option receive special education and related services outside the regular education classroom from 21% to 60% of the school day. Students who receive services for more than 60% of the school day are served under the separate class option. Finally, the separate school option is available for students who require services in a different setting for more than 50% of the school day. These separate facilities include

separate day school, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital facilities (McLeskey et al. 1999; Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). It is important to note these placement options do not include a program for students with disabilities who are included in general education classrooms 100% of the school day. Thus, even students who are educated up to 20% of their school day outside the regular education setting are considered under the ideal of inclusion according to the *Reports to Congress* (McLeskey et al.).

### Effects of Placement Options

The debate over inclusive education for students with disabilities is widespread and for good reason. Not only are the educational outcomes of disabled students at stake but those of nondisabled counterparts as well. Full inclusionists as well as those who support a continuum of services both can cite current research as a foundation of support in favor of their opposing beliefs.

Full inclusionists contend classification and placement of children in special education is ineffective and discriminatory (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994/1995). They also believe that regular education has “historically used, currently uses, and will forever use” special education classrooms and programs as “dumping grounds” for students that teachers view as “unteachable” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). Full inclusionists cite three meta-analyses studies that address the issue of the most effective setting for the education of students with disabilities (Baker et al.). These studies conducted by Calberg and Kavale, Wang and Baker, and Baker as cited in Baker et al. used a common measure called “effect size” that compares the effects of inclusion versus noninclusive practices (p. 33-34). The effect sizes in these studies showed a small to moderate beneficial effect of inclusive education on the academic outcomes (achievement of students as

measured on standardized tests) and social outcomes (ratings of the disabled student's success in relating with others in the classroom setting) of students with disabilities (Baker et al.). Thus, Baker et. al. stated, "the effects of inclusion are positive and worthwhile, but they are not huge" (p. 34).

Full inclusionists are not naïve in their proclamations concerning including all students with disabilities in regular classrooms. They know full well that such an endeavor will be challenging at best (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). There are numerous factors for successful inclusion programs cited in the available research. Among them are effective collaboration among classroom teachers and special education staff, shared instructional planning time (Jorgensen, 1995; Logan et. al., 1995), "backwards planning" that begins with the desired outcome and leads to lesson design, "essential questions" used to guide performance-based curriculum development (Jorgensen), ongoing staff development and inservice training, ongoing compromise and analysis of program issues, and involvement of families and students with and without disabilities in the planning and implementation process (O'Shea & O'Shea). The overriding theme of the literature is that regular education teachers need support if inclusion is to be successful, especially given the apprehensions expressed by the teachers expected to include students with disabilities in their classrooms (Jorgensen; O'Neil, 1995; O'Shea & O'Shea; Ruder, 2000).

Given the supports necessary for effective inclusion programs, supporters of full inclusion contend nondisabled students also benefit from their relationships with students with disabilities. Available research indicates there are positive themes that emerge from such relationships. Students without disabilities report their fears of human differences decrease while their comfort and awareness increase. Additionally, nondisabled students learn to be more

tolerant of others and improve their own self-confidence. Many nondisabled students also experience growth in their personal moral and ethical principals as a result of their relationships with disabled peers while developing caring friendships (Staub & Peck, 1995). The current research available to proponents of full inclusion supports the belief that there is no question about the appropriateness and benefits of including students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Other advocates for disabled students cite compelling research that favors a continuum of placement options for disabled students.

Those advocates in favor of a continuum of placement options for students with disabilities acknowledge the research that indicates in some cases inclusion programs are more beneficial than more restrictive placements, but they stress that inclusion is not appropriate for all students. The efficacy studies that full inclusionists use as the part of the foundation for their argument to date has involved mostly students with mental retardation. These studies generally show more students in regular classrooms performing as well as, or better than, their disabled peers that are placed in special education classrooms. Proponents of a continuum of service options contend that these studies are seriously flawed in that researchers rarely assigned the disabled students randomly to regular and special education classes and students involved in the studies were primarily mentally retarded. The disabled students who were placed in these regular education classrooms were strategically placed in these settings due to their stronger academic abilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

When current literature is more closely examined, supporters of the continuum of services options say special education is viewed in a different light. For example, Calberg and Kavale cited a meta-analysis of 50 independent studies of special classes versus regular classes. They concluded that special classes were inferior to regular classes for students with cognitive

deficiencies and superior to regular classes for students who had behavior, emotional, or learning disabilities (cited in Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995, p. 526). Similarly, Sindelar and Deno reviewed 17 studies concerning the effectiveness of resource rooms and found that they were more effective than regular classrooms in improving the academic achievement of students with learning, behavior, or emotional disabilities and there were no reliable differences with respect to the academic achievement of students with mental retardation in either setting (cited in Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995, p. 526). Additionally, in an effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of a mainstreaming strategy, Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) tracked 21 students with learning disabilities before and after they transferred to regular education classrooms. They found that students made modest but steady progress in special education but demonstrated no gains in regular education.

In addition to reviewing the current research it is important to examine the underlying purpose of special education. The education provided by special educators is individualized. Specialists select from a variety of instructional techniques, curricula, and motivational strategies to devise effective instructional plans. Fuchs and Fuchs (1994/1995) said this was in contrast to the “one-size-fits-all” approach that is observed in many regular education classrooms (p. 24). Therefore, what’s special about special education is that it is “unique in ways that general education is not and probably never can be” (Fuchs & Fuchs 1995, p. 529).

Research studies and current literature abound on both ends of the spectrum on this topic. But what do the constituents say about the educational services being provided? With an influx of students being educated in less restrictive environments, namely the general education classrooms, it is only reasonable that the perceptions of the students, parents, and teachers involved in this educational movement be investigated.

### Student, Teacher, and Parent Perceptions of Inclusive Settings

It is important to investigate the perceptions of nondisabled and disabled students in inclusive settings for many reasons. According to Klingner and Vaughn (1999) students have a great deal of influence over teacher practices. For example, if a teacher makes accommodations for disabled students that other students view as unfair, the teacher is likely to be influenced by their opinions. Student's views on which instructional methods and accommodations are most useful could also assist teachers in devising the most beneficial and appropriate techniques (Klingner & Vaughn). As both regular education and special education students near high school graduation, it is presumed they should assume some responsibility for their own education so they can learn independence skills that will assist them when they transition to the work force. Therefore, it is beneficial to investigate their perceptions on educational practices that effect them (Klinger & Vaughn).

### Student Perceptions, Self-Concept, and Achievement

A study completed by Klingner and Vaughn included analyses of 20 independent studies that investigated the perceptions of a total of 4,659 students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The participants were interviewed on their perception of instructional procedures in general education classrooms. The findings revealed that students with high-incidence disabilities (specifically learning disabilities) want the same activities, books, homework, grading criteria, and grouping practices as their classmates. Their peers without disabilities agree, believing this is most fair. Additionally, they recognized that not all students learn in the same way, or at the same speed. Students with and without disabilities value teachers who slow down instruction when needed, explain concepts and assignments clearly, teach learning strategies, and teach the

same material in different ways so that everyone can learn (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). This study raises questions about what strategies and/or settings influence positive student outcomes at every level.

The aforementioned laws require regular and special education teachers to identify, assess, place, and instruct students in a way that does not label them or prove detrimental to their self-concepts. Self-concept is referred to as a product of all of the beliefs and evaluations one has about oneself (Burns, 1982; Hattie, 1992). Self-concept has often been described in terms of a descriptive element and an evaluative element (Marsh & Craven, 1997). The descriptive component is concerned with one's beliefs about oneself. The evaluative component is sometimes referred to as self-esteem (Burns, 1982), which takes the belief from the objective to the subjective. Beliefs, therefore may be incorrect, yet may still be a part of one's self-concept. The important factor is not the truth of one's belief, but one's awareness of it (Hattie, 1992). Shavelson et. al. defined self-concept as "one's self perceptions that are formed through experience with and interpretations of one's environment. They are influenced especially by evaluations by significant others, reinforcement, and attributions for one's own behavior" (cited in Marsh & Craven, 1997, p. 135).

Since self-concept is defined in terms of the environment that shapes an individual, it is noted that one's self-concept can be changed. According to Burns (1982), a positive self-concept can be equated with positive self-evaluation, self-respect, self-esteem, and self-acceptance. A negative self-concept becomes synonymous with negative self-evaluation, self-hatred, inferiority and a lack of feelings of personal worthiness and self-acceptance. Self-concept is a product of an individual's evaluations of himself/herself and environment. Despite the apparently inward looking nature of self-concept, it is not formed in isolation. Rather, the expectations and

evaluations of others are crucial to its formation (Hattie, 1992). Self-concept, therefore, is not innate, but is developed by the individual through interaction with the environment and reflecting on that interaction (Franken, 1994).

Current special education processes tend to be presumptuous and lead to discriminatory generalizations about disabled students (Obiakor, 1999). Pertinent to this issue is the impact of teacher expectations on the self-concepts of disabled students. According to Obiakor, lowering or raising expectations of disabled students affects their self-understanding, self-love, and self-empowerment. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that a positive relationship existed between teacher expectation, differential treatment, and student self-fulfilling prophecy. A teacher's perception of a student leads directly to an expectation of the student. If a teacher views the student as intelligent, then he or she will expect above-average work from the student. Consequently, a child's performance tends to reflect the expectations of his or her teachers (Powell-Hobson & Hobson, 1992). Therefore, changing teacher expectations of students will undoubtedly impact the student's individual self-concept. A change in self-concept is likely to affect a wide range of behaviors. In essence, when one aspect of a child's self-concept is affected there is a domino effect on his or her entire self-concept (Obiakor).

Research findings have linked having a learning disability with poor self-concept, and it is clear that students with LD often experience academic challenges that drain self-esteem (Elbaum & Vaughn, 1999). In a study conducted by Beltempo and Achille (1990) the various ramifications of special class placement on the self-concept of students with learning disabilities were investigated. The researchers found there was a strong link between having low self-concept and having a learning disability. Furthermore, those disabled students educated in more restrictive settings (i.e. more than 60% of the school day) displayed low self-confidence that

persisted throughout the school year. Ironically the disabled students educated in regular classrooms displayed the same persistent low self-confidence throughout the school year. The researchers found that a combination of services provided the best benefit for the disabled student's self-confidence (Beltempo & Achille, 1990). Teacher attitudes and perceptions also play an integral role in influencing student outcomes.

A growing body of research has focused on the predictors of school performance among learning disabled students. Deci, Hodges, Pierson, and Tomassone (1992) investigated the self-perceptions of competence and autonomy of 450 students ranging in age from 9 to 19 years. All were either learning disabled or emotionally handicapped and had been placed in special classes, apart from regular education students, for the majority of the day. A number of variables were found to be important contributors to the achievement and adjustment of these special education students. Specifically, maternal autonomy support was more strongly related to the motivation of elementary school students, while teacher autonomy support was more strongly related to motivation in high school students. Further, students who tended to take responsibility and not place blame on others had higher achievement. In general, the most significant variables for predicting achievement and personal adjustment among LD students were associated with competence. Deci et. al. concluded that motivationally related variables appear to be important for LD and emotionally handicapped youths.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the success of disabled students in the regular classroom has been a lack of appropriate instruction that yields adequate progress. When placed full-time in general education classrooms, students with learning disabilities who are emergent readers make minimal progress in reading even when extensive professional development is provided for the participating teachers (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). This minimal progress may be attributed

to the attitudes teachers convey both concerning individual students and the amount of work involved in including a child with disabilities in the regular classroom. Furthermore, students with lower levels of academic achievement have lower self-concepts than students with high levels of academic achievement. Students with more positive self-perceptions of their academic ability tend to do better in school than students who consider themselves to be poor learners (Elbaum & Vaughn, 1999).

### Teacher Perceptions

Studies that have investigated teachers' perceptions and use of effective accommodations and adaptations for students with learning disabilities demonstrate consistently that while teachers find these accommodations desirable, they view many as not feasible in light of their other classroom demands. Classroom teachers also express concerns that adaptations and accommodations made for students with learning disabilities will be difficult to implement because other students may perceive them as unfair (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999).

In a study conducted by Houck and Rogers (1994), randomly surveyed special and regular education teachers, principals, and supervisors were asked to respond to the contention that "pull-out" programs do more harm than good (p. 440). Of those responding, 61.5% disagreed or tended to disagree with the statement; 29.7% agreed or tended to agree; and the remainder of the sample shared no opinion (Houck & Rogers). A Harris poll indicated that 94% of regular education teachers believe services for students with disabilities are better now than over 12 years ago (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). Part of this positive outlook for special education may be due in part because more and more regular education teachers are assuming a greater responsibility for disabled students in their classrooms. Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) report that the

adaptations regular education teachers make are typically oriented to the larger class group, not to the individual. These teachers are pleased with services but believe if inclusion is to continue to flourish, they require additional training, increased planning and preparation time, and smaller class sizes to meet the needs of all of their students, including those with disabilities (Meisel, 1986).

In a study conducted by Bullock, Zagar, Donahue, and Pelton (1985), variation of teacher perceptions of behaviorally disordered students in four different educational placements was found, but not in every setting. This was attributed, according to Bullock et al., to inappropriate diagnostic procedures and/or placement decisions that may not be appropriate. The data in this study indicate that teachers' perceptions vary somewhat across settings. Teachers in residential treatment centers perceive their students as having fewer aggressive and disruptive behavior problems than those in other settings. In contrast, teachers in public school resource settings viewed their students as more irresponsible, inattentive, immature, and defiant (Bullock et al.).

### Parent Perceptions

With the reauthorization of the IDEA came federal support of parental involvement throughout the special education process. Communication and collaboration among parents and teachers is key to the successful education of disabled students (Lovitt & Cushing, 1999). In recent research that investigated parent perceptions of special education programs, Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) reported that 77% of parents of children with disabilities are satisfied with special education services. In another study summarized by Lovitt and Cushing, parents had mixed perceptions of the services their children were receiving. Many of the parents who participated in this study supported the idea of inclusion, but had reservations about including their own

children. These parents cited reasons such as setting their children up for failure or other students considering their children “stupid” (Lovitt & Cushing).

Lovitt and Cushing (1999) cited in their study that parents had varying degrees of satisfaction related to their disabled child’s educational program. Apparent in their responses to interview questions were common concerns among parents regarding services for their disabled child. According to the parent responses, many parents of disabled children do not believe the Individual Education Program (IEP) is individualized. Parents are often disgruntled because services are not always geared to meet the individual, specific needs of the disabled students. Additionally, many parents of disabled students have held misconceptions about special education services since the time their child was initially found eligible for services. Many parents in the study conducted by Lovitt and Cushing were confused as to why their child was not performing at a higher level. They were under the impression that special education would “fix” their child’s problems by the time they reached high school (Lovitt & Cushing).

#### Class Size and Caseload Issues

Thus far in the review of current literature it has been noted that there are increasing numbers of students with disabilities being educated in regular education classrooms. Additionally, teachers and students have strong perceptions about the strategies involved in implementing inclusion programs. With that said, issues influencing notable progress for students with disabilities should be explored.

When Congress reauthorized the Education for All Handicapped Children Act as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990 it prominently included the special education field’s concern for the individual into the bill’s title. In nearly all aspects of special education

policy and practice, individualism is present as a term, an idea, an approach, and a process (Kliewer & Landis, 1999). The field collectively speaks of individualized assessment, individualized education plans, individualized placement decisions, behavior plans, curricula, instruction, and so on. With such an emphasis on the individual, the issue of whether large, inclusive classrooms can adequately meet the needs of children with disabilities should be explored.

Research in the area of class size has been widely available but ignored by policymakers for decades. The growing determination to ensure that all students succeed in school coupled with the need to provide a safe environment has led to a more careful analysis of achievement data of different student populations such as smaller schools (Wasley & Lear, 2001). Parents, teachers, and principals have found that small schools are better able to engage the intellectual and emotional lives of students and improve academic performance (Wasley & Lear, 2001). Small schools are now being created to remove the sense of isolation that can breed violence and alienation. They are also reducing the gap between performance of poorer and minority students and the more affluent students. In 2000, a study cited by Wasley and Lear found that students in 90 small Chicago high schools made significant improvements in school behavior and achievement. Additionally, students in schools-within-schools attended up to five more days of school per semester, dropped out at one-third to one-half the rate, had up to 0.22 higher grade point averages, and improved reading scores by the equivalent of almost half a year (Wasley & Lear). This data clearly represents the benefits of small schools and smaller class sizes.

In addition to the academic benefits, students reported feeling safer and more connected with adults in these schools. Teachers reported a greater sense of effectiveness, job satisfaction, and connection with parents. They also reported they were afforded more opportunities to

collaborate with other teachers, build a coherent educational program, use a variety of instructional practices, and engage students more frequently in learning. Parents and community members reported increased confidence in the schools (Wasley & Lear, 2001).

Other studies of small schools detail similar findings. Disadvantaged students in small schools significantly out performed those in large ones on standardized basic skills tests. Small schools were better able to close the achievement gap, especially between less and more affluent students. Small schools were safer, reporting fewer fights and no incidents of serious violence (Wasley & Lear, 2001). Similar results have been reported for children with disabilities.

In support of the concept of smaller schools and class sizes is also the idea of reduced caseloads for special educators. In a study addressing this issue, it was noted that larger caseloads and instructional group sizes negatively impact student math and reading achievement. Furthermore, group or whole class instruction dominates all class sizes, but individualization occurs more frequently in smaller groups. Student attending behaviors and academic engagement also increase when group sizes decrease (Russ, Chiang, Rylance, & Bongers, 2001). Additionally, the structure, intensity, and camaraderie of a small, private, boarding school for students with disabilities gave one student the learning strategies needed to finally read history and write about Shakespeare (Sobel, 2001).

Research on class size is extensive and is often used as a sounding board for improving educational outcomes. However, research on class size for the past 50 years has contradicted the assertion that reductions in class size had led to major gains in student achievement (Slavin, 1990). Historically, four approaches have been used to examine and analyze research on class size. These four approaches include descriptive analysis, meta-analysis, best-evidence synthesis, and related cluster analysis (Robinson, 1990).

For several years class size studies were summarized and tallied by their results through descriptive analysis. Early analyses, such as Ross and McKenna (1955) and NEA (1968) generally favored smaller class sizes. In 1978, a descriptive analysis by the Educational Research Service concluded that class size had little impact on the academic achievement of most students above the primary grades (Robinson, 1990).

Meta-analysis was introduced in the late 1970's to provide statistical reviews of research studies. Effect sizes are calculated in meta-analyses to measure both direction and extent of the effect of treatment variables on outcome variables. Numerous meta-analyses were conducted on class size in relation to student achievement. Cone, as cited in Robinson (1990), reported a meta-analysis of 25 studies that included 124 effect sizes. Cone, as cited in Robinson (1990), found an overall effect size of only  $+0.14$  and concluded that student achievement was not significantly higher in smaller classes. Similarly, in 1978, Glass and Smith, as cited in Robinson (1990), reviewed 76 class size studies and found only a 6 percentile rank difference in the mean scores of students taught in classes of 20 versus 40. Glass and Smith concluded that class size made little or no difference in achievement (Glass, Cahen, Smith, & Filby, 1982).

In 1986, Slavin, as cited in Robinson (1990), combined elements of meta-analysis with descriptive analysis to form best-evidence synthesis. He found only 8 studies that met his criteria in the application of this method in 1989. The median effect size across the 8 studies was only  $+0.13$ . Slavin concluded substantial reductions in class size do generally have a positive effect on student achievement, but the effects tend to be small (Robinson, 1990).

In 1986, Wittebols and Robinson applied related cluster analysis to 100 class size studies conducted between 1950 and 1985 in K-12 classes containing 5 or more students. They found

the most positive effects of small class sizes on student learning in grades K-3, with only slight positive effects in grades 4-8 and no positive effects in grades 9-12 (Robinson, 1990).

Although the effect sizes of these studies were positive, they were not significant. Our educational system, though, continues to stress the importance of reducing class sizes despite only slight benefits. This is most likely due, according to Bourke (1986), to the general beliefs that smaller class sizes “promote higher achievement, better attitudes, different instructional practices, and higher teacher satisfaction and morale” (p. 558). Robinson (1990) contended, though, that in order to enhance the possibility of increasing student learning by reducing class size, the research indicates that specific students should be targeted for specific reasons and teachers should receive training and resources to make the most of learning opportunities in smaller classes.

In this current review of literature, it has been determined that the trend in placement of students with disabilities is shifting toward more inclusive programs in general education classrooms. The review of literature also supports the concepts of smaller schools and class sizes. It is apparent that the size of schools and classrooms has a direct effect on student achievement and outcomes, although that effect may be small. Further investigation into the achievement of students with disabilities in diverse settings is needed.

### Summary

A review of current literature has shown that there has been a shift in the educating of children with disabilities from more restrictive special classes to less restrictive regular classroom settings. This shift came about with the passage of the LRE clause in federal legislation that mandates students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive

environment alongside nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Furthermore, removal of these students from the general education classroom should only occur when the child's disability is so severe that the curriculum and instruction of the general classroom cannot be adapted to satisfactorily meet the needs of the student (McLeskey et al., 1999; Friend & Bursuck, 1996; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997). Each year the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) collects data from States on the number of students with disabilities served in different educational environments. These data help OSEP monitor compliance with the least restrictive environment (LRE) clause of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and inform advocates, parents, and researchers of the extent to which students with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

It is presumed that the increase in educating students in less restrictive environments can be attributed to the mandated legislation and federal and state pressure to educate most students in the regular classroom setting. What the research does not thoroughly investigate are the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers of a variety of educational placements for students with disabilities. The research in this area is sparse at best. This research project examined the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers concerning a variety of educational placements available to students with disabilities and the impact these environments have on student achievement and self-concept in the school setting.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

According to Carnine (1997), “a key goal of research in the social and behavioral sciences is the improvement of practice” (p. 513). Some researchers argue that there is a gap between research and practice because research is not inherently designed to make a practical difference (Carnine). Teachers and families often do not learn of important special education research, thus failing to make a connection to the “real world” (Schiller, Malouf & Danielson, 1995). The goal of this research project is to make a connection between research and practice that may lead to improved practices among school administrators and regular and special education teachers.

Qualitative research, specifically a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998), was chosen to examine the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Research participants included a regular educator and special educators in a variety of settings ranging from the least restrictive environment to more restrictive settings, students with disabilities who are served through a range of programs, and their parents. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section defines qualitative research and discusses the rationale for choosing a phenomenological study. A section on methodology outlines the steps that were followed to conduct the study. A section on how the data was analyzed will follow. The final section discusses validity, reliability, and ethical considerations of the study.

### Qualitative Research Defined

Creswell (1998) said “qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.15). In contrast to a quantitative study, qualitative researchers work with a few cases and many variables, whereas quantitative researchers deal with only a few variables and numerous cases (Creswell). Quantitative research is synonymous with positivist research. This research paradigm supports the ideal that the social environment has features that are independent and constant across time and settings. Positivist research collects and analyzes numerical data based on “observable behaviors of samples” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 28). On the contrary, qualitative research is similar to postpositivist research, which states that the social environment has features that are mere interpretations of individuals. These interpretations can vary depending on the circumstances and the situation (Gall et al., 1996). Some researchers contend that qualitative research is best used to discover themes and relationships, while quantitative research is best used to validate these themes and relationships. Therefore, some would contend that qualitative and quantitative research practices have “complementary goals” (Biddle & Anderson, 1986), as one plays a discovery role while the other plays a confirmatory role (Gall et al.).

A phenomenological study was chosen to investigate the research questions presented in Chapter 1. In a phenomenological study, the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomena being studied (Gall et al., 1996). The study describes the lived experiences of many individuals relative to one concept (Creswell, 1998). In the case of this study, the phenomena are inclusion and a continuum of placement options for students with high incidence disabilities.

The individuals involved are those stakeholders that are directly or indirectly impacted by inclusion or different service options, namely the students, parents, and teachers.

In planning this phenomenological study, Gall et al. (1996) are cited for describing procedures used in designing such a study. First, Gall et al. stated the researcher should “identify a topic of personal and social significance” (p. 601). It is important for the researcher to be invested in the topic because they will be collecting data not only from other individuals but also from himself or herself (Gall et al.). In designing this study, I am taking my own interests and personal background into account. As a special education teacher for ten years, I understand full well the impact of inclusion and a continuum of service options for students with disabilities. Furthermore, I have taught a variety of age groups in a variety of educational environments, including private schools for children with disabilities and co-teaching in inclusive classroom settings. Even though I have a personal opinion concerning the inclusion and continuum of services debate, I believe my variety of experiences will assist me in fully investigating both ends of the spectrum completely.

The second step in designing a phenomenological study is to select appropriate participants. According to Gall et al. (1996), the primary consideration in selecting participants is that they have experienced the phenomena being investigated. The current study only pursued information from sources that were directly or indirectly impacted by the debated topics in designated settings. I refer to these individuals as the stakeholders, because they have the most “at stake” when referring to the current topic. The stakeholders for this study were chosen based on recommendations made by the director and supervisor of the schools included in this study. Only students whose parents agreed to be contacted by me and subsequently agreed to participate in the study were interviewed.

The next step in designing this study was to interview each of the participants. In a phenomenological study, the researcher conducts at least one long, in-depth interview of each participant in order to document the experiences of that participant in relation to the phenomena (Gall et al, 1996). In the current study, one in-depth interview was conducted with a follow-up contact with the participants asking that they verify the information transcribed from the interviews. If any information was not accurate or the participants requested that additional information be included, this was reflected in the original transcripts and appropriate changes were made.

The final step in designing a phenomenological study is to analyze the data. The interview data are broken into smaller units through which the researcher looks for themes. These themes are compared and categorized, and the data are then synthesized and validated by the participants (Gall et al., 1996). A process called constant comparative analysis was used in this study to compare data to emerging categories and classify the data accordingly (Creswell, 1998).

### Methodology

Participants were identified according to the definition of a continuum of placement options for students with disabilities described in Chapter 2. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) collects data from states on the number of students with disabilities served in different educational environments. These environments include the following placement options: students served outside the regular class <21% of the school day, students served outside the regular class 21-60% of the school day, students served outside the regular class >60% of the school day, and students served in separate (private) schools (U.S. Department of

Education, 2001). Two students from the first category, three from the second category and two disabled students from the third category at a local public school were interviewed and two students at a separate, private school were interviewed, for a total of 9 students. Students ages 14 or above were selected for participation in this study for two reasons. First, it was believed these students would be more articulate in being able to describe their experiences. Second, it was believed these students would have more experiences to share since they were older.

Additionally, a parent or parents of these children were interviewed. A total of nine different parents of the interviewed students also participated. Additionally, 5 special education teachers that serve each of the disability categories listed were also interviewed. The total number of participants for this study was 24 interviewees. For the students being served less than 21% of the school day outside of the regular education class, one of their regular education teachers were interviewed. The participants were chosen from a local public school in the Tri-cities, Tennessee area. The private school participants were selected from a private school for children with disabilities in Bristol, Virginia. The following chart describes the interviewees collectively.

Table A: *Interview participants.*

Options of Service		Interviewees			
		Students	Parents	Special Education Teachers	Regular Education Teachers
Served outside the regular class:	<21% of the school day	2	2	1	1
	21 to 60% of the school day	3	4	2	0
	>60% of the school day	2	3	1	0
Separate (Private) School Placement:		2	2	1	0
Totals:		9	9	5	1

For a phenomenological study, data collection procedures primarily involve in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (1998), interviewing can be viewed as a series of steps that include the following:

1. Identify interviewees based on sampling procedures.

The participants for this study were chosen using the purposeful sampling strategy described by Creswell (1998). Creswell states that purposeful selection of participants allows researchers to design studies with clear criteria and rationales for decisions. More specifically, criterion sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, was employed in this study. Criterion sampling stipulates that all of the participants meet the same criteria (Creswell). In this study, all of the student participants were 14 years or older with an identified disability that falls under the definition of high incidence disability. Namely, the participants in this study had learning disabilities or mental retardation. Three of these students also had the medical diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder. The other participants were the parents and teachers of these selected students. Only children whose parents agreed to be contacted were included in the study.

2. Determine what type of interview is practical and will get the most useful information in order to answer research questions.

For the purposes of this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted using an emerging interview guide. I interviewed the participants using a prepared interview guide to begin. The interviews were informal, allowing dialogue to flow freely with additional questions added when appropriate. I conducted interviews at the convenience of the participants, allowing them to choose a time and location that was conducive to their schedules.

3. Secure adequate reporting procedures, such as recording devices.

The participants' interviews were recorded, with their permission, and transcribed as soon after the interview as possible. I used the method of member checking to ensure accuracy of the data collected. Member checking is a process through which participants review statements in my report for accuracy and completeness (Gall et al., 1996). Upon completion of transcribing the interview responses, I asked the participants to review them for accuracy.

4. Develop an interview protocol that has approximately 10-15 open-ended interview questions with ample space to write responses to the interviewee's comments.

I was prepared for each interview with a general interview guide that was semi-structured in nature. By semi-structured, I mean that the interview guide consisted of several structured questions of which responses were used to probe for more in-depth information (Gall et al., 1996). In developing the interview guides, I consulted special education teachers, special education administrators and parents of children with disabilities who did not participate in the current study. These consultants offered feedback on what questions were appropriate to ask and how best to interview students with low cognitive abilities or emotional or behavioral challenges. Based on this information, the interview guides were developed and refined to their current state. Prior to conducting the study I asked two students, parents, and teachers who would not be involved in the study to be involved in pilot interviews to provide additional feedback on the appropriateness and effectiveness of all of the interview guides.

5. Determine the location for conducting the interview.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one at a time and location that was convenient to each participant. For students and teachers this usually meant conducting the interviews in the schools they attend and work in. Some parents found it more convenient to interview them in their own homes in the evenings or on the weekends, while others agreed to come to the school

for the interview. In any case, the interview locations were conducive to tape recording the conversation and free from unnecessary distractions (Creswell, 1998).

6. Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study.

Before beginning my study I consulted the special education supervisor from area public schools and the director from the private school. One public school in the area agreed to participate in the study with few or no limitations, as did the area private school. After initial approval was granted, I asked the administrators to choose the appropriate number of disabled students in each of the four service categories that they felt would be appropriate for this study. I then request that these administrators contact the parents of the selected students and seek their permission for me to contact them and explain the study in greater detail (see letter to parents, Appendix A). I then contacted the parents and obtained permission for the student and the parent(s) to participate. Additionally, I reviewed in detail the purpose of the study and how the responses would be used in conjunction with the study (Creswell, 1998).

7. During the interview, stay close to the questions, complete the interview within the time allotted, be respectful and courteous, and avoid offering questions and advice.

Creswell (1998) stated “the good interviewer is a good listener rather than a speaker during an interview” (p. 125). In conducting the actual interviews I heeded Creswell’s recommendations by sticking to the questions as much as possible, completing the interview in the time the participant allotted, and being courteous and respectful at all times (p. 125).

In addition to conducting in-depth interviews, I also collected data from observations of the participants when necessary to gain an overall descriptive picture of the experiences of the participants. Document collection and standardized testing data was also necessary to

investigate. In looking at student success and outcomes, documents such as standardized test scores, grades, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) were important.

In summary, participants for this study were chosen based on the criteria that they had high incidence disabilities and were all stakeholders in the inclusion and continuum of service options debate. In conducting a phenomenological study the primary source of data collection consists of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews as well as document analysis and collection were conducted in the present study. The data was analyzed for accuracy according to member checking techniques. Finally, the information was coded and categorized according to emerging themes.

### Data Analysis

According to Gall et al. (1996) the “essence of data analysis is the coding of the document’s messages into categories” (p. 359). Before analyzing data the recorded interviews and notes were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible. Upon completion of my interviews and observations, the transcribed field notes were uploaded into the QSR computer program Non Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theory building (NUD\*IST) (Creswell, 1998). This computer program was used to code the data according to the inherent themes and sub-themes. These themes were directly related to the research questions listed in Chapter 1. Merriam (1998) suggested that the names of the categories can come from the researcher, the participants, or the literature. Merriam provided guidelines to determine the efficacy of categories:

- Categories should reflect the purpose of the research. The categories will emerge and be determined as the data is collected and analyzed.

- Categories should be exhaustive. All data that are deemed important to the study will be placed in one of the categories.
- Categories should be mutually exclusive. Each unit of data will fit into only one category.
- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of each category will be tied directly to what is contained in the data.
- Categories should be conceptually congruent. The same level of abstraction will characterize all categories at the same level in this study.

In order to determine whether several raters can use the same or similar coding strategies as those that are developed in this study, inter-rater reliability was used. Inter-rater reliability calculates a correlation coefficient for different rater's classifications. If the inter-rater reliability were low, I would need to identify issues that are ambiguous and clarify them (Gall et al., 1996). For the case of this study I asked a colleague who is a special education teacher to code the information and then compared her coded information to mine to determine inter-rater reliability. Once the data were clarified and coded sufficiently, frequency counts of the different categories were analyzed. These frequency counts served to analyze particular themes or sub-themes of data in order to make inferences.

### Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). Objectivity in a study is the essential basis of all good research. Without objectivity, the only reason the reader of the research would have for accepting the conclusions of the research would be an authoritarian respect for the author (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Objectivity is the “simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity

as possible (Kirk & Miller, p. 20). To ensure reliability and validity in research, the investigation must be conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998).

### Internal Validity

When research findings match reality, then internal validity is achieved (Merriam, 1998). In other words, do the findings of the research capture what is really there? Internal validity thus is dependent upon the meaning of reality (Merriam). The researcher seeks to answer the question, “Is my interpretation credible?” Merriam presented six strategies to enhance internal validity that include triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and researcher’s biases.

- Triangulation is the process of using multiple and varied sources, methods, and investigators to confirm the findings (Creswell, 1998; Merriam). In the current study, I interviewed 24 different individuals, as well as collected numerous forms and data and conducted observations of the variety of settings that were investigated.
- Member checking was used to verify the credibility of my interpretations of the data as well as the results of the study (Creswell; Merriam).
- “Prolonged engagement and persistent observation” (Creswell, p. 201) at the research site was used to gather data over an extended period of time to increase the validity of the findings (Merriam).
- Peer review was used to gain additional insight into the findings as they materialized (Creswell; Merriam). I asked a colleague to review the data as it was collected and to give me an unbiased interpretation of the findings.

- A participatory or collaborative mode of research is a method that involves participants in each phase of the research (Merriam). Although the participants I chose had not been involved in the initial development of this study, I involved them in each subsequent development. The participants, in essence, guided my study.
- Researcher's biases were limited as I investigated my own prejudices and sought to declare these from the onset of the study. As I stated previously, I have been a special education teacher for over 10 years. My experiences have led me to have strong beliefs about the appropriate placement for students with disabilities. I believe in a continuum of service options but also believe in the inclusionary setting for many students, just not all of them. I believe I was able to adequately remove my biases as I fully investigated each side of this controversial debate.

Creswell (1998) also addresses rich, thick description and external audits in conceptualizing internal validity.

- Rich, thick description allows the readers of the study to make their own decisions about reliability of the research. The detailed descriptions enable the reader to “transfer information to other settings” to see if the results are “transferable” (p. 203).
- A person who has no connection to the study conducts external audits. The auditor's job is to examine the process of the study and the results to evaluate their accuracy. An external auditor was employed to audit this research.

### External Validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other situations. In other words, how effectively can the results of the study be

generalized to other settings and situations (Gall et al., 1996; Merriam, 1998)? In qualitative research, the researchers goal is not to generalize to the population at large, but rather to understand a small control group in depth (Merriam). Erikson, cited in Merriam stated the generalizability of a study is not an appropriate goal for qualitative research. The intent is not to gain “abstract universals” (p. 210) by statistical generalizations from a sample to the larger population. Rather, the intent is to gain “concrete universals” (p. 210) by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it to other cases studied in great detail. In other words, what we learn in a particular situation can be generalized to similar situations (Merriam). Similar to concrete universals is the ideal of naturalistic generalization. People use their own personal knowledge, experiences, and intuition to explain the world around them. This thorough knowledge of particular events allows one to see similarities in the unfamiliar (Merriam). Finally, external validity can also be viewed in terms of reader or user generalizability. This, in essence, leaves the interpretations and generalizability up to the reader. The reader questions how the research can be applied and used in his or her own situations. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide enough description in the research’s content to allow the reader to deduct his or her own generalizations (Merriam).

In determining the validity of the current study, Polkinghorne’s, cited in Creswell (1998), questions for the researcher in determining validity were explored.

- Did the interviewer influence the content of the subjects’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects’ actual experiences?
- Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

- In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?
- Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
- Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations (p. 208)?

### Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which other researchers conducting the same study would arrive at similar conclusions as the first researcher (Gall et al., 1996). Lincoln and Guba, cited in Creswell (1998) use the term “dependability” (p. 197) in lieu of the term reliability. Merriam’s (1998) suggestions to determine if the current study is dependable and reliable were utilized.

- I explained the assumptions and theory behind the study, my personal position as it relates to the group being studied, the basis for selecting participants, and the context of data collection.
- Triangulation also strengthens the reliability of a study; therefore, multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used in this study.
- I used an “audit trail” (p. 207), which will provide the reader enough descriptive detail concerning how data was collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made throughout the study to be able to “replicate” (p. 207) my account of the study.

### Ethical Considerations

I followed the ethical standards determined by East Tennessee State University and the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department for this study. Participants for this study were provided informed consent and protection from harm. Further, participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their consent to participate at any time in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times. Participant's actual names are not used in the study or in any printed material. Written consent was obtained from the participants before any data were collected.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school students with high incidence disabilities, their parents, and their teachers regarding a variety of special education placement options. Most of the participants for this study were eager to share information regarding the successes and failures of the specific programs established for these children with disabilities. The most challenging population to interview for this study was the student participants. The cognitive abilities of the students ranged from average intelligence to significantly below average. Therefore, a wide variety of perceptions were expressed. The students did express valuable information regarding their individual likes and dislikes and what makes them comfortable in the school setting. All of the information shared has proven to be both enlightening and valuable in examining the perceptions regarding a variety of placement options for children with disabilities.

#### Introduction to the Participants

##### Students

As stated previously, 9 different students with disabilities, 9 different parents of these students, and 6 teachers were interviewed for this study (one regular education teacher and 5 special education teachers), bringing the total number of participants to 24. Of the student participants, 7 have learning disabilities and 2 have mental retardation, all of which are considered high incidence disability categories. Additionally, at least 3 of these students have diagnosed symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Attention Deficit Disorder

as recorded in school records or as reported by the parents in the interviews. Furthermore, according to one student's parent, one of the student participants has a condition known as Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome. According to this student's parent, this syndrome interferes with his ability to read text at a normal rate. All of the student participants have been certified as having a disability and have been receiving special education services for at least the last two years, with some participants having more than 14 years of special education services.

### Parents

A total of nine different parents were interviewed. All but one interview were conducted with just the mother of the student participants. The exception was an interview conducted with both a mother and father together. These parents were also interviewed for their two children who were served in 2 different categories, so their interview was conducted on behalf of both students.

### Teachers

The teacher participants for this study were all certified special education or regular education teachers having anywhere from 4 ½ to 32 years of experience. Many of these teachers have taught or managed the caseload of the interviewed students for more than four years, thus the information provided was credible based on their experiences. There were 5 special education teachers involved in this study. These teachers had experiences ranging from teaching in a resource setting to managing the caseload of fully included students. There was also one regular education teacher interviewed for information about two different students. This teacher has been teaching primarily secondary science classes for 11 years.

Table B. A summary of the participant demographics.

		Students		Parents	Teachers			
		Pseudonym	Disability Categories	Years of Receiving Special Education Services	Pseudonym	Years of Total Teaching Experience	Years of Special Education Teaching Experience	
Public School Grades 9-12	<21%	Rick	Learning Disabled	10	Mother	Doe	14	14
		Karl	Learning Disabled	2	Mother	Smith	10	0
	21% to 60%	Brian	Learning Disabled	5	Mother	Hall	25 1/2	25 1/2
		Lee	Learning Disabled	13	Mother			
		Mark	Learning Disabled	13	Mother and Father (2 Students)	Wood	4 1/2	4 1/2
	>60%	Luke	Mentally Retarded	14	Mother	Steel	32	30
		Logan	Mentally Retarded	15	Mother and Father (2 Students)			
	Private School Grades K-12	Separate School	Tyler	Learning Disabled	7	Mother	Brown	25
Perry			Learning Disabled	8	Mother			
Totals		9		9 (different parents)		6		

Served Outside the Regular Class <21% of the School Day

In this first category as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, students received special education services less than 21% of the regular school day. These services are considered indirect services. The two students in this category of services, Rick and Karl, are certified as Learning Disabled. These students are fully included in regular classes. They are on consultation, which means that their special education case manager monitors their progress at least two times per month. This management involves contacting the

teachers of these students in person and in writing to check on their individual progress in the areas of attendance, academic progress, behavior, and implementation and use of modifications. If the teachers of these students indicate a problem, the case manager contacts the students and/or the parents and attempts to implement a plan to assist the student. Because of the limited services provided, it is assumed that these students are high functioning despite their individual disabilities and weaknesses. The following is a summary of the perceptions of these students regarding their individual services and the school they attend.

### Students

The students interviewed in this category expressed their contentment with the public school they attended. Rick, a student with a learning disability, had the following expression to support his satisfaction with his school:

I enjoy it. Pretty nice school, nice teachers. I enjoy it, I guess.

One student did not express discontentment with the school itself, but alluded to the fact that he struggles in school, therefore making school unenjoyable for him. Karl stated:

I guess overall I like it. It's hard in some ways. For me at least, I can kind of, if I stick to what I'm doing, you know, then I can go hard and get great grades.

These students are academically successful in school as indicated by grades on their report cards, which is one of the reasons their services are limited to consultation. The students in this category stated that parents and teachers contribute to their individual success in school. In addition to parents and teachers, students also reported a good class, inviting classroom, and working hard assists them in being successful. Additionally, these students shared that they had all of the support they needed in order to be successful in school. When asked what things help these students to be successful in school, they stated:

Karl: Parents. That's one thing that I can come to them and ask questions. Definitely teachers help out a lot. And then...you just have to work hard. And that's about it.

Rick: Probably my mom. She helps me out on a lot of stuff. She, like if I have any questions or anything, she helps. She looks over some of my papers, if I need her to look over them. Some of the teachers, they'll help you if you need some help with something. I think a good teacher is always a very good thing to have and then having a good class where it's not a bunch of rowdy people and you can stay focused without them taking your attention away. Also, I think the room has to be kind of inviting. I think some rooms are just kind of bland and you just sit there, and also the temperature, that has a lot of effect, too. If it's really warm you can tend to fall asleep or really cold you tend to think about how cold you are instead of what you're learning.

Students were also asked what things were most challenging for them in school, and they had similar responses. The students responded with answers that indicated an area of their specific disability. For example, Karl, who has a learning disability primarily in the area of reading, stated the following:

Reading, of course. English, it's pretty hard. And then like Biology, reading all the stuff, it takes me a really long time to read through it and then look up the vocabulary and write it down. ...I can understand what I read fine when I read, it's just hard, it takes me a long time to read. That gets kind of frustrating.

Rick, another student with a similar reading disability stated:

Probably, English would probably be the hardest. Probably reading.

The students involved in this study were chosen to participate because they had a diagnosed disability; therefore, they knew this prior to consenting to participation. In spite of this knowledge, though, they were not familiar with their specific disability label, even though they knew they had a disability. Instead, they articulated the problems they had in relation to school work. For instance, students relayed the following descriptors when asked what their disability was:

Karl: Reading, well just sensitivity to light, or whatever, however you want to say that.

Rick: Um, disability? Um, I'm probably like, it's hard for me to pick up on things. Like I'll see it and I can run it through my mind but I have more of like a photographic memory that I have like somebody just telling me something. I like to see it written down and someone to show me.

In an effort to seek information from the students regarding their specific services, they were asked who their special education case manager is and what he or she does to assist them. Although these students did not know for sure who their case manager was, they were very clear about what she did to support them in school.

Karl: She for sure checks up on me and asks the teachers, I know that much. ...and just makes sure that they know that if I'm not, you know the quickest guy, you know if I'm taking longer on tests, there's a reason basically.

Rick: She kind of looks over my grades and everything and makes sure I'm doing good. She talks to my teachers to see if I'm paying attention and stuff.

Because the students receiving services less than 21% of the school day are all fully included in regular classes, their primary educational needs come from regular educators. The students were asked whether they felt their regular education teachers assisted them more than they assisted other students in their classes who did not have a diagnosed disability. Additionally, the students were asked if their regular teachers knew about their disability and their needs and if they talked to them about it. Only Karl responded that any of his regular teachers helped him more than the other students in his classes. The other student indicated that his regular teachers did not help him more than anyone else. This is not to say that he believed he was not receiving appropriate support, though. Rick indicated that some of his teachers would offer additional support but he did not see the need for the services.

The students were also asked if they were familiar with the term Individual Education Plan and what it meant to them. Both of the students had a vague idea of what an Individual Education Plan was but were not specific in their descriptions. They were, however, more familiar with the terms IEP or IEP meeting. The students knew that they were involved in an IEP meeting at least once a year at which time parents, teachers, and themselves met to discuss their program for the following year.

The student participants in this category of services seemed to have very similar perceptions regarding their special education services. The students who are served by special education less than 21% of the school day are high functioning, successful students. Although these students have disabilities, they have learned to compensate for their difficulties. Furthermore, it appears that a positive attitude and internal motivation play a part in their success. However, it was surprising that these students were not more knowledgeable regarding their disabilities and special education services. Since the students are high functioning, one would imagine that they would be more aware of their specific disability and all that goes along with having a disability, such as an Individual Education Plan and knowing whom their special education case manager is. In any case, these students shared valuable information regarding their perceptions of their services.

### Parents

An analysis of the data for parents of children served outside the regular class <21% of the school day shows that parents are generally pleased with the level and quality of special education services offered to their child. There were two mothers interviewed in this category. One mother is a homemaker, while the other mother is in the education field in an administrative

role. When these parents were asked to describe their child's disability and the way that it affects their academic progress, they had the following information to share:

The mother of Karl, a student with a learning disability and Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome stated:

I don't know the exact, well I guess his disability is with written language...so he struggles to read but he can do it with that overlay or glasses.

Rick's mother, who works in the field of education stated:

Ok, I think Rick's disability is primarily reading and language so it's difficult for him to be in classes that are accelerated such as AP History and that was a struggle, although he does enroll in those kinds of classes, he's taking Honors English now. But his writing, he has to do a lot more editing of his essays and things like that. And I think probably, he says he doesn't like to read or to write but just the fact that he has to do it a lot in those classes makes him better at it.

These parents expressed their pleasure with the level and quality of services being provided to their children. Even though these students are served the least amount of any in this study, these parents were satisfied that their services were sufficient in meeting the needs of their children. One of the mothers had the following information to share:

Karl's mother: Well, as far as I understand, there's a lot more services provided than I realized. Like I didn't know that he was getting called in once a month or something just to talk about how he's doing. So I know that's one thing. And then, they've offered help, if he wants it, abbreviated assignments if he's getting too overloaded at home with homework, and help from teachers if he needs extra time on tests. His Biology teacher was concerned that she might have been overloading him, but that provision was in there, that he could have abbreviated assignments. So I think there was a cooperativeness on the teacher's part too. They all have been very helpful and approachable when I talked to them.

Another mother commented on the following services, alluding to the limited amount of specific, direct services offered at this level:

Rick's mother: He is on consultation and he can, I think he can have extended time on tests if he requests those.

Parents were then asked how the services that were included on their child's IEP were implemented and what benefits they saw from those services. Only one of the mothers had additional information to share regarding services. Specifically, they stated:

Rick's mother: Well, he doesn't really ask for anything except when he took the...he took extended time for one of the ACT tests. And we just try to, like with the AP History we bought organizational kinds of things, highlighters and that sort of thing and we asked that he be allowed to highlight his textbook. But primarily you know if we need an M-team we've only called for one while he's been in high school and that was with the AP History to get together and brain storm some ways he could make it, make progress in that class.

As far as changing their child's current program, neither of the parents were adamant that specific, major changes be made. On the contrary, these parents were satisfied with their child's current progress and level of special education services. In response to the question, "What, if anything, would you change about the program that has been established for your child," the following responses were recorded:

Karl's mother: Nothing.

Rick's mother: Well, when he was in AP History I felt like if he would have gotten more assistance but with making B's you know everybody was happy with that except for (student) and for me. And so that's the only complaint I ever had was I thought well if he were failing they would see that he's not living up to his potential but he wanted to raise the bar and we were just kind of out, we felt like

we were out there on our own. I mean there were some suggestions made but I didn't see any real follow up on you know, how's he's doing or anything.

In specific reference to their child's school, these parents were very complementary and supportive. They had very few negative things to say about the school or its academic program offerings. Strengths of the school from the parent's perspective included things such as the school leadership, specifically the principal, excellent teachers, motivated students, a wide variety of curriculum, the special education staff, and accelerated classes. It should be noted that both of these parents commented in one way or another about the teaching staff in general as a strength. The weaknesses were limited but included the following items: more electives needed, more Advanced Placement classes needed, and improved monitoring of discipline problems and peer groups.

Communication among and between teachers and parents is usually an issue of utmost importance to parents, especially parents of children with disabilities. The parents in this category were very pleased with the level and frequency of communication that they received from their child's teachers, both regular and special education. The parents in this category stated steadfastly that they have found communication between them and their child's teachers to be effective in meeting their needs as parents and their child's needs. Rick's mother even added that it was "nice to know you have an extra person, an advocate. Because I think special education teachers are advocates for the kids." In specific regard to the frequency of the feedback they received, these parents also had positive comments. The parents commented that they receive feedback once every six weeks, at the end of the grading period. They were satisfied that this amount of frequency was often enough to meet their needs. Karl's mother

commented, "...I don't need any extra feedback besides the midterm reports and the (report cards)." Rick's mother did comment that the frequency of the feedback was sufficient, but she really didn't understand what she received in the mail. The parents also commented that they were satisfied with the feedback from teachers because they were confident that if there were a problem, their child would relay that information or a teacher would contact them as soon as was necessary.

Another concern for parents of children with disabilities can be the self-concept of their child. Children with disabilities often times have low self-concepts that can be attributed to years of frustration in school, poor peer relations, or feelings that they are inferior in comparison to their peers. The parents in this category of service stated that their child currently had a positive self-concept, even if it had not always been positive in the past. When asked what they think contributes to their child's self-concept, these parents imparted the following information:

Karl's mother: Well, knowing that they're loved and we're behind them. And knowing that God loves them more passionately than we do...also I think trying to develop them in each ones interests and making sure they have every opportunity to pursue the things they really want to do. We've taught them to keep on. With (student) it was a lot of training. He went through years of defeatedness, and crying, and you know, didn't want to read...But then just teaching him you will persevere at this task until it's over so he didn't have a choice really.

Rick's mother: Me. I think you make, you give your kids self-confidence that I don't think is always enough but. Their peer groups contribute to self-confidence, their teachers, past achievements.

Similar responses to the students were noted from the parents of the students who receive services less than 21% of the school day. These parents were pleased with most every aspect of their child's educational program and level of services. It is noteworthy to report again that these

parents did not share their child's specific disability label. But should this be considered noteworthy? What is more important is that the parents were very knowledgeable regarding their child's weaknesses and specific needs. It may not be as important that the parents share the specific disability label. Furthermore, I may be assuming that these parents do not know their child's specific disability label incorrectly. They may, in fact, know the special education term but chose instead to share just the characteristics of that disability rather than the term itself.

Another bit of surprising information from these interviews was the fact that some of these parents really saw no benefit from the services their child was receiving. In one case, the parent had not really seen any benefits for quite some time. This begs the question, then, why not make changes to the IEP or program in order to provide some benefit, or why even provide services at all? Despite the lack of benefits from special education services, these parents were very supportive and complementary of the school their child attends as well as their teachers, both regular education and special education. Yet again, valuable information was gathered from these interviews.

### Teachers

There was one regular education teacher and one special education teacher interviewed for this category of services. The regular education teacher, Mrs. Smith, has been teaching primarily secondary science courses for over 10 years. Mrs. Smith received her Bachelor's degree in Health Education with a Psychology and Biology minor. Furthermore, she received her Master's degree in Sports Education. She has been teaching at the public high school included in this study for 10 years. She averages approximately 24-27 students per class period that she teaches. She teaches 3 classes per day with one period off for planning.

In response to general questions regarding students who are included in regular classes, Mrs. Smith shared that modifications and accommodations such as cassette tapes of class material, using different versions of tests, giving students a word bank on tests, allowing someone to read tests orally to the disabled student, and tutoring opportunities were all helpful in allowing her students to be successful. Furthermore, she stated that specific accommodations such as copy paper for taking notes, use of the Learning Lab (a tutoring location to assist students during school hours), peer tutors, and before or after school tutoring services all contribute to the success her students experience. Mrs. Smith also added that the IEP meetings were extremely beneficial in gathering information. She appreciated the opportunity to attend these meetings so that she could meet the parents, and get input from both the parents and the child's previous teachers. She was also quick to say that she is careful to follow IEPs. If she did have any questions on how best to meet the needs of her students, she stated that she would consult with special education teachers for guidance. At the minimum, she follows the IEPs to the best of her understanding, but she did share that she would frequently do more than what the IEP stated if she believed it was in the best interest of the child.

Mrs. Smith shared valuable insight when asked the question whether she thought she had all the available resources available to her to meet the needs of disabled students in her classes. In response to this question, she believed that more training would be beneficial for all regular education teachers. At the present, this teacher only gets assistance from consulting the special education teachers in her school and talking to other regular education teachers who have had the same students previously. She was certain that additional training, possibly from someone outside her own school, would help all regular education teachers understand the legal issues involved with special education and the specific needs of the disabled students in their classes.

The topic of additional training led to a discussion regarding other regular education teachers in the school. When asked if other regular education teachers in the school understood the disabilities and needs of the children in their classes, Mrs. Smith had mixed comments. She

stated that some teachers simply didn't care about the regulations or requirements; therefore the student's IEPs may not be implemented appropriately. Other teachers, she said, don't know how to implement the IEPs appropriately but are willing to do so. This is where additional training may support these teachers and give them the necessary information to meet the needs of all students in their classes. Other reasons cited by this teacher for the unsuccessful implementation of student IEPs include lack of understanding the IEP, too time consuming to implement, and the documentation required.

According to Mrs. Smith, one of the things that serve as a barrier to the success of students with disabilities is the fact that they are "labeled." She shared the idea that simply having the label often singles them out and causes teachers to prejudge their capabilities. This prejudice may lead to the teacher not pushing the students to achieve their potential or may inadvertently cause the teacher to treat the students in a different way not conducive to successful learning.

When asked if she could change something about the services that are provided to the disabled students in her school, Mrs. Smith cited the heavy load of students that educational assistants are responsible for. In her school, the students who are included in regular classes often have the support of an educational assistant in the classroom with them. Mrs. Smith stated that this support could be more beneficial if the educational assistants were not responsible for a great number of students. She then added that the same goes for the special education teachers. With such large caseloads, she believed that the teachers and assistants were not able to meet the needs of the students as well as they could if their caseloads were smaller.

Mrs. Smith was complimentary of the school involved in this study. She stated that the strengths of the school include the teachers and highly qualified staff, good traditions for academic excellence, diverse group of students, the small size of the school, good administrators who seem to have the needs of the students at the forefront of their minds, good summer programs, and the honors curriculum. Things that were cited as weaknesses include inconsistent

discipline and finding a way to meet the needs of students on a personal level to assist in character building and helping them deal with issues unrelated to academics.

Mrs. Smith indicated that the parents of her gifted students were most often actively involved in their children's education. Unfortunately, she stated the parents of students in her general classes were not very involved, if at all. She stated that certainly the less amount of involvement by the parents, the more likely it is that their child's success will be hindered. Moreover, the self-concept of her students can be attributed to being successful. Thus parent support can contribute to this either positively or negatively. Mrs. Smith also shared that in order to enhance the self-concept of her students, she believes it is necessary to find out about them on a personal level and help them find ways to be successful, regardless of their deficiencies.

The special education teacher, Mrs. Doe, interviewed in this category has been teaching special education for the past 14 years. She has a bachelor's degree in general special education from birth to 22 years of age, and a master's degree in deaf education. She also started a doctoral program in administrative leadership but chose not to complete the program. Her experience includes residential service, teaching students with multiple disabilities, elementary resource, home based pre-school services, and high school consultation services. She is currently serving as a part-time consultation teacher in the high school in this study, as well as a part-time deaf education specialist for another school system in the region.

Mrs. Doe serves anywhere from 40 to 50 students per year, most of whom are classified as learning disabled. Other categories of disabilities that she serves include gifted, physical impairments, language impairments, and Attention Deficit Disorder served as Other Health Impairments. Her services are strictly for students who are fully included in regular classes and who receive consultation services. Mrs. Doe contacts all of the regular education teachers of the students on her caseload two times per month, once in a face-to-face conference and then again through written documentation. Through these contacts, she gathers information about her

students in each of their classes about behavior, attendance, academic progress, and the implementation of their modifications. Mrs. Doe follows up with a meeting with the student and/or parent if the regular education teacher notes a problem during these consultation meetings.

When asked about the things that contribute to the success of her students, she commented on the modifications that are included in their IEPs. Because these students do not receive any direct services, the majority of their services are encompassed in their accommodations and modifications. According to Mrs. Doe, these modifications are an integral part of the success for these students, especially for those with learning disabilities. On the other hand, students who are certified as gifted generally do not require modifications. Therefore, she stated there really isn't a part of their individual programs that contribute to their success. In fact, she stated that, "the curriculum in this high school serves to meet the needs of the gifted students, since it includes honors and Advanced Placement courses." Therefore, she expressed these students receive no benefit from their IEPs.

Mrs. Doe shared that this is one of the things she would change about the programs established for disabled students in this school. In her opinion, gifted students should not receive services at the high school level when their needs can adequately be met by the curriculum available. In addition to this change, she commented that she thought a full-time teacher to serve consultation students would better meet their needs. Her reasoning for this includes citing a lack of time to expand on services. She would like to conduct in-class observations of her students as well as help students in the General Education Diploma (GED) program or Alternate School program more effectively. Unfortunately, she stated, she simply doesn't have the time.

For students who are served through other programs, Mrs. Doe had the following comments:

For inclusion it is a challenge to find assistants who have the capabilities to work with students and who have specific academic skills. For resource, I wish we were able to offer more help for classes like Government and Economics that are required for

graduation. For CDC (Comprehensive Development Classes) I would like to see more structured education plans to include daily living skills.

Furthermore, she stated that another placement option is needed for the students in her school. She was not quite sure what that placement should be, but she shared it should address the needs of students who have severe behavior issues. Instead of placing these students in an alternative school setting, which is punitive in nature, she suggested a corrective program to assist these students in modifying their behaviors so that they could function in the school setting and ultimately in society.

In reference to the regular education teachers in this school, Mrs. Doe reported the following:

They're not special education teachers and I don't expect them to understand at a level as if they were. I would say 90 to 95% of them do or are willing to take advice and follow the lead that I give them. There is a small percentage that doesn't understand and don't want to understand.

Additionally, she stated that a lot of the regular education teachers take the IEPs very seriously and are meticulous about following them. Then there is a group of teachers who require reminding but are willing to go along with the requirements. And finally, there's the same group as above who doesn't want to understand, nor are they willing to heed advice and guidance.

In specific regards to the strengths of the school, Mrs. Doe reported that, "there is a strong curriculum with a variety of course offerings, a strong vocational department with very caring teachers, and that the school system uses resources wisely, focusing on programs that serve children and not focusing on the most up to date facilities." She then commented that: "Most staff are proud to say they work here. This school system has a good reputation."

Specifically related to student success, Mrs. Doe shared that her students are often unsuccessful due to different situations outside of school. Oftentimes, these students come from

an environment where educational success is not valued. “This is not because they don’t care about education, but rather because the parents don’t know how to value education.” She went on to state that, “the more the parents are involved in their child’s education, the more successful they are likely to be.” She stated that some of the parents of her students are involved, either in a negative or positive manner. “Obviously, if parents are involved in a negative way, this hinders the success of their child.” Still other parents, she shared, “did not appear to be actively involved but may be when their child gets home.” Additionally, she stated that some students on her caseload are not as successful as they could be because, “their disabilities cause them to be difficult to teach or get along with.”

According to Mrs. Doe, contributions to student self-concept can be attributed to the ability to have close friends and be involved with something either inside or outside of school. Furthermore, academic success such as passing classes and moving toward graduation contribute to a positive self-concept. For some of her students, knowing that they have a “touch point” to get help or advice, or just a place to complain is important. This is the role that this teacher often serves for some of her students. She also shared that:

I believe the consultation program has a positive influence on my students. It’s designed so that if they don’t want others to know that they have a disability, no one needs to and they still get services provided to them.

The teachers in this category of services shared beneficial information and insight into the programs and services established for students with mild disabilities. A common theme among the students, parents, and teachers in this category was the satisfaction with the public high school and services offered to students with disabilities. There did not appear to be any marked differences in the perceptions of these stakeholders regarding services.

### Served Outside the Regular Class 21% to 60% of the School Day

Services in this category are considered direct services and include services such as inclusion, designated educational assistants, and resource classes. The students in this category require more assistance than those included in the first category of services because their disabilities are more severe, even though the students may have the same diagnosed certification. There were three students interviewed in this category. These three students, Brian, Lee, and Mark, have learning disabilities. In addition to a learning disability, Brian has the diagnosed medical disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

There were three mothers and one father interviewed in this category. One mother and father chose to be interviewed together, while the other mothers chose independent interviews. All of these parents are middle-class, working parents.

### Students

The students in this category were all content with the public school they are attending. Brian even commented that, “this place is awesome! They got good programs, good teachers, food. Yeah it’s great. Atmosphere, it’s a lot more laid back than any other school.” The other students were not as overtly excited as this student, but they expressed their satisfaction nonetheless. When asked about what their favorite class was, the students were quick to share a range of electives and vocational education classes. These classes include areas such as welding, art, and auto mechanics. When students were asked about the things that are the most challenging for them, not surprisingly they responded with academic classes or symptoms related to their specific disabilities. This can be attributed to the fact that these students have endured years of frustration in the areas they describe. Therefore, they were quick to share that they continue to be the most difficult tasks to accomplish. Brian, a student with a learning disability and severe Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, stated that staying on-task and coming to

school were the most challenging things for him. Lee, a student with a learning disability, simply stated that reading was a challenge.

In spite of their severe problems with learning, these students were able to articulate their satisfaction with the education they are currently receiving in their public school. All of these students could name their special education teacher without hesitation, probably because they spent more time with these teachers than the students in the first category. All of these students also shared that their special education teacher had offered them some assistance. One student in particular seemed particularly pleased with what his special education teacher had done for him.

Brian's response was:

I don't even know if I can explain that. What hasn't she done is more like it! She's done just about everything to get this school year over.

Other students shared:

Mark: She, I think I'll use the word motivational, helpful.

When asked what things help them to be successful in school, the students responded in similar fashion to the students in the first category. All students stated that they had enough help in order to be successful in school. Brian even stated that he had, "more than enough." Their responses to what contributes to their success included:

Brian: My teachers. Yeah, (special education teacher) helped me a lot. My mom.

Mark: Teachers, yeah you know because there are some teachers...that are nice.

Lee: Sit there and listen; listening and paying attention.

Additionally, when students were asked questions about their regular education teachers, some said their regular education teachers offered more assistance to them than other students in their classes, while other students did not see a marked difference. Equally though, they all shared that their regular education teachers knew about their disabilities and their needs, although these teachers did not talk to them about the details of their needs.

In each of the interviews conducted in this category, it was apparent that the students knew very well what their limitations were and could easily express their frustrations with school as well as appreciation for the assistance they have been given up to this point in their education. All of these students have received special education services for most of their school careers due to the nature and severity of their disabilities. In spite of their extensive services, none of these students knew what the phrase Individual Education Plan meant until I used the acronym IEP or IEP meeting. Most importantly, once they heard this, the students could then tell me who was at their IEP meetings and what they discussed at these meetings.

Students in this category responded similarly to the students in the first category when asked to describe their disability and what it meant to them. They all could articulate what their deficiencies included, even if they did not know they had a disability or what the terminology for their specific disability was. Brian, a student with a learning disability and ADHD responded that his disability was, “ADHD. I really don’t see no affect but everyone else does.” Lee did not know what I meant by disability when I posed the initial questions, “What is your disability and what does that mean to you?” For Mark, I explained that a disability means there is something that you have difficulty with. Once I explained this, he stated the following:

It’s hard to see numbers, letters, words. They’re backwards. I forgot what it’s called, it’s like...(dyslexia?) Yeah, that’s it. It’s basically more in the reading, spelling.

Each of these students had favorable things to say about their parents and their support throughout their academic endeavors. In fact, each of the students interviewed in this category named one or both of their parents as the person or persons who have had the greatest impact on their lives. In describing what their parents had done for them, the students had the following to share:

Brian: My mom helped me since like, since I was 5 or 6 I’ve been helped by her in school. Yeah she backed me up and went to bat a couple of time.

Mark: They just tell me don't drop out. Just stick with it. Especially to get out of there (high school).

Lee: They just said do better.

The students who are served between 21% and 60% of the regular school day by special education services seemed to be more knowledgeable regarding special education than their counterparts from the previous category of services. Although these students did not know their disability label or even what a disability is, they too were able to share what their deficiencies entailed. Furthermore, they knew immediately who their special education teacher is and what was involved in an IEP meeting. This may be attributed to the fact that their services are increased, therefore, affording them more time with their special education teacher and possibly more frequent IEP meetings in order to establish an appropriate program for them. Regardless, the information shared by these students appeared to be an accurate representation of their level of services and degree of interventions.

### Parents

The parents in this category of special education services were able to easily share the deficiencies their children have in relation to their disabilities. Again, though, most of these parents did not know, or express, the specific label for their child's disability. These parents simply shared the academic deficiencies that interfere with their learning. Other parents knew and did express some of the disability terms related to their learning. Specifically, some of the parents interviewed had the following input:

Brian's mother: Well, he's been clinically diagnosed with ADHD. So far as disability, that in itself is quite a lot. As far as the way it affects his academic progress I'm assuming, you know, sitting still,

completing tasks, disorganization, the ability to focus, complete tasks. It affects his academic progress quite a bit.

Mark's mother: (Student) has a reading disability and he's dyslexic. When he was first prescribed with this he saw certain letters backwards.

Lee's mother: He sees letters sometimes backwards.

Parents in this category seemed to have more information regarding the specific services their children were receiving than the parents of children served less than 21% of the school day. They were descriptive about what was included in their child's IEPs and how they were implemented. The following details some of their comments regarding services:

Brian's mother: Well, he's eligible through the testing to receive services. I'm assuming that includes the pull-out program, one-on-one, peer tutors in order to keep him organized and complete tasks and achieve his goals that are set in the IEP.

Mark's mother: (Student's) basically is his basic IEP was he had to have TCAP English and TCAP Math mainly for his TCAP scores and he's had them 2 or 3 years at least. Basically his is to get him ready going towards TCAP and working on his reading ability. His was reading, learning him how to learn how to make things easier for him to read. But these last 2 or 3 years they been working on mainly getting him to pass the TCAPs and his math and stuff.

Lee's mother: Well, when he does testing, he gets to do that orally, someone will read that to him. And, it's usually one-on-one in a quiet setting. He also, if he's in a regular classroom, he's aloud to leave to go to the learning lab if he needs to.

Brian's mother: (Services) are managed by (special education teacher), but she keeps me well informed. And she's always up to date on all kinds of new loopholes in the system, and there's obviously quite a lot of them. (What benefits have you seen student receive from those services and special education teacher's assistance?) He's made it to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and he's completed 12 years of school that we didn't think he was gonna do. But, I mean, as well as I've seen improvements in his reading, even though he's horrible at math, even though his disability, I mean I've seen with my own eyes,

even though his disability causes him to not have the same thought process as you and I he's managed to accommodate that in different ways. Whether he uses a separate sheet of paper or the strange way he seems to remember his multiplication tables. He's managed to fill the loopholes on his own, knowing that he couldn't do it like you and I.

Mark's father: (Student) is in the (regular) classroom, that's where he gets most of his stuff is the (regular) classroom. He did do the on-the-job training program (and) he got a job at Pizza Hut through that. (He's) more independent. Decision making's a whole lot better, more outgoing personality you know. It's the teachers themselves. I got to say the teachers did it because the teachers did do it. I think they made (him) a better person.

Lee's mother: He can go to the learning lab if need be when he's in a regular class. Academically, yes, I mean he does score a little higher on his testing when it's read to him in a quiet setting. And even his regular classroom work, the grades are a bit higher. Yes, there's been improvement (in his overall reading skills.)

The above descriptors are just a sampling of how satisfied these parents are and have been with their child's special education services. All of these parents were adamant that they would not change anything about their child's current program. They are completely satisfied with the way things are. Additionally, they all shared that their child had appropriate support and services to meet their individual needs. Brian's mother shared:

Yes, absolutely. Well I mean just concern and caring, you know, because I think that goes a lot. If you have someone who's not as good as (child's special education teacher) in keeping you informed because anybody can sit at the table and write an IEP. It's implementing it that's the big deal. You know, making sure the student shows up as well as actually do the task that's set in his goals. That's really important. Trust me, I've wrote IEPs that never were implemented.

The parent's attitudes about special education services also carried over to their attitudes regarding the public school their child attends. The parents did not have any weaknesses to share regarding the school, with the exception of one parent's suggestion to add more remedial

computer programs. As far as strengths were concerned, the parents were in agreement that the teachers, both regular education and special education, and the administrators were the main reasons the school was successful for their child. The comments regarding these strengths included the following:

Brian's mother: I think the teachers have a large impact. (Administrator) too! He takes (student) in stride. I mean he's got a good support system here, I think. And they know him. And they don't, I don't know what word I'm looking for, ostracize? I mean they don't beat him up because of his disorder. You know what I'm saying? I mean they recognize it and they kind of deal with it because they know, they're aware.

Mark's mother: Well I think the teachers, my son's teachers first. He has had very good teachers who've cared about him. And the attitude, their attitude toward my kid. They treat him just like normal kids or something like that.

Mark's father: We don't have no problem with getting any meetings we've had, they've answered all of our questions. We haven't had any problems discussing anything with the teachers or the personnel from the school.

The parents of children served by special education between 21% and 60% had an open, compromising position on where best to educate their children. It seemed that all of the parents in this category had support for dual services, meaning educating their children in regular classrooms and special education classrooms collectively where appropriate. This could be attributed to the fact that this is exactly the type of services their children are currently receiving. All of the students in this category have a combination of regular and special education classes, the amount of time in each depending on their specific needs. Some of the remarks regarding the parent's preference of location of educational services include:

- Mark's mother: Now, (student) he's fine. He's been in a regular classroom the whole time he's been here except when he had to take (special education teacher) and the TCAP for the English and math. He does good in the regular classroom. (He) has no problem in the regular classroom. Because if he has any problems the teachers in that classroom will try to help him out and everything. So but, as it is the regular classroom is just fine for him.
- Lee's mother: Regular classroom as much as possible with appropriate support outside the classroom.
- Brian's mother: Well, so far I think both have worked out well, you know. Everybody wants to be in a regular classroom. It just depends on what your strengths and weaknesses are determines where you actually get to go. But the end result needs to be the same. You know, graduate, get a diploma, be a citizen.

These parents had similar comments regarding communication as the other parents previously interviewed for this study. All parents in this category stated that they received adequate feedback from both regular education and special education teachers. Additionally, these parents shared their satisfaction with the frequency of feedback, even if it was only at the grading period interim or the time when report cards were distributed. The parents shared that if there were a problem, they would receive feedback more frequently when appropriate.

The parents of these students also shared their pleasure with the level of self-concept demonstrated by their children. According to their parents, much of their positive self-concept stems from the values that their parents have taught them. Their self-concept can also be attributed to their teachers and success in school. Brian's mother relayed the following information regarding his self-concept:

Just depends on the actual situation, you know...I mean I learned that when I was first going to CHADD meetings when (he) was first diagnosed. You know, you get further with positive reinforcement on a lot of things no matter if it means picking up your shoes and putting them away. It's minute, but it's the point of noticing it as opposed to hounding him all the time. Even though he has a disability and there's some people that don't have the patience to deal with him I think he's genuinely, genuinely a good kid.

You know, and I'd like to think that I contributed to some of his mannerisms. You know, some of his mannerisms came from me.

Mark's mother stated:

I hope to say, I hope we can say it's our raising them. Teachers (have) helped them. I think teachers, you know if a teacher cares about a kid that kid's gonna show confidence. That's the way I feel. And the teachers that (he's) had have encouraged him to...you know, they say he can do anything he wants to do...Whenever they do something good I pat them on the back...You've got to encourage your kids. You don't want to discourage. I try to encourage my kids. We try to show them a positive attitude instead of a negative attitude. You have to show a positive attitude towards kids. But if they're bad we don't downgrade them and hold it over them. Like (he) made his first "F" this year but I didn't get him down. I said you're gonna bring it up. And the kid, well he started tutoring. He just said he was going to tutoring for Pre-Algebra because he knew he wasn't going to pass it without and he made his own decision to go to tutoring and he made his own decision this time to pass Algebra.

Thus far in the gathering of data for this study, there have been marked similarities among stakeholders of varying degrees of special education services. The parents of children who are served outside of the regular classroom between 21% and 60% are no exception. This group of parents is also very content with the school their child attends as well as the special education services that have been provided. What is different with this group of parents is that they seemed to be more informed about the specific services included in their child's program as well as how those services are implemented. Also different was the perception these parents had regarding the location of services for their children. These parents were much more open to the options of receiving services in both regular education classes and special education classes, as opposed to being fully included in regular classes. This is probably due to the more severe nature of their child's disability and their individual needs. It is apparent that these parents are supportive of the program that best fits their child's needs, regardless of what that might mean.

## Teachers

There were two teachers interviewed in this category of special education services. One teacher interviewed, Mrs. Wood, has 4 ½ years teaching experience. Four of those years have been at her current teaching position in this public high school. Mrs. Wood holds a bachelor's degree in special education. Her primary responsibilities include teaching resource math to approximately 40 students throughout the school year, managing a work based learning program for approximately 20 students per year, and monitoring the progress as well as keeping accurate records for a caseload of 22 students. In addition to her special education responsibilities, she maintains an assistant coaching position for the volleyball season. Most of the students she serves are certified as Learning Disabled.

Mrs. Wood had positive remarks regarding the school and school system. She stated that she has available resources to provide appropriate services and support to her students. She did remark, however, that the textbooks she uses, while good material, are out of date. But, she added that she generally has no problem securing resources and materials from the appropriate administrative avenue. She was adamant that she wouldn't change a thing regarding services that are provided to the special education students in her school. Furthermore, she stated that the disabled students in her school have adequate options for educational success and sufficient resources and services available to them.

Her support of her school was evident in her comments regarding the strengths of the school. Mrs. Wood was very complimentary of the administration, stating that they were, "supportive of the teachers." Specifically, she shared that the administrators were very supportive of teachers when conflicts with parents arose. Furthermore, Mrs. Wood cited the good staff and special education department as other strengths.

In specific regards to one of the students interviewed in this category, this teacher shared that Mark's individual program was appropriate to meet his needs so that he could be successful in the school setting. For Mark, she attributed his success to his individual motivation. She stated that:

(He) gets a lot of the credit. He is motivated and desires to get his high school diploma. The modifications were not a crutch for him. He wanted it.

Mrs. Wood shared that the barriers to success for her students again are varied. For Mark, she did not state there were any notable barriers to his success. She went on to say that many of her students tend to be their own barriers to success due to a lack of motivation.

Mrs. Wood was similarly supportive of the regular education teachers in this public school. She stated that the regular education teachers of the disabled students in her school were adequately notified of their individual modifications and that they understand what their needs entail. Mrs. Wood shared that most of the regular education teachers in this school implemented student IEPs to the best of their ability, particularly the teachers of the students included in this study. More specifically, she had the following comments regarding regular education teachers:

I would say probably 85% or more of faculty implement and don't have any questions or have any problems. I would say another 10% implement them to the best of their ability but maybe they don't understand a modification, maybe they don't do something correctly. And then, you know, you always have a few that just don't do it!

Mrs. Wood commented that the parents of the students involved in this study have been actively involved in their child's programs and that this has been an asset to what she tries to accomplish with these students. She shared:

I would say it helps, definitely. Both of these two students, the parents have formed a partnership, I feel like with me. You know, to where we communicate and we try to

decide together what would be the most appropriate services and classes provided to their children.

Mrs. Wood also shared that Mark demonstrates a positive self-concept that can be attributed to being successful, being well liked, having a good social status, making good grades, knowing he is loved by his parents, and having good home support. She shared that the programs that have been established for her students are a positive influence on their individual self-concepts. Furthermore, she did not know of any occasion where Mark was singled out or picked on by non-disabled students in his regular education classrooms. In fact, she shared that it may not be apparent to any other students that he even has a disability.

The other teacher interviewed for this category of services, Mrs. Hall, holds a bachelor's degree with a double minor in special education and psychology, and a master's degree in reading. She has over 25 years of teaching experience, all at the school she currently teaches in and all in special education resource. She currently serves between 20 and 25 students on her caseload each year. Additionally, she teaches resource English to between 55 and 60 students per year. She is primarily responsible for serving the disability categories of learning disabled, functionally delayed, and students with Attention Deficit Disorder. In her previous experiences, she has also taught students who were visually or hearing impaired, as well as multiply handicapped.

Mrs. Hall's primary responsibilities are to teach resource English three periods per day with one period off for planning. She is also responsible for the work based learning co-op, whereby students are released from school early to work for pay. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Mrs. Hall also manages the IEP paperwork, including re-evaluations and goal sheets, for the students on her caseload.

In response to whether she felt she had all the resources available to provide appropriate support and services to her students, she responded yes with the exception that she would like to have more computers. In fact, one of the only criticisms Mrs. Hall had in reference to her position and the school she works in, was the difficulty the special education department had securing necessary technology. Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Wood wrote a grant together to secure 10 computers along with other technology. She shared that this is the only way they would have gotten these computers. In her words, Mrs. Hall shared that funds for “large ticket items” were just not available to their department, whereby “small ticket items” were easily accessible.

In specific reference to her students, Mrs. Hall shared that the IEP process was definitely an integral part of their success. Specifically, she commented on the team process involving parents, teachers, administration, and the student. She said that, “everyone working together pushed the child toward success,” especially those children included in this study. Furthermore, Mrs. Hall stated that she values the daily contact she has with her students and shared that these students need a person to connect with on a daily basis. Having this person affords them the opportunity of a liaison to troubleshoot daily issues with. In regards to the students in this study, Mrs. Hall commented that they were most often unsuccessful due to attendance issues and specific disability problems. For Brian, his attendance interfered with his ability to succeed, while Lee struggled daily with a severe reading disability that affected his progress in all academic areas.

When asked if she could change anything about the services provided to her students, she shared that the main deficiency in her school was the lack of programs available to students who could not graduate with a regular high school diploma. She stated that the students who are receiving special education services had more opportunities for success than their non-disabled

peers. Specifically, she noted the increasingly difficult pre-requisites for taking vocational courses. Students are now required to take and pass Algebra I prior to enrollment in some vocational courses. For students with disabilities, the IEP team can determine to waive the Algebra requirement so that students can take these vocational classes. Unfortunately, non-disabled students are not afforded the same privileges. Therefore, they are often excluded from vocational courses that would be very beneficial for their futures because they are not able to successfully complete the course requirements.

Mrs. Hall alluded that most of the regular education teachers in her school understand her students' IEPs. She shared that there always will be those that don't get it, but support is available for those teachers. She stated that the IEPs were followed and the teachers are educated regarding the student needs. Furthermore, she stated that, "the regular education teachers know they have to follow the IEPs." She also shared that the regular education teachers implemented the IEPs appropriately. If there was a question, she said it was dealt with effectively, sometimes with the support of administration. In fact, she stated that administrative support was, "crucial to the success of the students and understanding on the part of the regular education teachers."

According to Mrs. Hall, the strengths of this public school include the fact that it is student centered, good materials are available, IEP teams are permitted to "look outside the box to find meaningful ways to help each student," and the faculty and staff are exceptional. The only barrier to success she could name was the barrier inherent in having a disability. Specifically, not being able to read at the high school level is a large barrier. She went on to say that, "the special education department does a good job of accommodating these deficiencies."

As far as parents were concerned, she shared that some were involved with their child's educational program, while others were not involved. The parents of the students interviewed for this category of service were very involved, which was a positive influence on the success of these children. According to Mrs. Hall, these parents were supportive of their child, supportive of the educational process, and supportive of her as their child's teacher. Furthermore, she shared that they could always work together effectively, because the parents were supportive of their children but did not make excuses for them. As far as her other students were concerned, she alluded that there was a direct correlation between how much the parents valued education and how involved they were. This, in turn contributed to their child's success or lack of success.

Mrs. Hall's final comments were in reference to her students' self-concepts. She shared the same sentiment as previous teachers, noting that simply experiencing some success contributes to their individual positive self-concepts. Specific to students with disabilities, their accommodations and modifications help to "level the playing field in regular classes" to give the students necessary support to be successful. She did share that these students were not simply passed on because they were special education students. Instead, the mindset in this school is that all students must work hard to reach their goals. A final contributor to her student's self-concepts is the relationship they have with their teachers and educational assistants. She shared that the relationship is like a family, which provides a very supportive atmosphere.

This teacher responded with many similarities to previous teachers. I continue to get the impression that this is a strong school that is very supportive of its students as well as the staff. All of the stakeholders thus far have commented on how exceptional the school is at meeting the needs of the students.

### Served Outside the Regular Class More than 60% of the School Day

The students who are served more than 60% outside of the regular classroom are students who have more severe needs than any other category thus far. The students interviewed all had cognitive deficiencies that put them in the mentally retarded range. Their academic needs are more involved, limiting their involvement in the regular curriculum to only participation in a work based learning program and a vocational class. Their special education classes focus on basic English, reading, writing and math skills. Their academic classes are called Life Skills, while their work based learning program is referred to as Transition. The program title for the students served in this category in this public school is Comprehensive Development Class (CDC). Generally, there are ten or less students in this setting with a special education teacher and an educational assistant. The parents interviewed in this category were also middle-income working parents. They are very familiar with their role as an advocate, as some of their children have been dealing with these disabilities from birth; therefore, the parents have become adept at lobbying for quality services.

### Students

Because of the cognitive deficiencies of the students interviewed in this category the interview questions were rephrased in an effort to provide the best understanding for the students. Even though the questions were modified, not much information was generated during the interviews. These students were not able or comfortable enough with me to express their answers to my questions in any detail. Therefore, the responses to my questions were simple one-word responses or short phrases with little or no elaboration. I do believe that the summary that follows is an accurate reflection of their perception of services in the public school they

attend. In order to verify that the responses they shared were a reflection of their true perceptions, I asked their special education teacher and their primary educational assistant to review the transcripts of their interviews and verify that the information was a reflection of their true perceptions. Some of the information shared during these interviews was not accurate but did relay some information delineating what the students are aware of in regards to their specific needs and programs. The implications of their lack of knowledge in some areas will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The students interviewed in this category, Luke and Logan, were quick and eager to share that they were happy with the public school they attended. They were not, however, able to articulate exactly what they liked about the school. The students were eager to share that their special education teacher's class was their favorite class, specifically preferring the math class to the English class. Additionally, the students shared that teachers were the reason they were successful in school. The reasons they gave for this success included:

Logan:           They sit down and help me on math.

Luke:            Do reading. Teachers help me.

Neither of the students could name their special education teacher when asked the specific question: "Who is your special education teacher?" Instead, Luke and Logan responded with the name of a regular education teacher who had taught them one of their vocational education classes. These students did share that their special education teacher's class was their favorite class previously, so I believe the term "special education teacher" was what confused them on this question. Both of the students shared that they had all the help they needed in school in order to do well. There was not anything the students could think of that would help them more than the help they were already receiving. Neither of these students knew what the word

disability meant. When I explained that disability meant what they have the most trouble with, Logan responded:

I don't have any troubles, no.

Each of these students appeared to be quite comfortable in the school setting. They shared that they had many friends, most of whom they named from their self-contained special education classroom. They also shared that they were well liked in the school setting. They did not share that other students had picked on them. Only Luke had an appropriate response to the question, "Who has had the greatest impact on your life?" when it was rephrased. His response was:

My mom. She helps me with stuff.

The additional questions on the interview guide were omitted because the students could not distinguish between regular education and special education issues. Therefore, they were not able to determine if their regular education teachers helped them more than they helped other students, nor were they involved in any true inclusionary settings. Moreover, the students did not know what the phrase Individual Education Plan or the term IEP meant.

Although the information gathered from these students is limited, I believe it does offer valuable information regarding their perceptions. Though cognitively delayed, these students shared perceptions and information that could likely be used to influence how these students are taught. Because these students are in high school, the goal for their teachers is to prepare them for transition to the next phase of their lives. This is expected to mean securing a job and attempting to live independently. Therefore, their lack of knowledge regarding particular issues

in school could be used to assist educators in planning and preparation for providing appropriate services to these students prior to their leaving high school.

### Parents

The parents in this category were once again middle-class parents. Luke's mother is a stay-at-home mother while Logan's mother works. These parents were not as knowledgeable about their child's needs or their current services as some of the other parents interviewed for this study. They shared information that was not always accurate according to the special education teacher interviewed in this category.

The parents described their children's disabilities, again without using the specific educational terms included on their child's current Individual Education Plan. Furthermore, the parents seemed to intentionally avoid or were not aware of the specific terminology for these students. According to the student records, these students are mentally retarded. However, Logan's mother relayed that her child was very smart with only symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, stating that it was, "just not known how smart he is." Some of the information shared regarding the parent perception of individual disabilities includes the following:

Logan's mother: He's ADHD and...they don't know how smart he is but the kid makes A's and B's in school. But his disability is relating to other subjects like other people would, but his academic progress, the kid makes A's and B's. He was honor roll for this year. So he's a very smart kid. He interacts with people really good. He has no problem interacting with people. He's a very social kid. His problem is they just don't know how smart (he) is. They don't know how his brain works up there.

Luke's mother: It's just reading and the math. He's not able to be in the regular classroom with children his own age...He's still making progress, but not as much as I want. I want him to be able, which I know

we're not going to be able to, I would love to see him be able to be out in the regular classroom. But I know that's not a possibility.

As far as services are concerned, the parents again appeared to either not fully understand the question or were not fully aware of their child's special education services. Luke's mother brought his IEP with her to the interview and preferred that I review it to get the information that I was seeking rather than her share information about services in her own words. Logan's mother shared information about her child's classes. Neither of the parents shared specific information about accommodations or modifications. One parent relayed the following:

Logan's mother: In the IEP he has on the job training, he has special education teachers and everything. And right now he's in the classroom 3 periods a day and he's out of the classroom one period a day. He don't get English, math, they teach him math and reading. Basic life is where he goes to, basic life is his last period that's the period he's out of the class. That's wood-working or wood shop. He's had home (economics) but it's a special class with home (economics). That's basically what he gets but he gets, mainly he gets the one-on-one training, his is one-on-one training. (The focus is to prepare him) for the real world, his basic is the real world. To leave high school and go and live by himself one of these days.

In the IEP that Luke's mother shared with me, it was determined and verified by her that Luke was involved in 3 special education classes, one of which is a work-based learning class, whereby students go to non-paid job sites to learn job skills. Furthermore, Luke has one vocational education class with a regular education teacher and a special education assistant to accompany him. His IEP includes goals in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics focusing on such short-term objectives as comprehension, sequencing, cursive writing skills, division, calculating taxes, and multiplication. The only comment she made regarding these services was:

Which this right here has never been accomplished: improve cursive writing skills. That's never been accomplished.

As far as implementation of services is concerned, these parents repeated similar information to what was just shared regarding specific services provided. They did share new information regarding the benefits of these services, though. Both of the parents shared that there was some benefit with only one parent expressing that she wished her son had made more progress.

Logan's mother: Basically his is in the classroom, but where he goes on the job he goes out of the classroom like he's going to Little Caesars this time. He goes out of the classroom to go to Little Caesars to learn the job. Well, I've seen him more independent...Um even with (him) he does meet people.

Luke's mother: (He has 2 special education academic classes and one work based learning and one vocational class) which he does well in. It's modified. He goes in with another teacher, with the aide. And she stays with him. So he doesn't go in the classroom by himself. He has learned to use hand tools. He can make shelves and you know wood-working. Wooden deer that we put out in the yard at Christmas...He has improved in his math and reading but I expected more. I would like for him to be on his 11<sup>th</sup> grade level but that's not going to happen.

Both of the parents stated that their child had appropriate support and services included in their IEPs, and only Luke's mother had anything to share regarding changing their child's program. Her only comment was:

More one-on-one help. Be out in the regular classroom. I keep saying that.

These parents seemed to be content with the current placement of their children, with the exception of some of Luke's mother's concerns. The parents were content to leave the recommendation of placement of services up to the special education teacher, sharing that he knows what is best for their child. They were realistic about the appropriateness of the location

of services, sharing that it was not likely that their children could learn appropriately in any other setting without appropriate support than the self-contained class they were currently a part of.

Parent comments regarding this issue include the following:

Logan's mother: Well, in his case we leave it up to (special education teacher)...for the math and reading he does (need a special class). They would not be able to teach him to do this, (to do) as much for him as (special education teacher) has done for him. That's the reason he's in (his) class 2 periods for the math and the reading. So I don't think, I say (he) would be ok but he would not understand if you put him in a regular English class. He wouldn't know what a verb or a noun was like.

Luke's mother: I would prefer regular classroom, because there's a lot of commotion. There's a lot of kids in his room that (are disruptive). Disruptive and loud. Makes it difficult for him to keep his mind on what he's doing. When you're in the regular classroom you don't have all that. You're in there, you're sitting down, you're listening. But in that class, I went in there one day and it was just like...(a lot going on). Yeah.

One of the parents stated that the strengths of the school included the teachers and the attitude they demonstrated in regards to their child. Luke's mother chose not to answer the questions referring to the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Moreover, the parents shared their satisfaction with the communication between their child's teachers and themselves and the frequency of this communication.

The parents in this category of services were in agreement that their child's positive self-concept could be attributed to the way they were raised by their parents and the values they instilled in their children. They did not state that their individual disabilities had interfered with their level of self-concept in any way. In fact, they implied that their children were very happy and well adjusted. The parents had the following information to share:

Logan's mother: I hope to say...it's our raising them. Teachers has helped them. I think teachers, you know if a teacher cares about a kid that kid's gonna show confidence. That's the way I feel...He made honor role and I said, "Let me pat you on the back for making honor role." He's always (had a positive outlook on life). Well, when (he) was little he'd have his little fits and everything. He's really, in a way he's grown out of the ADHD. He's grown into a person. He can go to Food City with me and if people don't know he had a handicap they wouldn't know. I think basically he's had pretty good training and I like (this school) for that reason.

Luke's mother: I believe (he has a) positive (self-concept), yeah. I don't think this will make sense to you but I've always told him to do the best he can do. And you do the best you can do and then that's all you can do.

Although the students in this category were not able to easily articulate their perceptions regarding their special education services, much can be inferred from their interviews. A common theme emerging among student interviews is the need for additional, appropriate instruction regarding services and learning to advocate for their own needs. Obviously, the students in this category will not be able to advocate for themselves in the same manner as the students in the first category, but the goal for all of these students is to transition to the next phase of their lives. Additional support and assistance prior to this transition is warranted based on these interviews.

### Teacher

There was one special education teacher, Mr. Steel, interviewed for this category of service. Mr. Steel has over 32 years of teaching experience, with 30 of those years in special education. He holds a bachelor's degree in health, physical education, and psychology, and a master's degree in special education. He is certified to teach all areas of special education.

Currently, he is responsible for 12 students who are classified as Educably Mentally Retarded in

a self-contained Comprehensive Development Class (CDC). He teaches reading and math to his students on a daily basis. Furthermore, he supervises a work-based learning program for them.

When asked if he felt he had all the necessary resources available to him to provide appropriate support and services he shared that he did, with the exception of services for one student who was not included in this study. For all of his students, Mr. Steel commented that the work-based learning program is the one part of all of their programs that helps them to be most successful. The part of their programs that cause them to be unsuccessful is their math skills. He commented that these students have the most difficulty with math skills. This is ironic because his students interviewed for this study said they enjoyed their math class the most.

The one thing Mr. Steel would like to see changed regarding the services provided to his students is more opportunities for them to get out in the mainstream of the school setting.

Specifically, he stated:

I would like more doors to be open for my kids to participate more. More like resource kids.

He explained that resource students have more opportunities to be involved in more of the curriculum than his students. His students only have select choices and they all have to have the same class so an educational assistant can be with them. Other than this issue, he believed his students have adequate options for their educational success and they have sufficient resources and services available to them. The only regular education teachers these students have are the ones chosen to teach them designated vocational classes. According to Mr. Steel, the vocational teachers who teach these classes are well informed of his student's services and do a good job of implementing their IEPs.

As far as strengths of the school are concerned, Mr. Steel agreed with previous teachers regarding the variety of curricular options available to students. Specifically, he shared that the

variety of special education programs that were available to disabled students was a strength. The only barrier to success this teacher commented on was specific to his students getting jobs for pay and losing Social Security benefits. Because of the severe nature of their disabilities, many of his students receive Social Security benefits, which the parents have come to rely on to supplement income. Many of these parents are concerned that if their child gets a job, they will lose all or most of their benefits. Therefore, it is counterproductive in some cases to prepare them for work after high school, when they may not work at all because it doesn't benefit them to do so. Most of these parents are actively involved in their child's academic program, particularly because of their children's severe disabilities.

In reference to their self-concepts, Mr. Steel attributed their positive outlooks on life to making them, "feel as though they are not CDC." He said he, "takes them as far as they can go," which increases their confidence. He takes particular care not to label them and makes every effort to get them out with non-disabled students as much as possible. All of these steps, he shared, helps them to have a positive self-concept.

Although Mr. Steel didn't share as much detail as previous teachers, he did share similar responses. Thus far in the summary of data all of the stakeholders in this study seem to support the particular programs they are affiliated with. This leads me to believe that a continuum of service options is effective in meeting the needs of the various students involved in each setting.

#### Served in a Separate (Private) School Setting

There were two students, Perry and Tyler, and their mothers interviewed in this final category of services. Perry and Tyler attend a private, day school that is for children with moderate to severe learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). The students involved in this study attend this day school for all of their academic classes for most of the school day. Any other class requirements, such as elective classes, are fulfilled on their own outside of the private school setting, with the appropriate credit being awarded in these classes upon verification of documented participation. Both of these students have verified learning disabilities and diagnosed symptoms of ADHD. Perry and Tyler are attending this private school because of parent choice and their private school tuition is the responsibility of the parents. The parents in this category are both stay-at-home mothers who have focused a great deal of attention on their children's needs. At the time of the interviews, Tyler's mother was volunteering her time to work in the private school's summer school program. According to the parents, the nature and severity of the student's disabilities warrant this restrictive placement.

### Students

Two male students, Perry and Tyler, were interviewed for this category of services. Both of the students were very articulate in sharing their responses to my questions. In fact, despite the severity of their disabilities, they were able to share more information than most of the other students involved in this study.

In regard to their personal perception of the private school they were currently attending, both students could not say enough about the benefits they have received from this setting. In fact, I was surprised they were so pleased with the atmosphere given the small number of students, lack of class choices, and the inability to socialize with their peers. The students shared the following information regarding their perception of the private school:

Tyler:           It's a really good school. I've made a whole lot of progress this year.  
                      They said to me I've gone up about two years within this one year on my

study level. And I'm doing a whole lot better on my oral reading than I've ever done before.

Perry: How I feel about this school? I feel it's a really good thing about helping me because, I guess I've gone here...I feel this school has helped me a great deal. See I went to (another private school), as my mom said, good school, loved it, they just couldn't help me out with my disability so we went to (this school) and they helped me out from day one. Matter of fact, I was above grade level when I left... But then as soon as I got to (public middle school) the first few weeks was working out great, I was getting done with my work. Then they just kept dumping more and more work on me and stuff that I couldn't even understand because I had never dealt with that type stuff. And, teachers they all loved me and everything, and they all tried to help me as much as they could. It was just really hard for me to deal with all that pressure. Plus, and also socializing. That's big thing about public school is you get to socialize and everything like that. But I just couldn't deal with it because usually, if you go to a public school and you hang out with certain pals you'll always hang out with that type of crowd, might change, might not. I was picked on, put down, lead me into depression and just went down hill. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was doing ok, started going back up hill. And then it went back down, it was like boom! And then 8<sup>th</sup> grade I was doing, I was barely even passing. Then high school was actually working out quite fine because I only had like 4 classes: ROTC, remedial math, Foundations I, and English. And basically all I had to do was worry about 2 classes, English and Foundations I. And I was doing awesome in that and then ROTC I was failing it because, as my mom said, I was getting picked on. And then also, then I came back here fresh and I've been doing good here ever since. I've been loving it. All my old teachers are still here and they're all nice and everything.

These students shared their enjoyment with classes that were not directly related to their disability, such as reading for Tyler and math for Perry. Furthermore, they both had very positive things to say about one teacher in particular who used non-conventional methods for teaching them history and social studies. Perry shared that the reason he was successful in this school setting could be attributed to, "the teachers and how they got me organized." Tyler stated that his success came from his use of his laptop and his confidence in his own abilities. The following details their responses regarding their success:

Tyler: I will have to say my laptop and my confidence in myself. Because I didn't get my confidence until I came back here but it's been building up. I get along with everyone here and there just good, good people...I'll have to say knowing that I can do it, and I can do it well. And not having to sit there and struggle every night trying to get like a 500-page report done or something like that!...I can type faster than I can write and people can read it, read my laptop better than my handwriting. I can write neat but I cannot write cursive neat. I write like a doctor. And also I misspell a lot so the laptop helps me correct it.

Perry: The teachers and how they've taught me to be organized. Because that was my main problem in the regular schools that I wasn't organized. So if I went to go find like my homework I couldn't find it. Because I had papers just sprawled all over the place...The teachers that are in the public school don't really take their time with you they just, they give you a piece of paper, explain the directions and then sit down. And they'll answer your questions but also they didn't actually push you to go further. They just try to keep you on your level. Where (this school) actually pushes you and gives you harder work as you progress to that level. And then you can rise.

When asked what things were the most challenging for them, these young men responded with comments that are related to their individual disabilities. For Perry, English and grammar were difficult, while math was challenging for Tyler. Perry, who mentioned organization as a weakness earlier, shared that this school has helped remediate that problem so he is not as challenged by the lack of those skills as he was before.

These students were both very familiar with all of their special education teachers at the private school because all of their teachers were special education teachers and none were regular educators. Again, they had positive remarks regarding these teachers and how they have helped them in school. Furthermore, they both shared that they had all the help they needed in order to be successful in this school. Some comments regarding these questions included:

Perry: Because they're right there, it's a smaller group, it's not like 10-15 people in a class so you have like one-on-one individual time with them to work so if you have a question, you don't have to worry about raising your hand and asking a question in front of a whole bunch of people since it's just

you and like 2 other students. So that's basically how because you don't feel so nervous.

Tyler: (History teacher) made it fun and challenging but not too challenging. (English teacher), she made it, she would never give up on me. If I like started getting down on myself because I can't do it she said that, she always comes up to me and tells me I can. She has a whole lot of confidence in me so that makes me have confidence in myself.

Perry: They've got basically everything here. Because we've never, ever gone to a school, or even heard of a school that's as good as this one. Even though at the time I didn't feel like I was missing anything, but now since I've gone to this school I feel like I was missing a lot.

As I stated previously, these students were very adept at being able to articulate their personal deficiencies related to school. When asked about their disabilities, the students used descriptors to relay specific information. Although neither of them used the terminology "learning disabled," they did use other terminology that is most commonly heard in the field of special education.

Perry: My biggest problem, I mean I'm disabled in all 4 academic classes. One is reading. To be able to read out loud, I do a whole lot better when I'm reading silently because I actually can take my time and everything. But when I read out loud I get nervous so I start skipping words. To be able to write, my handwriting's not very good. Math is, I'm on the 6<sup>th</sup>, almost 7<sup>th</sup> grade level in math, so that's a difficult point for me. Science and social studies are alright. It's just what they're trying to work with me now is that to be able to read out of the book and that's about it. I can understand it, well I mean I can understand some of it on my grade levels but I'm on like a 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. I'm going, next year if I go there, I'm going up to the regular 9<sup>th</sup> grade level.

Tyler: Well my first disability is ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder. It means I can't focus clearly without some form of medication or anything else like that. And I'm also really hyperactive. I can't sit still for that long. Matter of fact, I bob my head every once in a while or my hands will start twitching because I can't stay still. And I have this, auditorial something, I can't pronounce it. But basically, I'm sitting here talking to you and I'm trying to listen to you and someone's in the other room talking, I'll hear them before I hear you. And that bothers me because I'm sitting here, if I'm sitting here trying to do my work and hear someone

whispering, start talking in the back of the room really, really quiet I'll hear them and it gets on my nerves. I take Wellbutrin. It's an antidepressant and also a stimulant for the Attention Deficit Disorder... Time released. I take 2 in the morning, well 1 ½.

Both of these young men are staunch supporters of their mothers. They both were quick to share the amount of time and effort that their mothers have put into assisting them with their schoolwork. When asked how their parents help them to be successful in school, the students revealed the following:

Perry: My mom, since she's here like all the time with me, she helps me with my oral reading and my flashcards, my spelling flashcards, and then my times table flashcards. Then she helps me out with my phonics.

Tyler: They never give up on me. They're loving and if I start getting down on myself they just like, like smack me in the back of the head, calm down (Tyler)! They don't really smack me in the back of the head, but they're just really, really loving parents. They try to help me as much as possible. But we've been through the thick and the thin.

Additionally, Perry stated that his mother was the one person who had had the greatest impact on his life due in part to her dedication to him. He shared:

My mom. She's the one that really pushes me because she even went on the computer and found out that you lose more than 28% of what you learned in one year, you lose that over one summer, so that's why she's doing this morning thing with me.

Even though these students attend a private school and do not have any regular education teachers currently, I asked them to share their perceptions regarding the regular education teachers they had in the past. When asked the question, "Did your regular education teachers help you more than they helped other students in their classes?" the students remarked that they

were not singled out nor did they believe they received more than any other student in their regular education classes. These students shared the following comments:

Tyler: It was pretty much equal. They were all nice teachers, they were all willing to help me but they were giving the same amount of help to everyone.

Perry: I had 2 (regular education classes) but I, they found out that the classes were too hard so they dropped me out of those and put me in with special education teachers so then from there on out all I had were special education teachers, except for my home economics teacher but we didn't really do any writing in there, it was all oral. I was treated the same (in those classes).

These students both were certain that their regular education teachers knew about their disability and their needs, but they responded that the teachers did not talk to them about their individual needs or the contents of their IEPs. In reference to the regular education teachers talking to them about their needs, the students shared the following:

Tyler: Well, I knew they knew about it because my mom went, we went and had a meeting with all my teachers at the beginning of the year, we've done that every year. They gave me everything that everyone else got. There was occasion they said, (Tyler) are you doing ok? I say, yeah, I'm doing as fine as I can. And they'd try to help me and then they'd just go off and they can't figure out why I can't get it. Which I believe someone should help me they need to realize they need to have an education to help explain it to the tip, because where my brain is, where I can't understand a lot of things, I need it really big in depth and they just...patience, patience.

Perry: Yeah, they knew what my needs were but what one thing that made it harder was that there was other regular kids in there and they didn't know I had learning disabilities so I really wouldn't raise my hand or ask for help or anything, because I'd be embarrassed. So I'd normally would have like a real good friend that would sit beside me and I'd ask them well what do I do here, and he'd help me out. It really wasn't them (that realized the material was too hard). It was the principal because my mom called the principal because she found out I was making D's in the classes so then they, so then he got me dropped out of those classes.

According to the information these students shared, their attendance at this private school has afforded them many more opportunities for academic progress and personal growth than any public school had yet to offer them. They were both extremely supportive of the environment and services provided for them in the private school setting. It was apparent to me as I was interviewing these students what a relief it was to them that they were given the opportunity to go to this school. These students had experienced much frustration and even severe torment due to their disabilities prior to coming to this private school. This setting provided a safe refuge for these students that helped them regain a positive self-concept.

### Parents

The parents in this category were very verbal in regard to their child's previous and current programs primarily because both of these families have had negative experiences in the public school setting. These parents have served the role of advocate for their disabled children since they were very young. Therefore, they had a lot to share regarding their experiences.

These parents were very familiar with the special education terminology used for diagnosing their children's disabilities. When describing their disabilities, these parents stated:

Perry's mother: My son has ADHD and CAPD, which is Central Auditory Processing Disorder.

Tyler's mother: Okay (he) has specific learning disabilities. He's dyslexic, severely dyslexic in his language arts and moderately dyslexic in his mathematical ability. And then on top of that he has ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Also, the parents had the following comments regarding how their child's disability impacts their learning and progress in school:

Tyler's mother: ...which makes it very hard for him to learn and pay attention.

Perry's mother: It affects him, the ADHD of course was the first (onset) that there was something wrong because we were noticing distractibility in class, he wasn't able to complete his assignments, very impulsive, had a hard time sitting still, fidgety, excessive talking, hard to control that. And even as a little child before he was in a school setting, very, I called it "bouncing off the walls", just constant motion, always in constant motion.

The parents easily and readily described the services that their children are currently receiving and how they are implemented in the private school they are attending. They shared the following data:

Tyler's mother: We have an IEP twice a year, here at the (private school). He was here 4 years the first time, went away for 6<sup>th</sup> grade to...8<sup>th</sup> grade to (a public middle school) and went on to 9<sup>th</sup> grade at (a public high school). Which they were not very good about, (that high school) didn't even do an IEP on him. (The middle school) did. And of course, upon reentering here, all major testing was done, an IEP was done, everything back on target. And then started here after the Christmas holidays. (He's in 9<sup>th</sup> grade). Catching up to where he should be.

Perry's mother: Mostly, what they're doing, you know from layman's terms in all his classes, he's in special education for all his main academia. He goes out (in the) mainstream for his elective courses. (He) gets extra time on tests, he gets his tests read to him, he gets tested in a small environment, he gets extra time. In the actual class itself, things are taken at a slower pace, you know according to each child. He gets, there's a bunch of behavioral stuff in here (the IEP) that helps him manage himself better. One thing we started at the high school they call it, oh what is it?, bouncing, antiseptic bouncing, something like that, it's funny. But it's where they, if he's getting into, like he's just out of sorts, or he's not able to focus or you know he's getting into something with another student they let him leave and he can walk the hallway or he can go run an errand to the office or he can use the bathroom or something. And it removes him from the situation at that point, lets him kind of calm down and he can come back in and he's more focused. But anyway, there's a lot of behavioral stuff that we had to address for the assessment last year because of all of these problems and stuff he's having so there's a lot written in here (the IEP). But basically, from what I've, you know (he) can use a calculator on a test in math, he can use a keyboard situation to write his reports, although a lot of it's written. They wrote it (the IEP) assuming he's going to

(the private school). And then giving him that time, what our plan was, he'd go to (the private school) in the morning and do his main academia. He'd do his English, his math, his history, and his science...and his keyboarding. And then he would come to, I didn't want him going (back to the same high school), but I would take him to (another public high school) in the afternoon and he would do his electives. And the only reason we were doing that was because I wanted him to do driver's education. And driver's education and PE are the same class. So he would do half of the year driver's education and the other half PE. Provided we don't have any altercations there with the kids. But basically that's what it is. It states that (he) needs to be in a self-contained classroom. It states that (he) has, his weaknesses are mostly his language arts and some math and that he has to have things read to him, and that like in mainstream classes when there's book reading that has to be done, you know he can do that, they have what they call a tutoring time, tutoring class and he brings that to that tutoring class. (He's) included in the mainstream class and (he) comes back to the tutoring class and (he) gets all (his) homework done. So I like that, that was a good program.

The parents appeared to be pleased with the current programs that have been established for their children. Both parents were disgruntled about previous public school experiences but could not say enough positive remarks about the private school setting. In fact, both of these parents did not want to change anything at the private school. One of the parents had comments about changing previous experiences in the public sector but nothing related to the private school.

Tyler's mother: The IEP helps him meet his goals. Smaller classrooms, individual attention where needed, helps build his self-esteem. They (the public middle school) had him in a resource math and a regular math and that was the only thing. They refused to put him in any resource classes at the middle school because they were afraid that it would hurt him socially. That's when he didn't learn anything.

Perry's mother: Well, the biggest benefits are that he's in a smaller class setting so there's more structure and he gets a lot more one-on-one assistance, because usually most of the classes have always (had) a teacher and an assistant. So there's always enough people there to help these kids get through the difficult parts, you know. High school's a little different. They didn't have assistants but they had very small classrooms. He has a little, he's always had a lot of access to technology where that would help him. Like they've had

those little portable word processors that they had all through elementary school. He could type his stories and correct them. I really think they get more of an education than some of the mainstream kids because they get, in a self-contained classroom they get such one-on-one treatment.

Perry's mother cited problems with the public school setting, primarily because of the problems her son encountered in the public school and the fact that he has a current IEP from the public school. At the time of this interview it was questionable where Perry will go to school next year. The mother is waiting to hear if the private school will accept this student back. If not, the mother is prepared to teach her son at home rather than place him back in a public school full-time. Therefore, this mother shared concerns about the program established for her son through the public school IEP. Tyler's mother was simple and definitive in her response that nothing should be changed in her son's current program. Their comments include:

Tyler's mother: I would not change one thing here at the (private school). I do believe we have appropriate support and services and that the IEP, the parents are a part of the plan. There's only one thing I can think of, and I don't know if you consider this educational, is, what do they call it, driver's education? And since he's no longer a part of a public school system, I cannot find anyone that will do it.

Perry's mother: I think they have it in there. I mean the only thing I had problems with was the inclusion time that they did. But they do, they spell it out really well and they list every little detail. So I think the IEPs are written really well and I think the teachers really do put a lot of time into that. Now, whether or not it's helping him or whether there needs to be adjustments I think they could work a little harder at that, in checking that out. One thing about middle school and high school that I notice is a big problem with these children, they're switching classes. I don't think special education children should ever switch class. I think they should be in the same class from the time they get to school until the time they leave. It would solve 2 problems. It would keep them from being picked on by other kids because they really wouldn't associate with them that much, because they don't associate with them anyway. And every time they leave a classroom and go out into the hallway and they have that 10-minute window, even though it's just supposed to be 4 minutes, you know, that's not how much time they spend out

there. They can get their little motors revved up and they're having to calm that down. It takes like, I mean I saw this from subbing, it takes like 10 minutes of the class time to calm them down to get them in the mode. If they're sitting there at their desk, same desk all day long, all they're doing is switching their subjects, that's programming, that's structure. It's keeping them on focus, on track. But they're not. And it's behavioral management all day long for these teachers. He moves to other classes. He has different teachers. They switch just like everybody else. They don't keep them in one class all day. See, they did that in the elementary school and that was really where he got the most benefit. But as soon as middle school started, in middle school they stayed with the same teacher for their main subjects but they had to go out for their electives because that's when electives started. And the minute that started that was when he started having really major behavioral problems. And focus problems. So I really think that, that self-restricted still needs to stay almost elementary through middle school and high school for the ones that really have the bad issues. And they don't offer that. And it's all about least restrictive environment. You know, well we want them in the least restrictive environment, we want them to be as close to the normal kids as possible. Well, they're not, you know! So quit trying to make them fit into that mold. It's like here you have this ball and you're trying to fit it into a square opening. It's not going to work, you know. This is the way the child learns best, this is the way the child needs to be taught. So, that's the only real complaint I have about (his services).

The parents' satisfaction with the private school their children are currently attending is evident thus far in the comments that have been shared. Tyler's mother was consistently simple and direct in her responses to my questions. In reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the private school, she had the following comments:

Most of this is redundant. The strengths of the school are good teachers, excellent director, attentiveness to you child's needs, willingness to take extra time to help. I really don't see any weaknesses whatsoever.

Perry's mother shared:

First of all, they offer that one-on-one attention to these children because the class sizes are so small. I think there are only 5 kids in his high school group. And even though the

most would have been 10 when he was in with the middle school kids, still there was a teacher and an aide. Also, they do move between the classes, but it's very structured, very monitored. I mean it's not like they're just going to walk out in the hallway. An aide's going with them making sure they're getting from point A to point B. (The director's) on hand. She's a licensed psychologist. She herself has learning disabilities. And she knows what they're dealing with. And she's able to mediate problems. She's able to help them socially. Because these children don't just have learning disabilities, they have social disabilities as well that they've accumulated over the years from years of you know bruised emotions and battering. And she is really wonderful about taking them in there and talking to them and helping them work things out and teaching them conflict resolution. And the school itself is a very loving, nurturing environment, very conducive to learning for these kids. My son felt so safe there. And was so happy to be there. He knew that he would not be hurt there, neither emotionally nor physically. You know she's got a staff that has the educational background to do what they say they want to do. Provided the child is willing to work hard and learn, they can do their part of it. The staff is definitely capable of doing their part of it. So, I just, you know just all around, it was a Godsend. So, but it is, she's (the director's) had years of experience with these children and wanting, and they want to work with these children. It's not like they're being forced and they're waiting for the year to be over with, and they're just passing them along to get them out of their hair. They have a true concern for each and every child that's there. And you see that. That structured environment is just crucial to them being able to manage themselves. The only weakness that I really saw is that, you know most of the teachers there are really old, age wise. It's kind of the time of their lives where they'd be retiring. And of course one did. I think that's going to be hard on (the director) to be able to replace them. You know these women that have been there for 17 years or whatever, they're the backbone of the school, they know it, and so now she's going to have to get new staff and train them and have them ready to go. And you know funding, even though it's expensive to go there, gosh they could use a lot more money. Even to make the school bigger. You know the school is quite small inside. Although that is quaint and keeps it kind of like a one room school house. But I know they're out growing themselves. They could probably take care of a lot more kids if they were bigger and more staffed. But she can't, the funding's not there for that. I mean she's even having a hard time getting a lawn mower. So, you know that's, those are just some issues with a private school. Because they don't get the funding like the government gives the county schools, which don't do the job that the private school does. It's stupid. I'm all for vouchers. I want my tax dollars back.

Another strength cited by both of these mothers had to do with communication.

Although not detailed with the above information, both parents responded that they receive daily feedback from the teachers at the private school regarding their child's progress. Additionally, both parents shared that the feedback they received from previous public schools was either non-

existent or so infrequent that it didn't matter. Information regarding communication from these parents included the following comments:

Tyler's mother: Well it was lousy in public school and wonderful here. Here, (I get feedback) on a daily basis. (In public school) only if I pursued it. And even then, there wasn't much feedback. They didn't deny me the right to talk to them, but it was just, we're doing the best we can with what we've got. A daily note is sent home every single day (here). I do have to sign it, saying that I have received it so that I'm aware of what's going on.

Perry's mother: At (the private school), yes. And in elementary school, yes. I was very close to his teacher. But in middle school and high school no. But yeah, the teachers at (this private school), I mean, you know (the director) and I would talk sometimes weekly, and it was great. It was always letting me know. And plus, they send home lots of notes and stuff to communicate what the, you know what's a going on or where there's a problem, or whatever. So I could do more work at home with him. And that's crucial. And see in high school, public school and even in middle school I didn't, the notes stopped. I wasn't getting information. And then I'd see a bad grade and I'm like, well where was the study guide? You know, we could have done this at home. And you know at (private school), they let you know what's going on...pretty much weekly, there. I mean (the director) would come out to the car, and maybe it was just a brief little conversation but she, daily, actually daily because we had the agendas and in the agendas it would say what was going on that day and if he'd a made a bad grade on his test, I'd have to sign it. So they have a lot of things set up there that the parent, there's no reason the parent doesn't know what's going on. Report cards (was the only time I'd receive feedback from the public school)! Unless I went there and said what's going on? They'd only call me for behavioral reasons, not for educational reasons. Except in elementary school. Everyday she (his teacher) told me if there was a project coming up or anything going on she was right on top of it.

The issue of self-concept is an important one to these students and their parents. Due to the nature of their disabilities and the location of their special education services, these students can be considered as having a severe disability that warrants a more restrictive class placement. With more severe disabilities often come occasions when students are singled out or picked on

by their peers, as has been shared by the students and parents in this category of services.

Therefore, the question regarding student self-concept was an important one to consider. These mothers relayed the following information regarding their child's self-concept:

Tyler's mother: What contributes to my child's self-confidence is because he is awarded and respected and not put down at the (private school), which has built his self-confidence, which he did not have in public school. He was bullied; he was suspended from school for sticking up for his own rights (in public school).

Perry's mother: Currently, I'd say it's probably as high as it's ever been. I'd say what contributes the most negative to his self-confidence is himself. He wears himself down. He'll tell, because he's been told this by other people and he's believed what they've said, that you know, they'll call him retarded or say he's stupid and he'll say that. But I do think he's his worst enemy at times. And I think it comes from frustration. You know, he knows that he can do it but he's not being able to do it. And I'm seeing that while we're during the summer school program. He gets so frustrated that the first thing that comes out of his mouth is I'm an idiot, or I'm stupid, or I can't do this. And then, we'll just, what I'll do then is I'll switch to something that I know he can do well and praise him and get him to see that he's proud of himself for doing it, then he'll have a better attitude when we get back to the hard stuff and he can work through it. So, and you know, he gets that at (the private school). And I've seen a big, big, big change since he's been (there). You know, he's a happy child. He's not being beat up every day by these other kids being told that he's worthless. And it does seem like every summer he really does mature a lot. Every summer I see major progress. So, he has been in counseling ever since he was little. And it's wonderful for him. But a lot of it, a lot the damage done to this child has been self-esteem and confidence from the picking, from constantly being picked on.

Also very important to these parents is the choice they made to place their child in a private school. These parents chose to place their children at this private school due to the unfortunate and unsuccessful circumstances in public schools throughout their children's years of schooling. This can be inferred from the information provided thus far. More specifically,

these mothers shared the following data in specific response to the why they chose a private school for their child:

Tyler's mother: Because it was the only school, and you know I had (him) in another prep school. But they were not set up to handle children with his problems. And I pulled him out of there and put him here and drove 700 miles a week for 4 years. But I do think it's really sad that our country cannot provide an education for our disabled children and that we have to drive many, many miles and spend money on just regular education the cost of a college education. And you know they didn't even recommend that I take him out of there. They felt like they could meet his needs. I said, well you haven't so far. I mean, you know we've been here since 6<sup>th</sup> grade and all he's done is go down, down, down, down. They wouldn't let him have a laptop. (The director of this private school) went with us to the first IEP meeting at the transfer, recommended it. What else, they wouldn't let you uh, no modification of tests, which she recommended, and the teacher went with us. I mean we didn't agree to anything. There at the end they let us, we bought him a laptop and he could take it. Oh, and they recommended at the high school that he not bring a laptop because they couldn't be responsible for it and something would happen or it would be stolen. So they didn't want, and they said it would make him look weird because no one else was using computers in the classroom, laptops. So this would single him out to be teased, so therefore they would not let him have a laptop.

Perry's mother: Well, 2 reasons. I really didn't think he was progressing in the public school system the way he needed to to be on track for graduation. And we only have you know, 3 possible 4 more years to get him there. And I saw his desire to want to be on track and to want to go on to higher-level education. And that wasn't going to happen with what they were, whatever they were teaching or however they were teaching him. And also safety issues, major safety issues in the high school. The school's too big. He can't function in that kind of environment. So we started researching to find another situation that would benefit him and we found (this private school). I call (my son) the chameleon. His dad was that way, too. They become who they're around. And until he gets mature enough to have that judgment to see, know that person's a bad person, he gets taken advantage of, he gets used, he gets into trouble by just trying to fit in. Desperate for, you know, peer acceptance. So I really have to guard him against other individuals that would do that to him until he's able to do it for himself. And he's getting better. And church has really helped.

I will say one thing, in general for all special education kids that really do want to learn and work hard. I think, you know they look at their disabilities so negatively. Like why did God do this to me, or why did this happen? But you know, it builds such character and such persistence and determination in the ones that want to move beyond it that these are really the successful people in the world. You know, that's why we had people like Ben Franklin that were learning disabled or Einstein or all these geniuses or these people, Hans Christian Anderson, these people that created these things or were so creative and so talented. It taught them persistence and I see children in GT classes when I've subbed that have less determination, persistence than I've seen in special ed. kids. And if the high schools and the public schools could just bottle that, you know learn to manipulate that, learn to help them feed into that instead of playing them down and just teaching them like well this is the best that they can do. You know, challenge these kids more. Teach them that they're capable of functioning and doing all, anything they want to do. And I don't see that and that has been the biggest disappointment to me with the public schools. As opposed to, like this is my first with the private school that taught these children. But opposed to like (this private) school, they do play that. They do tell them you can accomplish anything you want to. It's in your hands. You know, and that gives that child that control and that responsibility back. You know, that they might have taken away from them for so long and have been taught to be so dependent on everything else.

The parents in this category of services for this study recorded some of the most poignant comments regarding special education services. These parents have spent a lifetime as advocates for their children, always seeking to make sure their children are taken care of and have the best available opportunities for a good education. They have met with resistance along the way, which has only served to encourage them to fight harder for the sake of their children. Although these parents were verbal about their experiences, they do not differ greatly from the other parents included in this study. Both of the parents involved in this study have expressed their satisfaction with the program in which their child was currently involved. This realization

supports the idea that a continuum of services meets the needs of all students, with each level of service meeting the needs of the children being served.

### Teacher

The final teacher, Mrs. Brown, interviewed for this study has been teaching for 25 years. She recently decided to retire after 18 years from her current teaching assignment. She holds a bachelor's degree in history and was certified to teach high school social studies and economics. She has a variety of experiences, teaching public school secondary classes, elementary school, Bible classes, and finally teaching at a private school for students with disabilities. When she was hired at this private school, Mrs. Brown did not have a special education background or certification but soon completed those requirements. She taught for 25 years with 18 of those years at the private school included in this study. During last school year, Mrs. Brown was responsible for teaching 15 students, with a homeroom of 7 students. Most of her students had Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder as well as a learning disability. This teacher's primary responsibilities include teaching the junior high English class, civics class, and earth science class. She was also responsible for supervising the instruction implemented by educational assistants who taught algebra 2, geometry, algebra 1, world history, and literature.

Mrs. Brown was extremely supportive of the private school involved in this study. When asked whether she had all the available resources necessary to provide appropriate support and services for her students, she commented that the only barrier she encountered was the lack of resources for science labs. She explained that labs were not possible except at the simplest level. The science textbook that was used was also out of date, but she said she used supplementary materials, so that was not really an issue. In her words,

It's about teaching them how to learn rather than what to learn. So adequate resources are not my main concern.

Specific to her students, Mrs. Brown reported that they are successful due to parental support, putting in the necessary time at home to work on weak skills, and simply wanting to be at this school. One strength of the specific program in this private school is the consistency shown with making students correct their mistakes. She shared that no student is permitted to move on when mistakes are present. Instead, they have to correct their mistakes every time they are made. Furthermore, the students in this private school are unsuccessful when they neglect to do their homework, when their organization skills interfere with their progress, or when they have a difficult time accepting their disability. According to Mrs. Brown, parents and students alike interfere with a child's progress when they make excuses for the disability.

Regarding parents, Mrs. Brown stated that she wished the private school would establish more parent meetings whereby parents could get information concerning the school and also gain information from each other. In essence, she was encouraging a parent support group of sorts. Mrs. Brown also shared that the parents are involved in their child's program because they are required to be when they decide to place their child in the school. When they begin the program, parents are given a set of parameters. These parameters include help with only certain assignments, avoiding teaching concepts, not reminding the student to do assignments, and providing structure at home to do homework at a certain time each evening in a designated location. Additionally, the parents are guided in establishing a set of privileges at home. Mrs. Brown commented that the way parents communicate with their children is key to their individual success. She stated:

...How things are said is important. They should say “earn” as opposed to taking away something.

She shared that for some parents, they have not been involved enough, so they must be taught how to be involved, while other parents have been too involved, essentially doing the work for the child, so they must be weaned off some of that “support.”

As stated previously, Mrs. Brown was very supportive of this private school. As far as strengths of the school are concerned, she specifically shared strong leadership from the director, a good reputation, and dedicated, veteran teachers who see the importance in what they are doing. Mrs. Brown implied that the teachers often make great sacrifices for the benefit of the students, making less pay than public school teachers, with little or no benefits. As far as barriers present for her students, she commented that communication with the public schools often interferes with the success of the students. Additionally, she shared that students with ADD/ADHD often struggle when a consistent lack of structure is present, when organizational skills interfere with success, and when students leave the program prematurely and are thus at risk for failure. She commented that the students who leave the program when the staff recommends they leave are more successful than those who leave prior to the recommended time.

Mrs. Brown responded emphatically that the program definitely contributes to the self-concept of the students in attendance. She shared similar sentiment as the other teachers in this study when she commented that individual success contributes to their self-concept. In this private school setting, she shared that they start off quickly with success on individual assignments and then gradually challenge them with more difficult material. This helps to rebuild an often damaged self-esteem. Mrs. Brown iterated that the goal of the program is not

teach specific skills but to teach them how to accommodate for their disabilities so they can experience individual success.

Mrs. Brown shared similar sentiments regarding student success and parental support as the other teachers in this research. There are common themes emerging among these stakeholders regarding topics that contribute to successful programs for students with disabilities at the secondary level. Even though this teacher chose to teach in a private school setting, she holds similar beliefs regarding the best programming options for children with moderate to severe disabilities. One of the only things that are different is the location of these services.

### Summary

The interviews conducted for this study revealed valuable information regarding the perceptions of disabled students, their parents, and their teachers regarding specific special education services. Some of the common themes that emerged from the research involve the level of satisfaction with services, the level of satisfaction with the specific schools in this study, the apparent lack of knowledge regarding specific special education terminology, and the impact of services on individual students' self-concept.

The students, parents, and teachers shared an overwhelming sentiment of support for their specific schools, as well as the particular programs established for the students in this study. Interestingly, however, many students and parents did not share specific details regarding disability categories and services. This is surprising because many of these students have been receiving services for most of their academic careers. Therefore, it was presumed prior to this research that the students, and particularly the parents, would be able to share more specific

details regarding these services. The next chapter will address these deficiencies and offer suggestions as to how best to remedy this apparent problem.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school students with disabilities, their parents, and teachers regarding a variety of special education placement options. Those options include receiving special education services outside the regular classroom less than 21% of the regular school day, between 21% and 60% of the school day, more than 60% of the school day, and in a private school setting. The areas of interest pertaining to this study include topics related to individual student achievement, teacher support, parent support, level of self-concept, and choosing a private school setting.

As previously reviewed in the literature, there are a variety of placement options available to students with disabilities. These options, though, are not always offered, as more and more school systems seem to be focusing on including children with all types of disabilities in regular classroom settings. Advocacy groups contending that all children should have the right to the same educational opportunities, regardless of their intellectual ability, brought about this movement (Kubicek, 1994; Shanker, 1995). These advocacy groups use the least restrictive environment provision stated in federal law to support their contention that these children can and should be educated in regular classrooms. These advocates consider themselves “full inclusionists” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994/1995, p. 22; Kubicek, 1994, p. 29).

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the advocates supporting full inclusion of all children with disabilities, are those supporters of a continuum of service options. A continuum of service options provides services based on individual needs in a variety of locations ranging from inclusion in a regular classroom to more restrictive placements such as self-contained classrooms or private school settings. According to its supporters, this option contends that all students are not the same, thus they do not have the same needs, making a variety of options a necessity. In this case, removal of disabled children from the regular education environment

should only occur when the nature and severity of the disability warrants such removal (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

Since full inclusion of all students with disabilities is a rarity, this study focused on students served in four different categories of services as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The intent of the study was to gather perceptions regarding student involvement in these settings and to determine if there is a perceived need for these settings as opposed to a movement toward full inclusion.

### Findings Related to Students

The students involved in this study had cognitive abilities ranging from average intelligence to significantly below average. The difference in their abilities greatly impacted the variety of information gathered from the students. While some students were very knowledgeable regarding their perceptions, others showed very little understanding of the interview questions. The students with more severe cognitive impairments did share important information related to their own personal experiences and knowledge regarding their special education services, as did their peers that were interviewed in the other categories of service.

### Individual Student Achievement

Full inclusionists contend identification and placement of children with disabilities in more restrictive settings is both ineffective and discriminatory (Baker et al., 1995). Furthermore, full inclusionists contend that special education has historically been used as a “dumping ground” for “unteachable” students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). These advocates cite meta-analyses studies that showed a small to moderate benefit of inclusive education on academic outcomes as measured by standardized tests (Baker et al.). Thus, these advocates concluded that the effects of inclusion are valuable but not vast (Baker et al.).

Supporters of a continuum of services have a different viewpoint. They contend that special education classes are inferior to regular education classes for students with cognitive deficiencies but superior to regular classes for students who have behavior, emotional, or learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). Additionally, supporters of a continuum of services cite other research studies that reported that resource class settings were more effective than regular classrooms in improving the academic achievement of students with learning, behavior, or emotional disabilities. Furthermore, there were no reliable differences regarding academic achievement for children with mental retardation in both settings (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

For the current study, there was an overwhelming sentiment of contentment among the student participants with the school(s) they attend and the educational programs established for them. In specific response to the contributors to their individual achievement, all of the students primarily cited their parents and teachers. They indicated that they were their primary motivators, supporters, and advocates regarding their education. Other factors contributing to their individual achievement were having good classes, inviting classroom settings, and the ability to have an inner drive to work hard. Simply put, these students implied that being successful in school continues to contribute to their overall academic achievement. In other words, these students were more likely to continue to demonstrate academic attainment after achieving small goals.

Although these students implied that their disabilities oftentimes interfere with their success in school, they implied in their interviews that their successes in school were a direct result of the individual programs established for them. Their parents and teachers were cited as major contributors. This is evident to the students because of the “hands on” approach they have regarding their education. What the students did not always express, but is most likely the case, is that the parents and teachers also have a very active role in their education behind the scenes. In other words, their programs were established to best meet their needs through the IEP process,

whereby their parents and teachers meet as frequently as needed to refine their programs. During this process, the individual programs established for these students were chosen because a team of individuals thought it was in the best interest of each child. Therefore, it can be ascertained that according to the students in this study, the variety of services offered to them is considered necessary to meet their individual needs and to support their academic achievement, thus supporting the continuum of services options available to children with disabilities.

### Parental Support

Every student included in this study cited his/her parents as major contributors to their individual success in school. Furthermore, parents were most often cited as the persons who have had the greatest impact on the students' lives. All of the students, in their own ways, expressed that their parents were extremely supportive of them. Mothers in particular were noted as providing the most support and guidance for these children.

Although this study did not specifically investigate or gather information regarding the economic status of the parents or their level of education, this information was deduced during the interviews. Some of the students appeared to come from upper-income families where both parents were educated beyond high school, while other families were middle to low-income with both parents working to make ends meet and little or no education beyond high school. In this study, it didn't seem to matter what socioeconomic status the parents held or what level of education these parents had attained. According to these students, their parents were crucial to their successes both in and outside of school.

### Teacher Support

The student participants in this study were supportive of most of their teachers, both regular education and special education. The students who were higher functioning and thus received fewer special education services cited their regular education teachers as being

supportive, while students with more intensive services tended to cite their special education teachers before regular education teachers in terms of support. This can be attributed to the amount of time spent with these teachers. The higher the percentage of time spent with a particular group of teachers, the more often they were cited as reasons for academic success and supportiveness.

All of the students in this study noted that their regular education teachers were supportive of their needs. They did not always agree, however, on whether they believed that their regular education teachers knew about their specific needs. Additionally, there was not consensus on the amount of assistance offered to these students in direct relation to their non-disabled peers. Some of the students shared that their regular education teachers offered them more assistance than their non-disabled peers in their classes, while others shared no difference at all. Several students implied in their responses that they believed their regular education teachers would help them if necessary. Others commented that their teachers tried to help but the assistance that the students needed was beyond their scope of capabilities, either because of constraints such as class size or because of a lack of knowledge to assist them with their specific disabilities. None of these students, including those educated in the private school setting, had anything specifically negative to say about their regular education teachers.

According to the students, their special education teachers were more important to students who received more restrictive services. In fact, most of the students in the least restrictive environment included in this study did not even know the name of their special education teacher. Most of the students knew that they had a special education teacher and that this teacher did something to support their educational programs. Students with more severe cognitive delays did not know they had a “special education teacher,” probably because they did not understand the terminology. They did, however, express who their special education teacher was at another point in their interviews. It appeared that the more services a student received, the more positive their comments were regarding these teachers. Again, this can be attributed to

the fact that the students who received more intensive services spent more time with their special education teachers than the students who received fewer services. This time spent in more restrictive settings was also academically beneficial for many students who had moderate to severe disabilities. The research included in chapter two supports the findings of this research study that students who have severe reading disabilities and are placed full-time in regular classes make very little progress (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). Lee, a student included in this study, is one such student with a severe reading disability. According to Lee's mother and special education teacher, he makes much more progress in a more restrictive setting than he does in his regular classes.

### Level of Self-Concept

The research regarding student self-concept demonstrates a direct correlation between teacher expectations and a student's self-concept. Furthermore, a teacher's perception of a student leads directly to an expectation by that student. If a teacher views a student as intelligent, then that teacher will expect more from that student (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Therefore, a student's self-concept can be impacted greatly by how an individual teacher responds to them directly or indirectly (Obiakor, 1999). In this research study, similar results were inferred from the interviews with students, parents, and teachers.

Although no direct questions regarding self-concept were posed to the students during their interviews, many of the questions were designed to elicit responses that indirectly lead me to make some assumptions regarding the primary contributors to their self-concept. Most importantly, it should be noted that the perceptions students have regarding their achievement equates to a certain level of self-concept. Even though most of these students have struggled with moderate to severe disabilities most of their lives, even the slightest successes have enhanced their self-concepts. Therefore, it is important to state that the more opportunities these children have for success the more likely it is that they will succeed in the future. In many cases,

the failures and frustrations far out weigh their successes, yet all of these students appeared to have positive self-concepts, which was further confirmed by their parents. This is contrary to research studies that indicate students with disabilities inherently have low self-concepts, especially those being educated in more restrictive settings. Such researchers found that a combination of services provided the best benefit for a students' self-concept (Beltempo & Achille, 1990).

Another contributor to the student's level of self-concept included the social aspect of attending high school. This was measured by their friends and their level of comfort in the school setting, for most of the students. All of these students indicated that they did not have trouble making friends. Furthermore, even the students with more severe disabilities did not indicate that they had been bullied or picked on by non-disabled peers in the school setting, with the exception of the students in the private school. In their cases, they did admit to being picked on but it was unclear as to whether this was a direct result of their individual disabilities.

The final contribution to their self-concept can be directly related to their parents. The more involved the parents were with their child's lives, both in school and out of school, the higher the level of positive self-concept for the students. Parents appeared to have a very powerful impact on the lives of their children. In all of the cases involved in this study, there were positive relationships noted both by the students and the parents. This may not always be the case, though. I may have been fortunate with the participants in this study. Further investigation involving other parents and students may be warranted.

### Recommendations Related to Students

A common theme noted in all of the student interviews for this study was the level of knowledge they had pertaining to their special education services. In order to improve services for students with disabilities, I believe this issue should be investigated further. More

specifically, the students demonstrated a lack of specific information regarding their special education services.

In the case of the students in the least restrictive environment in this study, most of them did not know who their special education teacher was, what an Individual Education Plan is, or what specific services they received from their special education teacher. In my opinion, this group of students should be the most informed group, given their higher level of functioning. In order to improve educational services for these students and all students with disabilities, it is important that they be knowledgeable about what it means to have a disability and what services they are receiving or are eligible to receive. As a special educator myself, I am cognizant of the fact that the parents and students often know best what their needs are and how best to meet those needs.

Specifically, these students should be taught about their disability long before they get to the high school level. Instruction regarding their disability should be ongoing as the student's level of understanding increases with age, so that by the time he or she reaches high school they can more effectively advocate for themselves and their needs. After all, it should be the goal of secondary education to prepare all students for life after high school. Teaching these students about their disabilities and their needs is a major step in initiating independence for these students. Therefore, additional input from the students could only help in establishing an appropriate program for them.

These students should also be educated about what an Individual Education Plan entails. The IEP should be fully explained and shared with the students. Again, from my experience, I realize that most special educators already share IEPs with their students, especially at the high school level. What is lacking, however, is understanding from the students. Therefore, I do not

believe it is enough to simply share the IEP with the student in an isolated, one-time meeting. I believe the student should continue to get information regarding their IEP on an ongoing basis. Fully sharing the contents of the IEP as well as information that is not included will enlighten the student so that he or she can make better decisions regarding ones own educational needs. If students are aware of what is available to them, they can make informed decisions regarding whether additional services are appropriate for them or not.

### Findings Related to Parents

The parents interviewed for this study came from socioeconomic levels ranging from upper to middle to lower-income. Additionally, the parents had educational levels that ranged from college educated to only the completion of high school. The parents interviewed for this study were knowledgeable regarding the needs of their children. They were also supportive of the school their children were currently attending.

### Student Achievement

The parents involved with this study had much to say regarding what contributes to their children's success in school. A common theme relayed from most of the parents was the support given to their children by their teachers, both regular education and special education. The parents shared that level of teacher support was directly related to their student's level of achievement. Inferred from their interviews was the idea that the more support their child received from teachers, the more likely he or she would be successful academically. Some parents commented further that the concern and caring provided by teachers were positive influences on their children's success. The research in this area supports the parent perceptions in this study. The research states that lowering or raising expectations of disabled students

affects their self-concept (Obiakor, 1999). A teacher's perception of a student leads directly to an expectation of the student. As stated previously, changing teacher expectations of students will undoubtedly impact the student's individual self-concept.

According to the parents, another factor related to student achievement was the special education services and modifications provided for their children. Parents were pleased with the level of services each child was receiving. In one case, the parent was surprised at one point during the school year to discover that her son was actually receiving more services than she knew about. For many of these parents, knowing that their children had education plans that informed all teachers about their children's needs was a necessary part of their success. Not only do the IEP's relay valuable information, they provide the teachers with necessary guidance as to how to best meet the needs of these students.

### Teacher and School Support

Research previously cited in chapter two regarding parental perceptions of their children's programs indicate that 77% of parents are generally satisfied with special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). In this study, all of the parents interviewed shared their contentment with the schools their children currently attend. Even though there may have been bad experiences in the past at other schools, the current schools seem to be meeting the needs of most everyone involved in this study. The research outlined in chapter two reported common concerns among parents of children with disabilities that included a sense that their children's IEP's were not individualized to meet their needs as well as the misconception that special education would "fix" their children's disabilities (Lovitt & Cushing, 1999). The parents involved in the current study did not verbalize any of these same sentiments. Rather, the parents

interviewed for this study were pleased with the programs established for their children and none of them alluded to the belief that their problems could be fixed by special education services.

Some parents did have suggestions on improvements for the schools or the programs they provide, but none of them really made any negative comments. Their responses seemed extremely unusual based on my own experience and the review of relevant literature, that schools can meet the needs of so many students so effectively that the parents didn't have any concerns. In any case, it can be inferred that the positive comments made by the parents regarding the schools indicates that they are satisfied with the support given to their child. This support was reported as directly related to the variety of course offerings available and the variety of special education services available to their children.

Teacher support was spoken of as positively as the support spoken for the school. Virtually all participants expressed their satisfaction with the teachers at the schools involved in this study. A common theme from students, parents, and teachers alike was the quality of teachers at both schools. According to the parents, the teachers are at the front line when dealing with the success or failure of these children. In the case of this study, teachers played an extremely critical role in promoting student achievement through their actions as well as their skills as teachers. It is not enough to simply have a teacher who can write an IEP or have a teacher who is knowledgeable about math or science. Instead, teaching that promotes success in students involves a caring attitude and a human approach to learning that engages all students at their own level of learning. The parents in this study stated that this is just what is occurring with their children's teachers.

## Level of Self-Concept

Of utmost concern to all parents, and especially those with children who have disabilities, is the level of self-concept experienced by their children. The parents in this study attributed their children's self-concept to many factors. A common theme throughout the parent interviews was the topic of how the parents raised their children and the values they instilled in them. According to the research, enhancing interactions between parents and their children has led to enhancing the self-esteem of children with learning disabilities (Elbaum & Vaughn, 1999). Most parents in this study commented that they were the main reason their children had positive self-concepts. These parents taught them perseverance through difficult, challenging times. They also encouraged them to develop their individual skills and interests so they will always have their strengths to support them. Parents with particularly challenging children shared that positive reinforcement instead of punishment goes a long way with improving their children's self-concept. Instilling a feeling of self-worth and showing these students respect were other contributions noted by the parents.

Additional issues important to these parents regarding their children's self-concepts included their teachers' support, their peer groups, and their past achievements. As noted previously in this chapter, the impact teachers have on the success of these children is almost overwhelming. Again, these parents shared that teachers have enormous power when it comes to contributing to their child's self-concept. Unfortunately, these contributions can have either a positive or negative impact. The same can be said for the student's peer groups. Peers at the high school level have a significant influence on the way other students react. Finally, parents shared that the level of their individual achievements enhanced their children's self-concept. The

students themselves shared this concept as well. In summary, the more positive achievements these children experience, the more likely it is that they will be successful in the future.

### Recommendations Related to Parents

In addition to the student participants, the parents involved in this study seemed to lack specific information regarding their children's special education services. The parents were able to articulate descriptions regarding their children's disabilities, but very few of them knew or shared the specific educational terms to "label" these services. In my judgment, this is not that important but does warrant some attention. What is most important is that the parents are able to thoroughly share what their children's needs are in the school setting. Secondary to that is the knowledge of the specific terms. Unfortunately, in the educational arena, knowledge of the specific terms related to disabilities could prove to be very useful. Because educators are very familiar with the terms and parents are more concerned with the specific details of their children's specific needs, a recommendation would be to find a compromise between these two issues. It may be that parents don't fully understand the meaning of the terms thus educators should concentrate on bridging the gap between educational jargon and the bare descriptors of disabilities.

Another recommendation for the parents repeats a recommendation for the students. The parents did not express a great deal of knowledge regarding specific services for their children. In fact, one parent simply brought her child's IEP to the interview so I could review it rather than attempt to describe the services herself. I believe it is the responsibility of special education teachers to adequately share the contents of the IEP and ensure the parent's understanding. As a special education teacher, I can say that I thought I did that in my IEP meetings, but as I reflect

now, I question whether my descriptions of the contents are sufficient (and in the appropriate terms) for the parents to fully understand. There are many confusing terms and components of an IEP, and I believe educators take for granted that parents understand most of it.

The private school parents in this study specifically chose to send their children to a private school because of specific issues related to public schools. In both students' cases, they had experienced academic failures as well as bullying from peers. For one of the students, the bullying resulted in two separate physical altercations, the last of which was a severe beating by another student. For that student's parents, that was the last straw in giving the public school setting a chance at teaching their child. His parents shared that they no longer thought the school could ensure his safety, nor were they meeting his academic needs.

The parents of the other child chose to send him to the private school during his elementary school years and then made the decision to place him in the public school setting. According to his mother, he was in the public school for almost four years and made no academic progress. Furthermore, when he was initially transitioned into the public school, an IEP meeting was held where specific recommendations were made from the private school that could potentially benefit him in the public school. The public school chose not to include those specific modifications in his IEP and his parents ultimately shared that this contributed to his lack of success. Had he received appropriate support and services in the public school, he might have made adequate progress, thus avoiding a move back to the private setting. Since returning to the private school, both the student and the parent shared that he had gained a few years academically in a very short period of time.

The parents of these students decided to place their children in a private school because they stated that the public schools their children were attending were not meeting their needs.

Neither of the public school systems offered to pay or even supplement the tuition of these students because they maintained, according to the parents, that the public schools could meet the students' needs. Therefore, according to both parents, they have to make sacrifices in order to keep their children in this school because the tuition is expensive. The parents emphatically agree, however, that the sacrifice is well worth the benefit of seeing their children succeed and seeing their self-concepts improve with each passing day.

### Findings Related to Teachers

The teachers included in this study teach in a variety of settings ranging from regular education to special education in regular classes to self-contained classes. Their years of experience ranged from 4 ½ years to 32 years. All of the teachers hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree with 4 of the 6 teachers holding a master's degree. The teachers were very responsive in sharing information regarding their experiences with the students involved in this study as well as sharing information about the schools where they teach and the students they serve.

### Student Achievement

According to current research, both regular and special education teachers are satisfied with current special education programs and practices (Houck & Rogers, 1994). Additionally, 94% of regular education teachers indicated that services for students with disabilities have improved over the past 12 years (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

Also indicated in the research is practice by regular education teachers to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of all students, rather than simply adapting and modifying

instruction for students with IEPs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). The regular education teacher included in this study shared this same practice, indicating that she provides learning modifications for all students if it is deemed appropriate. Both the special education teachers and the regular education teacher in this study shared constructive information regarding the achievement of their students. All of the public school teachers reported that the modifications and accommodations included on the IEPs were an integral part of the success students with disabilities demonstrated. As inferred from the interviews, these teachers believed that the modifications gave the students much needed support in order to overcome their deficiencies or compensate for their learning difficulties. Most of the teachers also reported that the level of parental support for these students contributed to their individual successes. This has been a common theme among the students, parents, and teachers in this study. Again, more support from parents equates to more success for the students.

Other contributors to success for these students include IEP meetings and individual motivation on the part of the students. One teacher stated specifically, while the others implied, that information shared at IEP meetings is extremely valuable in planning and preparing programs for children with disabilities. Of particular interest is the fact that the regular education teacher in this study appreciated being included in IEP meetings so that she could get first hand information from the children's parents and previous teachers. It was important to the teachers that the students were involved in these meetings so that they too can share what they believe their needs are if they are cognitively able to share such information. The teachers implied that students who seem to demonstrate characteristics of intrinsic motivation tend to be more successful than students who are more apathetic regarding their education.

### Student Self-Concept

The teachers included in this study either specifically stated or inferred information regarding issues that contribute to their students' self-concepts. A common theme among most of the teachers resonated around individual student success by the students. Once again, the degree of previous success experienced by students was cited as a major influence on a student's self-concept. In other words, the more success students experience, the better they feel about themselves. Furthermore, teachers repeated the sentiment that parental support was directly related to student self-concept. Students, parents, and teachers alike have all shared this same response in this study.

Other topics shared by the teachers in this study regarding student self-concept included getting to know the students on a personal level and making sure the students have an advocate or a staff member to talk to when needed. A personal contact seems to be a crucial issue for some of the disabled students of these teachers. Having such a person lets the student know that there is someone who cares about him or her, thus influencing a positive self-concept. Some of these teachers also shared that having a close group of friends and being involved in something outside of academics improves a student's self-concept. As stated earlier, peers are a powerful influence. Unfortunately, this influence can either be positive or negative. Nonetheless, all students reported feeling better about themselves when others like them.

### Parent Involvement

No new information regarding parental involvement was noted in the teacher interviews. All of these teachers agreed that the more a parent is involved, the more likely it is that a student will be successful. For most of the teachers, parental involvement serves as an additional asset to

the programs established for these children. One teacher did note that sometimes parental involvement could be negative, when the parents are unrealistic about their children's needs or when the parents defend their children at all costs. In these cases, the involvement of the parents can hinder the progress of the student and cause undue controversy for everyone involved. In general, though, the more the parents are involved the better the educational experience was reported to be for the students.

### Recommendations Related to Teachers

For teachers, the first suggestion is that parents and students should be more informed regarding specific special education services. I am repeating this recommendation in this section because it is my belief that this responsibility falls on the special education teachers. The special education teachers are the most knowledgeable members of the IEP team in specific regards to disabilities, services, and educational terminology. Therefore, it should be their responsibility to adequately share information with the students and teachers.

Another recommendation regarding teachers is the need for additional training for regular education teachers about specific special education topics. The regular education teacher interviewed for this study was helpful in her comments suggesting that more training regarding legal issues, the IEP, teacher responsibilities, and implementing services would be beneficial for herself as well as other teachers in her school. In fact, she stated that teachers who have a negative attitude regarding students with disabilities in their classes might be more receptive if given more training. From my experience, I believe most special education teachers are doing the best they can to inform regular education teachers about the needs of the disabled students in their schools. What needs to happen, though, is training opportunities on a larger scale, such as

inservice training offered by administrative personnel or sending regular education teachers to special education conferences. Information that is provided by someone other than the special education teachers who work directly with the regular education teachers may also be heeded more readily. The special education teachers interviewed for this study agreed with this recommendation that more information and training for regular education teachers would be beneficial.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, the stakeholders involved in this study had similar responses regarding the pertinent topics for this research. Specifically, the students, parents, and teachers shared common perceptions regarding issues such as individual student achievement, parent support, teacher support, and student level of self-concept in the school setting. With specific reference to the first three research questions posed in Chapter 1, the perceptions of these stakeholders do not differ greatly regarding these topics. In fact, most of the participants in this study agreed that student success is contingent upon parent support, teacher support, and some special education support. Furthermore, a student's self-concept correlates to their level of success in the school setting. The more success a student experiences, the more likely it is that the student will have a positive self-concept. Regarding the fourth research question, the parents in this study chose a private school setting for their child due to a lack of progress in the public setting coupled with social issues that interfered with their child's self-concept and academic success.

The original intent of this research project was not only to examine the perceptions of these students, parents, and teachers, but also to determine if a continuum of services was a viable option for students with disabilities as opposed to fully including students with disabilities

in regular classroom settings. According to the data gathered, there is vast evidence to support a continuum of services. All of the stakeholders in this study expressed their satisfaction with the level of services they were currently receiving. Therefore, it can be inferred that the student's needs are being met in the variety of settings. Thus, all of the alternative settings seem to be required.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Only two schools, one public and one private, were included in this research project. Therefore, the results of the research are limited to these settings. In order to adequately generalize the findings of this study, additional research is needed in other public and private school settings to see if similar results are achieved. If similar results are achieved, it could be inferred that the results are accurate and could provide pertinent data to support the current findings. If similar results are not found in other locations, additional research at the schools included in this study might be warranted to research the details regarding what is working and not working for those stakeholders. This may provide valuable information for other schools as to how to best meet the needs of disabled students.

Expanding the research to include more specific topics of inquiry would also be beneficial to this study. Additional information from students, parents, and teachers regarding the topics discussed could expand upon the information that was shared and help clarify from whence these individual perceptions stem. Specifically, a study that looks more closely at the issues that were raised relating to specific special education terminology and how services are explained to both students and parents would be beneficial for educators. Additionally, a study that focuses only on the students with disabilities and the specific elements of their programs that contribute to their academic success as well as their level of self-concept could potentially offer

information to improve current educational practices for these students. Specifically, a study regarding disabled students and the importance of teaching them self-advocacy skills as they transition to post high school activities would be interesting and enlightening. Furthermore, a study into the specific details of the private school program included in this study would be interesting, as would a comparative study of other public and private school programs for children with disabilities. Ascertaining how this particular private school can improve the academic success of individual students by more than two grade levels in a short period of time could prove to be enlightening for other educational venues.

As a special education teacher, I began this research project with some preconceived notions regarding what I thought the responses from the participants would be. While many of my notions were affirmed, I was also surprised by many of the comments from students, parents and teachers. The fact that information was shared that I was not anticipating shows me that the field of special education is ever changing, as are the clients it serves. Furthermore, as a special educator, I have learned from this research that I must remain open-minded regarding delivery of services to these unique and special individuals. I have also learned that I must be cognizant of the manner in which I relate to both students and parents when explaining details regarding specific disabilities and services.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Letter to Parents

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University in the program of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. I am conducting a research project on the perceptions of high school students, parents, and teachers regarding placement and program options for students with disabilities in public and private school settings. The purpose of my study is to examine these perceptions as they relate to a variety of educational settings for children with disabilities ranging from full inclusion to self-contained classrooms.

In order to conduct my research, I am requesting your assistance. I am interested in interviewing you and your child so that I can gain insight into your personal perceptions of your child's current educational program and special education services. Attached to this letter are the questions I will ask you and your child, upon your granting me permission. I will conduct the interviews at your convenience at a location that is suitable for you. The purpose of my research is not to evaluate any particular teacher, school, or program but rather provide an opportunity for parents, students, and teachers to share their perceptions regarding special education programs and services. All audiotapes of the interviews and written materials will remain strictly confidential, and pseudonyms will be used for the names of participants and schools. In addition, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form as required by East Tennessee State University.

If you would be willing for me to contact you and discuss my study in greater detail, please sign the attached permission form and return it to me in the enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope. If I can answer any questions or provide any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 652-2707. I appreciate your consideration of this project and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Annette M. Tudor  
Doctoral Student  
East Tennessee State University

Permission to Contact Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

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

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (parent, guardian) of a student at  
\_\_\_\_\_ High School, give permission for Annette Tudor to  
contact me regarding her doctoral study for East Tennessee State University.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information:

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time of day to reach you at this number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Emerging Interview Protocol:

#### Students

1. Tell me how you feel about this school.
2. What is your favorite class or classes? Why are these your favorite?
3. What are the things that help you to be successful in school?
4. What are the things that are the most challenging (hardest) for you in school?
5. Who is your special education teacher?
6. How do you think he/she helps you with your schoolwork?
7. Do you think that you have the help you need to be successful in school?
8. What is your disability? What does that mean to you?
9. How do your parents help you to be successful in school?
10. Tell me about your friends. Do you find it easy or hard to make friends?
11. Who is the one person who has the greatest impact on your life? How have they impacted your life?
12. Do your regular teachers help you more than they help other students in their classes?
13. Do your regular teachers know about your disability and your needs? Do they talk to you about your thoughts and feelings?
14. Are you familiar with the term Individual Education Plan? What does that mean to you?
15. Tell me about the schools you have attended. Were you more or less successful in those other schools?

## APPENDIX C

### Emerging Interview Protocol:

#### Parents

1. Describe your child's disability and the way it affects their academic progress.
2. Describe the services that are provided in your child's IEP.
3. Do you believe the services that are included in your child's IEP are implemented fully and are beneficial to your child?
4. What, if anything, would you change about the program that has been established for your child?
5. Do you believe your child's special education teacher(s) are providing appropriate support and services to your child?
6. Do you believe the school your child attends utilizes all available resources and supports to assist your child?
7. Describe the strengths of the school your child attends.
8. Describe the weaknesses of the school your child attends.
9. Do you prefer that your child be educated in the regular classroom as much as possible or do you prefer special class placements?
10. Are your child's teachers, both regular and special education, readily available for assistance when needed?
11. Do you receive regular feedback regarding the progress of your child? How often?
12. What is the general attitude concerning students with disabilities at your child's school?
13. Do you have other children who do not have a diagnosed disability? Describe their educational services compared to your disabled child's services.

14. What do you believe contributes to your child's self-confidence? Does your child have a positive or negative self-confidence?
15. Have you ever considered placing your disabled child in a private school? Why?

## APPENDIX D

### Emerging Interview Protocol:

#### Teachers

***These questions will be asked of the specific special education and regular education teachers who serve the students that will be interviewed for this study. The questions will be directed to the teacher in relation to these individual students only.***

1. Describe your background including your education and job experience.
2. How many students do you serve?
3. What disability categories do you primarily serve?
4. What type of services do you provide to your students?
5. Do you feel you have all the available resources to provide appropriate services and support to your students? If not, what are the barriers?
6. What parts of their individual programs make your students most successful?
7. What parts of their programs cause them to be unsuccessful?
8. If you could change something about the services that are provided to students in this school, what would it be?
9. Do you believe the disabled students in your school have adequate options for their educational success?
10. Do the regular teachers in this school understand your student's disabilities and their individual needs?
11. Do you believe the regular teachers of your students implement their IEPs to the best of their ability?
12. What do you believe are the strengths of the school and school system you work in?
13. What, if any, barriers to success are present for the students you serve?

14. Are the parents of your student actively involved in their educational programs?

Does this involvement hinder or support their success?

15. What do you believe contributes to your student's self-confidence? Do you believe the program that is established for your student is a positive influence on their self-confidence?

APPENDIX E

Bristol Tennessee City Schools Permission Letter



615 Edgemont Avenue ♦ Bristol, TN 37620  
(423) 652-9451 ♦ Fax (423) 652-9238 ♦ www.btcs.org

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*Assistant Director, Elementary*  
John Clark, Ed.D.  
*Supervisor, Student Services*  
Rick McInturf, Ed.D.  
*Supervisor, Federal Programs*

September 29, 2003

Annette Tudor  
201 Brookwood Drive  
Bristol, TN 37620

Dear Annette:

Thank you for your interest in conducting a research study in the Bristol Tennessee City School System. I am pleased to grant you permission to conduct your study with students, parents, and teachers in our school system, pending permission from all interested parties.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

John Clark  
Supervisor of Student Services  
Bristol City Schools

APPENDIX F

Morrison School Permission Letter

FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITY  
A PRIVATE NON-PROFIT, NON-SECTARIAN CORPORATION

*Morrison School*

ESTABLISHED 1977

139 TERRACE DRIVE  
BRISTOL, VIRGINIA 24201

(703) 669-2823

September 26, 2003

Mrs. Annette Tudor  
201 Brookwood Drive  
Bristol, TN 37620

Dear Annette:

You have permission to use Morrison School students, pending approval of the parents, in your doctoral study relative to levels of special education services available to handicapped students.

Sincerely,



Sharon Morrison, Ed.D.  
Director

## APPENDIX G

### External Auditor's Letter

August 19, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to have read Annette Tudor's dissertation and was asked by Ms. Tudor to provide my comments on the dissertation as an external evaluator. Initially, may I say that I found her project enjoyable and easy to read, as well as informative and insightful.

The chosen topic is pertinent to today's educational field. Thoughts vary widely on the most appropriate placement for children with high incidence disabilities. I felt that her decision to interview the student, parent, regular education and special education teacher provided a unique compilation of perspectives on the same situation. I wondered what input she might have gotten had she also included interviews of administrators responsible for those students and the programs that serve them.

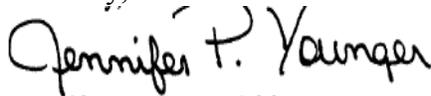
The literature review was comprehensive and well documented. All sources seemed related to the topic and were reliable. The interview process was thorough. I believe that the questions were well phrased and well designed to elicit the information being sought. I found the embedded charts helpful in keeping track of the respondents.

In reviewing the transcripts of the interviews and comparing them with the dissertation itself, I was pleased to see that Ms. Tudor was very true to the script when quoting those interviewed. At times, the syntactical difficulties of some of the parents interviewed made reading the quotes disheartening and troublesome, however, I believe that this in itself added to the dissertation as we try to understand that families bring different perspectives to the table depending on their own experiences and education.

In reading Ms. Tudor's conclusions and reactions to her study, I believe she met the purpose of her dissertation. Although there were some surprising findings in regard to how much or how little vital stakeholders know about the special education process, I believe that overall, she found what she'd expected to find. I would agree that a continuum of service is imperative to meet such a diverse set of needs within a diverse population. It seems that most any component of the continuum can produce successful results, but only if managed skillfully. In turn, there can be catastrophic results at any level of service if teachers are not aware, capable and vigilant in carrying out an appropriate individual plan for each student.

I appreciate the opportunity to have been involved in reviewing this study and wish Ms. Tudor the best of luck in completing her doctoral program.

Sincerely,



Jennifer P. Younger, Ed.S.  
Principal  
Rivermont School, Roanoke, Virginia

## VITA

Annette M. Tudor

Personal Data: Date of Birth: June 1, 1971

Place of Birth: Fort Riley, Kansas

Marital Status: Married

Education: Roanoke Catholic High School, Roanoke, Virginia

Emory and Henry College, Emory, Virginia;

Early Childhood Education, B.A., 1994

Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia;

Special Education, M.S., 1998

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D., 2004

### Professional

Experience: Special Education Teacher, Morrison's School; Bristol, Virginia;  
Spring & summer 1994

Special Education Teacher, The Achievement Center, Roanoke, Virginia;  
Summers 1995, 1996, 1997

Special Education Teacher, Fishburn Park Elementary School, Roanoke City;  
1994-1998

Special Education Teacher, Jefferson Elementary School, Kingsport City;  
1998-1999

Special Education Teacher, Tennessee High School, Bristol Tennessee Schools;  
1999-Present

### Honors and

Awards: Mini-Grants, Roanoke City Schools, Roanoke, VA

Foundation Grant, Bristol Tennessee City Schools, Bristol, TN