

Perceptions and Needs of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Parents of Children Receiving Learning Disabilities Services

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was (a) to determine if and how the reported involvement and perceptions of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents of children with learning disabilities differed with respect to the special education process in a large, culturally diverse, urban school district, and (b) to suggest ways in which the involvement of parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds might be advanced by local school personnel. Results indicated that while parents from both groups were often not adequately included in some of the most basic aspects of the special education process, Hispanic parents were at greater risk for poor treatment. This was especially true concerning knowledge of the IEP and communication with school personnel. The reluctance of principals to explore these issues was also revealed. Establishment of parent support groups in native language, collaboration between bilingual and special education staff, inclusion of bilingual parent advocates at staffings, and school-wide assessment of parent satisfaction and treatment are among the recommendations made.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly referred to as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, guarantees free and appropriate public education in least restrictive environments to children and youth with disabilities ages 3 to 21 years. A substantial number of regulations are contained in the IDEA that promote parental involvement in the special education process and that discourage the discriminatory treatment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds who are being evaluated for or who are receiving special education services. Concerning parental rights, the IDEA requires of schools that parents (a) be informed in their native language of actions taken by the school regarding special education services; (b) give their consent prior to evaluation for and initiation of special education services; (c) have the opportunity to participate in meetings

concerning diagnostic and program decisions; and (d) have the opportunity to pursue due process procedures if they disagree with current or intended actions of the school.

Concerning the nondiscriminatory treatment of students, the IDEA requires of schools that students (a) be tested using nonbiased instruments and procedures and in their native language; (b) be placed in settings with their nondisabled peers except in extreme circumstances; (c) have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that suits their unique needs, including language needs in the case of students with limited English proficiency; and (d) have access to the same general education curriculum and services afforded to their nondisabled peers.

Parental rights and nondiscriminatory treatment are two aspects of the IDEA that have helped to make the special education arena, at least in a legal sense, a more friendly environment for parents from CLD groups who complained prior to the enactment of the law in 1975 that their opinions were not solicited and that they had limited or no input concerning the placement of their children in special education programs (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hickerson, 1966; Southern Regional Council, 1974). Theoretically, we should expect to find parents from CLD groups engaged in meaningful interaction with school personnel concerning special education issues and their children in receipt of culturally and linguistically appropriate services. If these expectations are valid, then we should also expect to find that the involvement of parents from CLD groups in the special education process has improved substantially since the passage of the IDEA and that this process does not reflect discriminatory patterns when compared to the involvement of Anglo-American, monolingual English-speaking parents.

Results of recent investigations, however, indicate little evidence that parents from CLD groups have been successfully included in the special education process. The few researchers to examine parental knowledge and participation by ethnicity have found significant differences unfavorable to these parents. Sontag and Schacht (1994), in an ethnic comparison of parents involved in early intervention programs for toddlers with developmental delays, found that American Indian and Hispanic-American parents were less likely than Anglo-American parents to be knowledgeable about the process of obtaining services and to be involved in coordinating and making decisions about services for their children. Lynch and Stein (1987), in a study of ethnically diverse parents of school-age children with various disabilities, reported that Hispanic-American and African-American parents were less knowledgeable about the special education services their children were receiving and were less likely to offer suggestions at the IEP meeting than were Anglo-American parents. Hispanic-American parents were also reported as less likely to participate in the assessment process than were Anglo-American parents. Other researchers who have examined the experiences of parents from CLD groups when interacting with special needs service providers have

documented the poor connections made between service agencies and the home (Bennett, 1988; Harry, 1992; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Kalyanpur & Rao, 1991). For example, in an ethnographic study by Harry (1992) of 12 Hispanic-American parents who had children with mild disabilities, the input of parents concerning their children's special education programs was found to be greatly compromised by differences in cultural conceptualizations of disability and by numerous instances of poor communication practices, including scheduling problems and superficial attention to parental concerns. Smith and Ryan (1987), in a study examining the reactions to service providers by Asian-American parents of children with developmental disabilities in an interview format, cited parental confusion and frustration due to a lack of personnel who spoke their language, misunderstanding about how the school system functions in the United States, and limited knowledge about the causes of disability.

These findings, coupled with the concerns of special educators that children from CLD backgrounds suspected of or identified as having disabilities continue to experience misdiagnosis and poor instruction due to factors including prejudicial attitudes of school personnel, lack of appropriate prereferral strategies, inadequate models of assessment, limited numbers of bilingual special educators, and IEPs that do not properly address language development (e.g., Artilles & Zamora-Duran, 1997; Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, Yawkey, 1997; Hamayam & Damico, 1991), suggest that we have not fully utilized the IDEA to bring parents from CLD groups into the special education process and that the process remains largely closed and inhospitable to them. Rueda and Chan (1979) used the term "triple threat students" to focus on the obstacles faced by many children and youth with disabilities from CLD backgrounds even before they enter the school system, i.e., disability, limited English and/or non-Anglo, and low socio-economic status. Similarly, there are many "triple threat parents" who are forced to operate within systems that make little accommodation for individuals outside of the traditional mainstream, i.e., nondisabled, English proficient and/or Anglo, and of at least middle income. In order for schools to better meet the needs of these parents, four basic issues must be addressed: How are parents from CLD groups treated in the special education process? How does this treatment differ from the treatment received by other parents? Are there gaps between current treatment and the type of treatment mandated by the IDEA? What strategies can be put in place to maximize the opportunities afforded to parents from CLD groups by the IDEA? This study was an attempt to approach these issues in relation to an urban Hispanic-American community. Specifically, the purpose of this study was (a) to determine if and how the reported involvement and perceptions of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents of children with learning disabilities differed with respect to the special education process in a large midwestern city, and (b) to suggest ways in which the involvement of parents from CLD groups might be advanced by local school personnel.

Method

Development of the Survey

A survey was developed to elicit the responses of parents concerning four primary aspects of learning disabilities services: (a) knowledge of and involvement in the IEP process, (b) communication between the home and school, (c) cultural sensitivity of school personnel, and (d) satisfaction with the school program and suggestions for improvement. The survey consisted of 10 questions related to demographic information and 35 questions related to learning disabilities services. The content part of the survey was divided into three sections: (a) questions requiring a yes/no response, (b) questions requiring a satisfaction rating, and (c) questions requiring short answers. An additional demographic question asking if the child's special education teacher was bilingual appeared on the Spanish version of the survey. A letter of introduction to the survey was developed informing parents of the confidentiality of their responses and with instructions for returning the survey to the authors in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. The survey and letter of introduction were written in English and then translated to Spanish by two of the authors so that both English and Spanish versions of the documents were available. In order to provide accurate translations of special education terms in English to Spanish, the authors examined previously translated special education materials available in the district and drew upon their experiences as bilingual teachers in communicating with Spanish-speaking parents about disability issues.

First, a pilot study was undertaken to determine potential difficulties with the survey, such as confusing language or problems with the format, and to ascertain a likely rate of return of the survey by parents. Using the schools in which the first two authors were employed as teachers at the time of the study, 30 surveys were about equally distributed to Hispanic and non-Hispanic students with learning disabilities to take home to their parents. Of the 30 surveys distributed, only 5 were returned which accounted for an approximate 16% rate of return. The authors hypothesized that the low rate of return might have been due to the time of the year the surveys were distributed, i.e., prior to the end of the school year, or to the lack of an incentive for returning the survey. As a result, the authors decided to distribute future surveys toward the start of the school year and to offer an incentive of \$1.00 to each parent who returned the survey within two weeks of the distribution date. The authors also decided to give parents the option of requesting a copy of the survey results. In addition, the vocabulary and sentence structure of several questions were adjusted for easier comprehension. Mailing the surveys to parents instead of having them delivered to parents by their children was considered as well; however, this idea was rejected when several school administrators indicated that the release of names and addresses would not be permitted.

Distribution of the Survey

Twenty-one elementary schools located primarily in two ethnically diverse subdistricts of the citywide district were selected for possible participation in the study. These schools were chosen because they provided learning disabilities services, had a mixed population of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students, and offered Spanish bilingual and/or ESL services. Principals of the schools were contacted by phone to assess their interest in participating. If interest was shown during the phone conversation, then packets containing samples of the surveys and letters requesting the permission of the principal and the local school council to conduct the survey were hand delivered to the school by one of the authors. During these visits, the authors met with principals and other relevant staff to answer additional questions. The principals and/or staff of eight schools declined to participate, citing reasons such as, "I won't do it if I have to go through the local school council," "Parents will make a fuss in our school if they knew all that is written here," and "I have had some LD staff changes lately and this may show in the results."

The principals of the remaining 13 schools agreed to participate in the study. Schools in this final sample varied greatly by size, from 300 to 1200 students. In 10 of the schools, over 60% of the students were from low income households while in the remaining three schools percentages ranged from 29% to 47%. All schools had substantial percentages of students classified as having limited English proficiency, i.e., 25% to 56%. Hispanics accounted for 16% to 89% of the student population across schools. Ten of the schools served populations that were over 50% Hispanic. The range of Black and White non-Hispanic students were similar across schools, 0% to 46% and 1% to 52% respectively. Asian students and Native American students were less represented across the schools, from 0% to 24% and 0% to 1% respectively. With respect to demographics, these schools were similar to those in which principals did not wish to participate.

Principals of the participating schools informed the authors of the approximate number of surveys that would be needed in each language. In total, 176 Spanish forms of the survey and 148 English forms of the survey were delivered to the schools. Included in each survey package was a letter of introduction, a response card for receiving the \$1.00 incentive, a copy of the results of the study, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Once the surveys arrived, teachers in learning disabilities programs distributed the surveys to their students who were told to deliver them to their parents.

Data Analysis

Responses to dichotomous questions were analyzed using either Chi-square or the Fisher Exact Test, which is used when Chi-square is not appropriate because of small cell sizes. Responses to questions which required

ratings from 1 (low) to 5 (high) were analyzed using ANOVA. Responses to questions requiring short answers were evaluated qualitatively.

Results

Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 50 surveys were returned from the 13 schools in the sample. This total was about evenly split between Hispanic (54%, N = 27) and non-Hispanic (46%, N = 23) parents, representing an approximate rate of return of 15% and 20% respectively. The mother was the primary respondent for both groups. In general, the Hispanic group was younger than the non-Hispanic group and earned less income annually. Of the 27 Hispanic parents, slightly over half (58%) were of Mexican origin, approximately one-third (32%) were of Puerto Rican origin, and the remainder were of Cuban (5%) or Peruvian origin (5%). Nearly half of the parents were between 31-40 years old (48%), followed by parents between 20-30 years old (37%), and then by parents between 41-50 years old (15%). Approximately three-quarters (77%) of the parents reported annual incomes of \$10,000 or less while the remainder (23%) reported incomes of \$10,000 to \$20,000. Spanish was the primary language spoken in over two-thirds (70%) of the homes while the remaining one-third spoke either both Spanish and English (19%) or primarily English at home (11%). Of the 23 non-Hispanic parents, about two-thirds (65%) identified themselves as White while the remaining parents identified themselves as Black (35%). No parent indicated Asian or Native American origins. Over two-thirds of the parents were between 31-40 years old (70%) with the others divided between the age groups of 20-30 years (17%) and 41-50 years (13%). Annual incomes were divided about equally into thirds among the ranges of less than \$10,000 (38%), from \$10,000 to \$20,000 (33%) and over \$20,000 (29%). English was indicated as the only language spoken at home however, two of the respondents indicated that English was not their native language.

Characteristics of Children of Respondents

The children reported on by the parents from both groups ranged in age from 6 to 14 years and had received learning disabilities services from several months up to 6 years at the time of the survey. All of the children from non-Hispanic households spoke English at home. Approximately half (48%) of the children from Hispanic households spoke primarily Spanish at home while the remainder spoke either English and Spanish (26%) or primarily English (26%). Male and female children were about equally represented in the non-Hispanic group (55% and 45% respectively), whereas there was a greater percentage of males than females in the Hispanic group (65% and 37% respectively). This difference, however, was not found to be significant.

Knowledge and Involvement in IEP Process

Of the items that related primarily to parental knowledge of and involvement in the IEP process, significant differences were found between the responses of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents in four instances: (a) Hispanic parents had their rights concerning the IEP process explained to them in their native language significantly less often than did non-Hispanic parents, 59% and 90% respectively ($X^2 = 5.829$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$); (b) Hispanic parents were asked significantly less often by professionals if they understood their children's IEP than were non-Hispanic parents, 56% and 91% respectively, ($X^2 = 7.424$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); (c) Hispanic parents were significantly less aware of the severity rating assigned to their children's learning disability (i.e., mild, moderate, severe) than were non-Hispanic parents, 59% and 100% respectively, ($X^2 = 13.01$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$); and (d) Hispanic parents were significantly less aware of the type of delivery system (e.g., resource room, self-contained room) that was used to provide services to their children than were non-Hispanic parents, 53% and 100% respectively ($X^2 = 9.23$, $df = 1$, $p < .005$).

No significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents were found in the remaining responses. First, concerning knowledge of terminology, parents in both groups responded in simple vocabulary that learning disabilities meant primarily that their children were slower than other children. The remarks of non-Hispanic parents, however, tended to express the belief that their children could "catch up" given proper assistance (e.g., "harder for him to comprehend, needs a little more help") while the remarks of Hispanic parents tended to focus on the differences between their children and other children (e.g., "does not think as a normal child does"). Second, concerning knowledge of program issues, parents in both groups reported not knowing what an IEP was, although this was true for a greater percentage of Hispanics (44%) than for non-Hispanics (22%). A similar percentage of parents in each group reported that they did not know whether the services listed on the IEP were actually being received by the children (44% for Hispanics and 29% for non-Hispanics). Third, concerning parental rights, parents in both groups were well aware of their right to see their children's records (96% for Hispanics and 87% for non-Hispanics) although only about one-third of the groups had ever done so (37% for Hispanics and 30% for non-Hispanics). Fourth, concerning involvement during the IEP process, over half of the parents in both groups reported self-initiated involvement by asking questions or giving input (52% for Hispanics and 68% for non-Hispanics). Parents in both groups reported that a similar percentage of professionals asked them to make decisions regarding some aspect of the process (58% for Hispanics and 62% for non-Hispanics). Nearly two-thirds of the Hispanic parents (64%) and slightly less than half of the non-Hispanic parents (42%) stated a preference for school personnel, rather than themselves, making decisions about their children's education, citing reasons such as, "The school is more aware of my child's needs," and "Teachers are more qualified."

Table 1

Significant Differences in Parent Responses to Survey Items on Knowledge of IEP and Home-School Communication

Survey Items	Hispanic		Non-Hispanic		Significance Level
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Did professionals explain your rights in a clear and understandable manner (in native language)?	59%	41%	90%	10%	p < .025
Did professionals ask if you understood your child's IEP?	56%	44%	91%	9%	p < .01
Do you know the severity level the district assigned your child (i.e., mild, moderate, severe)?	59%	41%	100%	0%	p < .001
Do you know how your child receives services (e.g., pull-out resource, self-contained)?	53%	47%	100%	0%	p < .005
Were you offered advice about how to help your child at home?	70%	30%	95%	5%	p < .05
Do you communicate with your child's special education teacher on a regular basis?	50%	50%	78%	22%	p < .05

Communication Between Home and School

Of the responses to items that related to communication between home and school, the following significant differences were found between Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents: (a) Hispanic parents communicated with their children's special education teachers on a regular basis significantly less often than did non-Hispanic parents, 50% and 78% respectively ($X^2 = 4.194$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$); and (b) Hispanic parents were offered significantly less advice about how to help their children at home by school personnel than were non-Hispanic parents, 70% and 95% respectively (Fisher Exact Test, two-tailed, $p < .05$).

Responses to the remaining items showed no significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents. Parents in both groups reported that they did not receive frequent oral or written communication from the school, although the percentage was greater for non-Hispanics (52%) than for Hispanics (29%). Similarly, parents in both groups reported that they never received a copy of their children's IEP (35% for Hispanics and 19% for non-Hispanics). Parents in both groups expressed a preference for communicating with one of their children's teachers over other personnel about school issues and a preference for face-to-face meetings with school personnel over other forms of communication.

Cultural Sensitivity of School Personnel

Nearly half of the Hispanic parents (48%) indicated that their children's special education teachers did not speak Spanish, however, no significant differences were reported on other items related to cultural sensitivity. A high percentage of parents in both groups felt that their children's special education teachers were sensitive to the cultural background of the family (90% for Hispanics and 95% for non-Hispanics).

Level of Satisfaction

Of the five items in which parents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction from 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), the ANOVA indicated that Hispanics and non-Hispanics differed significantly on only one item: Non-Hispanic parents were significantly less satisfied with their level of involvement in the school than were Hispanic parents, $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.46$ and $M = 3.89$, $SD = .89$ respectively.

Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents did not differ significantly in their level of satisfaction on the following items, each of which averaged a rating of about 3 (somewhat satisfied) [$F(1,48) = 4.48$, $p < .04$]: (a) the amount of communication between themselves and classroom teachers (3.88 for Hispanics, 3.48 for non-Hispanics); (b) the amount of communication between themselves and other school personnel (3.59 for Hispanics and 2.96 for non-Hispanics); (c) the special education services their children receive (3.97 for Hispanics and 3.74 for non-Hispanics); and (d) the help that they receive from the school in order to help their children at home (2.77 for Hispanics and 3.00 for non-Hispanics). In addition, a high percentage of parents in both groups indicated that they agreed with the school personnel's decision to give their children learning disabilities services (85% for Hispanics and 95% for non-Hispanics).

Concerns and Suggestions

About half of the parents from both groups wrote comments at the end of the survey form (55% for Hispanics and 43% for non-Hispanics). Comments from Hispanic parents primarily indicated their desire for bilingual special

education teachers, better communication between home and school, the use of stricter discipline procedures, and a smaller student-teacher ratio. Comments from non-Hispanic parents primarily indicated their desire for more classroom space, better classroom materials, and a greater understanding of learning disabilities. Finally, in response to a dichotomous item, a moderately high percentage of parents from both groups indicated a need for a formal program that would help them to assist their children at home (81% for Hispanics and 64% for non-Hispanics).

Discussion

The results of this study must be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. Due to the fact that nearly 40% of the principals contacted refused to distribute the survey to parents, often citing reasons that indicated apprehension about possible outcomes, the responses received may reflect schools in which the special education process is more participatory, particularly with respect to Hispanic parents. The tactic of offering a token monetary award and survey results to respondents did not prove to be an effective strategy for increasing return of the surveys in this population. The low return rate of the surveys limits the level of confidence and generalizability of the results. A greater respondent pool, particularly across income levels and racial/ethnic status, would have been valuable. Nevertheless, the results offer some insights into the dynamics of the special education process in relation to urban parents and schools. These findings will be discussed in terms of the broad questions posed earlier in the paper.

How are parents from CLD groups treated in the special education process?

The findings of this study suggest that Hispanic parents of children with disabilities are at risk for poor treatment in the public school system even when the schools their children attend provide Spanish bilingual programs and other services for students with limited English. At staffings, many Hispanic parents did not have their rights explained to them in Spanish nor were they asked if they understood the proceedings. Relatedly, many Hispanic parents were unsure about the severity level assigned to their children's disabilities and the type of service delivery model being used. Although parents reported that assessments were conducted in native language prior to special placement, only half of the special education teachers assigned to Hispanic children spoke Spanish. While having monolingual English-speaking special education teachers serve Hispanic students may be entirely appropriate from an instructional perspective, especially in the case of English proficient students, opportunity for meaningful dialogue with parents may be seriously compromised. This is a particular concern in special education where there are often medical, behavior, and academic issues which need to be discussed on a regular basis.

These findings are similar to those reported previously in studies involving parents from CLD groups (Harry, 1992; Lynch & Stein, 1987; Smith & Ryan, 1987; Sontag & Schact, 1994) and support the notion that these parents remain isolated in the special education process largely because of language and cultural communication difficulties between themselves and service providers. As Harry (1992, 1995) noted, these differences are exacerbated by factors including the failure of school personnel to contact parents prior to arranging meeting dates and times, the often intimidating and restrictive structure of the IEP meeting, and an apparent lack of interest in the ideas of parents by many professionals. The results of this study suggest that these problems continue to be experienced by Hispanic parents even in the context of culturally and linguistically diverse school environments.

How does this treatment differ from the treatment received by other parents?

The findings of this study also suggest that many urban parents, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, are not adequately included in some of the most basic aspects of the special education process in the public school system. Small to moderate percentages of parents from Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups reported not knowing what an IEP was, not actively participating in staffings, not being asked to make decisions during the IEP process, not knowing whether their children were actually receiving the services specified by the IEP, not receiving a copy of the IEP, and not communicating frequently with school personnel. In addition, none of the parents surveyed indicated a clear understanding of the term learning disabilities. These results support the conclusion of Turnbull and Turnbull (1990) that most parents are passive rather than active participants in the special education process despite the intent of federal policy. For example, findings of previous studies have shown that parents are more likely to respond to comments than to initiate conversation during IEP meetings, are often unclear about school personnel's expectations of them, and find special education terminology confusing (Vacc et al., 1985; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). The findings of this study, while showing communication problems specific to Hispanic parents, illustrate that limited knowledge of and involvement in the special education process are shared concerns of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents.

Are there gaps between the current treatment of parents and the type of treatment mandated by the IDEA?

The intent of the IDEA was to bring parents and professionals together as equal partners in the special education process so that previous discriminatory actions taken by school personnel against children with disabilities and their families would not continue (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990; Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wheat, 1982). The IEP meeting was conceptualized as the primary format for this interaction and was designed to serve as a

communication vehicle in which joint decisions would be made about the needs of the child, services to be provided, and anticipated outcomes (Federal Register, 1981, p. 5462). When the data reported in this study are examined by these standards, the performance of schools is mixed. On a positive note, Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents appear to be relatively satisfied with the services provided by the school and feel that individual teachers are culturally sensitive to their needs, although non-Hispanics are less content with their involvement in their children's education. On a more critical note, one wonders how joint decision-making is possible when many parents report issues such as inadequate understanding of their children's disabilities, passive participation at IEP meetings, and, in the case of Hispanic parents, special education teachers who are not able to communicate directly with family members. As Yanok and Deruberis (1989) concluded in their study of parent participation, the IDEA appears to have increased communication between the home and school without necessarily enhancing the quality of educational involvement of parents. Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that urban parents, particularly urban Hispanic parents, are often provided with superficial opportunities for involvement in the special education process rather than the extensive parent-professional interaction necessary to form equal partnerships.

What strategies can be put in place to maximize the opportunities afforded to parents by the IDEA?

Building on the suggestions of other authors (e.g., Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997; Harry, 1992; Valenzuela, Torres, & Chavez, 1998; Voltz, 1994) and the findings of this study, the following strategies are proposed to enhance the quality of involvement of parents from CLD groups in general and special education:

1. Development of a school philosophy and operational guidelines that directly acknowledge the diversity of the school population and describe how all parents will be welcomed and supported as partners in the education of their children.
2. Establishment of a parent advisory board and/or inclusion of parents in existing forums so that parent members represent the diverse characteristics of the school and learning community.
3. Establishment of professional development programs for monolingual English-speaking and bilingual general education and special education administrators and teachers about the needs of parents in relation to culture, language, and disability.
4. Establishment of educational programs and support groups for parents in their native language about disability issues including the special education system, parental rights, student rights to culturally and linguistically appropriate services, participating in the IEP conference, and providing educational assistance at home.

5. Establishment of a pre-IEP information and support session conducted for individual parents in their native language by other parents who have completed informational and advocacy training.
6. Inclusion of bilingual/bicultural staff members on the assessment and IEP teams children from CLD backgrounds.
7. Inclusion of parent advocates on the assessment and IEP teams of all children.
8. Flexible scheduling of IEP meetings and reasonable allocation of time for discussion.
9. Agreement between parents and professionals on the method and schedule of communication about child's progress.
10. Commitment to recruit and develop bilingual/bicultural special education staff members.
11. Regular evaluation of parental perceptions and needs by school administrators concerning their involvement in the schools based on mandates of the IDEA.

In closing, none of strategies listed above are viable if school administrators refuse to critically assess parental involvement. A disturbing revelation of this study was the reluctance shown by some principals when faced with the prospect of parents reading and responding to the survey questions. Whether the source of this reluctance was related to noncompliance with special education regulations by school staff or concern over other issues that informed parents might raise within the school community is unknown. In any event, administrators need to have an accurate perspective of parent involvement so that positive changes can occur. With respect to bilingual parents whose children attend schools with established bilingual or ESL programs, administrators and teachers cannot assume that an appropriate language and cultural milieu extends to special education services. Just as monolingual English-speaking staff may be insensitive to the needs of the bilingual community, bilingual staff may be insensitive to the needs of children with disabilities and their families. Collaborative and inclusive efforts must be made to fulfill the goal of parents as equal partners in the schools.

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