Middle School to High School Transition of Students with Disabilities
How can formal and informal data be used to inform high school retention of students with disabilities?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade, for students with disabilities in Ohio. This report highlights the formative findings from both quantitative and qualitative data. Ohio’s trends from the 2012-2013 Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive (OLDA) were summarized, followed by the qualitative interviews at an urban high school (91.2% Economically Disadvantaged, 23.3% Students with disabilities in 2013) of students with disabilities, their parents and intervention specialists. Our findings provided some answers to a small but significant facet of the larger question: Is the relative access to a public school education related to receiving equitable treatment inside of the schools, particularly for the student population that has one or multiple disabilities? The study investigated the data transmission between schools, implementation of accommodation, and student assessment, which affect lives of students based on both statistical analysis of the statewide longitudinal data and intensive qualitative interviews with students with disabilities, their parents, and teachers.

OLDA data findings suggested that the mobility of 9th grade students with disabilities may be higher than other students, making data transfer from middle school to high school more difficult. The 9th grade students with disabilities from “Urban-Very High Poverty” school districts and “High Poverty” school districts (combined Rural, Small-Town, and Urban) were overrepresented (76%) in post-secondary career assessments. The qualitative data revealed that there was a perception of inadequate transmittal process of special education documents between schools. Also, there was a perception of insufficient professional preparation to introduce and understand special education laws for all teachers, and an insufficient level of collaboration and sharing of information to be compliant with current special education laws.

Key Words: Subgroup Performance Indicator, Students with Disabilities, Ninth Grade Transition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An OERC grant funded the research project to investigate the transition process of students with disabilities from their eighth grade to their ninth grade year. This study provided qualitative and quantitative findings on both document and information transmission and services provided from the school to the parents and students.

The focus of the project was to collect and interpret data of students with disabilities on the transition process from middle school to high school. The project used a mixed method research approach by interweaving quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative findings used the 2012-2013 Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive (OLDA) data. OLDA data suggested that the mobility of 9th grade students with disabilities may be higher than other students, making data transfer from middle school to high school more difficult. About a half of the 9th grade students with disabilities were considered to have specific learning difficulties and about 10% of students were counted by multiple school buildings. Students with disabilities who were mobile as 9th graders were listed with multiple and/or different disability conditions between schools in which they were enrolled. The majority of the 9th grade students with disabilities who also took a standard format of assessments were associated with Career Technology Center (CTC) assessments (72.7%), indicating that there were discussions about post-secondary career options while they were in the 9th grade. The 9th grade students with disabilities from “Urban-Very High Poverty” school districts and “High Poverty” school districts (combined Rural, Small-Town, and Urban) were overrepresented (76%) in post-secondary career assessment information. The schools also recorded academic achievement assessment information, but different patterns from career assessment were found.

Interviews with students with disabilities, their parents and intervention specialists were conducted at an urban high school (91.2% Economically Disadvantaged, 23.3% Students with disabilities). The investigation revealed areas where the school could vastly improve their professional practices to be compliant with special education laws in order to improve their professional services to special education students and their parents. There were three areas that needed improvement. The first area was the inefficient methods in transmitting the documents and performing a districtwide online data base search for students’ special education information. The second area was lack of professional development opportunities for all teachers, not just for intervention specialists. Teacher collaboration and co-teaching need to be emphasized and given a higher priority in order to serve the needs of all students and their parents. Lastly, educational professionals needed to inform the parents and students with current information about special education laws. Parents and students with disabilities were still using the academic matrix of mainstreaming and were not receiving the full educational rights under current special education laws.

In the first area, the qualitative data showed that the dominant perception from most of the students and their parents was one of underservice. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were not efficiently transferred from one building to the next. As a result, some students with disabilities were not served, and in one case, for up to eight months. This problem could have been reduced if there was a list of students with disabilities that was consistently transmitted to the next school along with database training to give access to digitized special education information.
In the second area, the qualitative data showed that there was a gap in the professional development opportunities for the all the teachers that exists within the purview of the central administration office responsibilities. As a result, intervention specialists were required to implement special education techniques in accordance with the special education laws, about which the general education teachers know very little. As a result, there were classroom territorial disputes where intervention specialists were seen and treated as academic aids in general education classrooms and not as academic partners. This professional obstacle could have been avoided by providing consistent professional development opportunities on both the special education laws and the theory of inclusion to all teachers by using internal or external professionals such as college or university teacher educators.

Lastly, the qualitative data showed that parents and students were not informed about the current educational laws, and thus, their rights under them were not served. The parents and students were still operating under older special education laws that limited their rights. Their academic successes were still filtered through the prism of mainstreaming. The current special education laws could have been disseminated via digital letters for parents who have access to technology such as email and mailings of pamphlets and verbal reinforcement in every parental meeting. In this way, parents and students could have been provided with opportunities to ask questions concerning their current educational rights.

Educational literature and research data support the current special education laws concerning the inclusive education model where every student can be academically successful. Further investigation on the topic of inclusion in special education is needed. A larger investigative project that includes more schools including all teachers, parents, and students will be necessary in order to build a more comprehensive picture. Investigations need to continue to find out what is needed to be compliant with the current special education laws and to serve the needs of all students and the rights they have as citizens.
I. THE PROBLEM

Does access to a free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment provide equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities? One of the primary goals of public education is “education for all students,” yet more than 20% of students with disabilities drop out from high school (Ohio Department of Education, 2011).

Public schools are required to provide inclusive education to students with disabilities according to federal laws (e.g. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004). In 2014, public schools are trying to implement inclusion as an educational practice.

The universal right to an education is a mantra upon which the United States public school system is based. The universal right to an education is a complicated construct that was not always practiced and still has yet to be achieved. The universal right to an education begs two main questions: (1) Does the universal right to an education require the construction of a public school system supported by a public tax base for its operation, and (2) Is the relative access to a public school education related to an equitable treatment inside of the school particularly for the student population that has one or multiple disabilities? The answer to these questions will require some rethinking. Public education may provide equal access but it does not provide equitable treatment to all students and we would like to investigate to find the answer to the second question through the lens of Inclusion.

A Brief Legal History of Special Education

There is no specific literature available that deal directly with student school transition between middle school and high school buildings. What was constructed below was a brief legal history of Special Education to illustrate how students with learning disabilities have been pushed to the margins and the attempts to bring them back into general education classrooms to benefit all involved.

The first accommodation for the special education student population in the United States was the founding of the American School for the Deaf in 1817 in Harford, Connecticut. In 1818, Connecticut Governor Oliver Wolcott proclaimed to the public (American School for the Deaf, 2014, p. 10):

“to aid ... in elevating the condition of a class of mankind, who have been heretofore considered as incapable of mental improvement, but who are now found to be susceptible of instruction in the various arts and sciences, and of extensive attainments in moral and religious truth.”

This proposition to care for those who were less capable of taking care of themselves was based upon a revelation that people with disabilities were teachable and their mental capabilities were expandable. It is unimaginable that in almost two centuries that the general consensus in the schooling of the students with disabilities today has not significantly changed from Governor Wolcott’s sentiment in our educational achievement. The stigma of special education is still with us today.

In the late nineteenth century, Sir Francis Galton, the father of the Eugenics Movement, a cousin to Charles Darwin, read the book, the Origin of Species, became convinced that humanity could be
improved through selective reproduction. During this part of his career he was interested in the factors that determine what he called \textit{human talent and character} and their genetic basis. He constructed his own theory of inheritance that placed primacy of nature over nurture in its explanation (Gilham, 2001). The word eugenics has its etymological roots in a Greek concept of \textit{well-born}. In practice, Eugenics has taken on the meaning of \textit{a science that deals with the improvement, as by control of human mating, of hereditary qualities of a race or breed} (Merriam-Webster, \textit{n.d.}). As a direct result from the pseudo-science of Eugenics theory, in the Buck vs. Bell decision of May 2, 1927, the United States Supreme Court upheld a Virginia statute that provided for the eugenic sterilization for people who were considered genetically inferior. Upholding Virginia’s sterilization statute provided the green light for similar laws in 30 states, under which an estimated 65,000 Americans were sterilized without their consent or that of a family member. Even when American Eugenics practice of sterilization was linked to the Nazi’s Holocaust, some states continued to sterilize residents into the 1970s (Cold Springs Harbor Laboratory, \textit{n.d}).

\section*{Legal Parameters}

In 1965, the Johnson Administration passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title VI in this act created the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (this bureau today is called the Office of Special Education Programs or OSEP). At this time the education of students with disabilities was not mandated by the state or the federal law, the creation of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped was a step in that direction. In 1973, the passage of the Rehabilitation Act Section 504 protected qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. In 1974, The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was passed and it allowed parents to have access to all personally identifiable information collected, maintained, or used by a school district regarding their child. In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted. This was also known as P.L. 94-142. In 1977, the final federal regulations of EAHCA were enacted at the start of the 1977-1978 school year and provided a set of rules in which school districts must adhere to when providing an education to students with disabilities. Today we know this law as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted and applied in public schools. The ADA adopted the Section 504 regulations as part of the ADA statute. In turn, numerous 504 Plans for individual students start to become more common place in school districts. The EAHCA was amended in 1990 and is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This amendment called for many changes to the old law. One of the biggest was the addition of transition services for students with disabilities. School Districts were now required to look at outcomes and assisting students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to postsecondary life. In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized. This amendment called for students with disabilities to be included in on state and district-wide assessments. Also, regular education teachers were required to be a member of the IEP team. In 2001, No Child Left Behind was enacted. This law called for all students, including students with disabilities, to be proficient in math and reading by the year 2014. In 2004, IDEA was again reauthorized. There are several changes from the 1997 reauthorization. The biggest changes call for more accountability at the state and local levels, as more data on outcomes is required. Another notable change involves school districts providing adequate instruction and intervention for students to help keep them out of special education.
At a recent United States Office of Special Education Programs Conference, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan focused on a major education issue hotly debated currently when he expressed a sentiment that inclusion means all students.

**Background to the Theory of Inclusion**

The debate language that came about from the PL 94-142 addressed the issue of providing educational support and services in segregated schools and classrooms versus integrated settings or general education classrooms. The result was the construct of least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE language required the states and districts to establish procedures to insure the education of all students regardless of learning disabilities in the same classrooms by providing services to meet the needs of specific disabilities.

In practice, however, and more than a decade after the passage of PL 94-142, a report by Danielson and Bellamy (1989) found that there were consistent uses of separate facilities for students with disabilities. This practice is still being used today, though more muted than in the last thirty-nine years. This practice prompted a revisit of the debate between those who believe that there should be a measure of educational separation for students with learning disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities, and those who believe that students with learning disabilities should be taught with their peers with non-disabilities.

The separation perspective takes into consideration of students with severe disabilities to need separate educational settings. It believes that it is unrealistic to expect general education personnel to learn the instructional procedures required to succeed. LRE, in this context, is presumed to be a separate and segregated setting. This argument does not believe the general education teachers are qualified to deliver the intensive academic and behavioral supports needed to provide individualized appropriate education to which students with disabilities have rights.

The counter-perspective sees the building capacity as an integrated system. That is, the level of resources in the educational building, indeed the whole district, should be used to provide acceptable educational progress, on accepted curricula, toward independent functioning for all students. In the present day, all students identified for the services under IDEA are taught by teachers informed by an education that redirects the focus away from the placements of individual students and instead toward the structural elements of a system necessary to ensure effective instruction and high quality intervention for all students, based on their disabilities, learning styles, and risk factors.

**Developing a Definition of Inclusion**

In the last decade or so, researchers have found evidence supporting inclusion (Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker, & Agran, 2003). It pointed to direct benefit to general education students when exposed to educational practices supporting students with more extensive needs (Lenz, & Kissam, 2004; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). Inclusion can improve academic and social outcomes for all students. The question then is not whether integrated systems of education should occur but how they can occur more often and more effectively for all students.
This model of inclusion spoke to less about placement of students and more about the allocation of resources and how to rearrange the personnel and services in a more effective way. It addressed the issue of service delivery system and focus on how the resources are distributed and administered based on research data and the service capability of the building. A definition for inclusion can be drawn through the model of systemic change and a concomitant alteration in the discourse. A starting point in alteration of the current system is the intellectual, discursive, engagement of all teachers and support service personnel on their purposes in the classrooms, and the material resources are distributed to all students involved.

**Practical Recommendations**

When the inclusion laws and their reauthorizations were passed, lawmakers, justifiably so, did not specify the best practices for classroom teachers to use to gain compliance to the new laws. Classroom teachers need to turn to research literature for guidance. The following guidelines are principles that should be used to promote high quality education for all students (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2002a, 2002b):

- Policies and practices that are based on the least harmful assumptions and high expectations
- Membership and full participation in general education classes for all students
- Family and school conversation and partnership
- Collaborative teaming and co-teaching
- Planning and implementing of available resources and supports
- Appropriate augmentative and enhanced alternative communication
- Community and school building friendship facilitation
- Education reform for parents, students, and teachers
- Self-determination in student development
- Student-centered planning

Other recommendations, by no means less important, are the development of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and Response to Intervention (RTI). Briefly, UDL principles provide a conceptual framework that can be used as an alternative to the fragmentation of current educational programming (Center for Applied Science Technologies, 2011). UDL is an approach to systems change and curriculum rearrangement that ensures students with a spectrum of ability accommodations through the appropriate application of the general curricula. UDL curriculum rearrangement should include these principles: multiple ways of teaching, multiple means of expression, and multiple modes of engagement. RTI is a multi-tiered approach that provides an early academic warning system. It is a school wide network that operates on evidence based intervention that allows for the illumination of possible risk of school failure due to circumstances other than, or in addition to, the students disabilities.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 along with its legal precedents was to ensure that students with disabilities received more than mere access to public schools but to secure for all children an education that yielded positive outcomes. What this meant at the district-wide level was that all students along with students disabilities make adequate yearly progress within in general education curriculum that have learning objectives that are applicable for all students. This research project investigated a small but significant facet of the larger question stated previously:
Is the relative access to a public school education correlated with an equitable treatment inside of the schools particularly for the student population that has one or multiple disabilities?

What we found in our investigation of the transition process of formerly eight grade students now ninth graders and their parents was surprising based on the district’s declaration of compliance to the IDEA law. We would recommend a more comprehensive study to broaden the scope of the investigation to all areas of concerns including general education teachers, and building and central office administrators.

**Perspectives**

Using the critical pedagogy framework, we attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the transition process what current ninth grade students with disabilities and their parents have experienced after their eighth grade year. We also gathered the data from the teachers point of view particularly teachers who teach students with disabilities in the high school area to gain a clearer picture of service and information transfer from one building and one group of professionals to another. The intension was to capture the perceptions of students and parents regarding students’ learning exceptionality, implemented accommodations at schools, and inclusion practices. Also intended is to promote discussions about how the formal and informal data can be used to inform high school retention of students with disabilities.
II. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a case study design that spans quantitative analysis of the OLDA data of 2012-2013 on students with disabilities and qualitative analysis of interviews with 9th grade students with disabilities, their parents, and their intervention specialists in an urban high school in Ohio. In the spring and summer of 2014, the information from the OLDA data base was analyzed. The initial case study intended to shape interviews based on the analysis of OLDA data, but the data delivery delay caused the qualitative interviews to take place concurrently with the OLDA data analysis, therefore, interview questions were not shaped as a follow-up inquiry of the quantitative findings. Interviews were semi-structured and guided, and conducted with students, parents, and teachers from an urban school to assess the transition process of former eight graders to their current ninth grade year.

Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive

Table 1. Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive (OLDA) 2012-2013 Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLDA Source</th>
<th>Number of Data Entry</th>
<th>Information Available in the Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Enrollment</td>
<td>163,835 (1 to 32 entries per person)</td>
<td>Student Program Enrollment Frequency Local Educational Agency Serving Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Details</td>
<td>279,445 (1 to 31 entries per person)</td>
<td>Disabilities conditions, Reporting period, Student Grade, Section 504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed Event</td>
<td>2,785,608 (1 to 19 entries per person)</td>
<td>Individual Special Education Event Related Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>352,304 (1 to 30 entries per person)</td>
<td>Ohio Achievement Assessment scores Testing Accommodations Alternative Assessments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the numbers of entries indicated in the Tables 1, data entry were made available multiple times per student, thus needed to be reorganized by collapsing multiple entries of individuals into one entry per person, and matched by identification numbers. The OLDA 2012-2013 dataset described in Table 1 was based on the initial entries made available to us, and we summarized the following in the quantitative findings section.

- Data transferred from middle school to high school for students with disabilities
- Summary of data about students with disabilities in Ohio

Interview Data Source

Interviews were conducted at an urban school which demonstrated interests in our inquiry based on our previous research report made available with a different school district concerning high school freshman dropouts and dropout prevention program, such as Credit Recovery. The district's
chief’s officer of school innovation invited us to particular investigate the urban high school in this report. The school had a full time designated freshman transition coordinator, who was a freshman transition coordinator, whose job description was to assist with the transition problems previously identified by numbers of individuals in the school, the district, and the community. Because he was also a former Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president, and well known in the community, he made home visits to maintain and increase parental involvement of the school.

Semi-structured guided Interviews were scheduled in the months of April and May 2014 at this urban high school after the freshman transition coordinator made personal contacts with all high school freshmen with disabilities enrolled in the building in the 2013-2014 school year, and their parents. Table 2 summarized the demographic characteristics of the school and the district. The district was classified in the Ohio School Typology 8 (Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population), and its operating spending per student was $11,432 in 2012-2013. Table 2 illustrated the characteristics of the high school where the interviews were conducted, the school district the school resided in, and the state of Ohio.

*Note: 11.31% of Ohio K-12 students attended Typology 8 schools from 6 districts in 2012-2013.

Table 2. Characteristics of School/District Where Interviews Were Conducted (2012-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Case Study High School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Enrollment</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>13,772</td>
<td>1,706,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>423 (91.2%)</td>
<td>12,970</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>108 (23.3%)</td>
<td>2,644 (19.2%)</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Students</td>
<td>453 (97.5%)</td>
<td>10,215 (74.2%)</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>616 (4.5%)</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>81% (2011-2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Mobility (All Students)</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Mobility (Economically Disadvantaged)</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Mobility (Students with Disabilities)</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured guided interviews were conducted among participants who consented to be interviewed. The interviews consisted of 6 questions, asking about the knowledge of legal rights concerning special education and inclusion practices (See Appendix A for interview protocols). Interview lengths ranged between 6 to 24 minutes per person for recorded portions, and 20 to 60 minutes per person for non-recorded portions. This summary reported only the recorded and transcribed portions of interviews. Table 3 summarized the interviewed participants and participation rates among all possible 9th grade students at the high school.
Table 3. Interviewed Stakeholders at the Urban High School in Ohio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
<th>Number of Persons Agreed to be Interviewed</th>
<th>Number of Persons on at the High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>9 (27%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of 9th Grade Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>9 (27%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Specialists of 9th Grade Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although we acknowledge that the case study interviews about perceptions of students with disabilities, their parents, and their intervention specialists could not be generalizable, we hope to present how informal data, as well as formal data could possibly inform the practices in schools concerning middle school to high school transition experience of students with disabilities. Based on the semi-structured guided interviews described above, we reported the following in the qualitative findings section.

- How the formal and informal data can inform us about high school transition.
- Perception on special education laws and inclusion practice by special education teachers/intervention specialists.
- Parents’ perception of academic accommodation offered to their children who have learning disabilities in the current school.
- Students with learning disabilities’ perceptions of the academic process offered to them in their current school.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness of Findings

The study findings were just as trustworthy as the OLDA dataset. Since OLDA data rely on data entry by each district for reporting, there were always potential human errors. Such errors, however, were not investigated at this point. There was no current accessible information that showed individuals who attended multiple schools during the school year stayed long enough in each school for special education related information reporting to catch up with them. There were many duplicated reporting of the same individuals or potential over reporting by the persons who were responsible of reporting to comply with the state and federal requirements.

As shown in Table 2, qualitative interview data were taken from one case study high school. The school was categorized as an urban high poverty school (91.2% economically disadvantaged, and 23.3% students with disabilities), not representative of all high schools in Ohio (47.4% economically disadvantaged, and 14.4% students with disabilities). Although 9th grade students with disabilities are over represented in urban-very high and urban-high poverty schools, again the data discussed in this report is based on the case study findings, not generalizable by any means.
III. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Following summarized the data of the 9th grade students with disabilities in Ohio in 2012-2013. Multiple entries of data were recorded in the state database system Education Management Information System (EMIS) as shown in Table 1. Combining all data entries for individual students can be challenging, especially because students with disabilities are highlight mobile during the 9th grade.

Data Transferred from Middle School to High School for Students with Disabilities

About a half of the 9th grade students with disabilities were considered to have specific learning difficulties (Figure 1). OLDA data suggests that the mobility of 9th grade students with disabilities may be higher than other students, making data transfer from middle school to high school more difficult. About 10% of students were counted by multiple school buildings. Students with disabilities who were mobile as 9th graders were listed with multiple and/or different disability conditions between schools their past and current schools.

Figure 1. Disability Conditions of 9th Grade Students in Ohio (2012-2013)

Disability Conditions of 9th Grade Students in Ohio (2012-2013)

- Multiple Disabilities (other than Deaf-Blind)
- Emotional Disturbance (SBH)
- Cognitive Disabilities
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Other

Note: N = 26,022 (Some students were counted for more than one condition)

Summary of Data about Students with Disabilities in Ohio

The majority of the 9th grade students with disabilities who took standard format of assessments were associated with Career related assessments (72.7%), which indicated that there were discussions about post-secondary career options while they were in the 9th grade. The majority of such career decision assessments were in the areas of Diesel Mechanics and Drafting (14.3% each),
followed by Entertainment Marketing (7.9%), Dental Assistant (7%), but 31.9% were in unknown assessment areas.

**Figure 2. 9th Grade Students with Disabilities in Ohio School Districts with Specific Career Assessment Information (2012-2013)**

![Graph showing the percentage of 9th grade students with disabilities in Ohio school districts with specific career assessment information (2012-2013).](image)

The 9th grade students with disabilities from "Very High Poverty" school districts (Urban only) and "High Poverty" school districts (combined Rural, Small-Town, and Urban) were overrepresented (76%) in post-secondary career assessments (Figure 2). Table 4 and Figure 3 showed the school districts with high number of post-secondary career assessment associated with the 9th grade students with disabilities. As clarified in Table 5, typology 7 and 8 are large urban school districts with very high and high poverty population.
Table 4. Districts with High Number of 9th Grade Students with Disabilities Associated with Specific Career Assessment Information (2012-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Name</th>
<th>2013 Typology</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Student Pct. in Ohio</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Student Poverty</th>
<th>Minority Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland Municipal City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43,202</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
<td>$22,343</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49,616</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>$26,759</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Western City</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19,336</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
<td>$31,838</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorain City</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7,585</td>
<td>0.46%</td>
<td>$22,509</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32,009</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
<td>$27,819</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painesville City Local</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td>$24,601</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akron City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22,603</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
<td>$24,324</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Districts listed in Table 4 house 10.82% of Ohio students. Figure 3 showed 55% of career related assessment information associated with 9th grade students were conducted by these 7 districts.

Figure 3. 9th Grade Students with Disabilities in Ohio School Districts with Specific Career Assessment Information (2012-2013)

9th grade students with disabilities shown in Figures 2 and 3, and Table 4 were the students of the 7 districts of 55 school districts in typology 7 and 8 category listed below, consisting of 25.07% in Ohio in 2012-2013.
Table 5. Ohio Schools Typology and Number of Students (2012-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology Code</th>
<th>Major Grouping</th>
<th>Full Descriptor</th>
<th>Districts Within Typology</th>
<th>Students Within Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Rural - High Student Poverty &amp; Small Student Population</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>170,000 (10.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Rural - Average Student Poverty &amp; Very Small Student Population</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>110,000 (6.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small Town</td>
<td>Small Town - Low Student Poverty &amp; Small Student Population</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>185,000 (11.31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small Town</td>
<td>Small Town - High Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population Size</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200,000 (12.23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban - Low Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population Size</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>320,000 (19.57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty &amp; Large Student Population</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>240,000 (14.68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban - High Student Poverty &amp; Average Student Population</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>225,000 (13.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban - Very High Student Poverty &amp; Very Large Student Population</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>185,000 (11.31%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Ohio, during the 2012-2013 academic year, students with disabilities were required to take the standard academic achievement tests (STR). Out of all the 9th graders, 91% of the students with disabilities had taken the standard academic achievement tests (STR) and 9% of the students with disabilities had taken the alternative tests (ATL) in their 8th grade year (Figure 4). There were no academic achievement tests administered to 9th graders. Figure 5 illustrated the accommodations associated with the standard (STR) tests that the 9th grade students with disabilities took during their 8th grade year, and likely to be the types of testing accommodations students with disabilities will have for the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) in their 10th grade year.
Figure 4. Required Academic Achievement Test Types of 9th Grade Students with Disabilities

Note: The assessment took place during the students’ 8th grade year in Ohio (2012-2013). N=19,413

Figure 5. Types of Testing Accommodations Recorded for 9th Grade Students with Disabilities in Ohio (2012-2013)

Note: N=19,413

School districts with high number of 9th grade students associated with academic achievement assessment information such as enrolled program, types of assessments, and testing.
accommodations were summarized in Table 6. Generally, school districts administered career assessments to the 9th graders also have information available about academic achievement assessment information. It appeared to indicate the differences between school districts about post-secondary guidance, as shown in different percentages of information available about academic achievement assessments and career assessments.

Table 6. Districts with High Number of 9th Grade Students with Disabilities Associated with Academic Achievement Assessment Information (2012-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Name</th>
<th>2013 Typology</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Pct. Students with Disabilities Required to take Academic Achievement Assessment in Ohio</th>
<th>Pct. Student in Ohio</th>
<th>Pct. Students with Disabilities Associated with Career Assessment in Ohio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland Municipal City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43,202</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49,616</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>11.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32,009</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOT</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>13,721</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22,277</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>1.36%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Western City</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19,336</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akron City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22,603</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ECOT (Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow) is a charter school. In 2012-2013, about 100,000 K-12 students attended charter schools. This study’s scope is limited to traditional public schools in Ohio. The data for charter schools were limited in its availability. The scope of this study was to capture trends about the 9th grade students with disabilities in Ohio, not a comparison of school districts.
IV. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Information dissemination about Special Education laws and practices is limited in the school building. The Theory of Inclusion that can be used to support the practice of co-teaching is absent from the discussion.

Special Education Teachers Perspectives

Following summarized the views on inclusion practice by Special Education teachers/Intervention Specialists. Note again that this inquiry took case study approach, focused on reaching to obtain voices of people other than general education teachers.

Disconnect between Central Office and School Building

School District has only informed Intervention Specialists (1Ss) about Special Education laws pertaining to inclusion via professional development meetings. About of the half of the parents participated in the interviews were foster parents or adaptive parents for more than 5 years, and others were biotical parents. Both groups appeared to know and concerned of their children equally. The intervention specialists’ responded to the following 6 interview questions.

1. What is special education?
2. How many students with learning exceptionalities are in your classroom(s)?
3. How do you accommodate students with learning exceptionalities in your classroom(s)?
4. What does inclusion mean to you?
5. How has your school building/district prepared you for inclusion?
6. Do you know the current law concerning inclusion?

While co-teaching is emphasized, the Theory of Inclusion that gives meaning to it is not acknowledged.

- “So therefore, no they have not set this up properly and therefore the kids fail in the long run because therefore, you don’t have the ridge between special ed. and general ed. and they are falling in the gap and the district has not looked at that clearly, they have not given any kind of in-services on that, they have not brought in any speakers, they have not done anything to prepare anyone for what the inclusion model should look like. It's not there.”
- “Well, the school district offers co-teaching PDs but when you actually get into the building because the second half of the co-teaching group which is the gen. ed. teacher has not necessarily gone through the training so it doesn't look like that particular model. I don't know that it's something they've prepared us for, like as far as special ed.”
- “It has not. It has not prepared us for inclusion. The inclusion model they have here right now is that the special ed. teachers are aids, we are aids inside the classroom and the general education teachers do not have an understanding of how valuable we are inside of a classroom. Here you have ‘these are my kids, and these are your kids.’ If a teacher is not there that day, I have seen teachers put kids out of the classroom and tell them to go find their special ed. teacher.”
• “The general education and special education teachers are uninformed about special education law pertaining to inclusion. The school building is practicing mainstreaming. The Intervention Specialists (ISs) are not welcomed in general education classrooms.”
• “...So we’re getting paid for a service that is not being done because no one wants to work together. And until people change their mindsets on an inclusion model, who should be in an inclusion model, who should be in a resource room, we’re always gonna have this division between us...And then you also have kids, I mean, teachers who don’t notice what’s on a child’s IEP, so therefore, you get into that because they, some teachers’ feel like ‘oh, I don’t need to give them these modifications because yesterday he was okay on a lesson and now today he’s lost’...so they don’t give them the accommodations they need and the kids fail in the long run.”
• “I don’t think they have prepared...That’s because I’ve been thrown into it. I’ve never had to do it before. I think building the relationship with the teacher you’re working with is extremely important because our teaching styles are so different...No, I don’t [knowledge of special education law pertaining to inclusion]. How about that. No, it’s very simple.”
• “I do not, I usually, as far as the word for word, verbatim, I have no clue what it says or what the laws are.”
• “No I don’t (knowledge of the special education law pertaining to inclusion), I was about to look that up today. I have not gotten it from the district. Actually, I was going to look it up this evening, after everything that happened today I need to look it up so I know what it is, so I know what I’m trying to tell my people and trying to tell our administrators and everybody’s on the same page.”

Parents’ Perspectives

The parents’ perception of academic accommodation offered to their children who have learning disabilities in the current school building is based upon old information. Generally, parents are not informed or are uninformed of the current special education laws, co-teaching practices, and the Theory of Inclusion. Parents of students with disabilities responded to six interview questions (See Appendix A). Parent responses to the interview questions related to inclusion suggest parents do not understand the definition of inclusion nor how it is practiced in their child’s classroom setting. Below are examples of the parent interview responses.

• “The information from the eighth grade didn’t make it to them.”
• “No because it seems like that’s the last time I hear from them after we’ve had the meeting. They may write it down but then there’s nothing actually being done as far as extra things.”
• “I mean, and I was in there a lot.....I just felt that they didn’t wanna work with me to figure something else out because we even, he goes to counseling every xx day.”
• “She knew he was on an IEP about two months after he was in school because before that they didn’t know and I guess when they had, I guess it wasn’t the second month, it was probably the first month, whenever they had the first teacher parent conference, that’s when I let them know that he was on an IEP.”
• “I guess the teacher just I don’t know if she was impatient, I don’t know what the problem was, but they eventually had to remove him from that class because she was not trying to work with him. So they removed him from her class and put him in another class and he’s doing very well now in that class. So I guess they moved him to a class where the teacher dealt with special needs children before or she had a program set up for slower children.”
• “Inclusion... I don’t even know what the definition is.”
• “Oh just being included, I guess it would be that you could be included in something or something like I guess surrounded by something, something like that.”
• “Inclusion, I don’t even know what that word means.”
• “To sum up, the end result.”
• “Inclusion, as far as what I’m included in, as far as his IEP?”
• “Inclusion...I'm thinking, as far as, being separated?"

Students’ Perspective

The students with learning disabilities’ perceptions of the academic process offered to them in their current school building ranged widely. Some students believed that inclusion is working for them in mainstreamed classroom. Other students expressed that their IEPs were not fully implemented in general education classes despite of intervention specialists’ effort. Below are examples of the student interview responses.

• “I don’t recall them telling me, if they did I don’t recall them telling me.”
• “They really, they really didn’t do nothing till the last minute. I guess it was something about my IEP they did. I guess they didn’t have my IEP or whatever and after my mom told them about it they got it straight but when they got the IEP they still, to me, they still wasn’t giving me my accommodations...It’s like they didn’t care...No she just like, she just helped me with the IEP. I was actually failing and then that’s when they bumped my grades back up because they didn’t know I had an IEP. Then my grades when back down because they still wasn’t going by it.”
• “Like my attention span is really short and sometimes I could just go into a daze and not even know it. I just find myself, cause, like, off. And I think a kid should pay attention but the teacher should be very active and catch the kids’ attention every time they teach. You can’t just stand up there and write down something and yeah we will, that’s how a teacher should do it but...”
• “Like I had a meeting with a lady but she got it right for me, it just still, they still wasn't really going by it. It's like they didn't care.”
• At the beginning they didn’t know I was on an IEP but then they found out...it’s just like, they thought I needed one and I kept on telling them I was on one last year. But since, I moved schools they probably lost paperwork for something. Then my case worker, she had called the school.”
• Special Education students are taught in separate special education classrooms and are mainstreamed into general education classes with few exceptions.
• “It's a smaller class so you don't have to worry about too many people...Like ten, eight. It depends on what class it is, it could still be fifteen.
• “I think I’ll use science for example, I started off in one science class and I didn’t really pretty much get it so then they sent me to another science class and it...The difference was like, the first class I had, she taught it one time and she just expected you to go home and study and you come back, she felt like, she was still teaching but she felt that you should know it by studying on your own like, the class they made sure, like the teacher made sure you knew what...”
V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The universal right to an education in the United States guarantees access to a free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment. This right, however, does not ensure equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities. The history of public education is replete with changes in the law to define and protect the rights of students with disabilities. Special education laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), are being implemented in the public school from which this project has collected its data. The data offers a piece of information that this public school is experiencing a difficult time to become compliant with special education laws in 2014.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data at hand, this investigative project concludes that this public school needs more resources and expertise to help it gain compliance with the current special education laws. A great deal more research is needed, however, to formulate a clearer picture. Some concerns that this project encountered were: that several intervention specialists did not want to participate in the project; that not many if any general education teachers were informed or volunteered to participate in the project, and is the data collected from this public school generalizable to all urban schools or only schools with similar demographics?

Special Education to accommodate the needs of individual students using the most cost effective way, combined with ineffective educational method that divides professionals in a school building, is a recipe for noncompliance. The data verified that students who attended this school are economically disadvantaged and have a higher rate of being diagnosed to have a learning disability. The data also pointed out the administrative processes such as special education document transmission, professional preparation, and parental and student information were spotty at best.

The issues that the data of this project revealed are not unsolvable. They need to be acknowledged by all those who are involved including the building and administrative professionals, parents and students, and teacher education experts. The data from this project exposed the shortcomings of the academic operations of one school, and is representative only of this school, and should not be used to place blame. The data from this project should raise a red flag for us that student rights and student academic success for all are falling short of the special education laws’ intention. Caring professionals and more investment in our children particularly the equitable treatment for children with disabilities in our schools will create a better society.
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The case study investigation revealed areas where the school could vastly improve their professional practices to be compliant with special education laws in order to improve their professional services to special education students and their parents. The perceptions of the owners of education, especially students, is valuable regardless of generalizability. Being aware of the study's limitations, we still recommend that informal data, that are, perceptions may be used to inform education, as much as formal data, particularly under the requirements of IDEA. Although limited in the scope, sampling, and methodology, the study suggested three areas that the school needed improvement.

The first area was the inefficient methods in transmitting the documents and performing a districtwide online data base search for students’ special education information. The second area was lack of professional development opportunities for all teachers, not just for intervention specialists. We recommend to emphasize and to give a higher priority in teacher collaboration and co-teaching, to serve the needs of all students with disabilities and their parents. Lastly, educational professionals needed to better inform the parents and students with current information about special education laws. Parents and students with disabilities were still using the academic matrix of mainstreaming and were not receiving the full educational rights under current special education laws.

In the first area, the qualitative data showed that the dominant perception from most of the students and their parents was one of underservice. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were not efficiently transferred from one school to the next. As a result, some students with disabilities were not served, and in one case, for up to eight months. This problem could have been reduced if there was a list of students with disabilities that was consistently transmitted to the next school along with database training to give access to digitized special education information. In some cases, such system was already in place, but no monitoring was done whether the system was used. We recommend the training among intervention specialists and administrators for efficient use of the data transfer system.

In the second area, the qualitative data showed that there was a gap in the professional development opportunities for the all the teachers that exists within the purview of the central administration office responsibilities. As a result, intervention specialists were required to implement special education techniques in accordance with the special education laws, about which the general education teachers know very little. As a result, there were classroom territorial disputes where intervention specialists were seen and treated as academic aids in general education classrooms and not as academic partners. This professional obstacle could have been avoided by providing consistent professional development opportunities on both the special education laws and the theory of inclusion to all teachers by using internal or external professionals such as college or university teacher educators.

Lastly, the qualitative data showed that parents and students were not informed about the current educational laws, and thus, their rights under them were not served. The parents and students were still operating under older special education laws that limited their rights. Their academic successes were still filtered through the prism of mainstreaming. The current special education laws could have been disseminated via digital letters for parents who have access to technology such as email and mailings of pamphlets and verbal reinforcement in every parental meeting. In
this way, parents and students could have been provided with opportunities to ask questions concerning their current educational rights.

Educational literature and research data support the current special education laws concerning the inclusive education model where every student can be academically successful. Further investigation on the topic of inclusion in special education is needed. A larger investigative project that includes more schools including all teachers, parents, and students will be necessary in order to build a more comprehensive picture. Investigations need to continue to find out what is needed to be compliant with the current special education laws and to serve the needs of all students and the rights they have as citizens.
REFERENCES


Jorgensen, C., McSheehan, M., & Sonnenmeier, R., (2002a). *Best practices that promote learning of general education curriculum content for students with the most significant disabilities*. Durham, NH: Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire.


http://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/sec504.htm
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocols

Student group
1. What is special education?
2. How long have you known about your learning exceptionality?
3. What did your previous school do for you for your learning? How did they find ways to do it?
4. What did your current school do for you for your learning? How did they find ways to do it?
5. What does inclusion mean to you?
6. Is inclusion being applied for you?

Parent group
1. What is special education?
2. How long has your child been diagnosed with a learning exceptionality?
3. How did the previous school accommodate your child's learning exceptionality?
4. How is the current school accommodating your child’s learning exceptionality?
5. What does inclusion mean to you?
6. Do you know the current law concerning inclusion?

Teacher group
1. What is special education?
2. How many students with learning exceptionalities are in your classroom(s)?
3. How do you accommodate students with learning exceptionalities in your classroom(s)?
4. What does inclusion mean to you?
5. How has your school building/district prepared you for inclusion?
6. Do you know the current law concerning inclusion?