

Winchester Public Schools Special Education Review

*Respectfully submitted by the
CREC Special Education Program Review Team*

Margaret MacDonald, Ph.D.

Lisa Fiano

Bob Greene

Jody Lefkowitz

Nicole Natale

*“In order to transform schools successfully,
educators need to navigate the difficult space between letting go
of old patterns and grabbing on to new ones.”*

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	5
Methodology and Data Gathered.....	5
Key Findings	
Resource Allocation.....	9
Processes	18
Educational Benefit	25
Communication.....	39
Recommendations and Action Plan.....	46
Appendix.....	58

WINCHESTER SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of the Special Education Review is to assist the Winchester Board of Education by providing summary information and recommendations on processes, resource allocation, communication and educational benefit provided to students with disabilities. The review team used a mixed method approach to gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data from state and local documents, IEP benefit reviews, in-depth student reviews, parent surveys, classroom observations, and staff and parent focus interviews from August to November, 2014.

The final report, entitled *Winchester Special Education Review*, is organized into four independent, but mutually supportive analyses, each containing an evaluation question posed by the Winchester Board of Education, results/findings, and recommendations. This format allows for each inquiry to be discussed independently, or when taken together, readers can look at the district special education as a whole. A comprehensive action plan with goals, activities, person(s) responsible and date for completion is provided. To the district's credit, work has begun on some of the recommendations, and we have provided a column in the action plan that describes work to date. Specific outcomes for success are provided in three month intervals to assist the Board and administrators in determining whether activities have resulted in an improved special education system.

The first analysis examined special education **allocation of resources**. A review was conducted of the organization of special education and pupil personnel services, staff assignments, and Winchester special education costs. Winchester's percent of budget spent on special education averaged 3.7% higher than the DRG G average from 2011 to 2013, while the special education per pupil cost during that time period averaged \$2,500/student less than the DRG average. Expenditures in the categories of transportation and tuition were greater than the DRG average. Sixty eight percent of the students, placed in out-of-district placements are high school students. Some out-of-district tuition costs could be avoided if programs were provided within the district. Winchester identifies 7% more special education students than the DRG or state which impacts special education expenditures. While the district appears to have sufficient special education staff to meet student needs they are not used effectively in four schools. Special education staff assignments and caseloads were not well planned and certified and non-certified staff were not used effectively. Staff turnover and difficulty filling "hard to find" special education vacancies along with uneven caseloads and contribute to ineffective use of resources. Instructional materials, equipment and assistive technology were limited and when available, they were not always used effectively. There was little evidence of quality professional development provided to teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators on issues related to special education. The areas of Human Resources and Curriculum and Instruction do not have sufficient administrative support and time. The district has not billed for Medicaid reimbursement for special education students in the past, but has begun the process this year. This effort should bring over \$100,000 of annual revenue.

The second analysis reviewed the **effectiveness and efficiency of special education processes** such as: Planning and Placement Team, identification of students, out-of-district placement, strategic planning, budget, staffing allocation and Scientific Research-Based Interventions. There was little to no evidence of formal consistent processes for the functions described above, resulting in inefficiencies, ineffective services, frustrated parents and staff, and inconsistencies in amount and delivery of quality services. There were incidences where some students received more services than they needed and other times when students did not receive enough services. An inaccurate electronic IEP system has added to the difficulty of getting accurate reports and IEPs. The district purchased a new system which should be in use by November, but this will require additional central office technology support. Along with poorly defined processes, and inaccurate electronic IEP system, there is, additionally, human resource challenge. Four out of the five district administrators are new to the system and there has been a part time Interim Director of Pupil Services since July, 2014.

The third analysis considers **impact of the learning environment on the educational benefit** of students with disabilities. Evidence from IEP reviews, in-depth student reviews, observations, parent and staff interviews, parent surveys, and performance data indicate that overall, the district is not consistently providing educational benefit to the students with disabilities. Well intentioned staff are not provided the materials, training and support needed to maximize the impact on learning. Concerns include poorly developed IEPs, frequent staff changes, use of non-certified special education teachers as special education substitutes, poorly defined and constructed service delivery model that does not provide a full continuum of services, especially at the high school, lack of administrative oversight and leadership, lack of appropriate staff training, and insufficient instructional materials. In addition, supports for inclusion and the use of specially designed instruction, modifications and accommodations were not in evidence. The transition program for high school students is limited and evidence suggests that it does not meet student transition needs. The WISE program is located in a school with no access to nondisabled peers, limiting meaningful inclusion.

The final analysis examines the effectiveness of **communication with parents, staff and the community**. Collaboration time for staff to work together is minimal. The transition program does not maximize the community businesses and organizations to provide transition services. Of significant concern is the deteriorating relationship between Winchester and The Gilbert School. The lack of strong Winchester leadership along with unilateral actions conducted by Gilbert administrators to try to gain public support, have built mistrust and caused staff and parent frustration. We recommend that the Winchester school continue to operate the special education program at Gilbert using the CREC strategic plan. It is the responsibility of both the district and Gilbert School to work together to make the program successful. Gilbert must provide a welcoming environment where all special education students feel valued and respected and where general education interventions and instruction support the learning of all students. Winchester must ensure that they provide strong leadership and hire, train, and supervise quality special education staff that follow established processes and provide best practices in instruction and assessment. The success of Winchester's middle and high school special education students depends upon both organizations contributing their part and working together.

Recommendations for Three Year Strategic Plan

This report provides specific recommendations that can be used to support a three year strategic plan focusing on the goals described below. The successful accomplishment of these goals will require strong leadership with a sense of urgency. The district should use an outside special education consultant to facilitate meetings and monitor progress. We have provided specific outcomes that should be monitored with progress reported to the Board every three months. We strongly encourage the district to first develop and implement the special education processes; the other goals will not be successful if processes are not in place and if there is a lack of specific oversight and accountability of outcomes. We have included a column in the strategic plan called "status" to indicate the areas where the district has already begun work. See the recommendation section for the action plan and for the three month indicators of success.

Goal 1: Improve overall functioning of special education through implementation and monitoring of processes.

Goal 2: Maximize instructional impact through improved IEP development, specially designed instruction, professional development, effective utilization of resources and purchasing of materials and equipment.

Goal 3: Provide a full continuum of special education services in each school that maximizes least restrictive environment.

Goal 4: Increase revenues and maximize special education resources.

Goal 5: Improve communication and collaboration of staff, parents and the community

INTRODUCTION

In August, 2014, the Winchester Board of Education awarded CREC the contract to provide a comprehensive special education review to look at all areas of the special education program as defined by four evaluation questions. This review was conducted by five Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) consultants from August to November, 2014.

Evaluation Questions

The Winchester Board of Education posed the following four questions for this review:

1. Are resources utilized effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of the special education population?
2. Are the processes used by special education and related services effective, efficient and adhered to with fidelity?
3. To what extent are special education students receiving educational benefit from the programs and continuum of services provided by the Winchester Public Schools, including The Gilbert School?
4. To what extent is the communication with stakeholders both within and outside the system effective in meeting the needs of students requiring special education?

Methodology

A variety of data were collected and analyzed in order to answer the evaluation questions (See Table 1).

Documents and Reports

- Aggregate and disaggregate trend data at the state, DRG, and local level regarding special education
- District budget, staffing, in-district and out-of-district placement information
- Reports from the district and state on state indicators from the State Performance Plan (SPP)
- Student achievement data
- Staff caseloads and staff and student schedules
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Parent Survey

Special education surveys were sent in English and Spanish via email and if no email address was available, by mail with self-addressed and stamped envelopes to 232 parents of current special education students. Thirty six surveys were returned for a return rate of 16%. Five percent of the surveys were from parents of students in preschool, 37% elementary, 26% in middle school, and 32% in high school. Parent responses regarding their child's primary disability were as follows: 39% learning disabled, 16% autism, 5% ADD/ADHD, 8%, speech and language impaired, 3%, developmental delay, 3%, deaf-blindness and 26% other (more than one disability listed). Eighty one percent of the students were in public school placements, 3% out of state placements, 3% private/parochial placements, 3% residential school and 5% out-of-district special education placements. The survey and demographics are in Appendix E.

Student IEP Review

A representative sample of 24 student IEPs from the three district schools and The Gilbert School were selected and reviewed utilizing established protocol designed to assess educational benefit and compliance to state and federal laws. See Appendix A for protocol and demographics.

In-depth Student Review

Four special education students whose IEPs were reviewed were selected for in-depth reviews. These students were observed in classrooms, their work reviewed, programs and services were verified and their parent(s) and staff interviewed.

Observation of Classrooms

A total of 23 classroom observations were conducted in three district schools and at The Gilbert School to assess the learning environment for inclusion and instructional practices, school/classroom climate, and implementation of the IEP. Observations in a variety of classroom settings included co-taught classes, general and special education classes, and specialized programs.

Individual and Group Focus Interviews

Input from the following 96 stakeholders was obtained through individual and focus group interviews conducted August through October 2014. Interview participants include:

- 12 parents of students receiving special education who were selected for in-depth review and who volunteered to attend focus interview sessions.
- 82 building and central office staff, including administrators, special education and general education teachers, and related services staff.
- 2 staff from a non-profit organization.

Background Information

Numerous staffing and programmatic changes have occurred in Winchester, over the past few years. The district hired a new Superintendent who began in July 2014. This year, the Director of Pupil Services was on leave from July through August and then resigned September 14, 2014. The district worked to find a full time Interim Director of Pupil Services and not finding any candidates, hired a part time Interim Director and a part time special education consultant. Both staff were retired Directors of Pupil Services. In October, a four day a week Interim Director was hired while the district continued to post and look for a full time permanent Director of Pupil Services. In addition, to administrative changes at Central Office, the district's building principals are all new to Winchester this year, with the exception of one principal who is in her second year at Winchester. Finding substitute and permanent special education staff was also problematic this year. It is important to note that experienced special education administrators, teachers and speech and language pathologists are a shortage area within the state and filling vacant interim and permanent positions in these areas is a statewide problem.

Another important piece of background information is the relationship with the Gilbert School, a quasi-public school in Winchester. For many years, Winchester Board of Education has sent all Winchester high school students to the Gilbert School and paid the Gilbert Foundation for tuition. In 2010 the Board decided to send the 7th and 8th grade students as well. The Gilbert School also tuitions in a few students from a neighboring community and international students. The arrangements for Winchester is 7-12th grade special education students is more complicated. In the past, Gilbert School provided the special education programs and services and billed Winchester for those services. The Winchester Board of Education found that the costs Gilbert School billed were too high and in 2010 decided to provide the Gilbert special education program and services through the Winchester Office of Special Education. Currently, special education and related services staff such as special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and school psychologists are hired and evaluated by the Winchester Board of Education. The programs and services provided are determined by the Board of Education. Gilbert School has some decision regarding whether the services are located at the school. For example, the

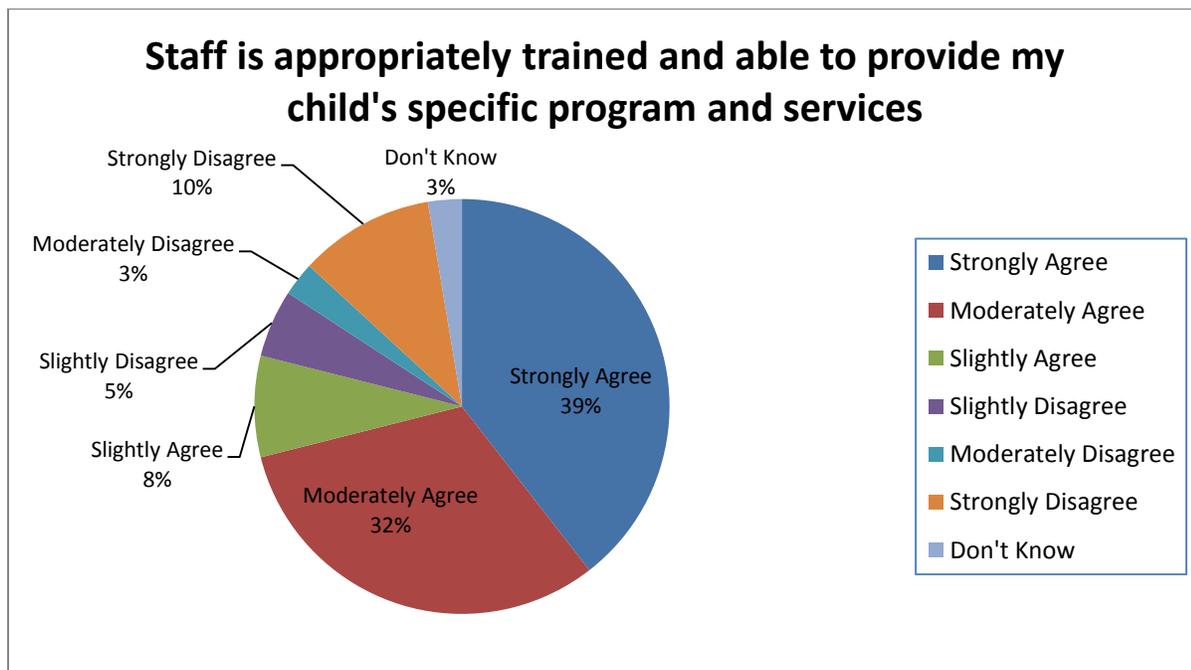
WISE program, a program for high school students with emotional disturbance is located in Pearson School, the district's 5th and 6th grade school. The Gilbert School general education staff and administrators attend PPTs, and as such have some decision making authority regarding student programs and services. In September and October 2014 the relationship between Gilbert School administrators and the Winchester Board of Education and administrators around special education issues deteriorated. Gilbert administrators contacted the media and conducted other unilateral activities that appear to have been meant to enlist public support. These actions have interfered with the ability of both parties to come together to solve problems and have deepened the sense of mistrust. Since both Gilbert School and Winchester need each other in order to provide quality programs and services to special education students, this is an alarming development and one that frustrates parents and staff.

The IEP electronic system currently in use does not accurately and efficiently provide the needed student information, The district has purchased a new IEP electronic system and plans to begin using it in November; the intended outcome of this change is that IEPs generated through the new system will be accurate and provided on time.

This year, the district requested a state audit around grant funding and use of criteria. The audit is still in process, so the CREC report cannot reflect the findings. The district should incorporate any findings from the audit into the strategic plan.

It was difficult to determine based on records what professional development was provided in the past for special education staff, but staff in focus interviews indicate that there was limited professional development for certified staff and no professional development offered to paraprofessionals. Staff indicate that there is no time for collaboration with other teachers or paraprofessionals. We also found that staff did not always have the most current information on how to complete an IEP, provide specially designed instruction and participate in inclusive best practices, such as co-teaching. We found little evidence of professional development about special education issues provided to administrators in the four schools. Parent input was mixed with some parents in directing in the focus interviews that staff required more training and other parents feeling satisfied that staff are well trained.

79% of the parents who responded to the survey question “Staff is appropriately trained and able to provide my child’s specific program and services” were in the “agree” category and 21% were in the “disagree” category.



Summary Findings and Recommendations on Resource Allocation

The first analysis examined special education **allocation of resources**. A review was conducted of the organization of special education and pupil personnel services, staff assignments, and Winchester special education costs.

Winchester’s percent of budget spent on special education averaged 3.7% higher than the DRG G average from 2011 to 2013, while the special education per pupil cost during that time period averaged \$2,500/student less than the DRG average. Expenditures in the categories of transportation and tuition were greater than the DRG average. Sixty eight percent of the students, placed in out-of-district placements are high school students. Some out-of-district tuition costs

could be avoided if programs were provided within the district. Winchester identifies 7% more special education students than the DRG or state which impacts special education expenditures. While the district appears to have sufficient special education staff to meet student needs they are not used effectively in four schools. Special education staff assignments and caseloads were not well planned and certified and non-certified staff were not used effectively. Staff turnover and difficulty filling “hard to find” special education vacancies along with uneven caseloads and contribute to ineffective use of resources. Instructional materials, equipment and assistive technology were limited and when available, they were not always used effectively. There was little evidence of quality professional development provided to teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators on issues related to special education. The areas of Human Resources and Curriculum and Instruction do not have sufficient administrative support and time. The district has not billed for Medicaid reimbursement for special education students in the past, but has begun the process this year. This effort should bring over \$100,000 of annual revenue.

Recommendations

1. Define an explicit staffing strategy and rationale, including relative allocation of certified and non-certified personnel.
2. Define an explicit overall strategy to budget, manage and provide accurate reports on special education spending given characteristics of the Winchester district.
3. Investigate the possibility of reducing special education transportation costs. If the percentage of total special education spending allocated to transportation could be reduced to the DRG G average, about \$100k/year could be saved for reallocation.
4. Modify the Winchester financial system or otherwise develop procedures to simplify allocation of special education costs across grade levels, and thereby facilitate future analysis of differences and trends in costs per student category (i.e. in-district and out-of-district students).
5. Provide comprehensive and ongoing professional development to staff.
 - a. Professional development for paraprofessionals on topics such as: Roles and Responsibilities, How to Create Independent Learners, Inclusion, Instructional and Behavioral Strategies, Communication Skills and Legal and Ethical Issues.
 - b. Comprehensive and ongoing professional development to certified special education staff and all administrators on topics such as: Writing IEPs for Educational Benefit, Providing Specially Designed Instruction, Monitoring Student Progress, Assistive Technology, Inclusion and Scheduling, and Co-Teaching.
 - c. Special education professional development to central office and building administrators around legal issues, facilitation of PPT meetings, specially designed instruction, Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction and processes for staff allocation, development of service delivery model, identification, and paraprofessional utilization.
 - d. Professional development to general education staff on Universal Design for Learning/ Differentiated Instruction and SRBI, identification, and service delivery processes
6. Conduct an inventory of instructional materials and equipment available at each school and begin purchasing and

training staff on their use.

7. Investigate the effectiveness of using outside consultants to provide speech and language services. If the district continues to use them, the pathologists will need to be trained on the proper identification process.
8. The district should begin to develop greater capacity to bring students placed in out-of-district placements back into the district. With six students currently placed in 18-21 year old programs, it would be worthwhile to develop a program in town. In addition to saving money, the program would allow students to be educated in the least restrictive environment, a requirement of federal law, IDEA. A plan and cost analysis of out-of-district placements compared to the development of in-district programs should be conducted.
9. Because 66% of the students placed out-of-district are high school age, the district should have as a goal to bring students back and to reduce the number of students sent out-of-district in the future. Additional in-district high school services would reduce the need to place students out-of-district while reducing out-of-district expenses.
10. The district has begun the process for reimbursement by Medicaid related expenses. These funds should be used for instructional supplies and materials first. This will provide an incentive to staff to input their service information into the Medicaid software and help to bring much needed instructional materials and equipment to the classrooms.
11. Hire staff that can perform Human Resources duties. This would include recruiting “hard to find” special education staff.
12. Increase Curriculum and Instruction administrative time to develop and implement an SRBI model that provides for quality interventions and assessments.
13. Increase technology support to ensure the electronic IEP system is working to maintain assistive technology equipment.
14. Develop a process for the consideration of assistive technology, including a process for acquiring AT services and supports including training of staff.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESSES

Question 2 Organizational Structure and Processes	Ed Benefit & In-depth Student Review	Classroom Observations	District and State Data	Focus Interviews
Are the processes used by special education and related services effective, efficient and adhered to with fidelity?	X		X	X

FINDINGS

Data from district information 2014 town audit report, interviews with staff and parents, IEP reviews and in-depth student reviews found that special education processes are informal, inconsistently applied and generally inefficient and ineffective. The following processes were reviewed: Special Education Identification, IEP compliance, PPT meetings and implementation of IEPs, Out-of-district Placement, determination of Need for Paraprofessional, Budget, Staff Hiring and Assignment, Service Delivery, Strategic Plan, and Special Education Roles and Responsibilities.

Finding 1: Special Education Identification

The percent of students identified as special education in Winchester in 2012-13 was 19.7, 7% higher than the DRG average and 8% higher than the state average. A comparison by school in Table 7 indicates that in 2012-13 the three district schools and Gilbert School all have a higher identification rate that the state average.

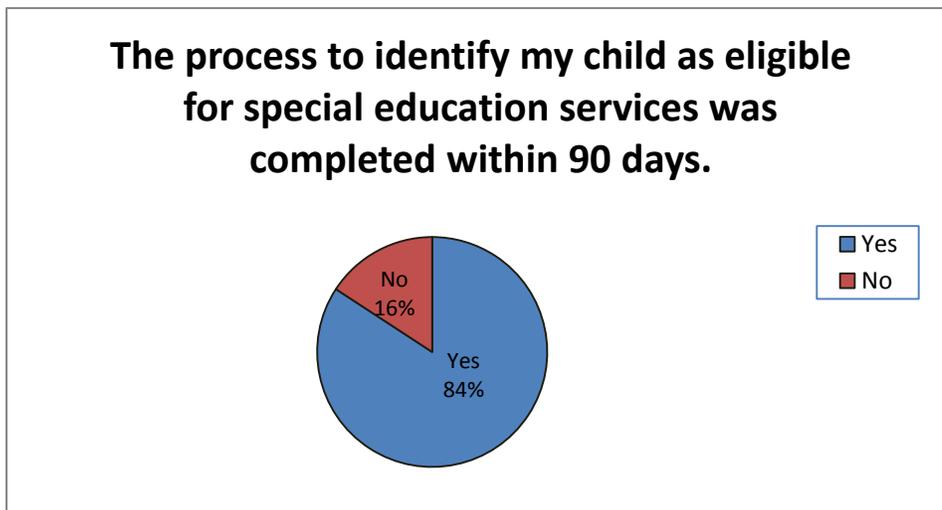
Table 7: 2012-13 Percent Special Education Identification Rate

District/School	% Identified	DRG	State
Winchester District	19.7	12.8	11.9 (for all school levels)
Batcheller	18.5		11.2 (for elementary schools)
Hinsdale	18.4		10.9 (for elementary schools)
Pearson	20.6		12.4 (for middle schools)
Gilbert	15.4	12.7 (for high schools)	11.3 (for high schools)

We saw little evidence of a consistent process across the district schools and Gilbert School to address student issues prior to referral to special education. Typically, when a district does not have effective child study and Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) processes, they tend to over identify students as special education. Districts are required to provide Scientific Research Based Interventions prior to identifying students as Specific Learning Disabled. The SRBI process is a general education process and for the three district schools it is the responsibility of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Principal. At Gilbert School the responsibility for SRBI lies with the Gilbert administrators. The SRBI process is not only important in identifying students with learning disabilities; it also provides general education interventions to a variety of students who exhibit academic and behavior problems.

Hindsdale School is in its second year of instituting the SRBI model. There is little evidence of a SRBI comprehensive system at Batcheller, Pearson, and Gilbert. Some staff and parents in focus interviews indicate a frustration with the lack of follow through in procedures and processes for special education identification and SRBI.

84% of the parents who responded to the survey question “The process to identify my child as eligible for special education services was completed within 90 days” answered yes and 16% answered no. One parent indicated that they were *satisfied with all the procedures being completed in 90 days*, while another parent indicated that *initially (2009-10) when trying to get my child identified as a special education student it was very difficult. I had to get legal services involved to advocate for my child before the district agreed to give him services.*



Parents indicate that initial evaluations for identification are very slow, to be initiated and not always completed on time. The district does not have an identification team for students with autism spectrum disorder and the only formal identification process appears to be at the preschool level. Speech evaluations are using a “2 standard deviation” model that is no longer standard practice, because SRBI is not fully developed, the district’s identification of students with learning disabilities is not in alignment with the state L.D. requirements.

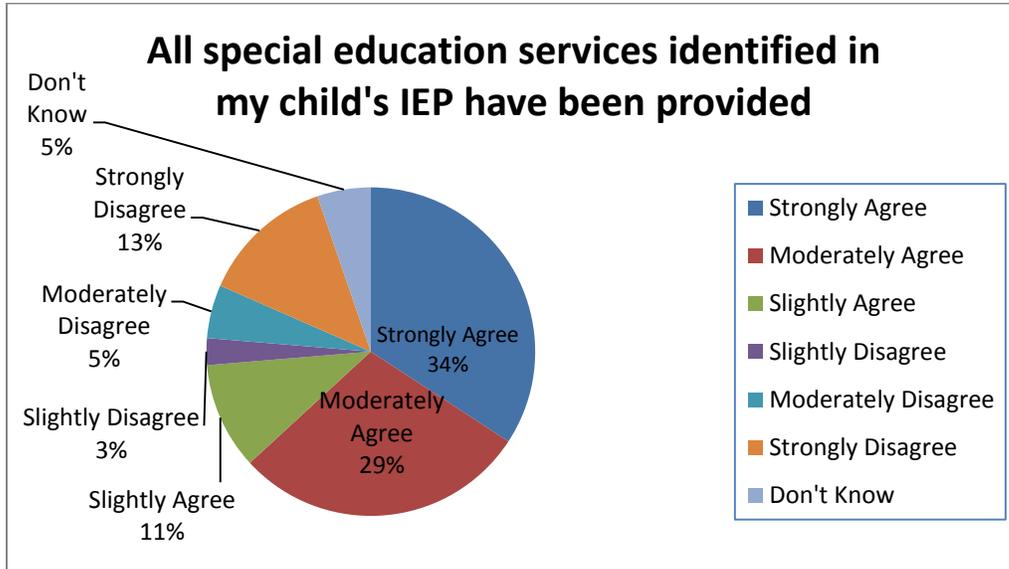
Finding 2: IEP Compliance

Significant problems were found with incomplete and/or inaccurate information on the IEP. The special education hours were documented on the IEPs incorrectly and there was no evidence that the IEPs were reviewed by administration for accuracy and compliance. Parents report inaccuracy in IEPs such as the parent not listed as present at the PPT and the discussion section left blank when there was discussion. In addition, staff indicate that the electronic IEP system used is not accurate and left out important information. Staff and parents reported problems with getting IEPs in a timely fashion and the accuracy of the IEPs. Some parents indicated that they did not receive a copy of their child's IEP after the PPT, while others indicated that the IEP they received was inaccurate. One parent's comments on the survey exemplified other survey comments and focus interview comments *Reports were issued and there were several areas that had "S" in it when the item had not been introduced. It took 6 months for these to be corrected and accurate copies to be put in her record. Her IEP had several errors in it and it misrepresented the content of the meeting.*

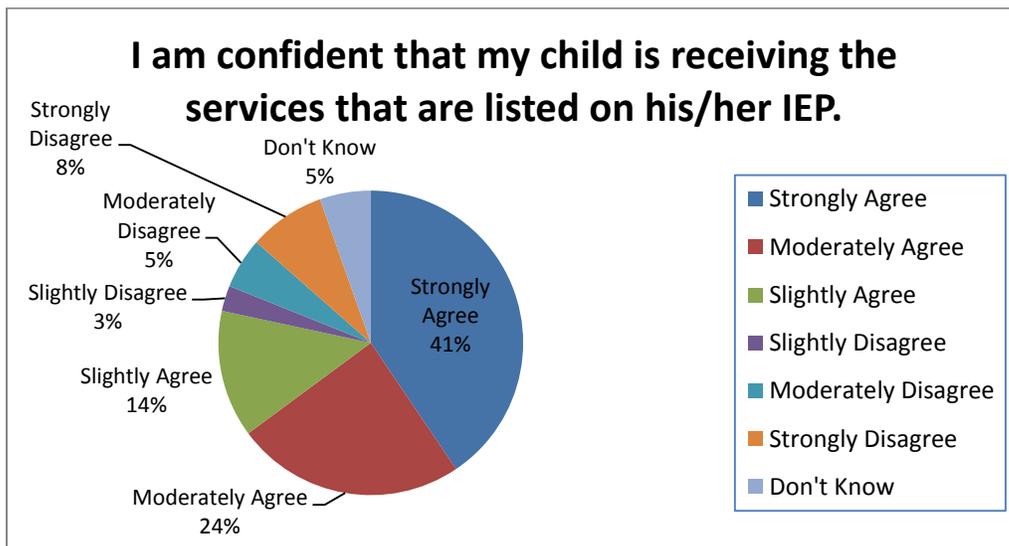
Finding 3: Planning and Placement Team Meetings (PPT) and Implementation of IEPs.

The electronic system used to generate IEPs has numerous problems and most staff admit that they do not have confidence in the accuracy of the IEPs or reports. Some staff indicate that they have stopped using the system. The district purchased a new system and the administrators were trained in its use in October, 2014. Next, the staff will be trained and implementation should begin in November. In the meantime, it is difficult to get accurate information on number of students, their disabilities, and other relevant information from the current system. There was evidence that services and programs were not implemented in accordance with the IEP and that the PPT itself was not attended by all required staff, such as a special education representative.

Seventy four percent of the parents who responded to the survey question "All special education services identified in my child's IEP have been provided" were in the "agree" category and 26% in the "disagree" category, with 13% strongly disagreeing and 34% strongly agreeing. One parent who disagreed that their child was receiving IEP services indicated, *She is supposed to be getting special technology training on which Apps on her iPad can help her in the classroom. It did not happen last year and I am still waiting for this year.* Another parent indicated *I have never had a problem with my child's special education.*



Seventy nine percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “I am confident that my child is receiving the services that are listed on his/her IEP” were in the “agree” category and 21% in the “disagree” category. A parent indicated, *I have been very pleased with the support my son has received during his elementary school years. He is now in middle school and is somewhat independent.* Another parent indicated *Last year at the middle school they were without a school psychologist for such a period of time that my child was not receiving social skills as implemented in her IEP.*



Finding 4: Out-of-district Placement

We saw no evidence of a process to determine when and why a student would be placed in an out-of-district placement. A review of the students placed out-of-district found that 66% of the students were high school age. The number of students placed out-of-district increased considerably once they become high school age. Staff indicate that the students who are placed in out-of-district placements are not registered as Gilbert students. Typically, even if a student is placed into out-of-district, they still remain registered at their home school.

Finding 5: Determination of Need for Paraprofessional

We saw no evidence of a consistent process used to determine when a student required a paraprofessional. We observed that paraprofessionals are used differently across all four schools. We also observed that generally, paraprofessionals were not utilized effectively in any of the four schools. The information on how paraprofessionals are used is further described in the Educational Benefit section of this report.

Finding 6: Budget

The budget process for special education does not appear to be driven by projected needs, with the exception of the out-of-district costs. The dramatic changes in line items, such as purchased services and instructional materials from year to year are not easily interpreted. Some changes are due to inaccurate coding. For example, occupational therapy staff were reported as purchased services when this \$60,000 amount should have been in the staffing line. The lack of a formal budget process that is developed and supervised by the business manager has resulted in inaccuracies. Overall, budget development and monitoring does not appear to be based on a spending formula and does not include staff input.

Finding 7: Staff Hiring and Assignment

There was no evidence of a process for hiring of special education and related services staff and there is no one assigned in Central Office as a Human Resource specialist. Since many special education positions are shortage areas in the state, it is difficult to recruit, hire and retain quality people. We saw no evidence of a process that would provide the district with “hard to find” special education staff. There is no evidence of a staffing allocation process, resulting in staff schedules and caseloads that are uneven within schools and across the district. Some teachers have triple the caseload of others, when student needs do not indicate this disparity. Interestingly, at the parent focus group session, parents indicated that there was only one special education teacher for the high school, when in fact there are six special education teachers assigned to Gilbert School. How the teachers are assigned at the high school level is ineffective and poorly communicated. There are no lists of special education staff, assignments, and caseloads. The electronic system to track special education students is inaccurate. Gilbert’s staff indicated that they are often reassigned with little notice. The Interim Director of Pupil Services is working to reassign staff by grade level, thus

evening out the caseloads. There is one district speech and language pathologist that serves 52 students across all district schools, while SLPs contracted from an outside agency do not have a similar caseload.

Finding 8: Service Delivery Model

The service delivery model varies from school to school and there was no evidence of a district process for determining the way services are delivered. The service delivery that we observed was inefficient due to uneven caseloads and staff and student scheduling and did not provide for maximum instructional time for students. Without a process, the way students receive services and what they receive is consistent across the schools. One parent's comments from the survey indicate that, *Looking at how special education is structured, how the schedule is structured for students in need, and how the learning space and environment is structured are key elements to improving the system at all levels k through 12.*

Finding 9: Strategic Plan

There was no evidence that the district has developed a strategic plan for special education. For that matter, no evidence was found that there was a strategic plan for the schools or for curriculum and instruction.

Finding 10: Special Education Roles and Responsibilities

No evidence of delineation of special education responsibilities of the building administrators and the central office administrator. This is especially needed when working with Gilbert administrators on special education issues, since this is not a district owned school. There appears to be much frustration about who is responsible for what, resulting in things that need to get done for students, not getting done.

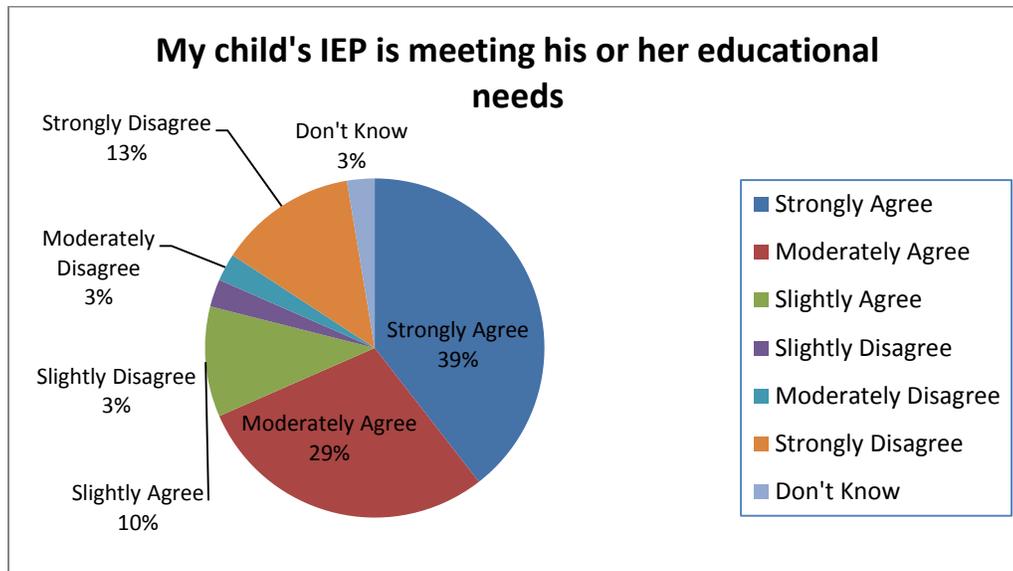
Summary Findings and Recommendations on Special Education Processes

The second analysis reviewed the **effectiveness and efficiency of special education processes** such as: Planning and Placement Team, identification of students, out-of-district placement, strategic planning, budget, staffing allocation and Scientific Research-Based Interventions. There was little to no evidence of formal consistent processes for the functions described above, resulting in inefficiencies, ineffective services, frustrated parents and staff, and inconsistencies in amount and delivery of quality services. There were incidences where some students received more services than they needed and other times when students did not receive enough services. An inaccurate electronic IEP system has added to the difficulty of getting accurate reports and IEPs. The district purchased a new system which should be in use by November, but this will require additional central office technology support. Along with poorly defined processes, and inaccurate electronic IEP system, there is, additionally, human resource challenge. Four out of the five district administrators are new to the system and there has been a part time Interim Director of Pupil Services since July, 2014.

Process Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive Procedures Manual for Winchester’s Special Education function, including systems and processes for disability identification (SRBI/RTI), case load duties and service scheduling, in-district and out-of-district placement and transportation, Medicaid reimbursement, and budgeting. Train administrators and special education staff from all four schools on processes. Monitor accurate use of processes.
2. Director of Pupil Services to develop a Special Education Strategic Plan using the one provided in this report as a guide. Director will provide updates to the Board on plan progress every three months.
3. Director of Pupil Services convene a small group of community members (businesses, organizations), parents, and staff to assist in the implementation of the strategic plan
4. Director of Curriculum and Instruction develop and implement a Curriculum and Instruction Plan to include the processes of implementation of SRBI and Universal Design for Learning.
5. HR and special education staff develop a plan to procure hard to find special education staff and to retain special education staff.
6. Given the confusion and frustration between Gilbert and Winchester administration jointly develop and implement a clear delineation of special education roles and responsibilities of each party.
7. Since the district tends to place very few elementary and middle school students into out-of-district placements, the process for placing high school students needs to be reviewed, revised and monitored. This will go hand in hand with the development of a full continuum of services at Gilbert School.

Seventy eight percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “My child’s IEP is meeting his or her educational needs” were in the “agree” category and 19% in the “disagree” category and 3% did not know.



- Four students, representing various disability categories and grade levels were selected for an in-depth review that included IEP review, observations of the student in class, verification of program and services aligned with IEP, review of student’s work and schedule, and interview with staff, parents, and student (as appropriate). A protocol was used to determine if the student received educational benefit from their programs (Appendix D). The team saw little evidence that the students reviewed were receiving sufficient educational benefit from their programs and services. Lack of a full continuum of services, uneven caseloads, inadequate instructional materials, limited specially designed instruction and ineffective and inefficient use of special education staff were reasons for lack of education benefit.
- Instruction was analyzed through classroom observations. A total of 23 classroom observations were conducted in three district schools and at Gilbert School to assess the learning environment for inclusion and instructional practices, school/classroom climate, and implementation of the IEP. Observations of a variety of classroom settings included co-taught classes, general and special education classes, and specialized programs. Trends noted in all four schools include:
 - Lack of specialized instruction.
 - Paraprofessionals provided assistance to students on tasks that could be managed more efficiently and effectively through better differentiation and implementation of appropriate instructional accommodations. For example, paraprofessionals were observed copying notes for students or taking dictation for written work which would then be re-copied by the student. Paraprofessionals were observed taking notes for students using pencil and paper, even though all students in the building are given iPads. These notes

could have been shared with students and special education teachers electronically prior to class so that students could add to or annotate the notes using their devices. Paraprofessionals could also have taken the notes electronically to share more easily with students and staff.

- Underutilized paraprofessionals. For example, a paraprofessional's only task during the observation was "waking up" the smart board when the computer went to sleep.
- Special education students received a lot of support from paraprofessionals, rather than the general education teacher.
- Special education teacher caseload distribution was uneven and appeared to be determined by disability.
- Students were generally involved in pencil and paper tasks.
- No evidence of age appropriate, evidence based, multi-sensory and/or multi-component reading interventions other than Read Naturally.
- Special education teachers in the general education classes tended to perform duties that a paraprofessional would do, while the general education teacher taught the class.
- Little evidence of differentiated instruction and universal design for learning in the classrooms.
- Students were taken out of the classroom when content was deemed too challenging instead of adapting the content.

The WISE program

- The WISE program has outdated computers and teachers did not have the high school curriculum and materials.
- The WISE program for high school students was housed at the upper elementary school, providing students no time with nondisabled peers.
- Staffing of the WISE program was inadequate for safety of staff and students
- Student population in the WISE program varies making it difficult for staff to provide what is needed for all students

Gilbert School

- Observations of Gilbert School provided little evidence of a full continuum of services. Evidence of true co-taught classes, services that allow for direct instruction to meet individualized needs outside the general education classroom and individualization of materials, in the general education classrooms was limited. Classes were generally arranged in rows and students did not collaborate, and although the iPads were used to access textbooks, there was no evidence of assistive technology to access text for students who had print disabilities.

Batcheller School

- Assistive technology was lacking. There are some low-tech visual supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) but those supports did not appear to be meeting their needs. Special education students were often off task, and there was very little support for students on the autism spectrum. The school is not using SCERTS or any other research based approach for students with ASD. A Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) is available on a limited basis, but staff indicate that they would like more assistance.

COMMUNICATION

Effective and efficient communication and collaboration are important indicators of a successful special education program. These two areas can have a significant impact on the quality of instruction. We reviewed how staff members interact with each other, with parents, and with the community. Data from the following sources were collected and analyzed.

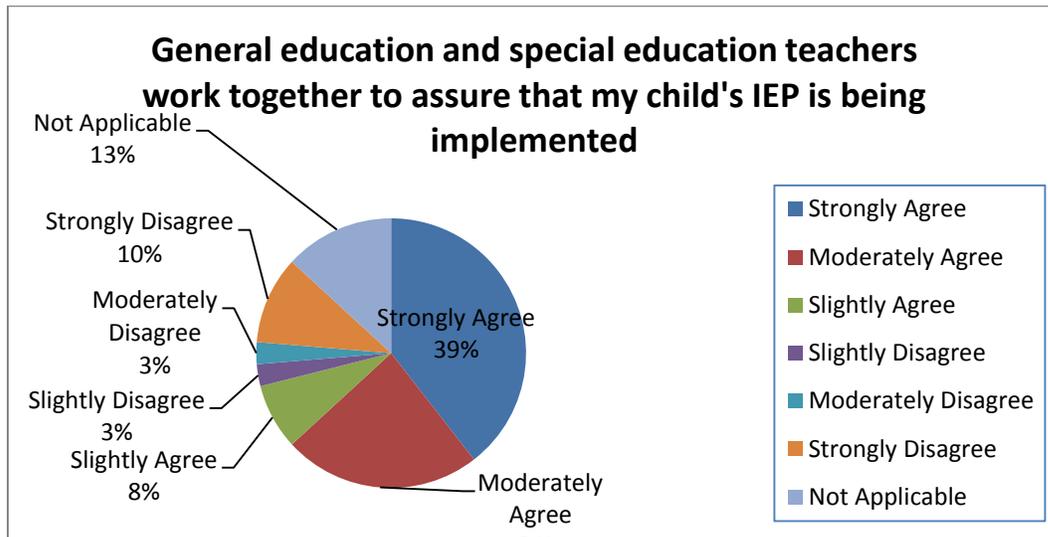
Question 4 Communication and Collaboration	IEP and In-depth Review	Classroom Observations	District and State Data	Focus Interviews
To what extent is the communication with stakeholders both within and outside the system effective in meeting the needs of students requiring special education?	X	X		X

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Special and General Education Staff

Observations of classrooms and focus group interviews revealed that the general and special education staff have limited opportunities to meet together to discuss curriculum instruction and individual student performance. Staff indicate that there is no formal allotted time for collaboration meetings and communication. Use of co-teaching is also limited. Staff indicate a desire to work more closely together, but time constraints are a challenge. In the in-depth review for a student at Pearson, we observed good collaboration and communication between staff. Overall, staff receive limited time to collaborate with specialists in the field such as clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and experts in Autism Spectrum Disorder. As the district moves to provide more services to students in-district, they will need to have these consultation services provided to staff.

Seventy one percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “General and special education teachers work together to ensure that my child’s IEP is implemented” were in the “agree” category and 16% in the “disagree” category and 13% indicated not applicable.



Finding 2: Central Office and Building Staff

Building staff report frustration in contacting the Central Office special education administrator. They have requested instructional materials and professional development but received no response. Communication between the office of special education and business office has been insufficient and no formal processes or communication system exists. The location of the special education office is in a separate building from other central office staff.

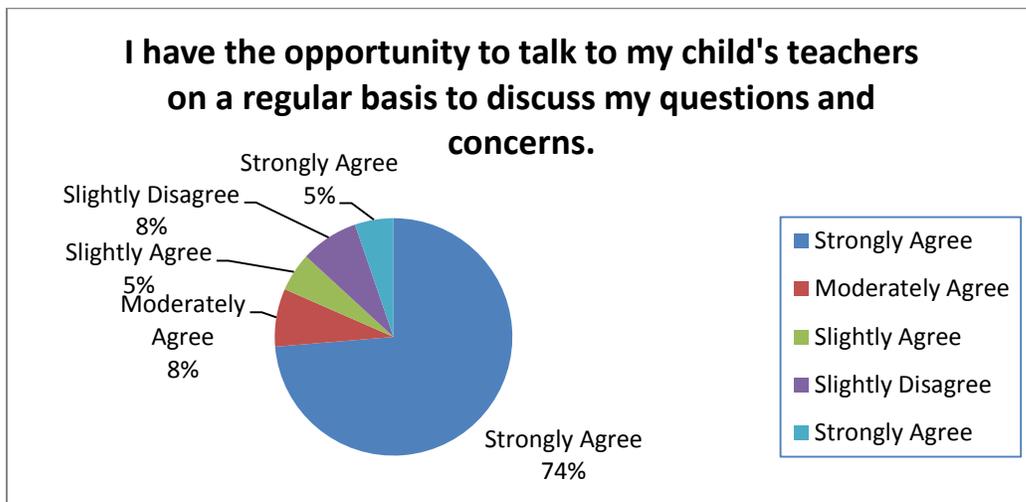
Finding 3: Gilbert School

Staff indicate that PPT meetings are cancelled and rescheduled without notifying building staff or parents. Gilbert staff indicate that the lines of authority are unclear. Over the three month course of this review, we witnessed the relationship between Gilbert School administrators and Winchester administrators deteriorate. Contributing to this is the lack of processes and clear lines of authority and the unilateral actions of Gilbert administrators to gain public support. Parents and staff are frustrated with the lack of cooperation and have indicated that they would just like them entities to work together.

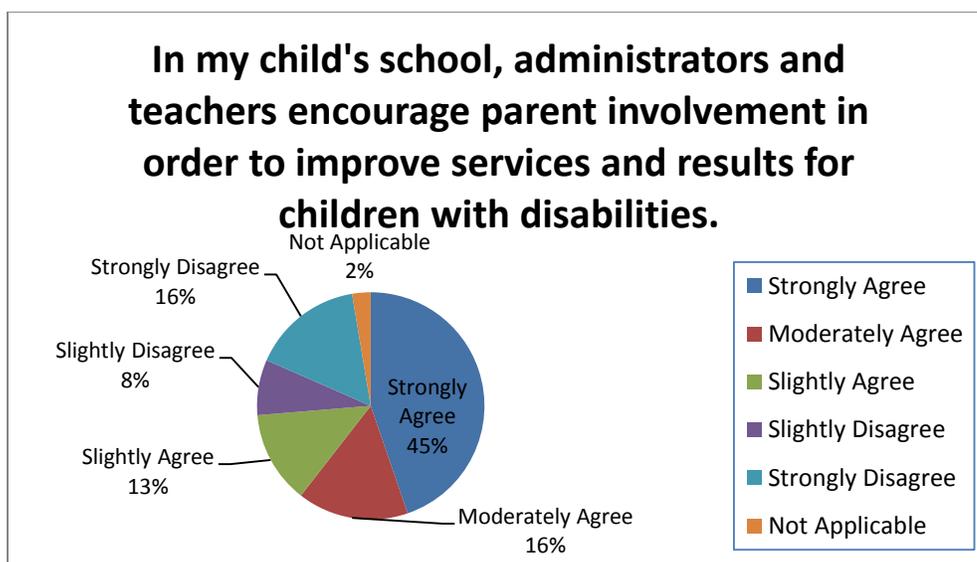
Finding 4: Parents

Some parents indicated in focus interviews that they would like to be notified by staff ahead of time about academic and behavioral expectations the schools have from year to year, not after the child has failed. Parent survey results show that some parents are pleased with the communication and other parents are very dissatisfied. Those that are unsatisfied describe 1) difficulty in reaching the Director of Pupil Services 2) feeling that Gilbert School does not want their child in the school and 3) multiple times when important information was not communicated effectively. Parents who indicated satisfaction with the communication describe frequent calls home, and good collaboration with staff.

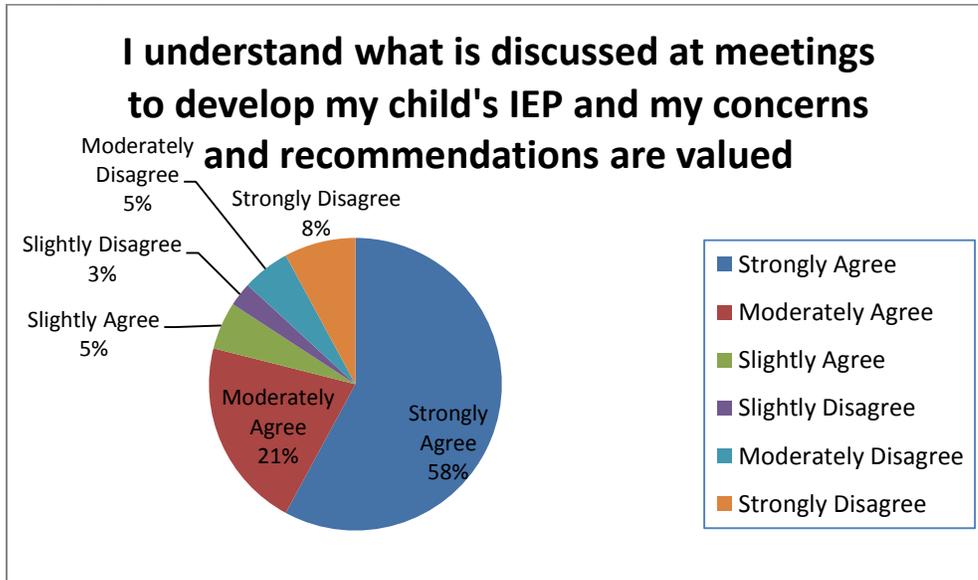
Eighty seven percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “I have the opportunity to talk to my child’s teachers on a regular basis to discuss my questions and concerns” were in the “agree” category and 13% in the “disagree” category.



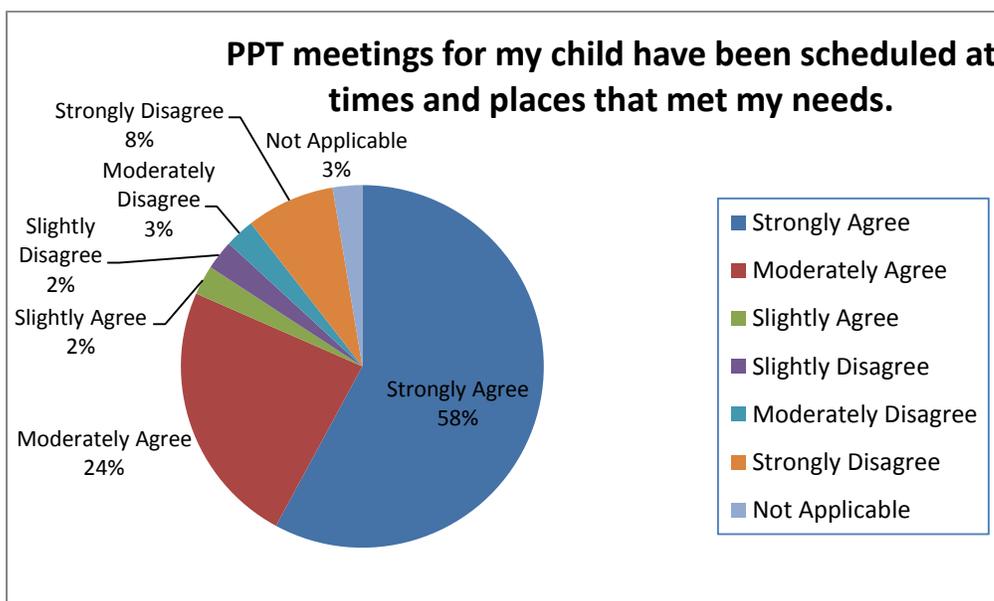
Seventy four percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “In my child’s school, administrators and teachers encourage parent involvement in order to improve services and results for children with disabilities” were in the “agree” category 24% in the “disagree” category and 2% not applicable.



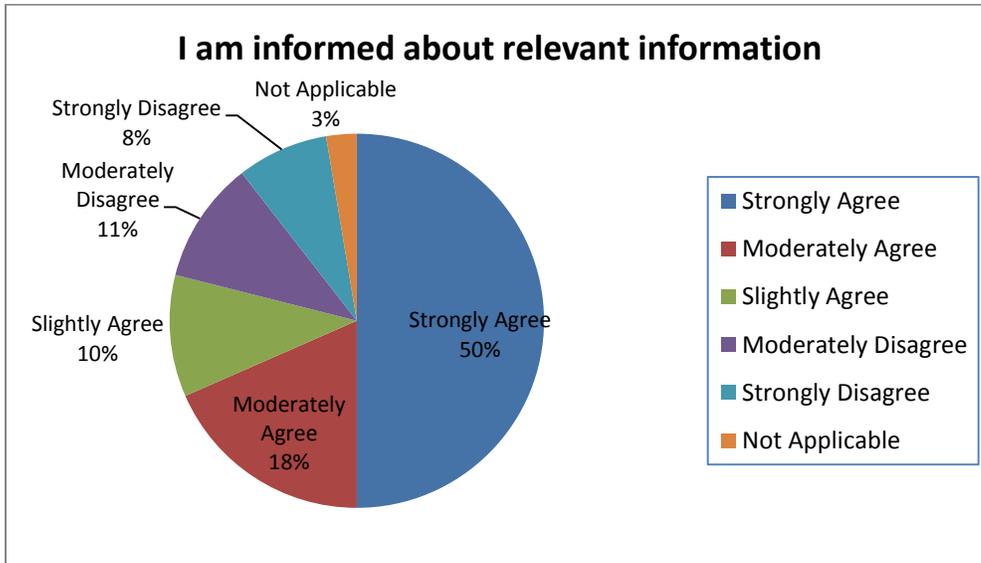
Eighty four percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “I understand what is discussed at meetings to develop my child’s IEP and my concerns and recommendations are valued” were in the “agree” category and 16% in the “disagree” category.



Seventy nine percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “PPT meetings for my child have been scheduled at times and places that met my needs” were in the “agree” category and 19% in the “disagree” category and 3% not applicable.



Seventy eight percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “I am informed about relevant information” were in the “agree” category and 19% in the “disagree” category and 3% not applicable.



Seventy one percent of the parents who responded to the survey question “There are opportunities for parent training or information sessions regarding special education provided by my child’s school district” were in the “agree” category and 16% in the “disagree” category, 8% do not know, and 5% not applicable.