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AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
STUDENT-LED IEP MEETINGS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School at the  
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EDUCATION

August, 2014

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## Abstract

Many parents/caregivers and teachers believe that students with disabilities acquire self-advocacy skills and benefit from leading their IEP meetings, yet it is unknown which teacher preparation factors have the greatest influence on implementation that will most likely increase the number of students leading their meetings. Some hypothesized teacher preparation factors affecting consistent implementation of student-led IEP meetings include; professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day.

The purpose of this mixed method study was to analyze survey data from 88 special education professionals in a large Midwestern school district, and to compare differences between groups of secondary students with disabilities participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings and teacher preparation factors for implementing student-led IEP meetings. This study also proposed to ascertain the participants' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with leading and participating in IEP meetings. The quantitative portion answered four research questions exploring significant differences between groups of students with disabilities participating in their IEP meetings and groups of students leading their IEP meetings, and teacher preparation scales for professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day. Correlations were computed among the four teacher preparation factors and the percentage of students participating in, and leading, IEP meetings. The qualitative portion of this study examined participant perceptions from open-ended and multiple-response survey questions. Findings indicated that fewer students were leading their IEP meetings than participating in their IEP meetings, and

special education professionals receiving administrative support attended more IEP meetings where students were observed both leading and participating in their IEP meetings. Findings also suggest special education professionals receiving curricula and materials to accompany instruction attended more IEP meetings where students were only participating in their meetings. Open-ended survey responses offered insights into the effectiveness of professional development and curricula and materials, usefulness of administrative support, length and location of instruction, and parent perceptions of student-led IEP meetings.

The findings from this study lend strong support to developing a process and procedure to increase the awareness and benefits of student-led IEP meetings with administrators, special education professionals, students, and families.

## Acknowledgments

The path leading to the completion of my doctoral course of study was long and surpasses all prior achievements. While it signifies the end of my formal education it is also the beginning of a new phase of life moving beyond the persistence and determination displayed through this long process. There were times when progress was slow and “life” got in the way. There were other times when great progress was made at the expense of “life.” Regardless, there were many individuals who inspired me to complete this journey.

I would like to first acknowledge and express sincere thanks and appreciation to my dissertation committee. A special thanks to Dr. Patricia Kopetz, Chairperson, who provided me with guidance, advice and support every step of the way. I learned so much from you about this process and know that someday, if asked, I will be prepared to “pay it forward.” I would also like to thank Dr. Natalie Bolton for your patience and support and for guiding me towards a better understanding of statistics. Dr. Susan Palmer from Kansas University has been on my committee from the very beginning, and I consider you my mentor. Our relationship has revolved around self-determination over the years, and hopefully will not end now, with this dissertation. You would often tell me to keep going, and I am so glad you did. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. April Regester for your continued support and expert guidance and suggestions. I look towards you for reminders to keep the “person-centered” approach when referring to people with disabilities. I appreciate the time and valuable input each of you provided during each phase of this dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Phil Ferguson, who inspired me to begin my doctoral work and remained on my committee for a time even after moving to Chapman University.

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I am also indebted to my family for their unconditional love, kindness and support, and especially to my children, Lora, David and Scott, and beautiful grandchildren, Morgan, Nick and new arrival, Olivia, they are my inspiration and the loves of my life. Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband, Neil, for tirelessly and patiently waiting for this day. It has been a long journey and I promise, the days of sitting and waiting are over.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Arnold and Leona Martin, who always valued a good education and supported me in the pursuit of higher education. Neither of them are with us, but I know they are smiling and proud of my accomplishment.

Thanks Mom and Dad.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background and Overview**

Many high school students with disabilities transition to adult life without being taught important self-advocacy skills, such as learning to speak up for themselves. As a result, Wehmeyer et al. (2007) found these students are often not as prepared to take control over their lives as compared to their non-disabled peers. The annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, federally mandated for every public school student with a disability, provides an opportune time for students to learn and practice self-advocacy skills by participating in, and/or leading, their own IEP meetings. By actively participating in the IEP meeting, students learn and practice crucial self-advocacy skills and initiate the process to gain more control over their education and transition planning. However, past research indicates that student-led IEP meetings, providing an opportunity to practice self-advocacy skills, has not been taught consistently in schools, and that very few students are leading their IEP meetings (McMahon & Baer, 2001; Test et al. (2004); Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000).

The IEP meeting, federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990), states that when transition is addressed in the IEP meeting, students age 16 and older, must be invited to attend. This provides a logical forum for students to practice advocating for themselves (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). Learning to self-advocate by participating in IEP meetings provides many benefits to students and should be consistently taught for a variety of reasons. First, students benefit by acquiring

necessary self-advocacy skills, such as understanding themselves, knowing their rights and responsibilities, setting personal goals, learning to communicate, negotiate, compromise, and becoming an effective team member (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

Additionally, many students and parents, concerned about the challenges that will be encountered during the transition from school to adult life, experience a sense of relief when self-advocacy skills are observed by their young adult during the IEP meeting.

Participating in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting creates a positive experience for students with disabilities, and increases the students' life-long ability to self-advocate in a variety of settings (Wehmeyer, Agran & Hughes, 1998).

Individuals with disabilities, underserved for many years, have advocated (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996) to help pass the IDEA mandate for students to be invited to attend their IEP meetings. There have been many important milestones achieved over the years that have contributed to the realization that people with disabilities should be able to take control over their lives and be allowed to experience the benefits of participating in their IEP meetings (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

Historically, the majority of people in this country take for granted the right that they have control over his or her own life. As recently as the 1960's, people with disabilities did not experience this freedom. After many years of intense effort, culminating with the passage of significant laws, people with disabilities have finally been able to rise above feeling powerless and vulnerable to having control and influence over their own lives. The following brief historical account of the past 40 years will provide a glimpse into the struggles and successes that were experienced along the way

by individuals with disabilities who fought for control over their lives (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

The arduous journey to independence began around the time that two significant movements enlisted groups of self-advocates in promoting civil rights for people with disabilities: the normalization and self-advocacy movements (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). These immensely influential movements, along with certain key individuals and several significant laws, resulted in paving a path for individuals with disabilities so they could experience more control over their lives, and earn the right to speak up for themselves (Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

In the early 1960's, Bengt Nirje, a representative of the Swedish Association for Retarded Children, persuaded Sweden to adopt a new way of supporting a normal routine of life for people with disabilities. This became known as the "normalization principle" (Nirje, 1969) and effectively started to improve the lives of individuals with mental retardation, the moniker used at the time. The normalization principle provided self-advocates with access to patterns and conditions close to the norms of mainstream society. In subsequent years, Nirje traveled the world speaking at conferences, and soon sparked others to adopt this new concept, which became known as the normalization movement (Nirje, 1969).

Nirje's influential normalization movement led to the beginning of deinstitutionalization in America. Advocates in this country soon joined forces to provide people with disabilities the opportunity to speak up for themselves and another movement, the self-advocacy movement began (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).



During the 1970's, Centers for Independent Living (CIL) emerged in the United States, providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities to live and become integrated into the community (Shapiro, 1993). Centers for Independent Living are not-for-profit organizations with a mission to empower people with disabilities to strive for independence through choice and becoming full participants in society. Individuals with disabilities synergized strength from each other through the CIL resources, advocating with one voice to become further integrated into community living and employment. Thus, the groundwork was set for civil rights legislation (Shapiro, 1993). Around this time, the first organized self-advocacy group, People First, began in Oregon in 1974, and provided structure and organization to deinstitutionalization efforts in the state. Michael Ward reported (as cited in Longhurst, 1994) that twenty years after the first People First Chapter began, 505 self-advocacy groups were organized. Most are still active today, continuing to provide structure and support for self-advocacy groups in America (Ward, 1996).

An early example of the fervor experienced in our country by the self-advocacy movement, was when voices of self-advocates united in disapproval of President Richard Nixon's veto of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). Once passed, this law became the first piece of legislation written against discrimination on the basis of disability (Ward, 1996). Each and every effort by these dedicated supporters of the 1973 Act created in them a more intense longing to be treated the same as every other American (Shapiro, 1993).

In 1977, disability rights activists across the country rose again to protest, this time over the delay in establishing and enforcing the regulations of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). Once passed and regulated, this legislation mandated equal access for students

with disabilities entering post-secondary institutions, and assured the right to file legal action for discrimination by schools (Brolin, 1995). Years later, the 1986 Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act established funding for supported and competitive employment for individuals with disabilities, providing an opportunity for employment outside of the sheltered workshops. For the first time, supported employment in community jobs was considered to be an achievable, successful outcome for individuals with disabilities. These early successful efforts added fuel to any subsequent advocacy effort, and people with disabilities were considered a source to be reckoned with among politicians (Shapiro, 1993).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), another first, provided all children the right to a free and appropriate public education, or FAPE (Neubert, 1997). Many young people with disabilities, previously excluded from public schools, were hence identified and provided a public school education for the first time. The passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 was the first in a sequence of laws with mandates that included the writing of an annual IEP for all students with disabilities (Brolin, 1995).

Disability rights activists intervened with regularity to pass legislation and the allocation of funding to help individuals with disabilities lead normal, integrated lives. One such significant legislation was the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990) by President George H. W. Bush, the most inclusive, disability rights legislation to date (Brolin, 1995). The ADA (1990) ended discrimination of individuals with disabilities by creating equal access to important areas needed for transition planning from school to adult life, and included expanded accommodations for

transportation, communication, and employment (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). The passage of this law is another example of successful advocacy efforts by people with disabilities striving to become part of mainstream society (Shapiro, 1993).

Much has happened to strengthen the role of people with disabilities in society, with each subsequent reauthorization of the law providing educational services for children and youth with disabilities. The original law mandated provision of the IEP, a blueprint for individualized programming for students certified with disabilities. With each reauthorization of PL 94-142, the language around involvement of students with disabilities in the IEP became stronger. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL94-142) was renamed the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)” in 1990. This legislation, again signed by President Bush, was the first law to mandate that students with disabilities age 14 and older must be invited to attend their IEP meetings. The focus of IEP meetings for students age 14 and older, was to begin development of a transition plan, designed to help the student choose post-secondary goals and develop strategies to achieve those goals (Halpern, Benz, & Lindstrom, 1992). In addition, the IEP also documented the invitation of any adult agency representative likely to pay for, or provide services to the student after graduation. The IDEA provided the first broad addition of transition planning in the IEP, and incorporated language that stated the student’s needs, preferences, and interests must be considered. This significant legislation launched the opportunity for students with disabilities to attain the skills to fully participate in their IEP meetings (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995).

Later, the Amendment to IDEA (1997), passed during the Clinton administration, mandated that students be invited to attend their IEP meeting when the purpose was to

consider the students' transition service needs. Predictably, since students' attendance at their IEP meetings has been understood as important to the planning of their adult lives, there has been an increased effort to engage these students at the meeting, so that the planning is as meaningful to them as possible (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

During the same time as the Reauthorization of IDEA 1997, Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), supported the funding of 26 model demonstration grants (Ward, 2005) aimed at teaching self-determination to individuals with disabilities. Researchers from across the country conducted studies emphasizing the importance of self-determination for people with disabilities.

Michael Wehmeyer, an internationally recognized expert on self-determination, defined the term "self-determination" for individuals with disabilities, recognizing it as an important educational support, and developed a scale for measuring self-determination (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). He also identified component elements of self-determination which became guiding principles in students' transition plans. Self-advocacy, one of the component elements most prominent in student-led IEP meetings, includes skills for improved assertiveness, effective communication, knowing and understanding rights, leadership and speaking up for oneself in a persuasive way (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

The IDEA (2004), signed by President George W. Bush, focused on improving post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities using language promoting transition planning in the IEP and greater involvement of students. First, the definition of transition changed to; the development of more realistic post-secondary goals based on a

results-oriented process. The wording was changed from outcome-oriented to results-oriented, which then placed the emphasis on the importance of helping students achieve their goals. Secondly, the required age for students to be invited to their IEP meeting unfortunately changed from age 14 to 16. Most importantly, stronger language was used for developing appropriate, measurable, post-secondary goals, based on age-appropriate transition assessments that related to education/training, employment and independent living, if appropriate. Lastly, to determine measurable post-secondary goals, new legislative language in IDEA (2004) stated the IEP team determines what transition services, including action plans, IEP goals, and courses of study, will support the individual to meet those goals (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

These important, new regulations contribute to an increased awareness of the importance for students with disabilities to engage in gaining more control over their lives through the IEP meeting. With each reauthorization of IDEA, language was strengthened to include mandates for the public agency to invite the student with a disability to attend the IEP meeting if a purpose of the meeting was to consider the post-secondary goals and the transition services needed to assist the student in reaching those goals. When students participate in, and/or lead, the IEP meeting for transition planning, the dynamics of the meeting changes to allow the students to share information about themselves (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

Unfortunately, many students are unprepared to participate in their IEP meetings, and are not able to take advantage of the opportunity to express their opinions, learn about themselves, and practice self-advocacy skills. With each reauthorization of IDEA,

participating in, and/or leading, the transition planning in the IEP meeting becomes more important for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

Throughout history, individuals with disabilities have strived for a voice that is heard, respected, and strong enough to allow them the choices to determine what happens in their lives. They have fought for their rights since the beginning of the century, and during this journey traveled, there are laws that have been subsequently instituted that have rewarded their efforts. Research in the area of self-determination has set the stage for students with disabilities to be present at their IEP meetings, and to speak up for themselves about their future plans (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). Participating in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting provides the opportunity for students to take control over their education and transition plans, while learning and practicing skills in public speaking, active listening, leadership, and decision making (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students who participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings benefit from the experience by learning to advocate for themselves. All students, regardless of disability or desired post-secondary outcomes, can benefit from learning important, lifelong, self-advocacy skills while in school (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Past studies have shown that when students with disabilities are provided an opportunity to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meeting or receive other training that prepares them to set goals, identify strengths and weaknesses, and take an active role in transition planning activities, they improve their ability to plan for the future (Zhang, 2001). Studies also report that students who lead their IEP meetings acquire increased self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, and are more assertive in requesting accommodations (Mason, McGahee-Kovac,

Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002). Learning these important skills, however, will only be achieved if teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in their IEP meetings, or if they provide other training to practice making choices in their lives (Wehmeyer, Sands, Doll & Palmer, 1997). This current study supports previous claims relative to the importance of student-led IEP instruction as one of the most effective ways to teach self-advocacy skills to students with disabilities.

Many teachers learn how to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meeting through a variety of professional development opportunities, but demonstrate inconsistency when it comes to implementation (Eisenman, Chamberlin, & McGahee-Kovac, 2005). Some hypothesized factors affecting consistent implementation include; professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day. Since most parents/caregivers and teachers believe that all students with disabilities could benefit from participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, knowing which factors have the greatest influence on implementation will most likely increase the number of student-led IEP meetings (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003).

Teachers can learn how to teach student-led IEPs through many different types of professional development opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, university and community education courses, state-sponsored workshops, web-sites, seminars and book clubs. In addition, there are numerous curricula and materials available through educational catalogs, and free, on-line materials for teachers to download. Considering all of these resources, past studies still report that only 8% of teachers are satisfied with the approach they are using to teach self-determination skills (Mason, 2004). Adding to the

complex issue of implementation, families and teachers report positive results from teaching student participation in IEP meetings (Childre & Chambers, 2005). While studies continue to report that teachers know the value of student-led IEP meetings and understand the importance to families, little is known about what influences teachers to teach IEP participation to students (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999).

There are many federal, state, and local initiatives competing for instructional time during a typical school day (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010), yet there is little information about which factors increase implementation of student-led IEP meetings in schools (Agran & Hughes, 2008).

Participation in the IEP meeting can be an important way for students with disabilities to improve their self-knowledge, and to take control over their lives. Unfortunately, students are not typically motivated to be involved in their IEP meeting without preparation. It has become more noticeable that students do not participate in their IEP meetings, or in some cases do not even attend, because of the lack of knowledge about what happens at the meeting. Unaware of what will be occurring, there can neither be the same level of expectation nor motivation to attend the meeting. Studies report that when students are involved in their IEP meeting, there is an increase in family satisfaction and more collaborative participation by all IEP team members (Childre & Chambers, 2005). But without preparation, as expected, a very small percentage of students talk during their IEP meeting (Martin et al., 2006).

Teachers who choose to teach student-led IEP's to students prior to graduation, could potentially impact 42,273 students with disabilities, ages 14-21 in the state of Missouri (DESE, 2010). This current study will strive to identify which implementation



factors have a positive effect on the number of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. Furthermore, the results can create a baseline for future data collection activities on student-led IEP meetings, and identify particular implementation factors for student-led IEP meetings that may generalize to future initiatives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to learn about differences and relationships between factors influencing teachers regarding the implementation of student-led IEP meetings and the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. Understanding critical factors that influenced teachers to support students to lead their IEP meetings, will help to increase student participation rates in IEP meetings, and, consequently, students' acquisition of self-advocacy skills prior to transitioning to adult life (Martin et. al., 2006).

A convergent parallel mixed methods design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged, will be used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This approach supports the use of survey data to measure the relationship between the secondary special education teachers' professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day, and the percentage of students participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings. Teachers' perceptions of student participation in IEP meetings will be explored through open-ended survey questions. The purpose for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data will be to enrich the information that is collected in brief response items, compare the results from two different perspectives (categorical data from quantitative

methods and elaborated information from qualitative items), and to strengthen the rigor and findings of the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the investigation of the relationships and differences between the secondary special education teachers' professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day, and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings as well as the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings:

1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?

Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): The distribution of scores in each group of students leading their IEP meetings are the same.

Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): At least two of the groups of students leading their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

2. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students participating in their IEP meetings?

Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): The distribution of scores in each group of students participating in their IEP meetings are the same.

Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): At least two of the groups of students participating in their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings subscales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) and the percent of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?

Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): There is an association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

4. What is the relationship between the scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, and the percent of students involved in participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings?

Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): There is an association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

### **Scope of Study**

There have been many efforts to increase the awareness and implementation of student-led IEP meetings in Missouri. This researcher was a special education teacher, administrator in the area of transition, and one of the first Transition Liaisons (TL) appointed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

in 2008. Each designated TL was responsible for building capacity in the area of transition at the local level, and supporting teachers to increase their knowledge of best practices.

There were 20 TLs in the 2011-2012 school year, who were considered by this researcher to be the most knowledgeable representatives for transition and for implementing student-led IEP meetings in the State of Missouri, and were each affiliated with one of the ten Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC) located across the state. For this reason, the TLs were chosen to complete the survey on Survey Monkey first, and then forward the email link to other teachers in their school districts, in an effort to collect survey responses from across the State of Missouri. Transition Liaisons received a small stipend as compensation for completing and forwarding the survey to teachers in their schools.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Self-advocacy*: A component element of self-determination is applied in this context as standing up for oneself and speaking up on his/her own behalf (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

*Individualized Education Program (IEP)*: The IEP is a document that is updated yearly, and provides a unique educational record of the student's special education needs, detailing services and programs to help educators understand how the student's disability affects his ability to learn. The IEP is mandated through PL 94-142 (1975) for all students with disabilities from ages 3-21, or as long as the student is enrolled in public school. Initiation of the IEP is the responsibility of the Local Education Agency (LEA), and is written on designated IEP forms consistent throughout the school district. The IEP

identifies the special education services the student needs, and the student's unique and specific yearly goals and objectives. The IEP specifies special education staff responsible for implementing, reviewing, maintaining, and evaluating the IEP on a yearly basis. The IEP team who creates the document consists of one or both of the student's parents, special education teachers, and other implementers of services, as identified for the purpose of reviewing or revising the IEP. The IEP is reviewed and revised yearly. For students 16 and older, transition plans are written into the IEP that include post-secondary goals for education, employment, and independent living, if appropriate.

*Transition Planning:* Transition Planning is a partnership involving students, parents, adult agency representatives, and educators to help the student develop a plan, including post-secondary goals and strategies to achieve those goals. Transition Planning is part of every IEP document for students from age 16 and older.

*Student-Led IEP:* Student participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting occurs when students prepare for the meeting, so that they can talk about one or more parts of the meeting, to include:

1. Welcoming people at the IEP meeting
2. Introducing people at the IEP meeting
3. Telling about or reporting findings from age-appropriate transition assessments
4. Telling about their likes and dislikes
5. Telling about their skills and challenges
6. Reporting or listing their accommodation needs
7. Stating disability or telling about their disability

8. Stating post-secondary goal for education
9. Stating post-secondary goal for employment
10. Stating post-secondary goal for Independent Living, if appropriate
11. Identifying action plans for each post-secondary goal
12. Reviewing past goals and performance on those goals
13. Identifying course of study for next year
14. Summarizing new IEP goals (Martin et al., 2006)

*Attendance at the IEP meeting:* Students attend part or all of their IEP meeting without expressing their opinions or participating actively in the meeting.

*Participation in the IEP meeting:* Students attend, responding to direct questions or comments on topic when asked, offering information on selected topics but not taking the lead or initiating conversation.

*Leading the IEP:* Taking the lead for communicating information to the IEP team on a specific part or parts of the IEP meeting. Students can use a template, technology, power point presentation or other method. When students lead their IEP meeting they take charge of part or all of the 14 steps of the meeting (Wehmeyer, & Field, 2007).

*Transition Liaisons:* This is a selected group of special education teachers and/or administrators chosen by the Missouri DESE to build capacity in the area of transition at the local level, provide input into statewide guidance documents, provide professional development and resources, and collaborate and share information at both the district and regional level.

## **Significance of the Study**

Since the late 1990's, much progress has been made in teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings. Researchers have developed curricula and strategies for teaching students to lead their IEP meetings, and both the 1997 and 2004 amendments to IDEA, added importance to the practice by requiring students to be invited to attend their IEP meeting for transition planning. From the early 1990's, progress was slow getting students to attend their IEP meetings. In 2001, it was reported that schools did not invite students to their IEP meetings, and they seldom attended (Williams & O'Leary, 2001). It is not surprising that students did not attend their meetings, since they were seldom given an opportunity to share their opinions or participate. Past studies stated that when students attended their IEP meetings, they only talked 3% of the time, and did not understand the purpose of the meeting (Martin et al., 2006). However, when prepared, they were able to demonstrate self-advocacy skills through participation in their IEP meetings (Martin et al., 2006).

Attendance at the IEP meeting is important, but without preparation to participate in, and/or lead the meeting, the students are less likely to attend. A more recent study reported that 78% of students with disabilities attended their IEP meeting; however, mere attendance is not enough (Martin et al., 2006). Involving students in their IEP meetings has become more important over time, and is listed as one of 32 secondary transition evidence-based practices (Test et al., 2009).

This study provides information potentially leading to increasing rates for student participation in, and/or leading during IEP meetings, thereby providing an opportunity for the acquisition of self-advocacy skills prior to transitioning to adult life. In addition,

practitioners will be able to use the information to determine how to present new initiatives to teachers in a more efficient and effective method.

### **Summary**

Findings from this study can be useful to school administrators or professional development departments when considering which teacher preparation factor(s) will influence implementation of student-led IEP meetings, or any other new initiative. Using the mixed methods approach, this study examines four questions around the implementation factors for student-led IEPs, and the impact each has on students' participation in the IEP meeting. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the related literature describing trends and effective practices implementing student-led IEP meetings, benefits and barriers of student-led IEP meetings, and an in-depth review of professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day, as it relates to student-led IEP instruction. The discussion ends with a summary highlighting the main issues surrounding student-led IEP meetings.

Chapter Three presents a detailed description of the method and research design chosen for this study, including a review of the purpose and research questions, research setting, participants, measurement, and quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses used to answer the research questions.

Chapter Four provides statistical results from the study and themes found in the data. Descriptive statistics are presented in narrative and in tables, followed by findings of the statistical tests used to answer all four research questions. The quantitative findings were presented first, followed by qualitative results. Chapter Five summarizes the



research findings, and provides an overview of the analysis, as well as the conclusions and implications for further studies.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Special education teachers are presented with more challenges today than ever before, due in part to competing initiatives in all public schools (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Local school districts are enforcing mandates from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act while, at the same time, following special education mandates from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). In many instances, special education teachers are facing barriers and other factors that do not allow them time during the school day to prepare students to learn what is considered best practice in transition, such as teaching students to self-advocate through participation in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. At the same time, however, there are other special education teachers who are able to overcome these challenges, and provide instruction to students with disabilities to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999). It is unclear why, regardless of the challenges, there are still teachers who are not teaching students to self-advocate through participation in, and/or leading, their IEP meeting.

It has been twenty-two years since the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded twenty-six demonstration grants to develop models to teach self-determination (Ward, 2005). Since then, teaching self-determination to students with disabilities has been identified as best practice in special education, as evidenced by an impressive research-base of over 450 published articles (Wehmeyer, Field, Doren, Jones, & Mason, 2004), resulting in the development of many curricula, along with international conferences that dedicate entire strands to the topic. It would seem that every special

education teacher would use one of the many student-led IEP resources available, to teach students how to self-advocate as part of their high school course of study.

Self-advocacy refers to the act of standing up for oneself and speaking up on his/her own behalf, and is listed as one of the component elements of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2001). Teaching self-advocacy skills through IEP meeting participation is an effective practice for ensuring that students with disabilities learn how to advocate while still in school (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Unfortunately, when students with disabilities graduate from high school without learning to self-advocate, they run the risk of allowing adult agency service coordinators or unknown service providers to make life-changing decisions for them, which can be influenced by funding and availability of services. This constitutes a larger problem, potentially affecting 2,275,915 children with disabilities (ages 14-21) in the United States served under IDEA Part B<sup>1</sup>, reported by the 2007 Child Count (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In an effort to promote the research-based practice of teaching self-determination, the State of Missouri has initiated several opportunities for special education teachers to learn how to teach self-determination skills to students, including the student-led IEP process. In 2002, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted with this researcher to write a “train the trainer” module on self-determination. One of the sections of the module included strategies for teaching the student-led IEP process. There were approximately 30 trainers from around the state who were trained on this module, and who were then asked to use the module to provide

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<sup>1</sup> The Data Accountability Center, funded by OSEP, provides public access to data about children and youths with disabilities served under *IDEA* Parts B and C; technical assistance materials to support the collection, analysis and reporting of *IDEA* data; and the forms and spreadsheets used for collection. Data retrieved Aug. 12, 2009, from <https://www.ideadata.org/PartBData.asp>.

instruction to teachers on how to teach self-determination skills to students. This researcher has provided trainings on student-led IEP methods for every year since then, and it was thought, but not known for sure, that trainers throughout the State of Missouri were doing the same.

In addition, during the month of February 2010, the Missouri's DESE (MO-DESE) sponsored a free, state-wide workshop to 200 teachers: "Self-Determination and Student Engagement." The workshop provided information on student-led IEP instruction, along with providing a Toolkit on Self-Determination to each of the 10 Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC) in Missouri for teachers and staff developers in local school districts to use. The toolkit included many resources, such as the American Institutes of Research, *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994), and *The Arc Self-determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), *STEPS to Self-Determination* (Hoffman & Field, 2005), *Next S.T.E.P.* (Halpern et al., 1997), and other curricula used to teach student-led IEPs, goal-setting, and self-advocacy. Many of these curricula were originally created through OSEP Self-determination grants (Ward, 2005).

Although MO-DESE initiatives, designed to bring student-led IEP meetings into Missouri classrooms is significant, it is unknown at this time how many students are participating in, and/or leading, their IEPs in Missouri, or any other state (Hawbaker, 2007). It is also unknown which factors create the strongest influence on secondary special education teachers to teach the student-led IEP to their students with disabilities (Hawbaker, 2007; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010). Only by understanding which critical factors influence teachers to teach students to lead their IEP meetings, will rates for

student participation in IEP meetings increase. The benefit will be that students will acquire self-advocacy skills prior to transitioning to adult life (Martin et. al., 2006).

This chapter will present a review of literature related to implications for student-led IEP meetings, including participation rates, benefits and barriers, and teacher implementation factors, including professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day. These tenets will be supported by evidence and organized by the warrant structure of the arguments. A review of the evidence will be structured side-by-side when several authors are used to justify a claim, and a convergent mapping tool will be used to organize evidence (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The last section will include a discussion of the relationship of the literature to the problem of this study.

Literature for this review was selected from searches of ERIC, Education full text and PsycInfo, using keywords *Individual Education Programs* or *high school* or *student involvement* and *education planning* or *student participation* and *self-determination*.

### **Student-Led IEP Meetings**

**Rates for Participation.** Early studies in the area of self-determination (Halpern et al., 1997; Shapiro, 1993; Ward, 1996; Wehmeyer et al., 1997) continually refer to the importance of increasing the self-advocacy skills of individuals with disabilities. Later, as further testament to its importance, self-advocacy was included as one of Michael Wehmeyer's component elements of self-determined behavior. These component elements of self-determination have become a source of topics for future research, and provide the framework needed by professionals to promote instruction to individuals with disabilities in the area of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2001).

The IDEA (1990) mandated for the first time that students with disabilities must be invited to attend their IEP meetings when considering transition planning, starting at age 14. This mandate generated an interest among researchers to learn about student attendance, and later, their participation in the IEP meeting, resulting in a growing body of literature on this topic. Researchers have reportedly gathered information over the years on student participation in IEP meetings, using self-reports, surveys or questionnaires to measure results (Chapman, 2003).

Student-led IEP meetings have become what is considered “best-practice,” and responsible in part, for increasing the self-advocacy skills of individuals with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). The term “*student-led IEP*” is used to describe the practice of preparing students to participate in their IEP meeting, so that they can talk about one or more parts of the meeting (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). In addition, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) (Test et al., 2009) has identified several evidence-based curricula teaching student involvement in the IEP meeting.

More students with disabilities are attending their IEP meetings now, than they were during the years before, and immediately after 1990. In fact, student attendance at IEP meetings has now become the norm, rather than the exception. However, early studies regarding student participation in IEP meetings generally reported that if students attended their IEP meeting, they did not participate at all (Lehman, Bassett, & Sands, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995; Powers, Turner, Matuszewski, Wilson, & Loesch, 1999). Another early study reported that only 4% of students attended their IEP meetings as per Vac et al. (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Student attendance at IEP

meetings became important to measure to determine if the 1990 IDEA mandate inviting students to attend their IEP meetings, was being properly implemented. Ten years after IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, only a limited number of studies specifically examined student attendance at IEP meetings, because the majority of students invited to their IEP meetings were regularly attending. To substantiate this finding, Martin, Marshal, and Sale (2004) noted that 70% of students with disabilities attended their IEP meetings. Another study that clearly demonstrates strong testament to implementation of the law, Shogren et al. (2007) found that 91% of 327 high school students, from six states and 36 school districts, attended their last IEP meeting.

As the number of studies on student attendance at IEP meetings started to decline around 2007, specific evidence related to student engagement in the IEP process began to surface in the literature. Curricula to support student-led IEP meetings were examined for effectiveness. Arndt, Konrad, and Test (2006) studied the effectiveness of the *Self-Directed IEP* (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1993) that included measuring the level of student participation in IEP meetings for five high school students. Findings from that study suggested that when students were provided the intervention, their IEP meeting participation rates increased, and they acquired skills to advocate for themselves.

Another study that clearly demonstrated the shift from reporting attendance rates to including different components of participation, Martin et al. (2006) reported that 84% of students attended at least the beginning of their IEP meeting. His continued findings offered that, after instructing students for two years to use the *Self-Directed IEP* (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1993), students increased the amount of time talking during their IEP meeting, from 3% to 6%. Additionally, in a large group study measuring

the effects of self-determination of 276 students' participation in their IEP meetings, Williams-Diehm, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, and Garner (2008) reported that the students participated in their IEP meeting at different levels. It was found that students who had more self-determination, as measured by *The Arc Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) and the *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (Wolman, Campeau, DuBoid, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994), participated more in their IEP meetings.

Agran and Hughes (2008) also reported that 80% of 17 high school students were not taught to set goals by themselves, resulting in only 53% of students who said they actually go to their IEP meeting. Surprisingly, 76% of that group did not know the meaning of an IEP meeting. However, when students were taught to take control over setting goals in the IEP, or become otherwise involved in the preparation for the meeting, the rates for student attendance and participation were likely to increase.

Most recently, studies dedicated to the topics of self-advocacy and student-led IEP meetings, have shifted to analyzing the content of the IEP that students are leading. Williams-Diehm, Palmer, Lee, and Schroer (2010) studied 332 high school students, reporting on the transition IEP goal content areas written for academics (47%) and for non-academics (52%).

Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, and Valdes (2012) interpreted results from more than 11,000 students participating in the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), and reported that 82% of students, ages 15-19, attended their IEP meetings, while 76% attended their Transition Planning meeting. A relatively smaller number, only 21% was found to take a leadership role in their IEP meetings.



Successful implementation of a student-led IEP meeting also depends, in part, on teacher participation. When teachers become involved in promoting student-led IEP meetings, the students not only attend their IEP meetings at improved rates, but at least half are knowledgeable about their IEP goals and objectives (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

When the official age for beginning transition planning in the IEP changed from age 14 to age 16, as a result of the Reauthorization of IDEA (2004), many students younger than 16 were no longer provided an opportunity for attendance or involvement in their IEP meetings. Weidenthal and Kochlar-Bryant (2007) found that, upon implementation of IDEA of 2004, middle school students were negatively affected by the changes in transition planning. Their study reflected the initiatives of 77 teachers whose students were no longer mandated to attend their IEP meetings. Teachers who were interviewed reported that 56% of their students were most always present at IEP meetings, while only 30% were frequently present. The teachers used a variety of strategies to increase student participation in their IEP meetings, including talking to students prior to each meeting about setting goals and reviewing assessments. Teachers identified barriers that impeded student participation in the IEP, such as lack of preparation, or not talking about the IEP before the meeting, which caused students to lose interest and become unmotivated to participate in IEP meetings. Several Midwest states, such as Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio have passed state legislation mandating transition planning continue as part of the IEP at age 14, believing that the additional two years of essential planning and preparation before graduation would be beneficial in creating successful outcomes (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

To validate the importance and sustainability of new initiatives, parent and teacher perceptions should be considered, when possible. A strong correlation between levels of self-determination and the quality of the IEP meeting was reported by 117 practitioners when students participated in the meeting (Branding, Bates, & Miner, 2009). A large group of 234 parents strongly supported teaching students to lead their IEP meetings when asked about their views of self-determination in a study by Grigal, Neubert, Moon, and Graham (2003).

The large body of evidence supporting the practice that involve students in their IEP meetings opens the possibility that all students of varying disabilities can benefit from taking a leadership role in their meetings. Reported findings of the benefit to students from student-led IEP meetings, suggest that the ability of individuals with disabilities to learn self-determination is impacted by disability category, but not their opportunities to be self-determined (Wehmeyer et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2006; Arndt, Konrad, and Test, 2006).

Interestingly, teaching students to participate in, or lead, their IEP meetings, has implications for general education students, as well. In a recent study of 39 students (19 special education and 20 general education) from a high-poverty high school, it was found that 58% of the students attended their IEP meetings, while a greater number, 95%, attended their guidance counselor meetings. In addition, none of the special education students led their meetings, whereas 80% of general education students initiated their meetings (Washington, Hughes, & Cosgriff, 2012). These findings would warrant future research to examine the impact of student-led IEP meetings in high schools located in high-poverty areas.

Since 1997, student rates for attendance and participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting has increased. In addition, students tended to become more actively involved in their IEP meetings.

**Benefits of Student-Led IEP Meetings.** Whether students participate in, and/or lead their IEP meetings, or individuals with disabilities of any age learn self-determination skills, the benefits are life-long. For example, Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of 94 students, during three years after high school to determine the effects of high and low self-determination status, based on scores from *The Arc Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). Findings suggested that young adults with disabilities who held higher scores for self-determination were financially more independent. The individuals were described as being able to pay for rent, utilities, phone, and groceries more independently than individuals measuring lower in self-determination. Students measuring higher in self-determination were also more likely to be employed either full or part-time, enjoyed better benefits, including vacation, sick leave, and insurance coverage. Results from this study implicitly validated the importance of learning self-determination skills preferably while in high school (Wehmeyer, 2001).

An earlier longitudinal study spanning 20 years reported a strong, positive correlation between a students' ability to identify personal strengths, preferences, interests, and needs, and learning self-advocacy skills through the student-led IEP process, to students achieving successful post school outcomes (Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins & Herman, 1999).

When students participated in student-led IEP meetings, they had the opportunity to increase their self-advocacy skills, and experience the benefits, throughout life, in a variety of settings. In a study that clearly identified benefits for students in postsecondary education, successful preparation for adult life was partly attributed to involvement in IEP decision-making (Morningstar et al., 2010). A study by Morningstar et al. examined the relationship between high school transition programs and levels of self-determination in college, and reported that family roles and involvement in IEP meetings were strong predictors of success. In a single-subject design study of six families' perceptions of the student-centered IEP meetings, perceptions were more satisfactory, open to better collaboration, and created a respectful atmosphere (Childre & Chambers, 2005). Further, when Getzel and Thoma (2008) conducted focus groups for 34 postsecondary college students, asking about essential self-advocacy skills needed for college, they reported that self-awareness consistently emerged as one of the most important components to success.

In a study based on findings from the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS, 2005), academic achievement and student participation in IEP meetings increased over time (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010). The large number of participants in this study, 3,912 students, ages 6-12 from all disability categories, provided a broader examination of IEP meeting participation. Academic achievement was measured by the *Woodcock-Johnson III* (WJ-III-R), and IEP participation was measured by survey questions answered by relevant school administrators.

Four students, ages 20 and 21, were interviewed to comment on self-determination. Themes repeatedly emerged reporting the importance of participation in IEP meetings to the acquisition of self-determination skills (Ankeny & Lehman, 2011).

In summary, when special education teachers prepare students to participate in their IEP meetings, the long-term effects will improve their success in adult life by increasing financial independence, employment, achieving successful post school outcomes, participating in postsecondary education, increasing academic achievement and acquiring self-determination skills.

**Barriers to Student-Led IEP Meetings.** Middle school and high school special education teachers experience an additional challenge when trying to find time to instruct students to prepare for their IEP meetings. The NCLB Act mandates high academic standards for all students and is tied to school accreditation; and additionally, it competes with IDEA mandates for transition planning tied to post-school outcomes (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Elementary school teachers also express concerns and challenges when considering the perceived importance of self-determination, as reported in a study conducted by Cho, Wehmeyer and Kingston (2010). Elementary teachers in 30 states identified the following primary reasons for not teaching self-determination to students: lack of training, lack of time, and lack of knowledge about curricula. They also reported that about half of the 407 general education and special education elementary teachers in this study identified that other content areas (besides self-determination) were more important.

A possible solution to the barriers of time and curricula for teaching self-determination to students was identified in a mixed methods study by Campbell-Whatley (2008). They combined quantitative survey results with qualitative observations and teacher reports to evaluate a lesson plan format for teaching disability awareness and self-advocacy skills. Survey findings from 13 elementary, middle and high school students,

determined that students learned more about their disability and increased their self-advocacy skills, when taught from a specific lesson plan format during resource room.

### **Implementation Factors**

**Professional Development.** Several questions arise when discussing implementation factors for teaching student-led IEP meetings, such as: Are teachers learning to teach about student-led IEP meetings in pre-service courses of study? Are they receiving the instruction but not implementing for some reason? What type of professional development provides the highest implementation rate: one-on-one coaching, internet, site-based workshops, conferences, etc.? How many hours of professional development are needed before teachers implement a new practice? What professional development programs have been successful? What barriers are teachers facing when deciding to implement something new? (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin & Palmer, 2010; Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Hawbaker, 2007; Mason, Field & Sawilowsky, 2004; McInerney & Hamilton, 2007; Test et al., 2004; Test et al., 2009; Torgerson, Miner, & Shen, 2004).

This current study attempts to answer these questions, however, there was very little literature addressing professional development specifically for student-led IEP meetings. One reason could be that before the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA, transition services were mandated as part of the IEP, and most states were in the midst of implementing systems change grants that provided guidance for improving transition services. One of the recommendations during that time was to provide professional development to teach strategies for increasing student, agency and parent participation in the IEP meeting (Williams & O'Leary, 2001).

A synthesis of research on self-determination recommended that pre-service teachers would better utilize their time and efforts to accommodate teaching self-determination, rather than continually starting new initiatives (Wehmeyer, Field, Doren, Jones, & Mason, 2004). In addition, Wehmeyer et al. (2004) stated that teachers, themselves, could benefit from becoming more self-determined in their own behavior. This could be accomplished by knowing their own strengths and challenges, setting goals, and developing an awareness of successful teaching practices by continually evaluating, changing, and then modifying practices based on those changes.

Wehmeyer and Field (2007) shared what they considered three quality indicators of programmatic efforts in the area of self-determination: 1) addressing self-determination in the curriculum, 2) developing family support programs, and 3) providing staff development. To further substantiate these findings, a study by Mason, Field and Sawilowsky (2004) surveyed 523 teachers, administrators, and related service personnel to discover information about their self-determination teaching practices. They found that only 8% of those surveyed were satisfied with their teaching method, and that there was not a district-wide plan in place to support teaching self-determination. A large number of teachers (70%) reported using an informal approach to teach self-determination, while 41% provided limited instruction.

In a study by Wandry et al. (2008), 196 special education teacher candidates from five different programs, were surveyed to determine competence in the area of transition. The results reported that they had a beginning level of competence (scoring a 1 on a 1-5 Likert scale) regarding knowledge about transition services. Survey participants also self-identified three key barriers to implementing transition practices: lack of parental

involvement, lack of educator knowledge, and lack of professional development.

Providing additional pre-service coursework on transition services was recommended.

Due to the limited number of studies regarding professional development for special education teachers, it was necessary, as a way to gain valuable information, to also review the impact of professional development on general education teachers. One study asked a group of 118 elementary science teachers' questions regarding barriers to implementation of programs/initiatives provided in workshops. Several obstacles affecting implementation by teachers after receiving professional development included: limited resources, time, mandatory curricula pacing and classroom management issues (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010). Another study on teacher implementation after receiving professional development, conducted by Cantrell and Callaway (2008), interviewed 16 literacy teachers regarding the level (high or low) of efficacy they possessed. Findings from that study suggest that high implementers of instruction were able to persistently work through barriers, find resources, and feel partly-responsible for motivating students. Low implementers of instruction faced barriers of time constraints, along with home and family influences. Similarly, when 33 early childhood teachers in the Midwest (Liber et al., 2009) were asked which factors influenced curricula implementation, they reported that individual teacher characteristics, such as motivation and ability to embrace change, were important.

Findings from a study of 22 special education middle-school and high school teachers, who were asked to implement student-led IEP instruction with their students, reported that teachers were motivated by each other. Additionally, some teachers liked



having choices regarding the level of implementation, and the number of students included in the instruction (Eisenman, Chamberlin, & McGahee-Kovac, 2005).

Realizing the complexity around implementation, a study by Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, and Vanhover (2006), examined which teacher qualities seemed to make a difference when teachers adapted new strategies. The study included interviews and observations of eight general education teachers from two schools during classroom instruction. They reported that some teachers utilize what they have learned from professional development and some do not, based on their classification as a high-level or low-level implementer. The high-level implementers had the following teacher characteristics: ability to quickly adapt new strategies, continually adding new strategies, and willingness to try new student and teacher-directed strategies. They also demonstrated high levels of knowledge, and provided instruction that met the needs of the students. Low-level teacher implementers needed high levels of assistance, and tried new strategies as a last resort. They also were not as knowledgeable and were inconsistent when implementing ideas.

One of the few studies where special education teachers were asked specifically about preparation to address transition competencies, a large study of 557 high school and middle-school special educators from 31 states reported receiving 27.6 hours of transition-related staff development hours during their entire teaching career. In addition, teachers felt somewhat unprepared to somewhat prepared in their knowledge about transition competencies (Benitz, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

In summary, teachers improve practices when provided professional development and strategies for increasing student, agency and parent participation in the IEP meetings

(Williams & O’Leary, 2001). In addition, pre-service teachers should learn how to better utilize their time and efforts to accommodate teaching self-determination (Wehmeyer, Field, Doren, Jones, & Mason, 2004), and would benefit from becoming more self-determined in their behavior by understanding their own strengths and challenges, by setting goals, and by developing an awareness of success by continually reflecting and changing practices (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

In most cases, when teachers chose not to teach student-led IEP meetings, they experienced one or more challenges: lack of knowledge on transition practices (Wandry et al., 2008), not enough professional development, limited resources, lack of time, mandatory curricula pacing or classroom management issues (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010). However, some teachers were motivated by one another and able to overcome barriers by finding necessary resources for instruction (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008). Other important factors to implementation included providing teachers a choice in the level of implementation and the number of students included. Teachers who overcame barriers quickly adapted to new strategies, and provided instruction that met the needs of the students (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, and Vanhover, 2006). Lastly, it was reported that teachers need more staff development in the area of transition (Benitz, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

**Curricula and Materials.** Students, regardless of their disability, will most likely increase their self-advocacy skills when teachers use specific curricula and materials designed to teach the student-led IEP meeting. The IEP process provides an opportunity for students to learn and practice several component elements of self-determination, including goal setting, decision-making, problem solving, and self-advocacy (Wehmeyer,

2001). The following curricula have been developed to teach one or more of these component elements of self-determination and/or teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings:

- *Self-Directed IEP* - Martin, Marshall, Mason, & Jerman, (1993);
- *NEXT S.T.E.P.* - Halpern et al., ( 2004);
- *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* - Wehmeyer et al., ( 2004);
- *The Self-Advocacy Strategy* – Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler (2002);
- *TAKE CHARGE for the Future* – Powers, Ellison, Matuszewski, & Turner (2004); and
- *A Student’s Guide to the IEP* – McGahee-Kovac (2002).

The IDEA (1990) required schools to invite students, ages 16 and older, to attend their IEP meetings, and later, Test et al. (2009) found two student-led IEP curricula (*The Self-Advocacy Strategy and The Self-Directed IEP*) as evidence-based practices for special education. Earlier studies reported increased levels of self-determination, measured by *The Arc Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) and the American Institutes of Research *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (Wolman et al., 1994) when using the self-determination curriculum, *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* (Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Adding to the importance of using a student-led IEP curricula, Test et al. (2004) reviewed five qualitative, and 12 quantitative studies, investigating participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting. Of those studies, findings suggested using a published curricula resulted in more students participating in their IEP meeting, regardless of disability category.

More recently, curricula or materials on self-determination were continually proven useful to implementation of student-led IEP meetings. One such study, involving a small group of students with significant support needs, evaluated the effects of the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)* on accessing the general education curriculum (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin & Palmer, 2010). Students using the model found improved academics, as well as transition, social, communication, and life skills. Since goal-setting is included in every IEP as either an annual IEP goal or as a post-secondary goal, the transferability of the skills learned with the *SDLMI* to the student-led IEP, can easily be envisioned.

Another small study by Neale and Test (2010), found 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students increased the quality of verbal contributions from using the *I Can Use Effort Strategy* (Hickey & Howell, 1990), which is modeled after the *Self-Advocacy Strategy*. The *I Can Use Effort Strategy* teaches the six steps to participation in the IEP meeting within five days, and was also found effective for teaching students ages 9 through 11, self-awareness and self-determination skills for successful participation in IEP meetings. This small sample and brief intervention shows promise as a strategy that could prove beneficial in overcoming the barrier of finding time for instruction with elementary students.

In summary, Test et al. (2009) identified several student-led IEP curricula as evidence-based practices, and when using curricula, self-determination skills increased (Wehmeyer et al., 2011). In addition, skills for academics, transition, social, communication and life skills increased (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin & Palmer, 2010). When using a published curricula, Neale and Test (2010), found the quality of verbal

contributions increased from the *I Can Use Effort Strategy* (Hickey & Howell, 1990). As a last testament to the effectiveness of using one of the many curricula to teach student-led IEP meetings, Test et al. (2004) reviewed 16 studies investigating participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting, and found them to support increases in student involvement in the IEP meeting.

**Administrative Support.** Teachers are faced with many challenges when implementing a new initiative, such as, student-led IEP instruction. Such challenges include; competing general education mandates from NCLB, and special education mandates from IDEA, choosing or having access to a curricula, adequate instructional time, and administrative support for providing instruction (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham 2003). McInerney and Hamilton (2007) studied 32 school districts in 20 states to identify implementation factors associated with scientifically-based practices in special education. One of the main predictor variables for starting and sustaining a six-month practice, identified by the Elementary and Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center (EMSTAC), was district and building-level leadership evidenced as administrative support.

Very little research substantiates or implicates administrative support in a school as one of the factors for implementing student-led IEP meetings. Barrie and McDonald (2002) describe the Arizona Student-Led IEP Project and the process that was used with 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to increase their participation in IEP meetings. They reported that administrators who observed student-led meetings were pleased with the collaboration between school and agencies and with the progress students were making towards increasing self-determination skills. Administrators noticed the increase in parent

participation as a positive outcome but the overall success of the program was, in part, due to the active involvement and support of the school administrator. This model incorporated the IEP process into the curricula, sending a message to teachers that they should spend time instructing students on the IEP process.

In addition, Lieber et al. (2009), reported administrative support was very important to teachers, and a weak relationship with early childhood administrators hindered the implementation of a new curriculum. Although there is an abundance of research on student-led IEP meetings, very little research is found to address administrative support as one of the influential factors when implementing student-led IEP meetings. However, when questioned, teachers indicated that the support of their administrator was key to successful implementation of any new initiative (McInerny & Hamilton, 2007; Barrie & McDonald, 2002; Lieber et al., 2009).

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** A model developed by Torgerson, Miner, and Shen (2004) suggests that teaching four 50-minute sessions was adequate for preparing students to lead part, or all, of their IEP meetings. These sessions were best taught during a consistent time of day, when special education instruction was normally scheduled. It was also suggested that the best time to begin instruction for student-led IEP meetings, was during freshman year, which would allow adequate time to practice for postsecondary opportunities.

Additionally, there is evidence from Mason, Field and Sawilowsky (2004), that 92% of teachers spend an average of one-to-three hours total time teaching student-led IEP meetings in the special education class. Their study surveyed 523 teachers, administrators, and related service personnel to evaluate their self-determination teaching

practices. Findings suggested that over half of the teachers reported that they could use more time preparing for and delivering the instruction.

In addition to scheduling instruction for self-determination, Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008) reported that out of 340 general and special education teachers from eight high schools, the majority (two-thirds) of educators included problem solving, self-regulation, decision-making and goal-setting as the most important component elements of self-determination. Interestingly, educators also reported that instruction in problem-solving was taught most frequently during humanities class. One consistent finding among the literature on scheduling instruction during the day, is that the instruction most often occurs during a special education class, and that teachers could use more time in preparing for and delivering instruction.

This current study is an attempt to 1) further evaluate the implementation factors for student-led IEP meetings, 2) determine what has influenced special education teachers' preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) and 3) to learn the perceived effect on student rates for participating in, and/or leading, IEP meetings. Providing an opportunity for students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings is an effective practice for teaching students with disabilities to advocate while still in school (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). However, there are many benefits for individuals who learn to self-advocate through the student-led IEP meetings, such as increased financial independence, employment, and achieving successful post school outcomes (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins & Herman, 1999), creating a positive impact for many years beyond high school. It is important to promote student-led IEP

meetings while still in school, so that special education students receive the life-long benefits associated with learning self-advocacy skills (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

Many curricula have been developed to teach student-led IEP meetings and resources are readily available through one of the 10 RPDC's located throughout the State of Missouri. However, the impact on special education teachers' preparation to teach student-led IEP has not been formally evaluated nor has the impact on the number of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. Other factors that could contribute to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings in Missouri, such as administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day, will be analyzed to add to the information that will provide guidance for future initiatives and to further support the institutionalization of student-led IEP meetings in the State of Missouri (McInerny & Hamilton, 2007; Barrie & McDonald, 2002; Lieber et al., 2009).

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## Chapter 3

### Method

#### Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher preparation factors that were found to make a statistically significant contribution to implementation of student-led IEP meetings, and to learn about the perceived impact these factors have on students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings.

This study considered four research questions to determine the impact of the percentage of students' participation in the IEP meeting and the percentage of students' leading the IEP meeting, on each of the four teacher implementation factors for student-led IEP meetings.

#### Research Questions

1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students leading their IEP meetings are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students leading their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

2. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students participating in their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students participating in their IEP meetings are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students leading their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings subscales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) and the percent of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

4. What is the relationship between the scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, and the percent of students involved in participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

## **Participants**

To address the research questions, data for this study were obtained from a self-developed electronic survey. The survey, along with the dissertation proposal, was submitted for approval to the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where research for the participation of human subjects was approved in January, 2011. Once approved, the 40 question survey was formulated into an internet-based format ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), and forwarded via email to 20 Transition Liaisons (TLs). The characteristics of the subjects for this study included 20 Transition Liaisons (TLs), who also serve as secondary special education professionals or administrators. The TLs, selected by the State of Missouri as regional contacts for transition, are also affiliated with one of the ten Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC) in Missouri.

Regarding the methods for sample selection, potential research participants received an email link to the online survey from the TLs, who were asked to forward the email to other professionals in their school district, utilizing a snowball sampling technique (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Characteristics of the other professionals receiving the survey from the TLs were secondary special education teachers, IEP case managers, administrators and transition coordinators.

The potential sample size was determined by first compiling a list of home school districts for each of the 20 TLs. A search of the DESE website provided the total number of high schools (70) within each of those school districts, and the total number of regular

and special education teachers in each high school. The researcher calculated the ratio of special education teachers to general education teachers in school districts in the State of Missouri, which provided an average ratio of ten general education teachers to one special education teacher. This formula was used to arrive at the estimated sample size of 764 participants.

However, the estimate ( $N = 764$ ) was higher than the actual number of respondents to the survey ( $n = 172$ ). Several TLs did not forward the survey and fewer professionals than expected completed the survey, resulting in disproportionate responses from the different RPDC areas in the State of Missouri. One of the RPDCs received two-thirds of the responses ( $n = 88$ ) from professionals employed by a large Midwestern school district. This researcher, a TL since 2008, followed the same directive as the other TLs, forwarding the survey to other professionals in the school district where employed.

The issue of missing data was addressed by using the mean substitution technique when creating reliable scale scores (Downey & King, 1998). This technique substitutes the sample mean for each missing item on Likert-type questions before calculating the scale score (Downey & King, 1998), and has been found to be an effective approach for maintaining adequate internal consistency reliabilities. In addition, data from 64 out of 172 cases (37%), regarding the RPDC affiliation, were missing and unusable, providing the rationale for using the large Midwestern school district sample in this study. Surveys were completed by 172 people for a response rate of 23% overall.

As a result of low survey response rates from RPDC areas, the focus for this study was changed to a study of a large Midwestern school district ( $n = 88$ ) instead of a Missouri study. The large Midwestern school district provides special education services

to students in 265 public schools in 22 school districts, serving 24,687 students with disabilities (2012-2013). The anticipated sample size for this large Midwestern school district ( $n = 350$ ) was also calculated from the average ratio of ten general education teachers to one special education teacher for 35 high schools, representing 46% of the original estimated sample ( $n = 764$ ). Surveys from the large Midwestern school district were completed by 88 people for a response rate of 25% from the potential sample size for this school district ( $n = 350$ ).

The number of participants responding to the survey ( $N = 172$ ) was significantly larger than the sample size ( $n = 88$ ) used for this study, and represented 51% of the sample size. Table 1 shows the frequency distributions from the last question in the survey (question #40): To “Which Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) in the State of Missouri does your school belong?” The sample size was determined after data for this question was analyzed, finding that a total of 108 participants (62%) answered the question, 88 participants (82%) reported they were affiliated with one large Midwestern school district, 20 participants (18%) reportedly were affiliated with RPDCs other than the large Midwestern school district, and 64 participants (37%) chose not to answer the question.

Table 1

*RPDC Representation as a Percentage of the Sample*

RPDC	N	%
Southeast-Cape Girardeau	6	5
Heart of MO-Columbia	1	1
Kansas City	10	9
Northeast-Kirksville	1	1
Southwest-Springfield	1	1
St. Louis	88	82
Central-Warrensburg	1	1
South Central-Rolla	0	0
Missouri Western-St. Joseph	0	0
Northwest-Maryville	0	0
Missing	64	37
Total	172	

*Note. n=172.*

The decision to only use data from one large Midwestern school district (n = 88) was made during the quantitative analysis phase, and the decision to consider the same data set (n = 88) for the qualitative data analysis will reduce validity threats that occur with unequal sample sizes, and assist in more understandable comparisons when analyzing quantitative and qualitative results. The benefits from choosing a mixed-methods design extend beyond adding depth and richer meaning to the data collection and analysis processes (Bryman, 2006), to providing additional data for analysis, especially with a smaller sample than anticipated.

### **Measures**

The first step in developing the researcher-created survey instrument was to prepare a list of specific objectives providing the overall guidance for creating each

survey question (Patten, 2001). The following five objectives were identified during the initial stages of survey development:

1. To determine special education teachers' preparation to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meeting (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day).
2. To determine the number of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings in the State of Missouri.
3. To determine the amount of time during the day allocated for teaching student-led IEP meetings.
4. The ages and degree of disability of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meeting.
5. The rates for attendance, participation in, and/or leading, the IEP meeting among 10 different RPDC areas of the State.

The teacher preparation factors for the student-led IEP meeting (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) were influential in promoting student-led IEP meetings, as evidenced by past research. For instance, findings suggest many teachers learn how to teach student-led IEP meetings through a variety of professional development opportunities (Eisenman, Chamberlin, & McGahee-Kovac, 2005). Other studies found having access to curricula and materials were important implementation factors for teaching student-led IEP meetings (Test et al., 2004), while McInerny and Hamilton (2007) found that there was a higher success rate for implementing scientifically-based practices in special education

when linked to administrative support. Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008) suggested that successful teaching of self-determination was related to the amount of time allocated for scheduling instruction

The survey included several types of questions, including Likert-type, open-ended, single and multiple-response questions. Survey questions addressed each objective (Patten, 2001) providing information on the demographics of participants; students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings; and a series of questions addressing factors impacting teacher preparation for student-led IEP meetings (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day).

The first survey objective was addressed by asking participants to identify the type of professional development on student-led IEP meetings they received (see Appendix B for survey). Other questions addressing professional development included a “check all that apply” question from a list of 14 items, identification of when their professional development occurred, rating the quality of the most effective professional development from a 4-point Likert scale (*Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor*) and an open-ended question on the most effective professional development on student-led IEP meetings they received.

The survey questions addressing curricula and materials included: rating curricula and materials used to teach student-led IEP meetings from a 5-point Likert scale (*Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Did Not Use*), an open-ended question regarding online resources, and rating supports most important to conduct student-led IEP meetings from a 4-point Likert scale (*Extremely Useful, Very Useful, Useful, Not Useful*).



Survey questions addressing administrative support asked participants to rate helpfulness from direct supervisor and district administrators, using a 5-point Likert scale (*Extremely Helpful, Very Helpful, Helpful, Not Helpful, No Contact With This Person*). Survey questions addressing scheduling instruction during the day included: How many hours during the school year were spent teaching student-led IEP meetings? What was the length of time used for instruction? and Where did the IEP instruction fit into the course of study?

Participants were also asked to identify the number of IEP meetings attended during the 2011-2012 school year, and from those IEP meetings, what was the number of students leading and participating in their IEP meetings, and to identify the parts of the IEP meeting when students were observed leading.

**Reliability.** Items from the survey were grouped together conceptually into summated scales measuring similar concepts: professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day.

To determine acceptable estimates of reliability for the survey, Cronbach's alpha measured the internal consistency reliability of subscale scores for each of the four dependent variables listed below:

**Professional Development.** The subscales of three survey questions from 11 items created the scale score for professional development. Questions asked about the type of professional development participants received to prepare them to teach students to lead their IEP meetings (question # 15); how long ago the professional development occurred (question # 16); and the most effective professional development (question #

18). The 11 professional development items were combined to form a single scale that measured professional development ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Curricula and Materials.** The subscales of two survey questions from 14 items created the scale score for curricula and materials. Survey questions asked participants to rate the curricula and materials used (question # 19); and to identify curricula and materials that might be important to supporting the student-led IEP meetings (question # 27). The 14 curriculum and materials items were combined to form a single scale that measured curricula and materials ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

**Administrative Support.** The subscales of two survey questions from two items created the scale score for the third dependent variable, administrative support. These questions asked participants to identify the helpfulness of their direct supervisor (question #21) and helpfulness of their district administrator to provide instruction in student-led IEP meetings (question #22). The two administrative support items were combined to form a single scale that measured administrative support ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** The subscales of three survey questions from 11 survey items created the scale score for scheduling instruction during the day. These questions asked how many hours during a school year were spent teaching student-led IEP meetings (question # 23); where did the instruction occur (question # 25); and what might be important to support student-led IEP meetings (question # 27). The 11 scheduling during the day items were combined to form a single scale that measured scheduling ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

The internal consistency for all scales were calculated by Cronbach's alpha, with reliability estimates  $\geq .70$  (Simon, 2006), resulting in adequately-reliable scale scores

for statistical analysis. Multiple-response survey questions, where participants were directed to “check all that apply” were not included in the scale, but were used for descriptive statistics.

**Validity.** To assess content validity, three “expert,” reviewers critiqued and revised the survey, aligning each question with the survey objectives, while ensuring data would adequately answer each research question. The expert reviewers provided feedback regarding the parts of the IEP meeting students were leading and types of professional development to include in the survey. Changes to the survey were made based on these recommendations.

### **Research Design**

The mixed-methods approach used in this study, was an effective way to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, and proved to be essential to developing the research questions in this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

**Mixed Methods Approach.** Mixed methods, or the previously named multi-methods approach, has been used since the 1930’s (Creswell, 2005). Over the years, it has been identified as a method that provides the researcher with the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the same study. Mixed methods, by definition, utilizes both approaches to provide a more complete review of the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This approach was particularly helpful when neither approach seemed sufficient alone to provide the best analysis of the data or understanding of the research problem. As a result, the mixed methods approach was determined to be the most appropriate way to explore and interpret factors that influenced the implementation of student-led IEP meetings.

The strengths associated with the quantitative approach (i.e., providing confidence in the reliability and stability of the results based on theories already-tested and validated), combined with strengths associated with the qualitative approach (i.e., words that bring meaning to personal experiences of the participants), provided a more-complex explanation of the problem (Jeanty & Hibel, 2011). The benefits of using the mixed methods approach are significant; however, this method presents unique challenges, such as requiring more time to analyze text and numbers, and requiring knowledge of both quantitative and qualitative forms of research.

Used together in the mixed-methods approach, the quantitative survey data enhanced the understanding of factors influencing implementation of student-led IEP meetings, thus showing a relationship between teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) and the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, IEP meetings. The qualitative survey data added in-depth explanations, giving voice to the participants on implementation factors related to student-led IEP meetings.

**Convergent Parallel Design and Rationale.** This mixed methods study utilized the convergent parallel design to identify which factors influenced implementation of student-led IEPs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Use of the mixed methods convergent parallel design provides an efficient method where collection of quantitative and qualitative data is collected concurrently, and given equal priority (Creswell, 2005). In this design, after the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, the data strands were analyzed and results were compiled separately. The two sets of data were then compared and contrasted, providing an interpretation based on both

results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It was important to corroborate results from both forms of data which brought greater insight into the problem than would be obtained by one type of data analyzed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The independent level of interaction between data, where two data are not mixed before the final interpretation, allowed the data to be analyzed as if there were two studies being conducted at the same time, assigning equal priority to the quantitative and the qualitative data (see Appendix A, Figure A1).

The convergent parallel mixed methods design was chosen for the following reasons (Creswell, 2003):

1. The implementation sequence of the quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred simultaneously for effective use of time.
2. Equal priority was given to the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to better understand the problem.
3. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data are merged into an overall interpretation, developing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Also, using this design can develop a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing special education teachers' instruction of student-led IEP meetings. The effort to engage students during the IEP meeting will result in planning that will be as meaningful to them as possible (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

This research design also provided a more complete review of the factors influencing implementation of the student-led IEP meeting, which allowed the researcher to draw conclusions from different, but complementary, sources of data to answer each research question (Jeanty & Hibel, 2011).

In conclusion, convergent parallel design strategy allowed data to be collected at the same time, with equal priority, to draw conclusions from different sources of data on the factors that influence special education teachers in secondary schools to implement student-led IEP meetings.

**Threats to Internal and External Validity.** Threats to internal validity of the design, such as participant attrition, were controlled by the representative sample of secondary special education professionals completing the survey within a six-week window. Once started, the survey was completed within a 15-minute time period, since the online survey did not support interrupted use. Selection of the sample was not a threat for this one-group design. The last threat to internal validity, maturation of participants, was controlled by lack of opportunity for the maturation of participants to occur given the one-time only responses to items within the online survey. The survey was completed within a short, six-week period of time which controlled for any outside influences on responses.

Threats to external validity were controlled through the extent the population can be generalized to other secondary special education professionals, the location for the study in secondary schools in Missouri, and the time for the study, which occurred during the school day. The sampling method used in this study was typical for an initial survey-driven study.

## Variables

**Independent Variables.** The independent variables consisted of groups of students with disabilities either leading or participating in the IEP meeting. The number of IEP meetings participants attended during the 2011-2012 school year, divided by the number of IEP meetings students were leading, and the number of IEP meetings students were participating in without speaking, created the independent variables.

To eliminate between-subject differences in student-led IEP meetings, means and grand means for each independent variable were calculated, creating new adjusted variables for leading and participating. The two new adjusted variables (participating in the IEP meeting and leading the IEP meeting) were rank-ordered and recoded into four dichotomous variables (0, 1, 2, 3), or levels, representing ratios between IEP meetings attended and number of students reported to participate and/or lead, their IEP meetings (Santos, 1999). The categories of students leading and participating in their IEP meetings were named: Lowest, Low, Moderate, and Highest.

**Dependent Variables.** The dependent variables consisted of the four teacher preparation scale scores for professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day.

Some variables were not included in scale scores for the dependent variables when conceptual differences or multiple response questions (i.e., question # 30) could negatively affect accurate reliability scores for the scale. These questions were used for descriptive purposes.

## **Procedures**

Survey data collection was selected for this study, providing a faster, simpler, systematic process for statistical analysis. The original email cover letter sent to the TLs included a timeline for completion, assurance of anonymity, link to the internet-based survey, and the directions for completing and forwarding the survey (Appendix B). The survey was sent in November, 2011, and in an effort to collect more survey responses, the survey was re-distributed a second time to the TLs, leaving the site open for a total of six weeks. The researcher, copied on the email message in an effort to track the survey's progress, sent a \$10 Target gift card to the TLs in appreciation for their participation, once the survey was closed.

After six weeks elapsed from the initial survey distribution date, data were uploaded from Survey Monkey to Excel, and later imported into the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS, v.21) to prepare for data analysis.

## **Quantitative Data Analysis**

**Research Questions 1 and 2.** These research questions required identical statistical analysis of the four dependent variables and four categories for two different independent variables: students leading their IEP meetings and students participating in their IEP meetings. The purpose of testing the hypotheses of research questions 1 and 2 was to determine if the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings and participating in their IEP meetings had a relationship to teacher preparation of the student-led IEP meeting.



1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students leading their IEP meeting are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students leading their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

2. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students participating in their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students participating in their IEP meeting are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students participating in their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

The data were imported into SPSS, version 21, in order to provide an objective evaluation of the statistical significance of student-led IEP meetings on teacher preparation factors associated with this study. A preliminary analysis of the data set was conducted, running frequencies for each variable, scanning for outliers, addressing missing data, and then standardized kurtosis and skewness coefficients were calculated for all subscales of professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day.

To assist in determining which statistical test would answer research questions 1 and 2, a flow chart based on the number of outcome and predictor variables was used (Field, 2011). A nonparametric analysis of variance (ANOVA), the Kruskal-Wallis test, was determined the best alternative for investigating the differences between the means of four categories of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings and the means of four, teacher preparation factors for the student-led IEP meeting, at  $p < .05$  (Field, 2011).

The following assumptions must be met before running the Kruskal-Wallis test: dependent variables must be ordinal or interval/ratio level, each grouping variable (leading and participating) consists of four categorical independent groups, and there are no assumptions for normal distribution (Field, 2011). The Kruskal-Wallis test was the best fit when the sample size and sub-groups may be smaller than anticipated.

Post-hoc follow-up analysis evaluated statistically significant pair-wise differences among the four categories for each dependent variable at  $p < .05$ . The statistically significant results were reported along with non-significant results, and effect sizes were computed using Cohen's scale.

**Research Questions 3 and 4.** These research questions required similar statistical analysis of the four dependent variables and percentage of students participating in, and/or leading their IEP meetings. The purpose of testing the hypotheses of research questions 3 and 4 was to determine if the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings had a causal pattern to teacher preparation of the student-led IEP meeting.

3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings subscales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) and the percent of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

4. What is the relationship between the scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, and the percent of students involved in participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e., monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

Correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meeting, and subscale scores for professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day.

A nonparametric correlation test, the Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, was used to determine which relationships were found to have a significant degree of association at  $p < .05$ . With the Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, correlations were determined on the ranking of values, not the data itself. An advantage of using this nonparametric correlation test is that normal distribution is not assumed, and values can be ordinal or continuous. Effect size was again determined by Cohen's scale.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time from the same online survey, as prescribed by the convergent parallel mixed methods research design. After six weeks, as with the quantitative data preparation, the participant responses from the survey were converted to an Excel spreadsheet, and then downloaded into SPSS, version 21, where the data was organized and prepared for analysis.

Responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed in Excel by developing a codebook, conducting content analysis, and grouping results into themes. Findings were represented in themes or categories, and/or presented in figures or tables.

The goals for conducting qualitative research, based on the objectives of exploration, description, comparison, and testing models (Bernard & Ryan, 2010), were evident in the current study. Research questions 1, 3 and 4, were partially answered through the qualitative process of content analysis of open-ended survey questions, surfacing themes and sub-themes, along with percentages and frequency distributions.

### **Research Questions 1, 3 and 4**

1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?
3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings subscales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) and the percent of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?
4. What is the relationship between the scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, and the percent of students involved in participating in or leading their IEP meetings?

### **Theme 1: Student-Led IEP Meetings**

Responses from the following open-ended and multiple-response survey questions were analyzed for content, assigned codes to develop themes, and when possible, converted to a quantitative variable, before finally comparing qualitative results to the quantitative results for the same research question.

- What part of the IEP meeting is hardest for students to lead and why?
- Why do you think it is important for students to participate in their IEP meetings?
- Why is it important for teachers to provide support for students to both participate in and/or lead their IEP meetings?
- Why do you think it is important for students to participate in their IEP meetings?
- What parts of the IEP meeting do students generally lead and why?

Participants identified parts of the IEP meeting their students participated in, and

led, checking all responses that applied. Responses were analyzed and presented in a table.

### **Theme 2: Professional Development**

- What was the most effective training method to promote effective IEP meetings?
- What helped you the most successfully implement student-led IEP meetings?
- What makes it more difficult for you to teach students to participate in and/or lead their IEP meeting?

### **Theme 3: Curricula and Materials**

- Rate the curriculum(s) and or material(s) you may have used to teach students to lead part, or all, of their IEP meeting.

### **Theme 4: Administrative Support**

- As you made the decision to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, what helped you the most to successfully implement this process?

### **Theme 5: Scheduling**

- If most of your students are not participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, why not?
- What helped you the most to successfully implement student-led IEP meetings?

Analysis of the open-ended survey questions consisted of reading and re-reading through the data, taking notes to develop a list of categories, and identifying themes and patterns that were eventually recorded into a codebook. The themes were coded, sorted by research question, and counted for frequency. The findings were then analyzed for consistency. The validity of the qualitative analysis was tested by using inter-rater

reliability, involving two or more people analyzing the data for consistency (Golafshani, 2003).

The qualitative data analysis was conducted for research questions 1, 3, and 4. Research question 2 analyzed responses for students participating in their IEP meeting, and, while important, were not as meaningful to the qualitative findings as students leading their IEP meetings, and not included in the qualitative analysis.

The mixed methods data analysis procedure for this convergent parallel design collected and analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data separately, comparing and contrasting the merged results to answer the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Limitations of Research Design**

The major limitation of this design was the small sample size affected by the large amount of missing data, resulting in disproportionate responses from RPDC areas in the State of Missouri. As a result, only participant data from one large school district were considered for this study, shifting the focus away from a State of Missouri study.

Another limitation was delivery of the online survey. The email may not have received the same level of attention from teachers as a personal letter that included a printed survey. However, the cost and ease of completion were considered when developing the study, leading to the decision to solicit questionnaire responses online.

Lastly, the actual report of the number of students leading their IEP meetings relied on participants' perceptions of activity/inactivity of students during these meetings, which may not be perfect measures, but seemed intuitively useful.

## Chapter 4

### Results

#### Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of teacher preparation for the student-led IEP meeting (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) on students with disabilities participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, and to ascertain the special education professionals' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with leading and participating in the IEP meeting. There were four research questions developed for this study.

1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?
2. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students participating in their IEP meetings?
3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings subscales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) and the percent of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?



4. What is the relationship between the scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, and the percent of students involved in participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings?

Results were organized as prescribed by the conventions associated with the convergent parallel research design: quantitative and qualitative findings reported separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The data for this study, collected from an online survey, were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS, v. 21. A Kruskal-Wallis test determined differences between groups of students with disabilities participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings (independent variables) and teacher preparation scales for professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day (dependent variables). A post-hoc follow-up test compared specific groups of students leading, and participating in, their IEP meetings, to determine which groups were significantly different from each other. Correlations were computed among the four teacher preparation scales and the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, IEP meetings. This chapter, organized by research question, will provide an analysis of descriptive statistics, independent and dependent variables, results of the Kruskal-Wallis test, post-hoc follow-up test results, and Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient results.

## Quantitative Results

### Research Questions 1 and 2

Research question 1 addressed teacher preparation factors for the student-led IEP meeting for students leading their IEP meetings and research question 2 addressed teacher preparation factors for the student-led IEP meeting for students participating in their IEP meetings.

For research questions 1 and 2 the table of critical Chi-Square values determined the critical value (7.81) based on degrees of freedom (3), and  $p$  value ( $<.05$ ) for the Kruskal-Wallis test.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Independent Variables.** Prior to running the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test, independent variables for research questions 1 and 2 were re-coded into adjusted mean scores, subsequently divided into four ranges (i.e., less than 1% of students, between 1-7% of students, between 8-50% of students and greater than 50% of students). The four ranges were reclassified into four categories or levels, representing the percentage of students participating in, and leading, their IEP meetings: 1) lowest = less than 1 % of students, 2) low = 1-7% of students, 3) moderate = 8-50% of students, and 4) highest = 51-100% of students.

Table 2 shows the four categories of students leading IEP meetings, and four categories of students participating in IEP meetings for Research Questions 1 and 2. For students leading their IEP meetings, the highest category (51-100% of students) represents the fewest number of students. In contrast, for students participating in their

IEP meetings the lowest category (less than 1% of students), represents the fewest number of students.

Table 2

*Distribution of Student Involvement in the IEP Meeting*

Category	Number of Responses	% of Responses
<b>Students Participating</b>		
Lowest	11	13
Low	47	53
Moderate	16	18
Highest	14	16
Total	88	100
<b>Students Leading</b>		
Lowest	19	22
Low	42	48
Moderate	16	18
Highest	11	13
Total	88	100

Means and standard deviations for students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings are presented in Table 3. Three out of four subscales (professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support) fell in the highest category (51-100% of students) for students leading their IEP meetings, and only one subscale (professional development) fell in the highest category of students participating in their IEP meetings.

Table 3

*Contrast of Categories of Involvement in the IEP Meeting*

Variable	<u>Leading</u>		<u>Participating</u>	
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>SE</i>
Professional Development				
Lowest,	48.95 (28.12)	6.45	52.09 (17.31)	5.22
Low	40.05 (26.29)	4.06	41.62 (25.85)	3.77
Moderate	44.00 (20.57)	5.14	37.22 (25.87)	6.47
Highest	54.55 (20.08)	6.05	56.54 (24.17)	6.46
Curricula/Materials				
Lowest	45.26 (28.81)	6.12	61.73 (24.48)	7.38
Low	40.29 (22.49)	3.470	43.05 (23.56)	3.44
Moderate	43.09 (25.46)	6.36	32.75 (25.62)	6.41
Highest	58.82 (28.39)	8.56	49.25 (26.78)	7.16
Administrative Support				
Lowest	45.26 (26.68)	6.12	63.91 (12.36)	3.73
Low	37.14 (23.14)	3.57	41.82 (25.69)	3.75
Moderate	54.13 (26.11)	6.53	38.31 (25.47)	6.37
Highest	57.57 (20.77)	6.26	45.32 (25.04)	6.70
Scheduling				
Lowest	39.08 (28.27)	6.49	42.32 (21.36)	6.44
Low	50.62 (23.93)	3.70	48.31 (24.80)	3.62
Moderate	34.09 (24.32)	6.08	35.78 (25.73)	6.43
Highest	45.64 (23.98)	7.23	43.39 (29.88)	7.99

*Note: Total n = 88.*

**Dependent Variables.** Table 4 shows the mean, standard error and standard deviation for the scale scores representing the dependent variables (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day). More students were participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings when special education teachers had access to curricula and materials, and/or received administrative support.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>SD</i>
Professional Development	.84	.03	.31
Curricula and Materials	1.25	.05	.46
Administrative Support	1.63	.11	1.03
Scheduling	.86	.04	.35

*Note:*  $n = 88$ .

Across all subscales for professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day, teachers participating in professional development with time allocated to teach student led IEP meetings, experienced a lower percentage of students participating in and/or leading their IEP meetings.

**Participants.** Table 5 shows demographic data of participants from a large Midwestern school district ( $n = 88$ ), showing a higher percentage of women than men. Most of the participants identified themselves by checking only one role, with the exception of the teacher and case manager categories, where many of the participants' responses (130) selected both responses. Participants teaching the fewest years (1-10) represented 24 % of the sample, while most (65%) of the participants taught between 11 and 30 years.

Table 5

*Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristic	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Gender		
Women	75	86
Men	12	14
Role		
Case Manager	76	86
Classroom Teacher	54	61
Transition Coordinator	13	15
Years Teaching		
1-5	8	9
6-10	13	15
11-15	15	17
16-20	19	22
21-25	9	10
26-30	14	16
31+	10	11

*Note:* Number of responses denotes the number of responses from participants, and % of responses denotes the percentage of participants choosing that response.

There were many factors that teachers perceived as important to leading the IEP meetings. These were evaluated by combining responses from the two Likert-scale responses for “extremely useful” and “very useful,” resulting in similarities between the most important factors, Table 6. Percentages for the combined scores of the highest two categories ranged from 47% to 61%. The student-led IEP meetings’ implementation factor scoring the highest percentage of responses (61%) was “having material and handouts readily available.” The other top responses were for “parent supportiveness,” “ease in scheduling with students,” “release time to attend professional development,” and “having curricula readily available.” The least important implementation factor (47%) was for “content knowledge.

Table 6

*Important Implementation Factors for Student-Led IEP as a Percentage of the Sample*

Factors		Count	Sub Table N %
Curricula readily available	Not Useful	7	8%
	Useful	16	16%
	Very Useful	16	16%
	Extremely Useful	31	35%
Ease in scheduling with students	Not Useful	7	8%
	Useful	13	15%
	Very Useful	24	27%
	Extremely Useful	28	32%
Parent supportiveness/cultural acceptance	Not Useful	5	6%
	Useful	15	17%
	Very Useful	28	32%
	Extremely Useful	24	27%
Computer access for the student	Did not use	11	13%
	Not Useful	16	18%
	Useful	19	22%
	Very Useful	24	27%
Materials and handouts readily available	Not Useful	5	6%
	Useful	15	17%
	Very Useful	18	21%
	Extremely Useful	35	40%
Computer access for you	Not Useful	10	11%
	Useful	18	21%
	Very Useful	13	15%
	Extremely Useful	29	33%
Access to general student template for the IEP	Not Useful	11	13%
	Useful	15	17%
	Very Useful	21	24%
	Extremely Useful	23	26%
Release time to attend professional development for IEP development	Not Useful	10	11%
	Useful	13	15%
	Very Useful	24	27%
	Extremely Useful	23	26%
Content knowledge	Not Useful	9	10%
	Useful	16	18%
	Very Useful	22	25%
	Extremely Useful	20	22%

### Preliminary Statistical Analysis

Prior to doing statistical analysis, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted across all subscales for students leading and participating in their IEP meetings: professional development ( $D_{(88)} = .26, p < .05$  non-normal), curricula and materials ( $D_{(88)} = .13, p < .05$  non-normal), administrative support ( $D_{(88)} = .16, p < .05$  non-normal), and scheduling instruction during the day ( $D_{(88)} = .26, p < .05$  non-normal). All subscale distributions for students leading and participating in their IEP meetings were non-normal.

A Levene's test was also conducted for students *leading* their IEP meetings, across all subscales for professional development ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 2.12, ns$ ), curricula and materials ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.17, ns$ ), administrative support ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.70, ns$ ), and scheduling instruction during the day ( $F_{(3, 84)} = .40, ns$ ). The subscale variances for students leading their IEP meetings were equal.

The Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was conducted for students *participating in* their IEP meeting across all subscales for professional development ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.05, ns$ ), curricula and materials ( $F_{(3, 84)} = .47, ns$ ), administrative support ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 3.26, p < .05$ ), and scheduling instruction during the day ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.07, ns$ ). The subscale variances for professional development, curricula and materials, and scheduling instruction during the day for students participating in their IEP meetings were equal; however, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the administrative support subscale ( $p < .05$ ).



Results for tests of normality were significantly different from normal for the four categories representing the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings and leading their IEP meetings as shown in Appendix A (Table A7 and Table A8).

Results from testing equality of variances found unequal results for all variables, therefore, to insure validity of the results, a nonparametric Levene's test was conducted for each group of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings (Nordstokke & Zumbo, 2010; Nordstokke, Zumbo, Cairns, & Saklofsk, 2011). The variables, transformed into rank scores, represented individual measures of the spread in relation to the group's mean.

A nonparametric Levene's test was conducted for students *leading* their IEP meetings, across all groups for professional development ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 2.17, ns$ ), curricula and materials ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.66, ns$ ), administrative support ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 4.27, p < .05$ ), and scheduling instruction during the day ( $F_{(3, 84)} = .87, ns$ ). The group variances for professional development, curricula and materials, and scheduling instruction during the day for students leading their IEP meetings were equal; however, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the administrative support group ( $p < .05$ ).

The nonparametric Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was conducted for students *participating in* their IEP meeting across all groups for professional development ( $F_{(3, 84)} = .81, ns$ ), curricula and materials ( $F_{(3, 84)} = .64, ns$ ), administrative support ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 3.64, p < .05$ ), and scheduling instruction during the day ( $F_{(3, 84)} = 1.35, ns$ ). The group variances for professional development, curricula and materials, and scheduling instruction during the day for students participating in their IEP meetings were equal; however, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the

administrative support group ( $p < .05$ ). The findings from nonparametric Levene's tests are consistent with the Levene's test results.

Administrative support was the only variable for participating in, and/or leading, IEP meetings, where a statistically-significant difference indicated no equality of variance ( $p < .05$ ).

### **Results: Research Question 1- Leading the IEP Meeting**

This study addressed the differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) and students with disabilities leading their IEP meetings. This section provides a report of findings from the statistical analysis conducted to answer this question.

**Administrative Support.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate differences in the scale score for administrative support among the four different categories, or levels, for leading the IEP meeting (lowest, low, moderate, and highest). The results, corrected for tied ranks, were significant ( $H_{(3)} = 8.82, p = .03$ ) with statistical significance accepted at the  $p < .05$  levels.

Pair-wise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Post-hoc analysis between administrative support and the different categories of students leading their IEP meetings were the same for the lowest ( $Mdn = 59.50$ ) and moderate ( $Mdn = 59.50$ ) categories with the low ( $Mdn = 26.50$ ) and highest ( $Mdn = 59.50$ ) categories representing the lowest percentage of students; however, differences between any of the pairs were not statistically significant at the  $p < .0083$  for six comparisons.

**Professional Development.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine significant differences in the professional development scale score and the categories of students leading the IEP meeting. Overall, the four categories representing the percentage of IEP meetings attended where students were leading the meeting were not statistically significant  $H_{(3)} = 3.66, p = .30$ .

The professional development scores for the lowest ( $Mdn = 43.50$ ), low ( $Mdn = 43.50$ ), and moderate ( $Mdn = 43.50$ ) categories were the same. The highest category ( $Mdn = 59.00$ ) was higher with respect to median scores.

**Curricula and Materials.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were differences in the scale scores for curricula and materials, and the four different categories representing the percentage of IEP meetings where students were leading the IEP meeting.

The curricula and materials median scores for the lowest ( $Mdn = 57.00$ ) and highest ( $Mdn = 70.00$ ) categories, and the low ( $Mdn = 39.00$ ) and moderate ( $Mdn = 43.00$ ) categories were similar for leading IEP meeting groups, but the differences were not statistically significant  $H_{(3)} = 4.81, p = .19$ .

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were differences in the scale score for scheduling instruction during the day and the different categories or levels of leading the IEP meeting.

The scheduling instruction during the day mean scores increased from the lowest ( $Mdn = 34.50$ ) to Low ( $Mdn = 56.50$ ) categories, and from the moderate ( $Mdn = 33.25$ ) to highest ( $Mdn = 42.00$ ) categories for leading IEP meeting groups, but the differences were not statistically significant  $H_{(3)} = 5.99, p = .11$ .

### **Summary Research Question 1- Leading the IEP Meeting**

The null hypothesis for Research Question 1 states that the distribution of scores in each group are the same. The four factors hypothesized to influence student-led IEP meetings were tested for statistical significance by the Kruskal-Wallis test. For students leading their IEP meetings, the scale score for administrative support was the only factor found statistically significant.

At the  $\alpha = .05$  level of significance, there exists enough evidence to conclude that there is a difference in the median scores for teachers receiving administrative support for the student-led IEP, among the four categories representing percentages of students leading their IEP meetings.

### **Results: Research Question 2- Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Research Question 2 attempted to determine if there was a relationship pertaining to students *participating* in their IEP meetings and teacher preparation for the student-led IEP meeting (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day).

**Administrative Support.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate differences in the scale score for administrative support, among the four different categories of participating in IEP meetings (lowest, low, moderate, and highest). The results, corrected for tied ranks, were significant,  $H_{(3)} = 8.09$ ,  $p = .04$ , with statistical significance accepted at the  $p < .05$  level.

Pair-wise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni-correction for multiple comparisons. Post-hoc analysis between administrative support and the different categories of students participating in their IEP

meetings were similar for low ( $Mdn = 44.50$ ) and highest ( $Mdn = 43.00$ ) categories, and lower for moderate ( $Mdn = 35.50$ ), with the highest percentage of students in the lowest category ( $Mdn = 59.50$ ). None of the differences were statistically significant at the  $p < .0083$  level for six multiple comparisons.

When teachers received administrative support for teaching the student-led IEP, students participated in their IEP meetings at a greater percentage within the lowest (less than 1% of students), low (1-7% of students) and moderate (8-50% of students) categories.

**Professional Development.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were differences in the scale score for professional development and the different categories of students participating in the IEP meeting. Overall, the four categories representing the percentage of IEP meetings attended where students were participating in the IEP meeting, were not statistically significant  $H_{(3)} = 6.14, p = .11$  at the  $p < .05$  level.

The professional development median scores varied from lowest ( $Mdn = 59.00$ ), low ( $Mdn = 43.50$ ), moderate ( $Mdn = 33.25$ ), to highest ( $Mdn = 63.75$ ) categories of students participating in IEP meetings.

**Curricula and Materials.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate differences in the scale score for curricula and materials among the four different categories of participating in IEP meetings (lowest, low, moderate, and highest). The results, corrected for tied ranks, were significant,  $H_{(3)} = 9.05, p = .03$ . with statistical significance accepted at the  $p < .05$  level.

Pair-wise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni-correction for multiple comparisons. Post-hoc analysis between curricula and materials and the different categories of students participating in their IEP meetings revealed statistically significant differences between the moderate ( $Mdn = 24.50$ ) and lowest ( $Mdn = 70.00$ ) categories, but not between the Low ( $Mdn = 39.00$ ) or highest ( $Mdn = 58.25$ ) categories, or other combinations at the  $p < .0083$  level for multiple (six) comparisons..

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if there were differences in the scheduling instruction scale score between the different levels of participating in the IEP meeting. The scheduling instruction score varied from lowest ( $Mdn = 42.00$ ), low ( $Mdn = 56.50$ ), moderate ( $Mdn = 38.25$ ), to highest ( $Mdn = 38.25$ ) categories of students participating in IEP meetings, but the differences were not statistically significant  $H(3) = 3.04, p = .39$  at the  $p < .05$  level.

### **Summary Research Question 2: Participating in the IEP Meeting**

To answer Research Question 2: The null hypothesis states the distribution of scores in each group are the same. Tested by the Kruskal- Wallis test for differences in teacher preparation scores for students participating in their IEP meetings, the factors of administrative support and curricula and materials proved statistically significant.

At the  $\alpha = .05$  level of significance, there exists enough evidence to conclude that there is a difference in the median test scores for special education professionals receiving administrative support and curricula and materials for the student-led IEP meeting, among the four categories representing the percentage of students participating in their IEP meeting.

### **Research Questions 3 and 4: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

#### **Results: Research Questions 3 and 4**

This study examined the data to see whether there was a relationship between the four factors associated with teacher preparation for student-led IEP meetings, and students leading and participating in their IEP meetings.

Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to determine the strength of an association between the percentage of students leading and participating in their IEP meeting, and teacher preparation for the student-led IEP meeting (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, and administrative support).

The data represented continuous variables of 88 paired observations. A monotonic relationship was visually confirmed; however, the relationship was non-linear between professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day, and participating in, and/or leading IEP meetings. An alpha level of .05 was used for this statistical test. When computing correlations, the list-wise deletion process of deleting each case with missing data was utilized to provide correlations on exactly the same response cases, and all data was ranked with ties converted to represent averages of the two numbers.

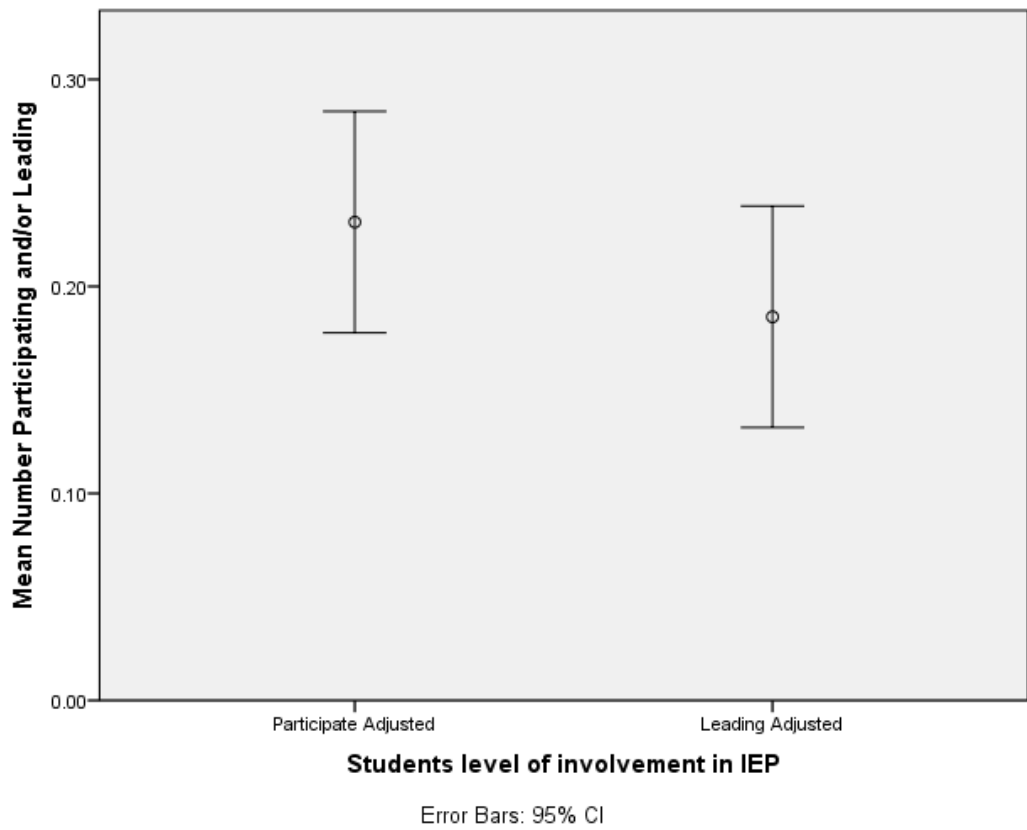
#### **Descriptive Statistics**

**Independent Variables.** Independent variables for Research Questions 3 and 4 were represented by the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. The percentage of students participating in IEP meetings, and students leading IEP meetings (independent variables) were computed from the number of students perceived to be leading IEP meetings ( $n = 220$ ), and the number of students perceived to

be participating in IEP meetings ( $n = 347$ ) divided by the number of IEPs attended during the last year ( $n = 1,738$ ). Participants averaged 17 IEPs per participant, overall.

In Figure 2, it appears more students were observed participating in their IEP meetings than leading their IEP meetings.

Figure 2





**Results: Research Question 3 – Leading the IEP Meeting**

**Professional Development.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between professional development received by secondary special education teachers on student-led IEP meetings, and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. However, there was a very weak positive correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and professional development,  $r_s (86) = .11, p = .32$ .

**Curricula and Materials.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between curricula and materials used to teach student-led IEP meetings by secondary special education teachers and percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was a moderately positive correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and curricula and materials,  $r_s (86) = .27, p < .05, 2$ -tailed. This suggests that students leading their IEP meetings are moderately correlated to teachers who use student-led IEP curricula and materials.

**Administrative Support.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between administrative support for teaching the student-led IEP meeting, and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was a moderately positive correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and administrative support,  $r_s (86) = .30, p < .05, 2$ -tailed. This suggests that

students leading their IEP meetings are moderately correlated to teachers receiving administrative support.

### **Results: Research Question 3 - Participating in the IEP Meeting**

**Professional Development.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between professional development received to teach student-led IEP meetings and percentage of students participating without speaking in their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was a weak positive correlation between students participating their IEP meetings and professional development,  $r_s (86) = .13, p = .24$ .

**Administrative Support.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between administrative support received to teach student-led IEP meetings and the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was an inverse correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and administrative support,  $r_s (86) = -.08, p = .49$ .

**Curricula and Materials.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between curricula and materials received to teach student-led IEP, and the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was an inverse correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and curricula and materials,  $r_s (86) = -.06, p = .56$ .

### **Summary Research Question 3: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

There was no statistically significant relationship identified between students leading their IEP meetings, and professional development, and for students participating in their IEP meetings and professional development, curricula and materials and administrative support.

### **Results: Research Question 4- Leading the IEP Meeting**

This study tested for a relationship between the time allocated to teach student-led IEP meetings and the percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings.

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between scheduling time to teach student-led IEP meetings and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual inspection of the scatterplot. There was an inverse correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and scheduling instruction during the day,  $r_s(86) = -.25$   $p < .05$ , 2-tailed. This suggests that a higher percentage of students leading their IEP meetings were correlated with teachers who schedule time during the day to teach student-led IEP meetings.

### **Results: Research Question 4 - Participating in IEP Meetings**

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** A Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between scheduling time to teach student-led IEP meetings and the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings. Preliminary analysis showed the relationship to be monotonic, as assessed by visual

inspection of the scatterplot. There was an inverse correlation between students leading their IEP meetings and scheduling during the day,  $r_s (86) = -.19$   $p = .07$ .

#### **Summary Research Question 4: Leading and Participating in IEP Meeting**

Correlations were computed among four teacher preparation subscales and student-led IEP data for students leading their IEP meetings and participating in their IEP meetings. In general, the results suggest that students leading their IEP meetings have teachers who use student-led IEP materials and curricula, have administrative support, and have time designated during the day to teach students to lead their IEP meetings.

#### **Quantitative Summary**

The quantitative data analysis reported which teacher preparation factors (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) significantly influenced teachers to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings. The findings suggest that administrative support was a significant implementation factor for students both leading and participating in their IEP meetings. Curricula and materials were found to significantly influence teachers for students participating in their IEP meetings. Of less significance to students participating in, and/or leading their IEP meetings were teachers who reported to have received professional development and time for scheduling instruction during the day for student-led IEP meetings. The qualitative results will provide depth to the quantitative results through comparisons in Chapter 5.

## Qualitative Results

The qualitative data was analyzed to identify themes representing the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of implementation factors for student-led IEP meetings, and the perceptions about students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. Major themes and sub-themes were organized by the patterns, counts and frequencies per each research question. The outliers or responses from only a few participants were noted before the summary and conclusion. Themes and sub-themes were identified to address the student-led IEP meetings, professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day, which represent the variables for Research Questions 1, 3 and 4.

1. Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) and students leading their IEP meetings?
3. What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings sub-scales (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support teachers receive) and the percent of students participating in and/or leading, their IEP meetings?
4. What is the relationship between scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, or leading their IEP meetings and the percent of students involved in participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings?

The goals of the qualitative analysis were similar to the quantitative analysis, which were to determine differences between students who participated in, and/or led, their IEP meetings, and between the teacher implementation factors (i.e., professional

development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) for student-led IEP meetings (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

The original plan to analyze survey responses using qualitative content analysis was reconsidered, finding that the approach was inappropriate for the analysis due to the short, open-ended responses from the survey, and a smaller sample size than anticipated. However, in a broader sense, Phillip Mayring reported a definition of content analysis, (as cited in Krippendorff, 1969, p.103) as “content analysis as the use of replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source” (Mayring, 2000) which provides the framework for analysis in this study.

After the open-ended and multiple-response survey questions were identified for qualitative analysis, the responses were then copied into separate sheets in an Excel program, and printed, numbering and eliminating all blank lines. Next, each question’s responses were read several times from the printed Excel spreadsheet, starting with the first line, making notes of key descriptors, codes and patterns in the margins while underlining key words and phrases. To ensure consistency with these coding schemes, the constant comparison technique, or compare and contrast technique (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) was used, finding differences between each passage and the previous or following passages. This process was used until the entire document was compared line-by-line with the previous or following lines, and all of the data was coded. Codes were labeled and grouped into themes. Themes were considered after reviewing the list of frequently-occurring words. Each coded phrase or word was compared to all of the other cases within the same theme. All themes were compared in the same way, making changes to

the coding along the way. From the interrelated themes, sub-themes were organized under themes in an outline format.

Some questions, such as multiple-response questions, were analyzed by the word repetitions technique, counting similar or same words within a selected response set. In this case, words from passages that signify answers to questions were noted in the margins. Each response was then tallied resulting in a frequency count, and reported as numbers and percentages, either in narrative or table format.

The data were organized by topic (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) with an additional topic for the student-led IEP meetings. These *a priori* topics provided the organizational structure for the data analysis, under which additional themes and sub-themes were noted. These topics will serve as the dimensions for comparison between the quantitative findings and the qualitative findings.

This study was found to be “a good study” by the quality and depth of the survey, determination of researcher and thoroughness of data analysis, personal interest in the topic, and the relevance to the field (Merriam, 2002). To ensure validity and reliability, member checking and peer review strategies were used. While the qualitative study cannot be generalized statistically, the knowledge of the findings from the study can be generalized by the reader on a case-by-case basis. This study was conducted in an ethical manner.

The five themes include: student-led IEP meetings, professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day.

Within these five themes, a total of 14 open-ended and four multiple - response survey questions were reviewed and analyzed.

### **Theme 1: Student-Led IEP Meeting**

Participants identified the number of IEP meetings they attended, and then proceeded to identify with a checkmark the part of the IEP meetings that their students were observed to either participate in, (i.e., attending, responding to direct questions or comments on topic when asked, offering information on selected topics, but not taking the lead), or lead (i.e., facilitated chiefly in communicating information to the IEP team on a specific part, or parts, of the IEP meeting) as displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

#### *Comparison of Parts of IEP Meeting: Number of Responses of Total Sample*

Parts of IEP Meeting	Participating		Leading	
	N	%	N	%
Welcoming and Introducing participants	83	14	33	12
Likes, dislikes, skills, challenges and needs, state disability	221	38	115	41
Transition assessment, post-secondary goals, action plans and course of study	248	42	114	41
Review past IEP goals and summarize new goals	34	6	18	7
Total	586	100%	280	100%

Nearly all of the participants (98%) replied that they participated in a collective total of 1,728 IEP meetings each school year, and in slightly more than one-third (33%) of those IEP meetings, students were either leading or participating. Participants'



responses from the open-ended survey question asking why students led certain parts of their IEP meetings over other parts, were mostly due to the student's comfort level:

As with most people, these students will participate in an event in which they are most comfortable and at ease.

Another similar response includes:

It's easy for students to state these items because these are questions they can most often easily answer.

Participants also reported perceptions important to the student, such as:

Because it is what is most important to them.  
Because this is what they are most interested in and understand.

Preparing students with disabilities to lead their IEP meetings is challenging from the student perspective, as well. Many participants stated that students have difficulty with particular parts of the IEP when leading the meeting, specifically stating their disability:

Few know what it is and how it affects them.  
Talking about their disability, because for most individuals in special education, they see having a disability as something that makes them different from their peers.  
They so want to just fit in without drawing attention to their learning difficulties. Many don't believe they even have a disability.

One reason students may lead fewer parts of their IEP meeting may be attributed to feeling self-consciousness about their disability. Student peers who do not support IEP meeting attendance or participation (negative peer support) may have a similar negative effect, making it more difficult for students to step up and take a leadership role in their IEP meeting. In fact, 10% of the participants felt that this was one of the significant challenges facing students regarding the student-led IEP meeting.

Interestingly, participants were also asked specifically what they felt was the hardest part of the IEP meeting for students to participate in, and talking about their disability was the most frequent response. As one participant responded about the hardest part of the IEP meeting to participate in:

Stating their disability or talking about their disability since most students have never been included in conversations about their disability even though they are the ones living with it.

It may be possible that the participants had difficulty discriminating between *participating* in their IEP meetings, and *leading* their IEP meetings, as noted in similarities of responses.

Students have an easy time participating in their IEP meetings when they introduce or welcome the IEP team, are involved in stating their transition plans or future goals, likes and dislikes, or strengths and challenges. Participants noted that when students talked about their plans for the future:

They have first-hand knowledge about what they can/can't do and what they want to do after high school.

Because most students know what they want to do when they graduate high school and are looking forward to it.

**Student Buy-In.** As teachers make the decision to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, they are motivated by several factors, but the most frequent response was “students were enthused about it!” Another participant responded,

The student themselves, because they became very excited about being able to have their own voice at the IEP.

The unfortunate thing about the students' enthusiasm is that they are dependent on teachers to teach them to lead their IEP meetings. If the teacher does not support the student-led IEP meeting, students will not have the chance to experience and practice

self-advocacy. Consequently, it will not be a motivating factor for the teacher. It is clear that any decision to introduce the student-led IEP meeting must come from a source other than the student.

**Students Empowered.** When teachers were asked for the reason they think it is important for students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings, many of them provided similar responses. Most of the participants (92%) stated comments about it being a good thing for the students. The responses included a variety of descriptors on what the student would gain from the experience, such as: “ownership of their future,” “empowerment,” “It is their future!,” “self-advocacy,” “better understand their disability,” “feel more in control,” “to have a voice,” and “so they can speak for themselves and get their needs met.” The high response rate for this question suggests that teachers were pleased to be able to give this experience to the students, and that it was perceived by them to be a positive experience.

**Teachers Know Benefits.** Teacher support for student-led IEP meetings was critical, and they know it, as evidenced by the responses to the question: Why is it important for teachers to provide support for students to both participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings? Again, almost all (92%) of the participants responded to this question, and the similarities in responses were noteworthy. They indicated that it would greatly benefit the students to the degree that they did not have an option not to help. The sub-themes from the content analysis of this question included: self-advocacy, builds confidence, encouragement to express themselves, self-esteem, control in their life, and finally,

We are their support system at school and need to assure a follow-through with other teachers, as well as with the student. Students need to know

someone is there to support them in their efforts.

## **Theme 2: Professional Development**

Participants chose “Workshops (on student-led IEP meetings)” as the most effective type of professional development received. The next two highest responses, displayed in Table 10, were “University Courses” and “Conferences.” The least effective professional development opportunities were “Podcasts,” “DESE sponsored workshop” and “On-site technical assistance.”

Table 10

### *Professional Development Frequencies for Student-Led IEP*

Type	<i>N</i>	%
Workshop	52	55%
Conferences	11	12%
Podcasts	1	1%
On-site technical assistance	3	3%
Peer leadership in student-led IEP	7	7%
University course	12	13%
DESE sponsored workshop	3	3%
Seminars	5	5%
Total	94	100%

**Effective Training Method.** Responses for the most effective training method to promote student-led IEP meetings were identified by the word repetitions technique and coding frequency. The most frequent response was “Workshop,” followed by “providing time for case managers and students to take a course together,” “demonstration and examples,” and “don’t know.” Many methods were mentioned by one or two teachers, such as “template,” “role play,” “power point class,” “KU’s Transcert Courses,” and “none of it was effective; the problem is a result of a larger issue.”

A variety of reasons, or excuses, related to professional development, as displayed in Table 14, were often stated when teachers decided not to teach student-led IEP meetings. 18 % of participants chose the response: “there was not much financial support to attend workshop on Student-led IEP,” 7% of participants chose: “I am unable to get release time to attend professional development,” and 24 % of participants chose: “I don’t know enough about supporting students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP.”

### **Theme 3: Curricula and Material**

In recent years, many of the special education teachers from the large Midwestern school district have been provided the opportunity to receive information to teach students to lead their IEP meetings consisting of: regional, district and state-wide workshops, participation in research studies conducted by Drs. Susan Palmer and Michael Wehmeyer from Kansas University (KU), and outreach to all high schools, including links to new websites and resources. In addition, materials and handouts, and in some cases, curricula, were provided at no cost to the participants. *Whose Future is it Anyway?* Wehmeyer et al. (2004) and the *SDLMI* (Wehmeyer et al., 2000) were among

materials provided to teachers who participated in KU research projects. Many teachers also received, free-of-charge through workshop participation, *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*, by Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler (2002), an evidence-based practice (Test et al., 2009). In Table 11, the curricula previously mentioned, *Whose Future Was it Anyway?* was most frequently used, with 22% of participants scoring it as “fair,” “good,” or “excellent.” *The Self-Advocacy Strategy* was used by 20% of participants and the *SDLMI* was used by 12% of the participants.

Table 11

*Effectiveness of Curriculum(s) and or Material(s) Used for Instructing Student-Led IEP as a Percentage of the Sample*

Curriculum / Materials		Count	Sub Table %
National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICCHY) 2002- Teacher's Guide to Student-Led IEPs	Did not use	82	93%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	2	2%
	Good	4	5%
	Excellent	0	0%
NEXT STEP Curriculum	Did not use	83	94%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	1	1%
	Good	4	5%
	Excellent	0	0%
STEPS To Self-Determination	Did not use	67	76%
	Poor	1	1%
	Fair	7	8%
	Good	11	13%
	Excellent	2	2%
Whose Future is it Anyway	Did not use	68	77%
	Poor	1	1%
	Fair	5	6%
	Good	11	13%
	Excellent	3	3%
Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)	Did not use	77	88%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	2	2%
	Good	8	9%
	Excellent	1	1%
Choicemaker	Did not use	84	95%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	0	0%
	Good	4	5%
	Excellent	0	0%
The Self-Advocacy Strategy	Did not use	69	78%
	Poor	2	2%
	Fair	6	7%
	Good	9	10%
	Excellent	2	3%
TAKE CHARGE	Did not use	83	94%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	2	2%
	Good	3	3%
	Excellent	0	0%
Online Resources (i.e. I'm Determined)	Did not use	90	91%
	Poor	0	0%
	Fair	1	1%
	Good	4	5%
	Excellent	3	3%

**Excuses.** A variety of reasons are often provided when teachers decide not to teach student-led IEP meetings. For example, 21% of teachers cited problems providing the instruction, due to the "lack of funds to purchase curricula;" 42% of teachers cited "materials unavailable to support student IEP participation;" and 38% of teachers cited "limited curriculum availability." 1% of teachers cited computer access, unable to access general student template for the IEP, and 17% of teachers reported that power point or other technology supports for students were problematic for implementation.

#### **Theme 4: Administrative Support**

18% of teachers identified that lack of administrative support was one of the reasons it is more difficult to teach students to lead their IEP meetings. One participant stated that "administrator support" was the most helpful factor to teach the student-led IEP meetings. There were not any open-ended questions in the survey asking about the administrative support received.

#### **Theme 5: Scheduling Instruction During the Day**

Difficulties with student scheduling was one of the reasons teaching students to lead their IEP meetings was more difficult,( reported by 66% of the teachers) while 60% of the teachers stated that "my schedule is difficult", as shown in Table 12.

Two participants responded to a question regarding the hardest part of the IEP for students to lead:

Coordination of planning for student to know all about the IEP and time it takes for case manager to prepare student prior to meeting.

They need to prepare and rehearse.



Table 12

*Average Amount of Time Teaching Students to Participate in, and/or Lead IEP Meetings*

Time	N	%
1-5 hours	42	60%
6-10 hours	11	15%
11-15 hours	7	10%
16-20 hours	10	14%
Total	70	100%

**Time.** Most respondents reported a short amount of time spent instructing students to lead their IEP meetings. When asked why it takes so long, the responses were mixed. Most of the teachers felt that:

- Students struggle with the content.
- Have difficulty learning power point or other technology
- Difficult material to learn
- The repetition of going over and over the material takes time.
- Some of the teachers responded,
- I have a difficult time figuring out when to teach it.
- I have short class periods.
- It did not fit into the schedule due to other priorities.

One teacher commented on the troubling regulation that, because transition planning starts at age 16:

- Students are not being prepared in the middle school.
- Students are typically not being held responsible until high school.
- Many students still do not know about their disability or how to verbalize needs to adults.

Self-determination and self-advocacy are best practices (Test et al., 2009) for transition planning. Unfortunately, students 16 and under are not required to attend the IEP

meeting, as per IDEA (2004), therefore, student-led IEP meetings may not be considered.

In addition to the amount of time it takes to prepare students to lead their IEP meetings, teachers are struggling with where to schedule the instruction during the day. As reported in Table 13, a large percentage of participants feel that it does not fit anywhere during the school day, and the easiest class for providing instruction seems to be a self-contained class.

Table 13

*Student-Led IEP Instruction*

Class/Time	<i>N</i>	%
Does not fit	24	27%
Career Class	6	7%
Core Class	3	3%
Elective Class	3	3%
Study Hall	5	6%
Plan Period	10	11%
After School	1	1%
Self-Contained Class	21	24%
Other	15	17%
Total	88	100%

**Unprepared and Unwilling.** Teachers reported that 55% of the students on their caseload are 16-17 years old, and when asked why most of their students are not participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, the most common response was that the students were unprepared and unwilling. Additional comments included:

They fight it. They do not want to do it.

They haven't been trained.

Many students do not want to because they do not feel comfortable doing so.

Because they refuse to attend

They are not leading because it is too overwhelming for them and they have not been trained; partially my fault for not training them.

Other responses related to reasons for not teaching student-led IEP meetings, in order of frequency, include: “too difficult,” “not doing it,” “do not want to,” “time,” “parent request,” “age” and “not trained.”

Many of the challenges related to providing instruction in student-led IEP meetings, displayed in Table 14, are frequently reported as excuses.

Table 14

*Challenges Teaching Student-Led IEP*

	N	% of Cases
Administrative Support	87	18
Curriculum Availability	27	38
Materials Unavailable	30	42
Student Scheduling	47	66
Teacher Schedule	43	60
Parent Disapproval	11	16
Negative Peer Support	9	13
Computer Access	1	1
Funds for Curricula	15	21
Financial Support for Workshop	13	18
Technology for Students	12	17
Release Time for Professional Development	5	7
Student-Led IEP Knowledge	17	24

### **Qualitative Summary**

The qualitative analysis reports the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of implementation factors for student-led IEP meetings, and from open-ended and multiple-response survey questions, the perceptions about students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. The data were coded and organized into themes corresponding to the four main implementation factors in this study: professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day. The student-led IEP meeting was added as a theme to analyze data that was specific to leading IEP meetings. In the quantitative phase, this theme was addressed via independent variables.

While more students participated in rather than led their IEP meetings, both groups talked during the IEP meeting about their likes, dislikes, skills, challenges, needs, and disability as their transition assessments, post-secondary goals and course of study. Participants also reported that students talked about parts of their IEP meetings they were the most comfortable discussing. Surprisingly, respondents reported that many students did not know the identification of their disability, or if they even had a disability. Regardless of conflicting results, it was reported that students were enthused about the process once they had experienced leading their meeting, and teachers were pleased that students gained significant skills in self-advocacy and confidence.

Teachers reported the importance of access to handouts and materials, parent support, a scheduled time to teach, and opportunity to participate in professional development, in supporting student-led IEP meetings.

“Attending workshops on student-led IEP meetings” was the most frequently used and most effective type of professional development reported by teachers who teach student-led IEP; however, they also reported that there was not enough financial support to attend workshops.

Several curricula were mentioned that teachers like to use: *Whose Future is it Anyway?*, *SDLMI*, and *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*; however, lack of funds to purchase materials, and limited access to curricula and materials, were identified as hindering the implementation of student-led IEP meetings.

Administrative support for student-led IEP meetings was important to teachers, and when not provided, identified as a barrier. The last theme, “scheduling instruction during the day,” was identified as a very significant problem when time was not available to teach student-led IEP meetings. Interestingly, the largest percentage of teachers were only spending between one to five hours per year instructing on student-led IEP meetings.

Students who were not participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings were identified by teachers as refusing to participate, and uncomfortable with the process, however, the teachers also recognized that they were not taking the time to prepare students for the IEP meetings. Challenges faced when leading the IEP meetings, were identified as: scheduling and access to curricula and materials.

### **Integration of Findings**

Triangulation of the results is accomplished through merging of the data during the analysis phase of this research design and comparing the divergent and congruent findings from this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This also provides a more

complete picture of the relationships between teacher preparation factors for students leading their IEP meetings. Additionally, triangulation counterbalances challenges from the small sample size reported in the quantitative findings by comparing results with the qualitative findings.

The side-by-side comparison for merged data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) displays the comparison of survey data from qualitative results from open-ended/multiple response survey responses and quantitative survey responses for leading the IEP meeting (see Appendix A, Figure A3).

In Chapter 5, the data-validation variant (Creswell & Clark, 2011) for the convergent parallel, mixed-method design will be used. This design variant is applied when surveys contain open-ended questions, and it provides validation and/or richer meanings to the quantitative findings.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This mixed methods study examined the impact of special education teacher preparation factors (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day) on secondary students with disabilities participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. An examination of educator participants' perceptions of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, provided additional data to corroborate and/or dispute which factors positively influenced teachers to provide instruction in student-led IEP meetings.

Data were obtained from an online survey from special education professionals from a large Midwestern school district, and a convergent parallel design was used to analyze quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative phase of this study analyzed four teacher preparation factors for the student-led IEP meeting to determine the relationship between students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, and was analyzed using Kruskal-Wallis test results, post-hoc follow-up test results and Spearman's Rank correlation coefficients. The qualitative data analysis resulted in themes based on the same four teacher preparation factors, thereby enhancing the quantitative results and providing evidence of convergence or divergence of findings.

The primary purpose of this study was to understand which teacher preparation factors influenced special education teachers to instruct students to lead their IEP meetings. There are several reasons for addressing this issue in the current study. First of all, it seems logical that more students will lead their IEP meetings if we have a better

understanding of how to effectively prepare teachers to teach them. This is important, because students with disabilities can learn self-advocacy skills and increase their self-awareness when they are taught to lead their IEP meetings. Using the annual IEP meeting for this reason provides students with an opportunity to learn and practice self-advocacy skills, which will be useful to them throughout their adult life.

Students experience many other benefits from leading their IEP meetings, and findings from this study could provide valuable insights into possible measures to sustain implementation, thereby increasing student rates for leading IEP meetings. Secondly, school administrators can economize time and resources spent on implementing new initiatives by supporting the most significant teacher preparation factor(s) identified in this study. Thirdly, staff developers can use findings from this study to provide more effective workshops, professional development opportunities, and curricula and materials to increase teacher implementation rates for the student-led IEP meeting. Finally, future researchers may use findings from this study when reporting how teachers can implement student-led IEP meetings. The findings and interpretations from the study follow.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

The quantitative findings and interpretations were presented immediately after each research question. For some of the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative findings were presented, which were followed by statements regarding the convergence or divergence of the interpretations and relevant literature. The five themes included: student-led IEP meeting, professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day.



### **Research Question 1: Leading the IEP Meeting**

*Research Question 1:* Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling instruction during the day), and students leading their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students leading their IEP meeting are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students leading their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

### **Results: Research Question 1 - Leading the IEP Meeting**

Administrative support was found to positively influence teachers; therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected for the four groups of students leading the IEP meeting. Curricula and materials, professional development, and scheduling instruction during the day, did not influence teachers to teach student-led IEP meetings; therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for the four groups of students leading the IEP meeting. What this informs us through this study is that one out of four of the teacher preparation factors identified were related to students leading their IEP meetings. Each is discussed next.

**Administrative Support.** Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of the distribution of ranked subscale scores for administrative support showed significantly different results across categories or levels of students leading their IEP meetings, rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the research hypothesis for the part of the

research question addressing administrative support. The level of significance of the hypothesis test was .025, adjusted to reduce Type I error rate. 10% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students leading their IEP meetings. This small effect (1% of variance in administrative support is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between students leading their IEP meetings and the teacher preparation factor of administrative support, could be the result of a small sample size.

When pair-wise comparisons of the four leading IEP meeting groups were conducted, there were no significant differences between any of the groups. However, a review of median scores, revealed a different score for one group of students leading their IEP meetings. The direct supervisor and district administrator's support had a positive effect on students leading their IEP meetings in the lowest, moderate and highest categories. This means that special education professionals attending IEP meetings where students were leading part, or all, of their IEP meeting, felt that support from their direct supervisor and district administrator contributed to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings for three out of four groups of students. Students which fell in the "low" category of students leading their IEP meetings were not affected by the administrative support, and represented a ratio (ratio of IEP meetings attended by teacher participants and students perceived to be leading the meeting) of participants attending a higher number of IEP meetings, but with fewer students leading the IEP meeting. These findings are consistent with the limited research on administrative support in relation to implementation of new initiatives (McIntosh et al., 2013; see also Barrie & McDonald, 2002; Lieber et al., 2009; McInerney & Hamilton, 2007).

There were no open-ended questions in the survey related to administrative support which represents a limitation with the survey design. However, survey questions regarding implementation factors and challenges for implementation suggested that administrative support was an important implementation factor, with just over half of the participants reported receiving release time to attend workshops as very useful. When asked about challenges to implementation of student-led IEP meetings, 18 % of the participants reported lack of administrative support. These findings suggest administrative support was most likely an important teacher preparation factor; a barrier to implementation when not present, and when present, a positive influence on teacher implementation. Findings suggest a lack of administrative support was not always a deterrent to implementation. Teachers seemed motivated to implement student-led IEP meetings with, or without, administrative support, from observing the positive reactions from students and parents. These findings indicate that it will be important to inform administrators of the benefits associated with students leading their IEP meetings and develop strategies to support teachers. For this teacher preparation factor, both quantitative and qualitative findings converged, suggesting administrative support was an important implementation factor to promote the practice of student-led IEP meetings for secondary students with disabilities.

**Professional Development.** Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of the distribution of ranked subscale scores for professional development showed non-significant results across all categories or levels of leading the IEP meeting groups, failing to reject the null hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing professional development. 4% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the

group of students leading their IEP meetings. This represents a very small effect (less than 1% of variance in professional development is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between students leading their IEP meetings and the teacher preparation factor of professional development.

A review of median scores, revealed that only one group of students leading their IEP meetings (highest category) was impacted by professional development. This means that special education professionals attending IEP meetings where students were leading part, or all, of their IEP meeting, felt that professional development contributed to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings for one group of students. The highest category represented the ratio (IEP meetings attended by teacher participants and students perceived to be leading the meeting) of participants attending a higher number of IEP meetings with a higher number of students leading the IEP meeting.

Special education professionals, who indicated they have attended IEP meetings where students were leading part or all of their IEP meetings, indicated that neither the type of professional development they received, nor the effectiveness of the professional development, contributed to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings for students leading their IEP meetings.

The quantitative findings were unexpected for professional development, making the qualitative findings even more valuable, especially during the interpretation phase. For instance, statistical testing on the impact of professional development as a factor for student-led IEP meetings did not provide significant findings; however, over half of the special education professionals responding to the survey's open-ended or multiple-response questions for professional development mentioned that release time to attend

workshops, conventions or other professional development for student-led IEP development, was extremely useful. To substantiate the qualitative findings, Pham (2013) found secondary special educators from 20 states learned about a variety of transition-related practices, including self-advocacy, primarily from professional development and colleagues.

In addition, workshops were identified as the type of professional development chosen most frequently to learn about the student-led IEP meeting, followed by university courses and conferences. Workshops were also reported as the most effective training method; however, the cost to attend some of the workshops and conferences were seen as barriers to implementation. Many teachers learn how to teach students to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meeting through a variety of professional development opportunities, but have been found to demonstrate inconsistency when it comes to implementation (Eisenman, Chamberlin, & McGahee-Kovac, 2005). To substantiate the importance, it was found that attending workshops with follow-along support resulting in a longer period of contact time, was proven as an effective professional development component (Garet, Porter, Disimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001).

Participants also identified “lack of knowledge about student-led IEP” as another barrier to implementation of the student-led IEP (Cho, Wehmeyer & Kingston, 2010). Past studies also found that teachers describe a lack of training on self-determination and self-advocacy as a major reason for not teaching students (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Torgerson, Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston 2010), and when teachers received only 27.6 hours of transition-related staff development during their entire teaching career, they do

not feel prepared to implement transition competencies (Benitz, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009).

The quantitative and qualitative findings represented divergent findings. Teachers who participated in professional development experienced a lower percentage of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, while the qualitative results added another dimension to the findings suggesting that professional development was the most effective way to learn about student-led IEP meetings. Perhaps more students would be leading their IEP meetings if staff developers or administrators offered consistent follow-up support after the professional development.

**Curricula and Materials.** Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of the distribution of ranked subscale scores for curricula and materials across all categories or levels of leading the IEP meeting groups was determined non-significant, failing to reject the null hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing curricula and materials. 6% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students leading their IEP meetings. This represents another surprisingly small effect (less than 1% of variance in curricula and materials is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between students leading their IEP meetings and the teacher preparation factor of curricula and materials. It seems likely that teachers would use curricula and materials for instruction of the student-led IEP meeting, and it would be interesting to determine if other resources not mentioned, were used.

Special education professionals attending IEP meetings where students were leading part, or all, of their IEP meeting, did not feel that the availability and effectiveness of the curricula and materials contributed to the implementation of student-

led IEP meetings. This was surprising because of the recent identification of student-led IEP meetings as one of the research-based interventions for students with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). However, since the majority of the curricula were originally created through OSEP Self-determination grants twenty-two years ago, teachers may be choosing not to use the outdated materials, substituting the more recent, updated materials available online.

While findings on the impact of curricula and materials as a factor for student-led IEP meetings resulted in non-significant results, over one-third of the special education professionals reported that when curricula, materials, and handouts were readily available, these resources were extremely useful as an implementation factor for student-led IEP meetings. Many special education professionals from the large Midwestern city were provided (free of charge) *Whose Future Is It Anyway?*, *The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)*, and *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*, as participants in workshops and/or research projects. In addition, others were examined for effectiveness, and were found to have positive results on teaching student-led IEP meetings, including the *Self-Directed IEP* (Arndt, Konrad, and Test, 2006; Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1993), *The Self-Advocacy Strategy* (Test et al., 2009), and the *SDLMI* (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin, & Palmer, 2010). In addition, it was found that when using published curricula, student-led IEP instruction was more effective (Test et al., 2004). Wehmeyer and colleagues (2011), found middle and high school students with disabilities to show positive gains in self-determination when using the *Whose Future is it Anyway?* curriculum. Many of the curricula were provided free of charge to some of the teachers in this study, yet “lack of funds to purchase curricula,” “lack of materials,” and

“limited curricula availability,” were reported as reasons for not teaching student-led IEP meetings. This impressive body of evidence and this researcher’s personal experience suggest that when curricula and materials for teaching student-led IEP meetings were made available to teachers, that the number of students leading their IEP meetings would increase, however, this study reported fewer students leading, than participating in, their IEP meetings. A conundrum to us in the field is whether or not teachers actually seek out materials or feel materials must be provided via formal adoption or purchase. It would be interesting to compare the use of internet or web-based support for including students in their IEP meetings to curricula, to determine the most effective approach for teachers to implement the practice of student-led IEP meetings.

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of the distribution of ranked subscale scores for scheduling instruction during the day, across all categories or levels of leading the IEP meeting groups, showed non-significant results across all categories or levels of leading the IEP meeting groups, failing to reject the null hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing scheduling instruction during the day. 7% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students leading their IEP meetings. This represents a small effect (less than 1% of variance in scheduling instruction during the day is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between this group of students and the teacher preparation factor of scheduling instruction during the day. The small sample size may have had an impact on the small effect of this factor since the divergent results from the open-ended responses reported how scheduling instruction was a significant barrier to implementation.



Special education professionals attending IEP meetings where students were leading part, or all, of their IEP meeting indicated the amount of time spent instructing students to lead their IEP meetings, the class period where instruction occurred, nor the importance of scheduling, did not contribute to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings. Since administrative support was a significant factor in this study, there may have been sufficient time already allocated during the day or within a course to provide the instruction to the teacher's satisfaction.

Based on the quantitative results, it seems scheduling instruction during the day for students leading part, or all, of their IEP meeting, did not have an impact on the implementation of student-led IEP meetings, including time spent on instruction, the location of instruction, and the importance of scheduling. The qualitative results, on the other hand, reported by well over half of the participants that problems with scheduling and coordinating teacher schedules were the most significant reasons for not teaching the student-led IEP meeting. These inconsistent results could be interpreted to mean that participants' perceived more students participating in their IEP meetings than leading their meetings, and difficulty with scheduling instruction during the day was considered a *potential* barrier to implementation due to increasing demands from federal education mandates.

A very small amount of time, 1-5 hours per year, was reported by over half of the participants as the average amount of time spent on instruction for the student-led IEP meeting. These findings were partially consistent with previous research. Mason, Field and Sawilowsky (2004) found that teachers were spending an average of 1-3 hours (total time) on teaching student-led IEP meetings in a special education class, with over half of

the teachers reporting they could use more time preparing for and delivering the instruction. Other studies reported instructional time consisting of four 50-minute sessions during the day beginning in freshman year (Torgerson, Miner, & Shen, 2004), and another study reported lack of time as the primary reason for not teaching self-determination to students (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2010). When providing professional development to administrators and/or teachers, it may be an effective strategy to inform teachers about the minimal time commitment to teach student-led IEP meetings and how to embed the content in other classes.

However, when asked about why it takes so long (instructional time), a variety of reasons were provided from “difficulty of the material” and “time to learn technology,” to “short class periods.” Some of the high school teachers expressed preference for students to enter high school already experienced at leading their IEP meetings. It is unlikely that middle school students will learn to lead their IEP meetings until the IDEA legislation changes the age when students must be invited to the IEP meeting . When the Reauthorization of IDEA (2004) changed the official age for beginning transition planning in the IEP from age 14 to age 16, students younger than 16 were no longer required to be invited to their IEP meeting.

There are many federal, state, and local initiatives competing for instructional time during a typical school day (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010), making it difficult for teachers to find time for student-led IEP instruction. While *time* is frequently the universal excuse used for many tedious tasks, or for those perceived as being difficult, teachers reported finding time to teach student-led IEP meetings as a significant challenge. As such, this may be one reason why the administrative support was found to

be a significantly-important teacher preparation factor in this study. When teachers were able to find time for instruction during the day, possibly due to administrative support, teaching students to lead their IEP meetings occurred most often in self-contained classes, plan periods, and career classes, with an occasional teacher providing after-school instruction.

Most of the reasons found for not teaching students to lead their IEP meetings, included; “students did not want to,” or “they have not been trained,” but interestingly, one teacher stated quite honestly, “it was *partially* her fault for not training them.” The divergent findings could possibly result from the small sample size, however, barriers for scheduling during the day should be addressed by administrators. There are many conflicting mandates for secondary schools and it is quite possible that there will be less time will in the future for providing programming and instruction to students with disabilities that will support them in adult life.

### **Summary Research Question 1: Leading the IEP Meeting**

Based on results from Kruskal-Wallis test, this study found that administrative support was the only teacher preparation factor that was found to significantly affect all groups of students leading their IEP meetings. In addition, the qualitative data points out that all of the teacher preparation factors (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) were important to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings.

The quantitative findings suggest that when administrators offer release time for teachers to attend workshops, it’s appreciated as very useful; the opportunity to attend workshops for student-led IEP meeting development was indicated as extremely useful;

and a lack of training on self-advocacy skill development was expressed as a major barrier to implementation. Findings indicated that special education professionals receiving administrative support attended more IEP meetings where students were observed leading and participating in their IEP meetings.

Curricula and materials were extremely useful, and well over half of the participants identified scheduling instruction and coordinating teacher schedules as the most significant reasons for not implementing student-led IEP meetings. As indicated by these results, all four teacher preparation factors were important, however, it is conceivable, when developing implementation plans for student-led IEP meetings in secondary schools, considering all four factors in the plan could create a more effective, sustainable effort.

The four factors considered to influence teachers when preparing to teach student-led IEP meetings in this study (i.e., professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day) have been studied over the years by many researchers (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin & Palmer, 2010; Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Hawbaker, 2007; Mason, Field & Sawilowsky, 2004; McInerny & Hamilton, 2007; Test et al., 2004; Test et al., 2009; Torgerson, Miner, & Shen, 2004). A noted difference between past studies and this current study was the collective impact of these factors (primarily related to professional development and availability of materials) on the implementation of the student-led IEP meetings. Studies have found relationships between some of the factors influencing special education teachers' implementation of student-led IEP meetings (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Lieber et al., 2009; Test et al., 2004; Torgerson,

Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2010; Torgerson, Miner, & Shen, 2004); however, there remains a need to investigate the influence of the convergence of these factors within the same study.

### **Research Question 2: Participating in the IEP Meeting**

*Research Question 2:* Are there significant statistical differences in teacher preparation (i.e. professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support, and scheduling during the day), and students participating in their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* The distribution of scores in each group of students participating in their IEP meeting are the same.

*Research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* At least two of the groups of students participating in their IEP meetings differ with respect to location (median).

### **Results: Research Question 2 - Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Two teacher preparation factors: administrative support and curricula and materials, were found to positively influence teachers with students participating in the IEP meeting, therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected. The other two factors: professional development and scheduling instruction during the day were not found to influence teachers to teach student-led IEP meetings, therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. What this informs us through this study is that half of the teacher preparation implementation factors identified were related to students participating in their IEP meetings. Each factor is discussed next.

**Administrative Support.** Based on results using the Kruskal-Wallis test, analysis of the distribution of ranked subscale scores for administrative support showed significantly different results across all categories or levels of students participating in the

IEP meeting, rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the research hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing administrative support. The level of significance of the hypothesis test was .025 adjusted to reduce Type I error rate. 9% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students participating in their IEP meetings. This represents a small effect (1% of variance in administrative support is attributable to each group of students participating in their IEP meetings) between this group of students and the teacher preparation factor of administrative support. The small sample size may have had an impact on the small effect of this teacher preparation factor.

When comparisons of the four participating IEP groups were conducted, there were no significant differences between any of the groups of students. And since a review of the median scores revealed that although the scores were somewhat divergent, these were not proved to be significantly different. These results suggest that administrative support was considered important to all groups of students participating in their IEP meetings but the differences between groups were non-significant.

Special education professionals, attending IEP meetings where students were participating in part, or all of their IEP meetings, felt that support from district administrators and direct supervisors contributed to the implementation of the student-led IEP meetings. This implies that these special education professionals were not observing students leading their IEP meetings, and could be basing the importance of administrative support on implementation of other initiatives, or were confused by the terminology *participating*.

**Professional Development.** Based on results from the Kruskal-Wallis test, the distribution of ranked subscale scores for professional development showed non-

significant results across all categories of students participating in the IEP meeting groups, failing to reject the null hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing professional development. 7% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students participating in their IEP meetings. This represents a small effect (less than 1% of variance in professional development is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between this group of students and the teacher preparation factor of professional development. The small sample size may have had an impact on the small effect of this factor since the statistical findings do not converge with the open-ended responses, specifically regarding the benefits of attending workshops to implement student-led IEP meetings.

Special education professionals, attending IEP meetings where students were participating in their IEP meetings, did not feel that the type of professional development they received, nor the effectiveness of the professional development, contributed in any way to students participating in their IEP meetings. This presents a disconnect to the qualitative findings where teachers reported that professional development was extremely useful, and that workshops provided the most effective information regarding how to teach student-led IEP meetings. Thus, it can be concluded that the statistical findings may have been impacted by the sample size, however, the qualitative findings support the importance of professional development. Professional development workshops provide the most frequently mentioned method of receiving new information, however, technological advances present new and cost-effective formats for practitioners to receive information using interactive computer platforms or through online viewing.

**Curricula and Materials.** Based on results from the Kruskal-Wallis test, the distribution of the rank subscale scores of curricula and materials across categories of participating in the IEP meeting groups, showed non-significant results, rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the research hypothesis. The level of significance of the hypothesis test was .025 adjusted to reduce Type I error rate. 10% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students participating in their IEP meetings. This represents a small effect (1% of variance in curricula and materials is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between this group of students and the teacher preparation factor of curricula and materials. The small sample size may have had an impact on the divergent findings related to this teacher preparation factor since the open-ended responses reported how curricula and materials were important to implementation of student-led IEP meetings.

When pair-wise comparisons of the four participating IEP groups were conducted, there were significant differences between the moderate and lowest groups of students participating in their IEP meetings. There was a low ratio between IEP meetings attended and students participating in their IEP meetings for the lowest group (i.e., more IEPs attended but fewer students participating), and a high ratio between IEP meetings attended and students participating for the moderate group (i.e., fewer IEPs attended with more students participating).

The effectiveness of curricula and materials and importance to the student-led IEP meeting, had a large impact (86%) on students participating in their IEP meetings between the lowest and moderate groups. Special education professionals attending IEP meetings, where students were participating in part or all of their IEP meetings, reported



that curricula and materials contributed to the implementation of students' participation in their IEP meeting for two out of four groups of students. The low and highest group or category of students participating in their IEP meetings were not significantly affected by the curricula and materials their teacher's received.

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** Based on results from the Kruskal-Wallis test, the distribution of ranked subscale scores for scheduling instruction during the day, across all categories of students participating in the IEP groups, failed to reject the null hypothesis for the part of the research question addressing scheduling instruction during the day. 3% of the variability in rank scores is accounted for by the group of students participating in their IEP meetings. This represents a small effect (less than 1% of variance in scheduling instruction during the day is attributable to each group of students leading their IEP meetings) between this group of students and the teacher preparation factor of scheduling instruction during the day. The small sample size may have had an impact on divergence of this factor between the quantitative and qualitative results since the open-ended responses reported how scheduling instruction was a significant barrier to implementation.

Special education professionals attending IEP meetings, where students were participating in their IEP meetings, did not feel that the hours spent instructing, the location of instruction, nor the importance of scheduling, contributed to the implementation of students participating in their IEP meetings. This is a noteworthy result, because students participating in the IEP meeting only answer questions when asked and do not take the lead, which does not require any advance preparation nor additional instructional time.

**Summary Research Question 2: Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Based on results from the Kruskal-Wallis test, this study found that administrative support and curricula and materials were the only teacher preparation factors found to significantly affect all groups of students participating in their IEP meetings. In addition, when group comparisons were made, significant differences were found between the moderate and lowest categories of students. This means that the difference between these categories, represented by the ratio of students participating in their IEP meetings and number of IEP meetings attended, was significant. This is important because there was a larger discrepancy in the ratios for these groups with curricula and materials than any other combinations of groups or factors. This suggests curricula and materials along with administrative support were more important to students participating in their IEP meetings than professional development and scheduling instruction during the day. In addition, special education professionals receiving curricula and materials attended more IEP meetings where students were participating in their IEP meetings.

The participant's ability to differentiate between terminology used in the survey for *participating* most likely had an impact on the results, nevertheless, the integration of data during the interpretation phase provided conclusive evidence pointing to the importance of each teacher preparation factor. Furthermore, many participants expressed the importance of administrator support for implementing student-led IEP meetings, the effectiveness of workshops and other professional development, and the availability of curricula and materials.

### **Research Question 3: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

*Research Question 3:* What is the relationship between teacher preparation for students leading their IEP meetings sub-scales (i.e. professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support teachers receive) and the percent of students participating in, or leading their IEP meetings?

*Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

### **Results: Research Question 3 - Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Curricula and materials and administrative support were found to have a positive non-significant correlation between students participating in their IEP meetings, and professional development findings suggested a positive non-significant correlation between students participating in, and leading their IEP meetings; therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for all of these factors. Curricula and materials and administrative support showed a moderately correlated relationship for students leading their IEP meetings, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted. What this informs us through this study is that two out of four teacher preparation factors were related to students leading their IEP meetings. Each is discussed next

**Professional Development.** Based on Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, there was a very weak, non-significant relationship between the professional development that teachers received on conducting student-led IEP meetings, and students

leading their IEP meetings, failing to reject the null hypothesis. In addition, there was a weak positive non-significant correlation between professional development and students participating in their IEP meetings, failing to reject the null hypothesis for the professional development part of this research question. This means there was no association between the increase in professional development and increases in percentages of students leading and participating in their IEP meetings. These findings are incongruent with qualitative results and should be noted that participants identified professional development, specifically workshops, as an important implementation.

**Curricula and Materials.** Based on Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, there was a moderate positive correlation between curricula and materials on student-led IEP meetings and students leading their IEP meetings, rejecting the null hypothesis. As curricula and materials increased, the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings increased, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted. There was an inverse correlation between the curricula and materials with non-significant results and students participating in their IEP meetings, failing to reject the null hypothesis. This means that curricula and materials were related to increases in students leading their IEP meetings, which corroborates with the qualitative findings. Teachers have many curricula from which to choose, as well as online resources, and should be able to locate supporting documents to implement the student-led IEP meeting.

**Administrative Support.** Based on the Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, there was a moderate positive correlation between administrative support on the student-led IEP meeting that teachers received and the students leading their IEP meetings, with significant results, rejecting the null hypothesis. As the scale score for administrative

support increased, the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings increased. There was an inverse correlation with students participating in their IEP meetings, with non-significant results, failing to reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that administrative support for students leading their IEP meetings increased significantly. Administrative support is likely very important to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings and it is necessary for researchers and practitioners to consider as planning for implementation of student-led IEP meetings.

### **Summary Research Question 3: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Based on results from Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, findings reported a slight relationship between administrative support and curricula and materials and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. There was not a significant relationship between professional development and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. In addition, there was not a significant relationship between professional development, administrative support and curricula and materials and the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings. This means that the overall findings for this research question and the qualitative findings were divergent. The statistical importance of administrative support and curricula and materials on the implementation of student-led IEP meetings, have been evident throughout all phases of this study. The professional development factor was found important through the qualitative findings. It would be difficult to state that professional development was not important to the implementation of student-led IEP meetings, because of the responses from participants and this researcher's personal experience.

#### **Research Question 4: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

*Research Question 4:* What is the relationship between scheduled time allocated for teaching students to participate in, or lead their IEP meetings and the percent of students involved in participating in or leading their IEP meeting?

*Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):* There is no association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

*Research Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ):* There is an association (i.e. monotonic relationship) between the variables in students leading and/or participating in their IEP meetings.

#### **Results: Research Question 4 - Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Scheduling instruction during the day was found to have an inverse non-significant correlation between students leading and participating in their IEP meetings, therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected for this factor. What this informs us through this study is that this teacher preparation factor was not related to students leading nor participating in their IEP meetings. Each is discussed next.

**Scheduling Instruction During the Day.** Based on Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, there was an inverse correlation between scheduling instruction and students leading their IEP meetings with significant results, rejecting the null hypothesis. There was not a statistically significant relationship between students participating in their IEP meeting and scheduling instruction during the day, failing to reject the null hypothesis. Just about one-third of the participants reported that they were able to provide instruction to students on leading their IEP meetings in a self-contained class or during a plan period. These findings suggest that teachers will find ways to implement student-led IEP

meetings when motivated, but first would require professional development, curricula and materials, and possibly, administrative support.

#### **Summary Research Question 4: Leading and Participating in the IEP Meeting**

Based on Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, this study found that there was a slight relationship between scheduling instruction during the day and the percentage of students leading their IEP meetings. In addition, there was no relationship between scheduling instruction during the day and the percentage of students participating in their IEP meetings.

The relationship between scheduling instruction during the day and students leading their IEP meetings suggests that having time to provide direct instruction to students prior to their IEP meeting was related to the number of students leading their IEP meetings. Therefore, the more direct instruction about student-led IEP meetings provided, the more students are willing to lead their meetings.

#### **Additional Findings**

##### **Theme 1: Student-Led IEP Meeting**

The five qualitative themes include: student-led IEP meeting, professional development, curricula and materials, administrative support and scheduling instruction during the day. The theme of Student-led IEP Meeting was not interpreted in previous sections; however, it was an important, recurrent theme for the qualitative analysis, addressed next.

Student-led IEP meetings have become what is considered "best-practice," and responsible, in part, for increasing the self-advocacy skills of individuals with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). Findings from the present study corroborates the findings of other

recent studies (Shogren et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2012) that more secondary students with disabilities participated in their IEP meetings (20%) than were found to lead their IEP meetings (13%). These results were unexpected, especially since students are encouraged to attend their IEP meetings and required by IDEA to be invited from age 15 turning 16, until graduation. However, a recent study by Hughes, Agran, Cosgriff and Washington (2013) reported similar results for IEP participation.

Data for this study were collected from experienced special education professionals with the majority of respondents (76%) reporting over ten years of experience. The high number of experienced professionals when compared to the low number of students leading their IEP meetings, was surprising, especially since most of the efforts to teach student-led IEP meetings were focused on secondary students who were taught by experienced teachers. Mason et al. (2004) also found that secondary teachers placed more importance than elementary teachers on teaching self-determination, which implies that perhaps there was a lack of administrative support for secondary teachers to implement student-led IEP meetings.

Students with disabilities, were categorized in this study according to the perceptions of the participants' 1) participating in, or 2) leading their IEP meetings. However, due to participant interpretation, it should be noted that there may have been some confusion when they responded to the questionnaire, when deciding between the two groups, regardless of the written definition provided within the prompts for some questions. This lack of consistency of responses was especially evident when interpreting themes during the qualitative analyses. Often in survey research, where it is impossible to



follow up and clarify participant responses, this concern should be noted as a limitation of the study.

Of the 88 study participants, most were special education teachers and/or IEP case managers for students with disabilities in the secondary setting, with over half of the students between the ages of 16-17 years old. The participants reportedly attended many IEP meetings during a typical school year, and only about half of the students in those meetings were either participating in the IEP meeting by attending, and possibly answering questions, or taking a leadership role in part or all of the meeting.

It was unclear from the survey whether students were even present at the remainder of IEP meetings attended. It is also a possibility that some of the special education teachers and/or case managers were attending IEP meetings for students younger than the age of 16, and for students who were not required to attend their IEP meeting. Concern over the low number of students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, was pre-empted by the possibility that a large number of students were not even present during their IEP meetings. If that were indeed the case, the IEP meeting attendance rates for secondary students with disabilities in this study, could fall well below the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). As reported in that study by Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, and Valdes (2012), 82% of 11,000 students, ages 15-19, were attending and participating in their IEP meetings. A relatively small number, only 21%, were found to take a leadership role in their IEP meetings. As noted prior, there were more students identified as participating in their IEP meetings than leading their IEP meetings in this study, which was consistent with findings from the NLTS2.

When teachers become involved in promoting student-led IEP meetings, the students not only attended their IEP meetings at improved rates, but at least half are knowledgeable about their IEP goals and objectives (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Participants reported a multitude of reasons why students were not leading their IEP meetings. The most frequent response was “being uncomfortable,” “unprepared,” or “feeling it was too difficult.”

The IEP meeting consists of many parts; however, there is a direct correlation between the number of parts a student leads during the IEP meeting, and the student’s ability and amount of time spent preparing before the meeting. In addition, it has been found that students cannot actively participate in their IEP meeting, unless they are prepared in advance (Martin, Van Dycke, Greene et.al, 2006). Learning to speak up for oneself can easily be achieved when teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in their IEP meetings, and if not, teachers must teach students to practice making choices in their lives by embedding choice-making and self-advocacy into the curriculum (Wehmeyer, Sands, Doll, & Palmer, 1997).

Some parts of the IEP meeting are obviously easier than others to talk about, and when asked to identify the parts most frequently led by secondary students with disabilities, the responses for both participating and leading groups were surprisingly very similar. Most of the participants felt that students talked most about their likes, dislikes, challenges, needs, disability, and transition planning (i.e., post-secondary goals, action plans, and course of study). When asked what part of the IEP meeting was easiest for them, the teachers felt that talking about their likes and dislikes and the transition planning parts were easiest, because those parts were considered important by the

students and relevant to their future. Interestingly, talking about their disability was one of the most difficult parts for the students, and for that reason, many teachers begin student-led IEP instruction with a discussion on disability awareness. Students with disabilities may avoid talking about their disability because they were embarrassed and/or self-conscious, and many students were not aware that they even had a disability. To clarify, further interpretation of the data revealed that there was indeed a relatively small number of students talking about disability; 31 of the students participating in their IEP meetings, and 13 of the students leading their IEP meetings. Regardless of the frequency, the concept of even one student uncomfortable when talking about his/her disability should be enough reason to motivate teachers to help students create an awareness of their strengths, preferences, interests, and needs in relation to their disability. When students learn about how their disability will impact them at work, college, or living, they will be better prepared for adult life (Wehmeyer et al, 2007).

Students who lead their IEP meetings acquire increased self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, and are more assertive when requesting accommodations (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002). Participants' perceptions about the benefits of student-led IEP meetings were very different depending on whether they taught students to lead their meetings or not. For instance, teachers were very enthusiastic and motivated by the students' enthusiasm for leading their IEP meetings and by their parent's reactions. Unfortunately, teachers who chose not to teach the student-led IEP meeting had difficulty becoming motivated by student responses, until they tried it.

Two survey questions regarding parent perceptions about student-led IEP meetings were interpreted: 1) What do parents say about student participation in the IEP

at your school? 2) What were parent responses about students leading their IEP at your school?

Again, the answers from these two questions were similar enough that there was possibly some confusion by the participants regarding the definition of participating and leading, in reference to this study. A case in point, there were many similar responses for both questions including: “proud,” “impressed,” “surprised,” “amazed,” and “impressed that students are self-advocating.” One would find it difficult to believe that these responses described reactions to participation without speaking during the IEP meeting. Teacher participants also reported “parents also felt positive and encouraging” regarding participation in the IEP meeting. There were several negative parent perceptions, such as, “don’t like it” and “some do not like to give up control of the meeting or want their desires /wants for the student to be discussed, but not the student’s views.”

If teachers were motivated to support and teach students to lead their IEP meetings, it is possible that the parents would feel proud of their son or daughter. Parents with prior student-led IEP meeting experience may also encourage teachers and their children to lead part or all of their IEP meetings (Wagner, et al., 2012). Grigal, Neubert, Moon, and Graham (2003), surveyed 234 parents, finding that there was strong support for teaching student-led IEP meetings. The majority of participants in this study reported that they felt parent support was very useful, or extremely useful, for implementing the student-led IEP meeting.

### **Summary**

Based on statistical and perceptual findings from this study, teacher preparation factors for students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, administrative

support was found to be the most significant factor impacting student-led IEP meetings which was not surprising. Most of the special education professionals were very satisfied with the administrative support they received, and considered that support to be an important factor for teaching students to lead their IEP meeting *and* participate in their IEP meeting.

This study also found fewer students leading their IEP meetings than participating in their IEP meetings. These results were somewhat unexpected and definitely disappointing, especially since secondary students are encouraged to attend their IEP meetings, and are mandated by IDEA to be invited from age 15 turning 16, until graduation.

Statistical findings suggested that the majority of educator participants did not feel professional development nor scheduling instruction during the day had an impact on implementation of student-led IEP meetings. However, in contrast, qualitative findings supported the importance of attending workshops, university courses and conferences as the most effective types of professional development, especially when administrators provided release time to attend. Barriers to implementation included the cost of the professional development and consequently, a lack of knowledge on how to teach student-led IEP meetings. In addition, the majority of participants did not find scheduling instruction an important implementation factor for students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. The perceptions of the participants did not agree with these results, as most of them indicated that student and teacher schedules were huge barriers to implementation.

Finally, access to curricula and materials were found to positively impact students participating in their IEP meetings, but not students leading their IEP meetings. Specifically, handouts, materials and curricula were identified as extremely useful when implementing the student-led IEP meeting, while a lack of materials, lack of funds to purchase materials, and limited curricula availability were reported as barriers to implementation.

### **Limitations**

There were several notable limitations impacting this study, despite the substantial amount of data contributing to the findings; 1) A smaller sample size than expected, however, with any survey, there is a chance that the respondent number may be small and 2) the change from a state-wide study to a school district study, were the limitations with the largest impact on quantitative results. The same sample was used for the qualitative and quantitative data collection resulting in accurate information from the survey and analysis. Although the sample size was small, it was difficult to determine if results would have been different with more participants since not all participants responded to all questions on the survey. All participants were special educators, and the targeted setting was a large suburban Midwestern school district which may limit the generalizability beyond the study sample.

The third limitation of the survey included the distinctions between “participating in” and “leading” IEP meetings. These terms were similar, since in order to lead, there needed to be some participation, and responses reflected participant perceptions and may not have reflected the true status of students during their IEP meetings which may, in

turn, affected the quantitative and qualitative results. The differentiation between students may have been clearer if the word *participation* had been changed to *attendance*.

Another limitation of this study impacted the qualitative findings. Open-ended survey questions addressing administrative support were not included. Adding open-ended survey questions about administrative support would have provided more in-depth results and stronger integration of findings. Survey questions regarding administrator's knowledge on the topic of student-led IEP meetings and suggestions for getting administrator buy-in for student-led IEP meetings are the type of questions that could have contributed to the findings in this study.

Qualitative validity was addressed through triangulation, evidenced by mixing two methods, where each method was determined to either converge or diverge. There were divergent findings for three of the themes; professional development, curricula and materials and scheduling instruction during the day. Administrative support was the only theme where the findings converged. The quantitative weaknesses found in these themes were compensated by the strengths of the qualitative results.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Findings from this convergent parallel study suggest that secondary students with disabilities were more likely to participate in their IEP meetings than to lead part, or all, of their meetings. This study, at a basic level, emphasizes the recommendation that all secondary students with disabilities, ages 16 and older, should attend their IEP meetings, and that more students should lead their IEP meetings.

The study also found that more students were likely participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings when teachers received administrative support and access to

curricula and materials. To learn about and support student-led IEP meetings, administrators are encouraged to attend workshops, conferences, or take college courses. They are encouraged to provide opportunities and offer funding for teachers to attend workshops and conferences. Administrators should secure support from upper administration such as the superintendent or members of the Board of Education, to gain the needed support. Students, teachers and parents can benefit by learning about student-led IEP meetings.

Another important finding in this study was that curricula and materials, handouts, and access to resources were useful to educators who attended IEP meetings, where students participated in their meetings. Additionally, to address implications of the study results, it is suggested that school leaders implement ideas from this study for special education teachers and students with disabilities. As early as elementary school, a school-wide approach would address the administrative support needed to provide focused, differentiated, professional development on student-led IEP meetings. The training would focus on the key elements identified in this study: curricula, materials and handouts readily available, computer access for educators and students, parent support, scheduled time for instruction and release time to attend the training. The professional development would provide follow-along support and coaching, with frequent opportunities to share experiences and prominently project the initiative to ensure sustained implementation (Harn, Parisi & Stoolmiller, 2013; Webster-Stratton, Reinke, Herman, & Newcomer, 2011)

In addition, several topics require closer examination to support a student-led IEP meeting initiative, including reducing competition for instructional time by school



initiatives and legislative mandates to provide important transition-related instruction for students with disabilities, provide transition planning in the IEP beginning at age 14, and include student-led IEP meetings in pre-service instruction.

This researcher based the study on the premise that educators who attend workshops on student-led IEP meetings are most likely implementing that practice with consistency. Findings suggest that this was indeed not true, and that educators were mostly not implementing the practice of the student-led IEP meeting. In fact, many more participants than expected reported that students were neither participating in, or leading, their IEP meetings, questioning whether students were even in attendance. This finding was surprising and has left this researcher with more questions and thoughts about how to provide new information to practitioners beyond administrative support, curricula and materials, professional development, and scheduling instruction during the day. For instance, why were students not attending? How can we motivate teachers to provide instruction for student-led IEP meetings? Can we coordinate the principles of student-led IEP meetings with current school standards? Can we empower all students by teaching them to lead either their IEP meeting, parent conference or guidance meetings?

### **Future Research**

This study identified relationships between four of the teacher preparation factors thought to influence implementation for students participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings. However, multiple opportunities to attend workshops and free access to available resources were not producing the fidelity for sustaining student-led IEP meetings, as previously thought. This study affirms that two of the teacher preparation factors, specifically administrative support and curricula and materials must be

considered when developing strategies to implement student-led IEP meetings. Research is needed to develop a multi-tiered model for implementing student-led IEP meetings throughout the school years including strategies for enlisting administrative support, differentiating curricula and materials to accommodate different learners, exploring new creative ways for offering professional development and prescribing time during the day to teach. This model would need to include strategies for institutionalizing the practice with fidelity. From a researcher perspective, further investigation is necessary to study how to firmly establish and sustain implementation for student-led IEP meetings beyond the initial training program utilizing all of these teacher preparation factors.

Future research should also explore strategies that positively influence increasing rates for students with significant disabilities to participate in, and/or lead, their IEP meetings. These findings would warrant future research to study factors that might impact student-led IEP meetings in high schools located in high-poverty areas, different levels of disability and for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This mixed methods study explored implementation factors contributing to secondary students with disabilities participating in, and/or leading, their IEP meetings, along with the participants' perceptions of students who led, or participated in, their IEP meetings. The conceptual framework (Test et al., 2005) proposed that student-led IEP meetings were associated with successful adult outcomes by increasing self - advocacy skills. The literature implied that students benefit from learning to lead their IEP meetings, that someone must spend time teaching them, and that special education teachers influence whether or not their students will have repeated opportunities to

practice and set goals (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Paek, 2013). According to the 88 participants responding to the survey, the benefits for students who lead their IEP meetings and positive parent responses created the motivation to continue to provide the opportunity to students. While themes varied and statistical test results were provided, the underlying conclusion of this study was that administrative support and curricula and materials were the most significant factors impacting student-led IEP meetings. The other teacher preparation factors in this study (i.e., professional development, and scheduling instruction during the day) were found to positively impact student-led IEP meetings only in the qualitative data analysis and interpretation.

The findings produced some convergent and other divergent interpretations of the four teacher preparation factors influencing the implementation of student-led IEP meetings for secondary students with disabilities. Recommendations focused on increasing student rates for leading the IEP meeting by providing school-wide initiatives starting in elementary grades. Additional research to be conducted is recommended; 1) sustaining implementation and teaching students with disabilities to lead their IEP meetings, 2) educators and administrators continuing to provide opportunities to students and families for a time and place to learn, and 3) student-led IEP meetings for students with significant disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds and high-poverty areas. Student-led IEP meetings provide the most logical time and place for students with disabilities to learn important self-advocacy skills, ensuring that their voices are always heard and that those voices do not come from professionals but from the students.

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#### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> The Data Accountability Center, funded by OSEP, provides public access to data about children and youths with disabilities served under *IDEA* Parts B and C; technical assistance materials to support the collection, analysis and reporting of *IDEA* data; and the forms and spreadsheets used for collection. Data retrieved Aug. 12, 2009, from <https://www.ideadata.org/PartBData.asp>.

*Appendix A*

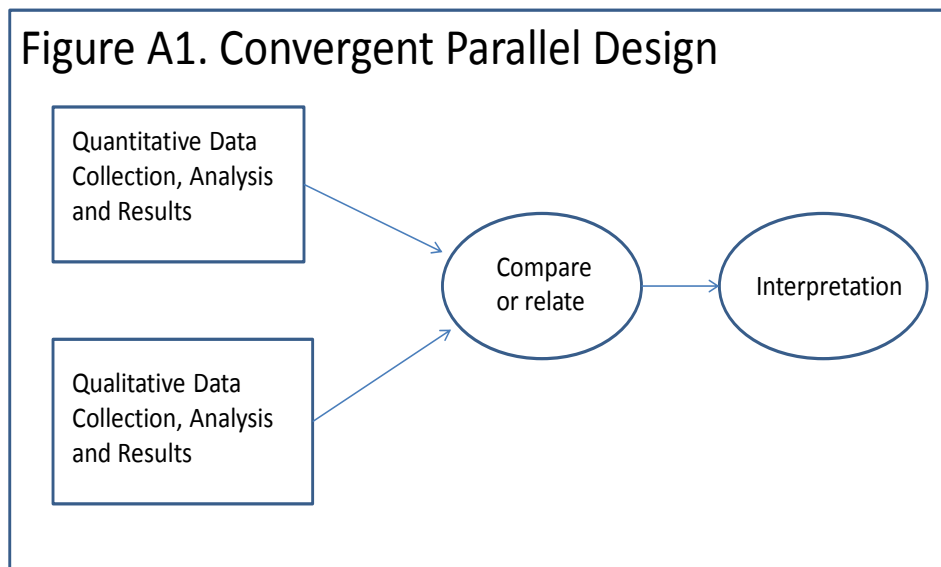


Figure A3

Side-by-Side Comparison

Leading the IEP Meeting		QUAL results	QUAN results
Comparison of Information from Survey Data			
Theme	Open-ended / Multiple Response Survey Responses		Quantitative Survey Responses
Major Topics	<b>Professional Development</b> Benefits • Release time to attend workshops and conventions was extremely useful • Workshops most effective Pd Barriers • Cost to attend workshops & conf. • Lack of knowledge about student-led IEP meeting	D	• Type of Pd did not promote students leading • Effectiveness of PD did not influence leading
	<b>Curricula and Materials</b> Benefits • Curricula and materials availability • Effective materials • Using published curricula had positive impact Barriers • Lack of funds to purchase curricula • Lack of materials • Limited curricula availability	D	• Availability of curricula and materials were not important • Materials may be outdated
	<b>Admin Support</b> • Important implementation factor • Release time to attend workshops	C	• Positively influenced teachers
	<b>Scheduling</b> Benefits • Only spending 1-5 hours per year on instruction Barriers • Scheduling conflicts • Teacher schedules • Short class periods • Time to learn technology	D	• Scheduling instruction nor time spent on instruction did not impact leading

C= Convergent D= Divergent

Adapted from Source: Li et al., 2000, Table 2, pp.124-125 (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)

Table 7A

## Tests of Normality

	Participating Category	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	<i>Df</i>	Sig.	Statistic	<i>Df</i>	Sig
Professional Development	Lowest	.291	11	.010	.880	11	.103
	Low	.169	47	.002	.925	47	.005
	Moderate	.209	16	.061	.888	16	.052
	Highest	.190	14	.185	.916	14	.194
Curricula and Materials	Lowest	.178	11	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.889	11	.135
	Low	.143	47	.017	.961	47	.115
	Moderate	.177	16	.195	.915	16	.140
	Highest	.187	14	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.876	14	.052
Administrative Support	Lowest	.185	11	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.872	11	.082
	Low	.214	47	.000	.914	47	.002
	Moderate	.179	16	.184	.930	16	.247
	Highest	.274	14	.005	.867	14	.038
Scheduling	Lowest	.142	11	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.943	11	.553
	Low	.140	47	.022	.944	47	.025
	Moderate	.171	16	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.919	16	.161
	Highest	.166	14	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.888	14	.075

Table 8A

*Tests of Normality*

	Leading Category	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig
Professional Development	Lowest	.178	19	.117	.909	19	.070
	Low	.170	42	.004	.911	42	.003
	Moderate	.197	16	.097	.940	16	.347
	Highest	.224	11	.128	.927	11	.385
Curricula and Materials	Lowest	.166	19	.180	.876	19	.019
	Low	.160	42	.009	.952	42	.076
	Moderate	.109	16	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.955	16	.567
	Highest	.199	11	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.867	11	.072
Administrative Support	Lowest	.233	19	.008	.899	19	.046
	Low	.225	42	.000	.920	42	.006
	Moderate	.195	16	.106	.902	16	.087
	Highest	.270	11	.024	.824	11	.019
Scheduling	Lowest	.176	19	.123	.881	19	.022
	Low	.145	42	.027	.948	42	.055
	Moderate	.153	16	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.938	16	.322
	Highest	.135	11	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.952	11	.669

*Appendix B***Student Involvement in the IEP Survey**

This survey is being sent to high school teachers in Missouri about students with disabilities participating in and/or leading their IEP meetings. While many high school teachers know the benefits of teaching students to participate in and/or lead their IEP meetings, there are many factors involved in making that decision. Please complete the survey that follows about your students' participation in IEP meetings and the factors influencing you to teach or not to teach student-led IEP. Please share your thoughts about implementing the student-led IEP, the importance of student participation, and the challenges of providing instruction related to IEP participation to your students. Thanks in advance for giving your time, expertise and ideas! The survey should take about 15 minutes of your time.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the purpose or design of this study, you may contact Marilyn Smith, Doctoral Candidate in Education, University of Missouri St. Louis, [ms744@umsl.edu](mailto:ms744@umsl.edu) or at 636-394-2186 or Faculty Advisor, Dr. Patricia Kopetz at 314-516-5791.

Participation in the survey is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or withdraw. Your survey completion indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least eighteen years old. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Office of Research Administration, at 314-516-5897.

Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. By starting the survey, you are giving your consent to report your answers combined with others who complete the survey as a whole and to note any individual suggestions while keeping your identity secure.

1. Do you participate in IEPs (Individualized Education Program) at your school district?

Yes     No



2. If yes, what is your role? (mark all that apply)

Transition Coordinator

Classroom Teacher

Case Manager

Related Services Provider

General Educator

Other, please explain

3. As you attend IEPs, are one or more students participating in and/or leading their IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings as a result of pre-planning of the student- led IEP?

Yes  No

4. How many IEPs do you attend each school year?

5. How many students are attending their IEP without speaking?

6. How many students are leading their IEPs?

No, students are not participating in or leading their IEPs (go to question # 19)

7. In what part(s) of the IEP meeting do you see students participating (attending, responding to direct questions or comments on topic when asked, offering information on selected topics but not taking the lead)? (check all that apply)

Welcoming people at the IEP meeting

Introducing people at the IEP meeting

Telling about or reporting findings from age-appropriate transition assessments

Telling about their likes and dislikes

Telling about their skills and challenges

Reporting or listing their accommodation needs

Stating disability or telling about their disability

Stating post secondary goal for Education

Stating post secondary goal for Employment

Stating post secondary goal for Independent Living, if appropriate

- \_\_\_ Identifying action plans for each post secondary goal
- \_\_\_ Reviewing past goals and performance on those goals
- \_\_\_ Identifying course of study for next year
- \_\_\_ Summarizing new IEP goals

**8.** What part is easiest for students to participate in? Why?

**9.** What part is hardest for students to participate in? Why?

**10.** What part(s) of the IEP meeting are your students leading (taking the lead for communicating information to the IEP team on a specific part or parts of the IEP? Can include using a template, technology, power point or other method. (check all that apply)

- \_\_\_ Welcoming people at the IEP meeting
- \_\_\_ Introducing people at the IEP meeting
- \_\_\_ Telling about or reporting findings from age-appropriate transition assessments
- \_\_\_ Telling about their likes and dislikes
- \_\_\_ Telling about their skills and challenges
- \_\_\_ Reporting or listing their accommodation needs
- \_\_\_ Stating disability or telling about their disability
- \_\_\_ Stating post secondary goal for Education
- \_\_\_ Stating post secondary goal for Employment
- \_\_\_ Stating post secondary goal for Independent Living, if appropriate
- \_\_\_ Identifying action plans for each post secondary goal
- \_\_\_ Reviewing past goals and performance on those goals
- \_\_\_ Identifying course of study for next year
- \_\_\_ Summarizing new IEP goals

**11.** What part do students generally lead? Why?

**12.** What part is hardest for students to lead? Why?

13. What were parent responses about student participation in the IEP at your school?

14. What were parent responses about students leading their IEP at your school?

15. What type of Professional Development did you participate in that prepared you to teach your students about being a part of their IEP or leading their IEP meetings? (check all that apply)

- Workshop       Web-based instruction     Teleconferences
- Conferences       Podcasts                       Book clubs
- On-site technical assistance     Satellite broadcasts       Peer leadership in leading IEP meetings
- University and community education courses
- DESE sponsored workshop: Self-Determination & Student Engagement- June 2010
- DESE sponsored workshop: Self-Determination & Student Engagement - Feb 9,2010
- Seminars               Television Courses              \_\_\_\_\_ Other (specify)

16. When did your professional development on student-led IEP occur?

- within the current school year     1 year ago     2 years ago
- 3 years ago or longer

17. What was the most effective training method to promote effective IEPs (students being more involved)?

18. How would you rate the quality of the most effective IEP professional development (that you listed above)?

- Excellent      Good      Fair      Poor

19. Please rate the curriculum(s) and or material(s) you may have used to teach students to lead part or all of their IEP meeting. Rate for effectiveness in preparing students for participating in and/or leading their IEP meetings.

\*National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICCHY)2002-Teacher's Guide to

Student Led IEPs	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did not use
*NEXT STEP Curriculum	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did not use
*STEPS to Self-Determination	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did not use
*Whose Future is it Anyway	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did not use



- \_\_\_ Study Hall or other non-credit class
- \_\_\_ Lunch time
- \_\_\_ During planning periods
- \_\_\_ After school club or after school time with teacher
- \_\_\_ Self-contained class
- \_\_\_ Other(specify)
- \_\_\_ It does not fit anywhere

**26.** As you made the decision to teach the students to participate in and/or lead their IEP meeting, what helped you the most to successfully implement this process?

**27.** Think about what might be important to support student involvement in IEPs. Please rate the following issues about IEP support and how useful these might be:

Curricula readily available

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Materials and handouts readily available

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Ease in scheduling with students

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Parent supportiveness/cultural acceptance

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Peer support from other students who know the student with an IEP

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Computer access for you

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Computer access for the student

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Funds to purchase curriculum

Extremely Useful   Very Useful   Useful   Not Useful

Financial support to attend workshop on Student Led IEP

	Extremely Useful	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful
Access to general student template for the IEP				
Research articles on student involvement in IEPs				
Release time to attend professional development for IEP development				
Content knowledge-what you already know about student participation in IEPs				
Other(specify)_____				

**28.** Why do you think it is important for students to participate in their IEP meetings?

**29.** Why is it important for teachers to provide support for students to both participate in and lead their IEP meetings?

**30.** What makes it more difficult for you to teach students to participate in and/or lead their IEP meeting? (Check all that apply)

Lack of administrative support (supervisor does not support IEP training)

Limited curriculum availability (few curricular materials for IEP training)

Materials unavailable (no materials to support student IEP participation)

Difficulty in student scheduling (student has difficulty finding time to prepare for IEP)

My schedule is difficult (I have limited time or no designated class to teach IEP participation)

Parent disapproval (parent requests student should not attend IEP)

Student peers do not support IEP attendance or participation (Negative peer support)

I don't have computer access

Lack of fund to purchase Curricula

There is not much financial support to attend workshop on Student Led IEP

\_\_\_ I am unable to access a general student template for the IEP, power point or other technology supports for students

\_\_\_ I am unable to get release time to attend professional development

\_\_\_ I don't know enough about supporting students to participate or lead their IEPs

To provide a context for your answers, I'd like to gather some personal information from you. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence.

31. Gender: \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male

32. Years Teaching : 1-5\_\_\_ 6-10\_\_\_ 11-15\_\_\_ 16-20\_\_\_

21-25\_\_\_ 26-31\_\_\_ 31+\_\_\_

33. How many of these years have been spent in administration roles only (no caseload/no classroom duties)?\_\_\_\_\_

34. How many students are on your caseload (students for whom you case manage IEPs)?

0\_\_\_ 1-5\_\_\_ 6-10\_\_\_ 11-15\_\_\_ 16-20\_\_\_ 21-25\_\_\_  
26+\_\_\_

35. How many of the students on your caseload are participating in their IEP meetings?

36. How many of the students on your caseload are leading their IEP meetings?

37. If most of your students are not participating in and/or leading their IEP meetings, why not?

38. Please write the number of students on your caseload with the following **primary** disabilities.

\_\_\_ Specific Learning Disability

\_\_\_ Intellectual Disability

\_\_\_ Emotional Disturbance

\_\_\_ Hearing Impairment/Deafness

\_\_\_ Autism

\_\_\_ Deaf/Blindness

\_\_\_ Language Impairment

- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment Blindness
- Other, please specify

**39.** What age range represents the majority of your caseload?

- 14-15     16-17     18-19     20-21

What level of disability do most of your students represent?

- Low functioning (Intellectual disability)
- Moderate functioning (mild MR/severe LD)
- Higher functioning (LD, mostly in general education classes)

**40.** To what Regional Professional Development Center in the State of MO does your school belong? If unsure, view this website to locate the answer to your specific RPDC region: <http://dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership/rpdc/>

- Southeast     Heart of MO     Kansas City     Northeast/Truman
- South Central     Southwest     St. Louis     Central     Missouri Southern
- Missouri Western     Northwest

Thank you for your time