

Abstract

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Racial, ethnic, and gender disproportionality in the field of Special Education is a phenomenon that has challenged our school systems since *Brown v. The Board of Education* (Blanchett 2006). This study of a Middle School in a Mid-Atlantic state is aimed to view disproportionality through the lens of the identification process (Kid Talk, Student Support Team Meetings, and Initial Individual Education Plan meeting). It is a qualitative study that included observations of initial IEP meetings and interviews with five professionals within the school setting. These interviews included two general educators, two special education teachers, and one administrator. Through a comprehensive data analysis, it was found that for these individuals the introduction of students into the special education depends upon a complex set of factors that include: teacher preparation, the perception of the teacher by their colleagues, and the student's academic/behavioral struggles, amongst others. Some recommendations include further professional development in the identification process and cultural competence.

TEACHERS AND THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS: MINORITY STUDENTS IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

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Teachers and The Identification Process: Minority Students in Special Education

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine more closely the role of general education and special education teachers in the identification process of special education placement. As a special educator, the continual disproportionate representation of minority youth into special education has raised several questions about the interactions of power, race, and culture in the classroom. My personal observations in classrooms, conversations in teacher lounges, and attendance at Individualized Education Plan meetings sparked questions about how cultural capital may be impacting the identification of minorities into special education.

The study takes place on the southern border of a Mid Atlantic state that has received top rankings for a number of years by *Education Week*. The state relegates the responsibility to educate the populations to their counties instead of town districts. This southern county is considered a suburb of a major city and has experienced a housing demand due to employment in the nearby metropolis. The northern historically White portion of the county, where this study takes place, is now experiencing a shift in population to Black.

Denton¹ Middle School, located in the northern part of the county, is one of the largest middle schools in the area. The school has been in operation for six years as a response to the growing population in the area. The county has recently redistricted their schools and in effect Denton has lost 200 students for the 2012-2013 school year. There are presently 906 students that attend Denton Middle School. There is an even divide of boys (453) and girls (453) within the school. There are 623 students that identify as Black, signifying the largest racial population

¹ Pseudonym

within the school. There are also 194 students that identify as White, 47 that identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, 38 that identify as Hispanic, and four that identify as American Indian.

Currently, there are seventy-one students enrolled in special education programs based upon the county standards. This number does not include those students who transferred into Denton Middle School from out of state because these students need to have county testing in order to qualify. Until they have been qualified under county standards, the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) is implemented as close as possible to the previous team's stipulations.

Denton Middle School's special education population, identified by the county's standards, account for approximately 7.8% of the school's total population. This population is comprised of 17 females/54 males, 53 Black students, ten White students, five Asian/Pacific Islander, two Hispanic, and one American Indian student. In order to distinguish the correct proportions of representation in special education for each sub population, one needs to multiply the percent of special education students in the population (7.8%) by the general population amount for each sub group. From here, we compare the product to the actual special education enrollment numbers. In order for Denton Middle School to have a proportionate amount of students in their special education programs, they would require approximately (rounded to the nearest whole number) 35 males/35 females, 49 Black students, 15 White students, four Asian/Pacific Islander students, three Hispanic students, and one American Indian student registered in special education. When comparing this potential special education data to the actual Denton Middle School, there are more males and slightly more Black students.

In Denton Middle School, special education students can receive services in a variety of environments, depending upon the recommended setting, from inclusive to a more restrictive setting. Students can receive services in a general education setting without a daily special

educator. In other general education classrooms, students can receive services in a co-taught classroom. If a student is not succeeding in the general education setting, there is a self-contained room where special education students can learn the general curriculum in a smaller group. Each grade level contains one of these classroom environments. A student may be enrolled in this setting for one block or all of the academic blocks. In terms of programing, special education students can be receiving services in a life skills classroom where all students are not diploma bound. In this room, students are working toward being independent members in society and are offered some mainstreaming by being included in non-academic classes (art, computers, physical education, and family/consumer science). There is also the Emotional Assistance (EA) Program, which is completely self-contained for students that have behavioral and emotional needs.

The backgrounds of students receiving services in a restrictive setting, including special education students that are in at least one self-contained class comprise of two Black males, one Black female, one Hispanic male, and one Hispanic female. Those students that are in two self-contained classes include: one Black male, one White male, and one Asian female. There are currently no students that have three self-contained classes. Those students whom are enrolled in all four academic blocks of self-contained classes include three Black males. In Life Skills, there are four Black male and two Black female students. In the EA program there are 13 Black male, one Black female, one White male, and one White female.

When thinking about over representation, in each racial group there is either the exact amount of students identified or more except for the Hispanic and White population of students. In terms of males vs. females there is an overwhelming amount of males are represented within special education programming. When examining the restrictive settings, the more restrictive the

setting the more likely for minority male students to be enrolled. Unfortunately this is not an isolated case, but instead resonates throughout American school systems (Blanchett 2006).

Since the Industrial Revolution of the 1800's schools have placed value on punctuality, conformity, and achievement. These virtues were a mirror of factories that were being built because one of the goals of public schools during this period was to create productive workers especially from the working classes. Students who struggled in the classroom were often humiliated by teachers for their lack of achievement. Those that were able to succeed in school were offered more managerial opportunities in the workforce, which led to improved salaries. Achievement became a way to prosper in school, employment, and in economic advancement (Tyack, 1974).

Students with disabilities were rarely educated before the implementation of special education laws since their purpose was not recognized by the educational system. The realities of the majority of many youth with disabilities were lives in institutions with limited amounts of clothes, food, care, and shelter. These students were merely institutionalized instead of educated (Duncan & Posny, 2010). In the 1950's and 1960's, as a response to the dire conditions suffered by many youth, organizations such as the parent group Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC), rallied to create practices for students with disabilities and their families (Duncan & Posny, 2010).

Special education as a service was built to remedy the uproar of parental disillusionment and anger towards the treatment and the inappropriate education of those who were considered disabled. The passage of Public Law 94-142 (since renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IDEA) in 1975 designated what special education would entail. The law determined that students with disabilities would receive a free and appropriate public education

in the least restrictive environment. Each student would receive these rights through an individualized education plan (IEP) that would be created by a team of professionals and a parent. Through this national guideline, states and districts were allowed to translate it in their own way to serve their specific populations (Duncan & Posny, 2010).

The service of special education, designed to benefit students with disabilities, has created a legalized way to segregate students of color (Blanchett 2006). Before the creation of PL 94-142, *Brown vs. the Board of Education* shook the United States with the integration of minority students into White schools (McLesky, Skiba, & Wilcox, 1990). As Black students were integrated into schools, they were placed into special education at alarming rates. According to Shealey, McHatton, & Wilson (2001), this rate of placement for minority students was greater to ensure that segregation continued in a new environment. Special education is not always an indication of a closure in achievement gaps, nor does it imply greater opportunity post-graduation (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010).

Disproportionality is defined as students' representation in special education programs or categories, which exceeds their proportional enrollment in the school's general population (Blanchett, 2006). Disproportionality is a complex issue that involves many factors on the macro and micro levels of society, contributing to disproportionality a phenomenon difficult to generalize. Even with the legislation that has been put into place to monitor this phenomenon, disproportionality is still alive today in our schools (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010).

I have personally encountered many tragic situations that dealt with the treatment of students in special education and the overrepresentation of minorities within that category. As a student in middle school I began to learn about the issues that impacted those with special needs. I volunteered in a Peer Partner Program, which was an effort to integrate those who had severe

needs into general education. Quickly, I noticed how fast those that had joined into the program with me disappeared. Many could not deal with the social pressures of interaction with students with severe needs. Our peers would outwardly make fun of the students and those who volunteered to include these students with special needs more in the general population. I now can see this as classic “othering” of students that are different from the normal standards (Reid & Knight, 2006).

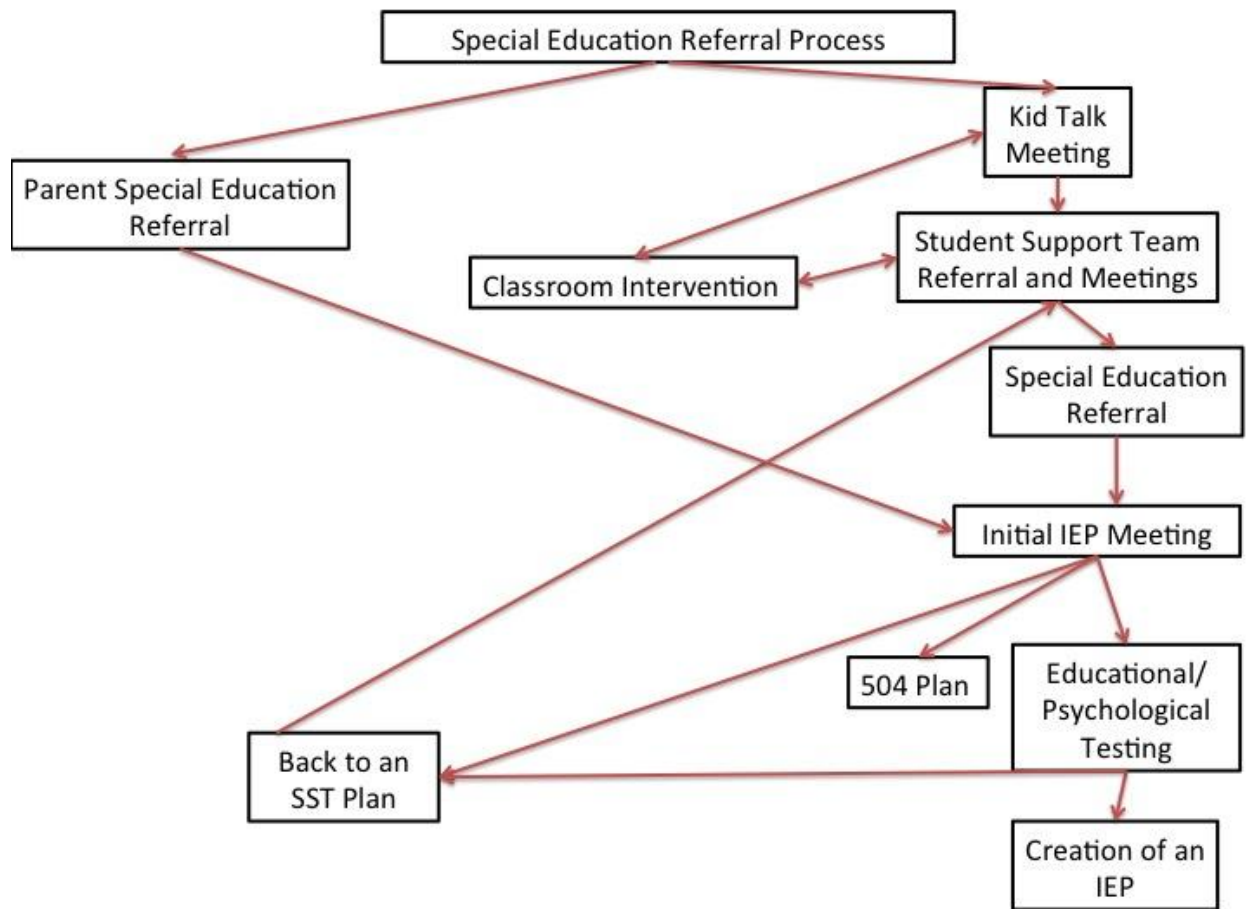
In my undergraduate work at Providence College I further learned about special education classrooms that contained mostly minority students. At the time, this seemed like a foreign reality that only happened in distant classrooms where I would never work. I could not rationalize how this injustice could be an actual reality for students in a post-civil rights age.

Upon being hired as an eighth grade special education teacher in a middle school in a Mid-Atlantic state, my principal told me that the majority of the students in the school were White followed closely by African Americans. The day I walked into my first day of school as a professional, I looked around my room and saw colorful faces looking back at me. It was a few months before I saw a classroom that had a majority of White students. I remembered being confused because I knew there was supposed to be more White students than those of color; yet I had seen only a speckle of White students in my crowded classrooms.

One afternoon I had to deliver a book to the teacher in the gifted classroom during my planning. She had been in the middle of teaching and I scanned the class for a brief second as I placed the advanced book on her desk. When I closed the door, a fleeting thought sparked through my brain, “This is where all the White kids have been.” I realized that all of what I had learned at Providence College about disproportionate representation was now my shared reality with the students in my own classroom.

I thus became interested in the process of identification of students in special education. I believe that since there are more minority students being identified as special education, than this process is important to understand. The complex pathway towards identification or provision of other services in my school district is complicated. This visual representation of this process accompanies the narrative description below to further clarify the process.

Figure 1, The Special Education Referral Process



The identification process for special education can start one of two ways: parent referral or through a “kid talk” discussion. When a parent mentions that he/she would like to have their student examined for special education eligibility, the process goes directly to the initial Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. “Kid Talk” is an initial discussion between teachers,

administration, and guidance counselors when a teacher voices his/her concerns with a student. From my observation, if multiple teachers explain that they have similar challenges, then the student's case is transferred to the Student Support Team (SST). If the student is not seen as a difficulty in other classrooms, a teacher's colleagues will offer their individual strategies that the student can use. The SST team is created to give the teachers and student skills towards academic/social success. The team consists of teachers, a guidance counselor, a psychologist, and the parent. If improvement is seen through this process, a special education referral is not necessary. However, if the student does continue to struggle, the student is directed towards the special education team. The special education team reviews the paperwork from the SST team conferences, and begins to set the appointment for an initial IEP meeting. This meeting consists of a special educator, psychologist, general educator, IEP facilitator, and parent. Occasionally a guidance counselor may be involved. It is in this meeting that the student is either referred for testing to determine eligibility for special education, 504 plans (if it is more of a physical problem that does not necessarily directly impact education), or back to the SST process. The chart below outlines which stakeholders are in attendance at which meetings.

Figure 2, Participants at Identification Meetings

Meeting	Stakeholders
Kid Talk Meeting	Teachers, Administrators, Guidance Counselors
Student Support Team Meetings	Teachers, Guidance Counselor, Psychologist, Administrator (occasionally), Parent, Student (occasionally)
Initial IEP Meeting	Teacher, special educator, IEP Facilitator, Psychologist, Parent

In November 2011, I conducted a pilot study at the middle school that I work at for a qualitative research class. In that study I conducted, one interview was conducted with the IEP

facilitator, Ms. Delcroy² of Denton Middle School. She heads every meeting conducted at the school. It was discussed in the interview that at the initial IEP meeting, Ms. Delcroy looked for specific key phrases in order to make the high stake decisions described above. Ms. Delcroy explained she was specifically listening for statements about the student that included: “easily distracted”, “not able to retain information”, “not able to follow easy directions”, “disruptive”, “aggressive”, “not able to keep friends”, and “not able to respond appropriately to adults”. The general educator or the special educator (if the special educator was familiar with the student referred) would make these assertions during the initial IEP meeting about the student in order to make their case for special education testing. While I listened back to this portion of the interview, I found myself thinking that each statement was very subjective in its nature.

If testing is indicated as necessary, then the student is given an educational and psychological exam. The results determine if a student fits the criteria designated by the district, they will receive an Individual Education Plan. Another one of my observations was that much of the information being shared by general educators during the initial meeting was subjective, information that might not paint an accurate picture of the student in question. An example of the subjective statements that are being shared include, “Student Name, cannot stay focused in class.” or “Student Name cannot adapt to his/her surroundings.” However, as revealed in this study, it was these types of subjective statements, which aligned with the key phrases in the IEP facilitator radar that resulted in special education testing.

As a result, I became more deeply interested in analyzing the process of how information is collected and shared at identification meetings from both the special and general educator, who are determining eligibility in special education. From my personal observations as a special

² Pseudonyms are utilized for all school personnel in this study

education teacher the manner in which information is shared can also sway the decision and convince a parent that special education would be a necessity to their student. The perspective of each stakeholder within these referral meetings is another important factor I choose to investigate because it would further assist in understanding for practice and policy, the specific kinds of information stakeholders should bring to the table.

The research on disproportionality has existed for years; yet the phenomenon still exists (Artiles, 2012). Among the literature on this subject, little has concentrated on the specific identification *process* for those placed in special education. Also there is a call for more local data since requirements from district to district change based upon the norm. As recent policy changes require more local data because of individual district distinctions, this type of local data can then potentially be utilized as a way to understand this phenomenon (Artiles & Bal, 2008).

There has also been very little research conducted by teachers themselves. Teacher researchers are essential to be integrated into the wealth of disproportionality research. Teachers have access to the field at an insider level that is difficult for outside researchers to access. Furthermore, authentic relationships are already formed with the subjects of study, contributing to a strong “insider” portrait, which possessing its own limitations, is nonetheless an asset for local studies.

Research Questions

Shaped, in part, by these circumstances, the following research questions thus guided this study.

- What rationales do general education teachers utilize to identify potential students for special education services?

- During the actual meeting (Kid Talk, SST Team Meetings, and Initial IEP meetings) how do the stakeholders (general educator, special educator, administrator) frame their “case” for a student’s need for special education services?
- At the initial IEP meeting, what perspectives do the stakeholders bring to the meeting in order to justify their recommendations for student services?

II. Literature Review

In order to create a lens through which to view the research on disproportionality, it is imperative to construct a critical theory base. I found that Freire’s (1970) work best serves my research as a theoretical framework. Freire (1970) builds off of the work of Michel Foucault and his ideas of knowledge and power. In one of his essays, *Power as Knowledge*, Foucault (1976) defined and described power in its many forms. For Foucault, power and knowledge become intertwined in discourse, which he defines as a complex concept in terms of power because it hinders and asserts. It was partially through these similar thoughts that Paulo Freire formed a critical theory. He also drew upon his work with underprivileged people of Latin America in teaching them how to read. Freire explained that the continuum between the oppressor and the oppressed binds both parties to a system that is focused on dehumanization. Dehumanization is defined as the distorting act of becoming more fully human. This impacts both the oppressed by having their humanity stolen, and the oppressor in their act of stealing humanity. The oppressors who exercise their power over the oppressed cannot liberate the oppressed or themselves from this bond. Oppressors, blinded by the power they are given, are not willing to give up such power completely. The power that comes from the weak or oppressed in their efforts to be liberated is the only means to break the cycle. This freedom is “acquired by conquest not gift” (Freire, 1970, p 47). Those who are part of the oppressors may join the oppressed in their fight. However,

instead of fighting battles for the oppressed, they need to trust in people because this support will go farther than anything else (Freire, 1970). In terms of my own research, students that are identified as special education can be classified as oppressed, since they are not offered the same opportunities as those that are not labeled as such. Using this label as a means to discriminate between populations is how the oppressors continue their mode of oppression. However, the oppressor's intent to dominate in society can be easily masked through the creation/implementation of legislation.

Through IDEA 2004, legislation was passed regarding districts responsibility to collect state and district level information on disproportionality data; however, the legislation does not specify how they must analyze this data. The risk ratio is the most widely used way to calculate disproportionality. Risk ratio uses the racial/ethnic group and divides it by the total amount of students in the category. Researchers can choose to use the White category of students as the total amount in the comparison group since it is the dominant one in society, or use the entire amount of students in a particular category. A risk ratio of a 1.00 means that there is no difference between the racial/ethnic group and the comparison group, and therefore, the racial group is not more likely than the comparison group to receive special education. If the risk ratio is above a 1.00 it signifies that the racial group is more likely to be receiving special education services than the comparison, while a risk ratio below 1.00 means that the risk of the racial/ethnic group is less than the risk of the comparison group (Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Morgren, & Brauen, 2007).

As Freire (1970) indicated in his theory, those that are oppressed must be the vehicle for the liberation of those that are oppressed and oppressors. This research would be in remiss if it did not include perspective of minority scholars of the subject of overrepresentation in special

education. Harry, Sturges and Klingner (2005) make an important quest into the realm of qualitative research in their grounded theory to learn more about disproportionality. They examined the factors that are impacting the disproportionate representation of minority youth in special education and find that it is a complex network of determinants that cannot be simplified into just professional biases, low socio-economic statuses of students, or poor funding. In addressing the issue of disproportionality, it is difficult to deal with because it is a multilevel and multidirectional attack of the standardization of the educational system (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005).

Although determining a group's risk for disproportionality is acknowledging the group as "other" than the norm, it can also be used to understand individual disability categories. Disability as a term is actually a form of oppression based on ableism. The word ableism is referred to in describing the feeling of it being better to be considered as normal as possible rather than disabled (Reid & Knight, 2006). This information is redolent of Freire's theory as a way the oppressors might control the oppressed and the society view (Freire, 1970). It is in this quest to be normal (designated by the oppressors), that the oppressed lose the ability to feel content in their identity, which takes their power away. Additionally, those who have lived experience with disabilities are usually not at the forefront on the fight against ableism. This is a dangerous misgiving because assumptions may occur from "experts" who have never lived with a disability. The idea of normalcy has made it easy to view those of color and in poverty to be seen as an "other" by also associating them with disability. Disability is considered an oppression of a culture and a historical period rather than an individual (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Disability, as a minority category, has had a long history of carrying the connotation of being a monstrosity of society. This image has not been forgotten and has been the catapult that

has launched rationality for discrimination against the label. Even today, those whom are characterized by some form of disability are seen as defective and incapable of receiving full benefits of inclusion. The result is segregation into different settings. The normalized standards that students are expected to conform to have been the historical White European ideal. This ideal is categorized by being able to adhere to Eurocentric and ableist concepts of knowledge and actions, the ability to use Standard American English (the English of Black and Latinos are considered inferior), and the belief that specialized instruction is needed to help those that underperform in school (Reid & Knight, 2006). It is through this lens that we are able to justify why those who are minorities, those whom are impoverished, and immigrants lie outside the standard and consequently, require special education in order to be successful. To perpetuate this oppression, our collective views of race, gender, class, and disability come into play in order to compare against the standard noted above, and apply strategies for those who do not fit this standard. Segregation is then viewed as permissible, not in terms of race, but in reference to disability. It is argued that the labeling of students and segregation in order to deliver specific services is inappropriate since student needs should be supported in the general education setting (Reid & Knight, 2006). Special education has become yet another hurdle for the oppressed to overcome. It has been placed as a blockade to minority populations, since they are not offered the same opportunities as others, (in the guise of aide) to continue giving the dominant group power (Freire, 1970).

The view that disability is a vehicle of oppression has been analyzed from many different directions. McDermott and Varenne (1995) describe a new way to think about the system of disability. Their main viewpoint is to describe disability as an artifact of a culture, rather than a trait of a particular person. Culture in itself has the power to create disability. It seems as

though we have created a variety of categories for students to be identified as culturally and mentally different than their peers in effort to further blame the child. Culture in itself is the way we live and create these categories for humans. “For every skill a person gains, there is another not developed; for every focus of attention, something passed by; for every specialty, a corresponding lack” (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p.331). Culture in itself is a way to refine, appreciate, and judge abilities: a way to define/categorize those who do not share the same value in the ability (McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) find a distinction in disability between that of biologically determined and non-biologically determined groups (termed the “judgmental” category) within special education. Biologically determined disability would be more physically impaired disabilities such as being deaf or blind. Non-biological disability (such as Specific Learning Disability or Emotionally Disturbed) is considered to be judgmental because there is a lack of biological definition to go with them and rely on professional clinical definitions. In turn, this creates a sub group of disability that is riddled with ambiguity and bias. These labels carry further weight since each applies a social stigma, which creates a high stakes situation (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010).

Special education in its original form was supposed to be a system of service delivery to students who needed educational support that could not be provided in the general educational setting. It was not supposed to be a place or location in a school. The program would use structured objective referral, eligibility, assessment/evaluation, placement, and exit process. Once students mastered skills they would be integrated back into the general education population. What this system has turned into for African American students has been a new way of segregation in the classroom. It is a mechanism created to become a legalized form of

segregation in the post *Brown v. Board of Education* era (Blanchett, 2006). This school system is reflective OF McDermott's ideas on culture becoming a disability. Special education becomes a way to not only discriminate against disability, but race as well.

Blanchett (2006) explains that this form of discrimination is undetected by White populations because it is seen as just a way of life. It is actually carefully constructed for Whites not to be cognizant of their privilege. It is a culture of power that has been constructed in order to mask this privilege that consistently benefits White students without their knowledge. This culture of power has been translated into the classroom by meticulously planning which set of behaviors will be accepted or not recognized. The acceptable strain of behaviors fit into what the dominate culture value as important and those that understand it succeed. Other minorities are therefore at a disadvantage because they have to adapt to this structure since they do not inherently know how to succeed under the conditions set (Delpit, 1995). This is done by teaching Whites that discrimination is individual acts of meanness instead of a system of dominance over other races (Blanchett, 2006).

African Americans are overrepresented in special education in separate classrooms for more than 60% of their day; however, it is also important to point out that they are underrepresented in general education which is defined as being segregated less than 21% of their day (Artiles, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz 2006). The inclusion model for special education is extremely important because the model benefits both special education and non-disabled peers. Those who are considered disabled in general education placements have been found to complete more assignments, show gains in reading performance, overall academic achievement, and appropriate social interactions. For those who are non-disabled in general education settings, there are definite benefits of improving their interpersonal,

social, and behavioral skills (Artiles, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz 2006). It is the overrepresentation of placement in segregation of African American students that might represent a greater obstacle rather than their representation in their disability category. This comes to light considering those African Americans who are labeled as learning disabled who display poor anger control are usually more likely to be segregated (Artiles, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz 2006).

The Latino experience in special education has taken on a different context than the African American experience (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010). It is important to note that when speaking of Latino populations, they are defined as “a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, p.1). Globalization impacts this community because it creates the socioeconomic conditions, which reinforce Latino movement and migration into the United States. It is these economic conditions that force segregation of Latinos from White communities, and consequently the segregation of Latinos in school (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010).

Although IDEA 2004 requires states to monitor disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, it does not account for those who are language minorities, meaning that there is a possibility that the disproportionate representation of English Language Learners remains undetected in many states (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010).

English Language Learners (ELL) continue to struggle politically in school. In 2010, over half of the states in the U.S. have recognized English as the official language even when strong opposition was apparent (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010). Currently, three states have passed laws to educate ELL students solely in English. This legislation demonstrates

a lack of evidence based research strategies and the faulty assumption that English proficiency can be achieved in one year of immersion. It is this disregard for the acquisition of language as a process coupled with the expectation of progress for ELLs that make the chances that Latino ELLs will be identified as learning disabled greater (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010). However, this is not surprising when thinking that the dominant culture's language would be English. In the spirit of colonization, the dominant group must force their values and beliefs (including language) on others stripping the oppressed culture of their power (Freire, 1970).

At this time, Latinos are represented in special education the same as White populations at a national level. This representation is due to the over and under representation in various districts throughout the country, making local data collection invaluable to understanding the Latino experience with disproportionality in special education. When looking at specific states, Latinos have been overrepresented in mental retardation in Massachusetts and Hawaii. When looking at gender, Latino male students are twice as likely to be identified as learning disabled to the comparison group, while Latina women were not overrepresented in any category. Once in special education, Latinos are more likely to be placed in segregated settings, which are similar to the African American experience (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010).

Latino ELL students need to be differentiated from their English speaking Latino peers in terms of their representation in special education. ELL students were three times as likely to be given the label of learning disabled and over two times as to be labeled as mentally retarded when compared with their White peers. When there are limited language supports to assist ELL students, it is more likely that they will be overrepresented in special education. It is also important to note that many IEP teams may not consider the impact of language acquisition and the opportunities that can impact student learning with these issues when determining special

education eligibility (Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, & Neal, 2010). It is important that Artiles, Sullivan, Waitoller, and Neal (2010) make the distinction between Latinos with English speaking skills and those without. It demonstrated that language is yet another component to impact the disproportionality of students. It also is a clear indication that the more divergent one is from the dominant culture, the more likely the identification for special education will be.

A group of researchers commented on what the next generation of research in disproportionality in special education should entail. Artiles (2010) explained the need to be looking at macro and micro levels due to the fact that labels themselves are viewed on these planes. These identifications have been recognized on a national level, while their definitions are constructed on a local level based off of district requirements. These categories in special education have been created in such a fashion that they are big enough to be widely recognized but different enough to describe populations that might be unlike depending on local “norm” standards. This means that disabilities can affect different populations depending upon what boundaries for identification of the specific disability districts determine. Artiles (2010) also states that we need to place this issue within the context of culture and history. Both aspects are needed in order to crystalize the gatekeepers (teachers) actions in the referral process. From here we can unpack the complex situations that lead to the over/under referral of students into special education services (Artiles, 2010). Instead of using this historical and cultural context to identify special education students, we use a comparative model. This comparison model is used to identify students as disabled by comparing them to the norm of local society. Then, society uses the comparison to make a statement that the disability is within the individual (Artiles & Bal, 2008).

Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, and Feggins Azziz (2006) explained the importance of qualitative research to examine the disproportionality of minorities in special education. It would be essential in order to look at the identification process of special education, because it provides a context to describe the complex issues that impact this issue. Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons and Feggins-Azziz (2006) identifies the need for more research in the areas of classroom management or the identification/eligibility process contributes to racial disparities in special education (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). With the literature base and the creation of the research questions above, the following methodology was designed to address the needs in this area of research.

III. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to understand how teachers contribute to the phenomenon of disproportionality through the initial IEP process. Disproportionality has been identified as when students' representation in special education programs or categories, exceeds their proportional enrollment in the school's general population. Educational resource allocation, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and inadequate teacher preparation have all contributed to the problem of disproportionate representation of minorities in special education (Blanchett, 2006). The fact that there is this overrepresentation of minorities in special education and underrepresentation of minorities in post-secondary education demonstrates that historical legacies of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, that have been engrained in our society, continue to influence our educational practices (Reid, Knight, 2006). The identification process for this study is seen as the series of meetings that culminate in a special education label.

To reiterate, the following research questions will be utilized,

1. What rationales do general education teachers utilize to identify potential students for special education services?
2. During the actual meeting (Kid Talk, SST Team Meetings, and Initial IEP meetings) how do the stakeholders (general educator, special educator, administrator) frame their “case” for a student’s need for special education services?
3. At the initial IEP meeting, what perspectives do the stakeholders bring to the meeting in order to justify their recommendations for student services?

The research questions have been designed to attempt to target the root of the phenomenon. In the first question, “What rationales do general education teachers utilize to identify potential students for special education services?” the word “rationales” is used to ask what grounds do teachers form in putting forward their justifications concerning students experiencing difficulties in their classes. The goal is to illuminate the subjectivity or objectivity in their arguments. For the purpose of this study, a subjective approach would be based upon a loose selection of data points that do not account for the whole child. It is categorized by informal description that does not include hard numbers, or solid systematic evidence to describe a behavior. In contrast, in this study, a more objective data system would include a systematic method of collected data such as through time sampling or intervals. These systems are used to derive numbers that describe a behavior in a way that excludes bias. The population of focus for this question is general educators because they are the professionals who have the most access to the student and relay the most information to describe the student. This first research question will address all meetings in the special education referral process (Kid Talk, SST Meetings, and Initial IEP meetings) because all are essential to the “weeding out” process.

The second question, “During the actual meeting (Kid Talk, SST Team Meetings, and Initial IEP meetings) how do general education teachers frame their “case” for a student’s need for special education services?” will be utilized to understand how the professional describes the problem behaviors to the team. The researcher will be looking how the general educator utilizes body language, verbal strategies, and actual props in all identification meetings (Kid Talk, SST, and Initial IEP meetings) in order to address their concerns and persuade his/her team members toward continuing the identification process toward special education. All meetings are being examined because they are an integral part of the referral process in that they may determine whether a child continues on to special education identification or not.

The last question, “At the initial IEP meeting, what perspectives do the stakeholders bring to the meeting in order to justify their recommendations for student services?” addresses the diverse perspectives that merge into a single decision during the initial meeting. The initial IEP meeting is solely pursued because it is the culmination of the series of meetings. Each person that attends this meeting possesses a different viewpoint that is essential to making this high stakes decision. It is imperative to understand which perspectives, if any, that each member has during this meeting to rationalize the student’s need for services.

Prior to conducting interviews, two IEP meetings, of which I was a part of, were observed in order to provide a context of understanding all the stakeholders that are involved in the Initial IEP process. It also supplied a framework into understanding the influential meetings in which these students are ushered into services. It provided reflective moments where I could explore my own agendas within the initial IEP meeting and how I personally contribute to the process of identifying students for special education services.

The population sampled for interviewing was teachers or those that are experts in the field of education. The teachers/professionals who were interviewed were special educators, general educators, and administrators who play an integral part of the identification process. I recruited participants by inviting them to join the study through snowball sampling. Informants, who had a great deal of information about the IEP identification process, chose participants for recommendation. The participants were eligible based upon whether they are involved in special education identification of students. They were not discriminated against based upon age, sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, or economic situation.

The informant was the IEP facilitator due to her ability to attend every meeting that involves an IEP within the school. A discussion occurred with the informant to explain the research and the type of professionals that would be needed to complete the study. I was able to answer any question that the facilitator had about the research project. The IEP facilitator aided in choosing whom would be an appropriate candidate for interview.

Participants were invited to be a part of a one on one interview with myself. After an invitation is extended, a consent form was given to the potential participants prior to the interview. The consent form was reviewed orally with the participant after they had read the form and questions were answered. Once the participant had accepted the agreement, the interviewer agreed upon a time and place with the participant. All interviews were conducted in a secure room and the interviewee was assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.

When the interviewer and participant met for the interview, an audiotape recorded the interview. All participants in this study were interviewed individually and were asked their viewpoints on their school, their roles in the school, the special education identification process, their data collection processes to prepare for these essential meetings, and how they perceived

the special education identification process. All participants were encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes through 60 minutes. Throughout this period, we spoke formally and informally about their lives, the school system in which they are involved in, and the roles that they carry throughout the workday. All of the participants were women and we met to conduct the interviews in a variety of places that felt more comfortable to them (i.e. living rooms, staff lounges, and classrooms). These women came from different places in the country and had different levels of experience in education. They all had been in Denton Middle School for at least one year and had been in the county long enough to receive tenure (at least three/four years). Their experiences with special education students were also varied but each had been involved in the identification process for at least a year.

When the interview was completed, the dialogue was transcribed from the audio recording to a laptop computer. The computer was locked with a password that only the researcher has access to. The transcription proved to be fruitful as many of the themes within the interviews began to emerge. Each interview was printed out in order to read and identify the themes further.

After the scripts were read over two times, themes in the separate interviews became even more apparent. I found that there were significant strands of information that were essential to piecing this puzzle together. Although new software such as Invivo is often used by qualitative researchers, as a result of the smaller scope of this study, my advisor and I agreed that the following process was acceptable for this research. I wrote on these scripts indicating what I deemed to be important concepts (based on the framework of this research) that

were being shared by each individual I had interviewed. I found that there were commonalities between these ideas that signified overarching themes. There were 13 themes that I saw and began the processes of color-coding the information. Once the information was color coded by theme, I took a clean copy of scripts and cut them onto index cards that were labels with the appropriate pseudonym, and theme at the top.

Once index cards were created, they were reviewed for analysis. I concluded that the original 13 themes could fall under four significant pieces of an outline that will be explored in depth within this paper. The four main themes are as follows: 1) a teacher's responsibility and the identification process, 2) student's behavior and the need for more restrictive placement, 3) blame and the unspoken truths of the current system, and 4) teacher perceptions and challenges of the current system. With teacher responsibilities and the identification process, there will be information that addresses what each interviewee perceives as their role and responsibility within their school. The section also addresses their knowledge and interaction with the special education identification process. In section two, teachers will address how behavior plays into special education identification and the restrictive environments that are available to place students. It will speak to how these restrictive environments are developed and who is expected to be placed within them. Section three lends itself to the amount of blame that was expressed by each participant and their experiences in the identification process that does not follow the intent of the process. Lastly section four portrays the perceptions believed and challenges faced by the special education identification process.

After the notes were used for the researcher's purpose, those and the audiotape were locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's professional office and will remain there for no less than 5 years. When five years have passed, the audiotapes and notes will be disposed of by shredding.

Throughout this entire process, I have questioned the duality of my role as researcher and special educator. I have personally felt like this experience has been an invaluable reflection into my role within a system that I believe needs improvement. I have thought about how I also color the research by having both roles. In interviewing, I attempted to keep my beliefs non-transparent in order not to taint any of the information shared by the interviewer. I understand, in already forming relationships with those that I interviewed, that it is possible that I swayed some of the content of my colleagues' responses. However, my role can be viewed as a double edge sword in that I was also able to establish immediate rapport with my subjects, which allowed for a level of comfort in discussing this highly sensitive material.

IV. Data Analysis

The Meeting

As I looked around the oval table, I saw that there were three other faces looking back at me. We had all assembled in order to decide if we would test another student for special education services; however, the parents/guardian had yet to come into the room. The faces I identified as the IEP facilitator, our school psychologist, and the general educator in the room. I noticed a phone on the table indicating to me that the parent/guardian would participate by phone. The student in question was one that I have never encountered in the past, but had been referred to the initial IEP team by the SST team. I found that I had a moment before the parent/guardian was to be contacted and explained that I was a little uncomfortable with presenting a letter that had been given to me as a form of data from another general education teacher. The teacher's intent was that I should report the content to the parent. The team (minus the parent/guardian) asked me to read the letter aloud. I read verbatim what was written on my piece of paper in a way that I interpreted the teacher to have written it. After I read the letter, I

explained that I was uneasy because of the subjectivity within the letter, its reference to the student's hygiene, description of her behavior, and how the teacher conspicuously deemed the student eligible for special education services. Upon hearing this information, the group informed me of this particular girl's situation.

In the brief moments before the meeting was to begin, I found essential pieces of personal information about this student whom I had never met that helped me to decide what I would suggest. I heard that she had been taken from her mother due to an abusive situation that dealt with her father. From this situation, she was placed in the custody of her aunt for the beginning of the school year. However, the student was then taken from that environment due to abusive situations with her aunt's boyfriends and not having a lock on her bedroom door. This student had particular trouble changing her clothes every day because she actually had no clothes to change into. She was then placed into a foster family situation that kept in touch with her birth mother on a regular basis. In this placement, her environment seemed to improve. I realized that this girl had seen a world that I have only watched in movie theaters and heard about through word of mouth. The psychologist informed the team that all teachers had been made aware of this student's situation and how inappropriate the teacher's letter was in attempting to address the matter.

In that moment the guidance office secretary opened the door and peeked her head into the conference room where we had gathered to explain that the guardian of the student was here for the meeting. The IEP facilitator stood up to greet this individual and welcomed her into the meeting. IEP facilitator introduced the guardian and explained that she was going to place a call to the student's mother. As this was happening, I was thinking about the series of events that this student had encountered in order to bring her into a situation where she was being identified for

special education. I was also considering how it was possible for her teacher, whom I directly work with, to write the scathing letter I held in my hand. I immediately decided that I would not insult the team with reading such a letter and placed it toward the bottom of my data.

The mother of the student answered the phone and the IEP facilitator introduced herself. The IEP facilitator then made certain that the mother was in a place where she could be part of the meeting. The IEP facilitator explained that we would introduce ourselves and we went around the table in order to comply. When the foster mom introduced herself she said, “Hi Mom!” into the speaker, which is an act that demonstrated to me that they were unified in their vision for this student.

The IEP facilitator clarified the purpose of the meeting and asked the general education teacher to speak about the student’s progress in her class. This teacher stated the student’s grade and little observations that she had noticed in the classroom. Since it was May, this teacher was able to describe the student from the beginning of the year. This teacher was basically summing up behaviors, claiming she understood the situation, and mentioning that the behaviors had been subsiding with the student’s new environment. Due to new structure and strategies that were reinforcing the necessity of her completing her homework, the student was more successful.

At the conclusion of the teacher’s observations and grade updates, the spotlight was then turned onto me as the special educator and I rattled off the grades that the student has received from his other teachers. I skipped over the letter I had deemed inappropriate in an effort to be sensitive to the student’s unique situation. After I had reported the grades that other teachers had given to me, the IEP facilitator took over the meeting in effort to make some general observations she had noticed while the general educator and I reported. She mentioned that it seemed the student was finding strategies that were beginning to work for her and that due to her

recent change in a more supportive environment; she surmised that we should not complete the special education testing that would lead to an identification. I agreed with the IEP facilitator based upon her recent environmental history, her ability to adapt, and her past successes within the general education environment. The others followed suit with this suggestion and the IEP facilitator illuminated that the student would be referred back to SST where they would continue to support her positive behaviors.

The meeting was over just as quickly as it had started and even though I had never met this student, I felt as though we had gathered together to make a decision that would help her to become successful in the future, whether it be with her birth mother or foster mother. The meeting also left me faced with a confusion that I did not know how to dissect until recently. What would have happened if the team had not been privy to the information of her heart-wrenching recent history? How was I, as a special educator, allowed to weigh into such a high stakes decision about a student I had never met? What concrete knowledge were we basing our decision from? How would the decision have changed if the general education representative had been the one who had written that paralyzing note? Although I was pleased with the team's decision I could not help wondering, "what if we had it completely wrong about this girl?"

In all of the initial IEP meetings that I have attended it seemed to follow the same formula. The only differing factors included the information about the student, the general education teacher, how the professionals sitting around the oval table reacted to the information shared, and the decision to test or not to test. While I carried this framework with me into my interviews, I cleared my head in order to listen critically to what other professionals were saying about the entire identification process.

Building Background for Discussion

Britt

I was able to first sit down with Britt Winters (this teachers name and all other teachers' names used in this study are pseudonyms as indicated in the IRB approval) who had just changed positions that year from a 7th grade general education social studies teacher to a 6th grade general education math teacher. She was 31 and had begun her teaching career at Denton Middle School the year it had opened. She had completed 4 years as a teacher in social studies and 1 year of teaching math. During her year in math she was given the Algebraic Thinking classes where she taught students who were just behind their "on grade level" peers. The class was comprised of general and special education students.

Students are arriving in Britt's classroom from an elementary school setting, where self-contained classrooms are a rarity due to the format of classes and scheduling. Because of this nature in 6th grade, students that would typically be thought of as needing a self-contained environment in the middle school setting were in her class for the first quarter until their services were changed in their IEPs. Throughout our interview, Britt spoke very informally when she responded to my questions. Her speech was fast, which is something she was known for, as she jumped from one idea to the next. She was able to describe her experiences with working with co-teachers, special education students, different grade levels, and various subjects.

Meaghen

I interviewed Meaghen Lundy on the same day as Britt. She started teaching in the county right out of college in 2009. She spent two years in a high school within the county before moving to the 8th grade at Denton Middle School. In both placements she taught Language Arts. In her high school placement, she taught the Wilson Reading intervention

program and worked with students who were two or more grade levels below their actual grade level. These students were in general and special education. When she came into Denton Middle School she was also in an inclusion style class where special education students and general education student come together to learn on grade level material. It was her first year dealing with the identification process in special education. We met in her classroom where we were able to discuss her experiences during the year. Throughout the interview, Meaghen was very careful in her response to my questions, but seemed to warm up as we continued to speak. She offered a view of a neophyte to the identification process and how the system accommodates those who are new to the system.

Amy

Later that week, I sat across the couch from Amy Powers in her living room during the first week of summer vacation. She was a mother of two and resided 10 minutes from Denton Middle School. Amy had been at Denton Middle since it opened and has worked as a special educator in the 6th grade. She teaches language arts and social studies and has been the Special Education Department chair for the last 5 years. Before coming to Denton, she worked in an elementary school as a special educator and requested a transfer to a middle school. She is currently working on her administrative degree. As we spoke during the interview, I noticed her speech to be very formal while being taped. Before and after the interview, I detected her being more informal with me as she confided more about some of her thoughts about living in the area near the school. Amy offered the ideas of an experienced special educator who has seen the identification process in different schools and different levels.

Kathy

Kathy Hendrick, the vice principal for the 7th grade, found time to sit down for an interview in the staff lounge with me while she was finishing up for the summer. As an administrator, she was an 11-month employee which meant that her last day comes at a later time than teachers. She was the mother of one and her mother took care of her little boy while we conducted our interview. She was an English teacher for 13 years. During this time, she worked in middle and high school. She was able to teach in a neighboring county for 10 years and then moved to a Southern state to teach the last 3 of her teaching career.

When she came back into the Mid Atlantic state, she began her administrative career in a high school. After four years at the high school, she was transferred by the county into Denton Middle School. By the time I was able to interview her, she had just finished her first year as an administrator in Denton Middle School. Throughout the interview she stumbled more on her words as she seemed to think carefully about what she was saying toward the beginning of the interview. As she warmed up, she gave insight into issues pertaining to the school and community. Kathy was able to address how an administrator becomes involved in the identification process.

Kate

Lastly, I was able to interview Kate Albright at Panera Restaurant two weeks from the last day of school for teachers. She had taught at Denton Middle School for the last 5 years, which have been the beginning of her career as a special educator. She was placed in the school's Emotional Assistance (EA) program. The program was designed to help students who are struggling behaviorally in the general education setting to a point where they need a restrictive environment in order to be successful. This program also had a therapeutic

component that allowed student access to a psychologist at any point during the school day.

Throughout the interview, she held a comfortable conversation and did not appear to be holding back on her thoughts and feelings toward her program, the school, and the identification process.

Below is a chart to clarify each participant:

Figure 3: Characteristics of Those Interviewed

Name	Title	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years of Experience
Britt Winters	Math General Educator	Female	White	5
Meaghen Lundy	Language Arts General Educator	Female	White	3
Amy Powers	Special Educator	Female	White	5+
Kathy Hendrick	7 th Grade Vice Pincipal	Female	Black	13 – Teacher 5 – Administrator
Kate Albright	Emotional Assistance Special Educator	Female	White	5

Responsibilities and The Process

Britt

Britt identified her general education duties as hall duty in between classes, planning her lessons, and teaching her students. Within lesson planning, she explained that it involved differentiation for students who are special education in her inclusion style classes. Britt also had the responsibility to collaborate with the special educator by planning for accommodations and modifications. Britt was amazed by the ability of special educators to pick out the ability and deficits of the students in her classroom. For her, it seemed to take a little longer to identify these aspects of students.

Issues concerning communication with colleagues, students, and parents permeated the conversation. It taints the thoughts and feelings of groups of professionals to shape their

perceptions. In changing from the non-tested subject of social studies to the tested subject of math, Britt was confronted with much anxiety. She had heard the other teachers complaining about all of the testing that was expected of a math teacher. This had added to her anticipation; however, once she got into the classroom and began the testing season, testing became a way to empower her teaching. Britt used the data from these exams to drive her instruction and facilitate her knowledge of what concepts her students' grasped.

Between professionals, communication and taking directions from leaders is a struggle. During her first years of teaching, Britt was given a leadership role as a History Day coordinator for the school. The lack of follow through when she asked her peers to help her with coordinating the event was frustrating. It was discouraging for Britt to have veteran teachers not respond to her excitement. She decided after that experience she would not continue to plan History Day. To her, if she could not inspire other people to work on the project, then she did not want to be in charge of it. Upon reflect during our interview she related the challenge to the struggle that administrators must have.

Another demonstration of the communication between teachers occurred after our formal interview. A teacher had walked into our interview at the very end to ask the teacher a question. Britt had asked this social studies teacher if he had a student that we were speaking about in his class. He mentioned he had and with body language that demonstrated disappointment. He immediately said the student had failed his class and he thought the student was "retarded." He further explained that he was positive that the student was "dumber than a box of rocks." After this teacher left, Britt turned to me and clarified that this was an example of why people in the school did not always listen to him.

The way in which teachers speak about students to other teachers is essential. It can dictate how one is viewed by their peers by demonstrating how they think about the child/subject. In the last example, a teacher stated negative and degrading remarks about another student. The fact that Britt does not refute the statement of the teacher directly to him makes evident that she does not feel she can change his mind; however, she uses this statement to prove her idea that what one says dictates how they are viewed.

The spread of information can also be marred by a lack of communication. There was another moment during the interview where Britt explained how she did not understand that time and a half could extend to assignment deadlines. She illustrated that during an IEP meeting the facilitator turned to her during the meeting and explained that time and a half could also mean more time for assignment deadline instead of just extra time on exams. This realization made her feel awful that she had not known sooner. It was a moment when she considered all the other students she could have affected in her past year. The guilt she felt has carried with her till the end of the year. Britt expressed the need of the information to be spread to everyone to ensure that all will be able to provide this support to their students.

Britt believed that many people did not know this misconception since she felt that she knew much about the special education process and how students are introduced into the programming. She stated that most teachers that she encounters think the team just needs to test the students instead of actually going through each step of the process. This information indicated that there are many professionals that do not fully understand the process for identification and that the steps have not been fully communicated towards the staff in an effective way.

It is my opinion that in education, communication is not limited to conversing between teachers but parents and students as well. During our interview Britt mentioned to me that she had a student that was not performing as well. The parent was attempting to explain to Britt that her child had an SST plan; however, Britt did not check into it because she had figured that other people had done their jobs in order to ensure that this particular child would be in the correct program. She expounded that the parent had “bugged” her enough that she finally went to the guidance counselor and looked through her folder. What she had found was that the child was referred to the IEP team and found ineligible. The team referred the student back to SST but the case was never transferred. Essentially this student had fallen through the cracks of the system due to miscommunication.

When describing her preparation for the meetings, Britt simply said that she did not. There was never an official form for her to use in preparation for any of the meetings in the special education identification process. Britt would state their grades and explain how they are performing in class (if they are off task, their struggles, and biggest challenges). Britt felt that she had more power during the SST meetings than in an initial IEP meeting. This feeling of empowerment also spread to feeling like the team could accomplish more with an SST plan.

When she was asked, she did not remember the races of the student whom were identified in special education within her class but felt like she remembered them all being African American. When she looked at her roster, she found that all students in her classes were African American or Hispanic. There were 6 males and 7 females that were identified as special education in her inclusion style classes. She thought it was interesting because usually more males are in special education. When looking at the restrictive data in Denton Middle School it

is more likely that the male students in special education will be in more restrictive settings, leaving more females to be in the inclusion classes.

Meaghen

Meaghen described her role as lesson planning, grading, and differentiation of the lessons. It was interesting when she had mentioned differentiation because this is typically the task of the special educator. She mentioned that she is working on her masters because she realizes education is a continual process and it is the responsibility of the teacher to be involved in. In her current class, she had identified that she had special education students that were performing very well within her classroom, and others that needed more support than she felt she could give. Meaghen's ability to give support to lower learners in the inclusion style classroom was something she identified as needing to improve.

In preparing for the kid talk meetings, she would not bring anything specific. This is when she would just describe her problem to other people and hope that they might offer suggestions or share a similar experience. In SST meetings she prepared more for the team. She would speak to all of the teachers the student had beforehand to retrieve detailed information about the student's progress. This allowed Meaghen to go into detail about the feedback about the student's progress. For initial IEP meetings, she prepared very little besides grades and initial insight into how they performed in the classroom.

While speaking to her husband, who also is a teacher in a different grade level, Meaghen realized another way she could provide information during the initial IEP meeting. Her husband had mentioned that he had been asked to keep a binder of his student's work. Meaghen figured it would be helpful for these meetings to have hard copies of student work to comment on. This

being communicated to her allowed her to reflect on this particular strategy that she could improve on for the upcoming year.

Megahen had difficulty describing the identification process into special education. She mentioned that she had not really known anything about the process until moving from high school into the 8th grade that year. What had been communicated to her throughout her year in 8th grade was that a student needed to be involved in a 504 Plan first. If the plan was implemented and still did not work, she believed an IEP would be sought after and testing would follow.

When Meaghen did have students that she thought struggled in her class, she would call upon the help of the Reading Resource Teacher in the building. Once this professional was involved, then she would test the student for Meaghen and give her results. Megahen became infuriated because that was where this intervention had stopped. The Instructional leader provided no strategies to try with the student to encourage his/her success. This made Meaghen feel abandoned in her own classroom. She had wanted the best for this student and was attempting to have other professionals involved to support her but nothing was given. Megahen explained that what teachers need most is to have strategies to attempt immediately in the classroom to promote student success.

It was during this time that Meaghen also expressed her dissatisfaction with the whole intervention system for reading/language arts in Denton Middle School. In her high school experience, the school had a schedule that was flexible enough that if a student needed a reading intervention such as Wilson, or Language!, there would be time in the schedule for them to be involved. In Denton Middle School this was not the case. Reading interventions were attached to placement of the student in restrictive settings. Therefore, only students that were identified

as special education could receive these interventions that all could benefit from. Meaghen made the distinction that reading interventions do not just benefit special education students, but all students that experience phonics deficits.

Meaghen spoke about how specific groups of students have more opportunity to be left behind. Boys with ADHD become identified as special education much earlier than girls who have the same disability. She attributes this to boys being more active than girls, and essentially, are over-identified in special education. The problem lies in the fact that girls then are pushed along to the next grade without their needs being identified due to their better behavior. In a sense, it is their lack of energy that allows girls to be “left behind” in their knowledge of the grade level content.

Amy

Amy described her responsibilities as very similar to a regular education teacher in that she plans for lessons using the curriculum and has to grade. The difference lies in the fact that she has to write IEPs, implement IEPs, and case manage by making sure all of the special education students that are assigned to her receive the accommodation indicated in their IEPs in all environments. Amy also teaches in different educational settings. In her self-contained class, Amy teaches kids that are really low in the areas of language arts and social studies. In her inclusion classes, she goes into a class where there is a general educator and higher functioning special education students who are integrated with their general education peers. Here, she tries to give everyone in the class what they require to be successful learners. She was also the co department chair for special education at Denton Middle School. Amy’s responsibilities for this position included making sure all staff were turning their paperwork (data collection, goal

updates and medical assistance forms) in on time and making sure that the special education teachers were fulfilling their duties.

Amy indicated that the process could be enacted by a teacher or a parent if they have a concern about the student. From here the team of the IEP facilitator, the school psychologist, regular educator, and special educator would sit to talk about the student. If the team decided to test then educational and psychological exams would be completed. There are times when the team might decide the student needs to have a 504 or goes through the SST process. To an extent this is accurate; however, if a teacher does refer a student they have to go through a kid talk meeting, parent teacher conference (possibility), the SST process, and then come to the meeting. Amy's description left out this difference when compared with a parent referral, which would result in an immediate initial IEP meeting.

In preparing for a kid talk meeting or a parent teacher's conference, Amy would want to do performance-based tests to find a reading baseline. From here, she would want to see how the student was performing in their classes. She would be looking to compare the student based upon those that were also in the student's class. For SST meetings, she was only involved because she needed to complete hours for her administrative degree. Otherwise, a special education teacher is typically not involved, because the students have not been identified as needing those services. To prepare for the meetings she did sit on, Amy did not prepare anything. She would listen to what teachers had to say and then offer suggestions as to certain strategies the team could implement that would hopefully prevent the student from entering the initial IEP meeting. This was her personal goal within the process.

Once a student was referred for an initial IEP meeting, Amy would ask for data to understand the grade level in which the student would be performing. She would look to reading

fluencies to see if there were any deficits in phonics and math progress. There would also be questioning whether the student is having difficulty with processing. Another important piece of data would be understanding if the student is able to retain information over a short or long amount of time. Right before the initial IEP meeting, Amy would gather progress from all of the content teachers. She mentioned that she would also send out a sheet for the teachers to fill out that targets particular behaviors the student has, whether it be turning in homework to speaking out in class. She would also bring the student's grades into the meeting in order to be able to speak about them to the parent. Her hope is that this information will paint a clear picture to the parent, the rest of the team, and to know where the child is functioning while in school.

During the initial IEP meeting, Amy's role is to speak about all the data she had collected from her general education coworkers. After this is completed, all stakeholders, the general educator, the IEP facilitator, the school psychologist, the parent, and she discuss how the student is learning, or if the student is learning. The team needs to decide if there is a blockage that is preventing the student from learning. They have to decide if the student is able to pay attention during class or completing their work. If it is the student not completing their work, are they not completing it due to the student not paying attention or is it that the student does not understand the information presented.

After these considerations, the team decides if a SST is a necessary step. If the student has not had the experience with the SST process before coming to the table, the team might deem it necessary. If the student is coming to the initial IEP table more than once, the team is more likely to test the individual. Amy believes that the testing, when completed will help to receive a clear picture of the child.

Kathy

Kathy described her responsibilities as being directly responsible for discipline and academic achievement for 7th graders. She is also coordinator for substitutes and an alternate testing director. In being a vice principal, the position becomes more of a disciplinary role. Kathy explained she did not want to be seen this way and instead considers herself to be an instructional leader in the building. To achieve this, she constantly reminds students that they need to be doing what they are asked to ensure that she can spend her time in class with their teachers to help create instruction. When asked if the teachers minded if she went into their classroom or were apprehensive, Kathy indicated at first they do seem that way; however, when they realize she is not there to evaluate them, they relax.

As one of the many hats that Kathy has as a vice principal, she is also directly responsible for the 504 process. She explained that the 504 process is usually triggered by contact from the IEP facilitator or the school psychologist. Kathy calls the meetings and brings the parent, school psychologist and general education teacher together. During the meeting she keeps minutes and then creates the plan. She is responsible to distribute copies of the plan to all of the student's teachers and make sure that the plan is being implemented for the student. On top of this responsibility, she has to attend the transition meetings for 5th grade students coming into Denton Middle and 8th grade students that are leaving.

To be prepared for a 504 meeting, Kathy would speak about the student's grades and want to know how these have progressed after a period of time. She relies on the parent's input during these meetings because they have a wealth of information about the student. The team would review medical documentation during the meeting to get a better picture of the child. Kathy explained that even if the child is medicated for their behaviors, they would have to look at the child not medicated. Kathy expounded that it is because "life could happen" and the parent

might not be able to provide the student with the medication they need to perform in class. To qualify a student, the team must answer four questions. These referred to whether the student's condition impairs their ability to function in class when compared to other students of the same age. If all questions indicate that the student's condition impacts their ability to perform the same as peers their own age, a 504 plan is given to them.

As an intervention for behavior, Kathy monitors the amount of times a student is brought to her for referrals for behaviors. She recognizes that if a student is demonstrating behaviors that are problematic in the classroom the student might be having trouble in that particular class or might have a deficit of some type. This means that Kathy will look at the students' grades to monitor progress. She attempts to connect with parents to get them involved or recommends a S.O.A.R.R. (Safety, Organization, Achievement, Respect, and Responsibility) behavior check sheet with a check in and out. She may recommend that the teachers sign in the student's agenda book as well.

During a kid talk meeting, the team discusses the behaviors or problems of a particular student and listing the interventions that have been tried. Kathy could bring the student's discipline folder and share this information with the team in order to identify the underlying problem that the student might be experiencing. The guidance counselor would begin the identification process by declaring that a team conference or an SST referral would need to occur.

Kathy has also been a mediator between the student and teacher in order to attempt to fix the behavioral issues herself, especially if it is only one teacher that is experiencing trouble. She exclaimed that just becoming involved can help some of her students perform better. Although Kid Talk meetings can be beneficial for the teachers and student, it can cause noticeable

problems. If one teacher is sharing that they are having particular challenges with a student behaviorally, other teacher become sensitive to the identified action. The students' teachers suddenly believe that they too are experiencing the same inappropriate behavior in the classroom. To combat this, Kathy tries to remind professionals that because the student might be having an issue on one teacher's class it does not mean it is your issue as well. She encourages teachers to teach the correct behavior and then have a "short term memory" in order to allow students to learn how to behave correctly.

Once a teacher makes a referral to special education, Kathy asks the teacher to contact the IEP facilitator to see if it would be appropriate to complete an initial IEP or SST referral. Kathy does attend the occasional initial IEP meeting as a means to give behavioral data. She explained that teachers usually collect grades and get incite from her to see how many times the student was in trouble and other discipline data or observations she had. This occurs mainly when the team is looking at the possibility of an emotional disability.

Kate

Kate illustrated that her responsibilities were to teach math for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders to students with emotional needs. These students are all on behavior plans that include a point and level system. Every student has a point sheet that is designed to give points half way through the block and at the end of each block. Along with figuring out behavior data, she has to document progress reports for their IEPs and grade tests/quizzes.

When asked if she attends Kid Talk meetings, Kate explained that she does usually attend the 6th grade planning time. However, when the team is discussing Kid Talk, she usually leaves. Upon reflection as we were speaking, she mentioned that the Kid Talk meeting would be valuable to her. She feels not connected to this conversation because her program is restrictive to

the point that few students that are discussed during this time would pertain to her. Kate does not attend any SST meetings or initial IEP meetings because they should be in the special education program in order to be considered for this restrictive placement. If a teacher did indicate to Kate that they might have a student that would be a good fit for her program, then she would observe the student in their classroom to begin the process.

For an initial referral into her program, it usually comes from a classroom teacher or school psychologist from the regular education setting. From here, there are a lot of observations and the teacher would have to have been implementing a behavior plan to fidelity. Even with this implementation, the student would still need to be struggling significantly to be considered. They would also need to have psychological and academic testing to determine if the student would qualify for an emotional disability. If the student does qualify, then the IEP process would occur at their school first. The IEP would be updated with more behavior goals and seclusion/restraint/intensive therapy accommodations and modifications. From this in school meeting, an inter county IEP meeting would occur to determine the appropriate placement for the student in question. The team, which includes the parent, discusses all of the options for the student that would be alternative placements for the student. Kate would be a part of this meeting if her program directors think it could be a viable option for the student. Alternatively, if program directors do not think it is a suitable suggestion for the student, Kate or another representative would not attend this meeting.

If the team decides the student does become a candidate for the EA program, the student would come in for an informal meeting with their parent to gain some understanding of the program. The parent is given paper work to sign off and the teachers speak about their classes and the structure/expectations of the program. This is the time when the student and family are

able to ask all of their questions; however, Kate explained that they still do not understand the program. She stated that it was a good week before the student began to understand the processes and point system completely. Kate said that there is no standard way to introduce the kids into the program; it is more that they are just thrown in and need to figure it out. When she was asked about if she could prepare them for this shock, she declared, "I dunno how you would prepare them." This process becomes more taxing when they receive students part way through the year because the new student have trouble understanding why they are not given the same freedoms as other students. This begins the conversation of the tiered behavior point system.

The behavior sheets can be misleading to the average observer. Kate is responsible for writing behavior goal updates. Many of these goals have a percentage of accuracy attached to them in order to make them measurable. When a parent is reviewing the progress and notices that a student is 85% accurate in a behavior it seems like a good report. In most worlds this would be a B average. However, Kate explains that this kind of percentage means that the child has exhibited the inappropriate behavior at least one time in every class. They need to be in the 90% range to be showing significant improvement in their behavior.

It is difficult to discriminate what is a student's inappropriate behavior and teacher inexperience. Kate offered a story about her first year. They used to have a big room as their ISR room. She had brought a student in there to conference with them but Kate was not standing in front of the door. The door had a lock on it on the outside. The student that was larger than her walked by her and closed and locked the door on her in the middle of the discussion. As a result from this incident, the EA staff decided that the room was a liability and too big for students. They promptly moved the ISR space into a smaller, more restrictive room.

When she is dealing with behaviors, Kate attempts to rely on every type of intervention they can without going to the vice principal. The vice principal is used as a last resort when they need a student to be in in-school suspension or out of school suspension. During our interview, Kate described the difficulty in working with Kathy because she was new to Denton. At first Kathy would try to hold student and parent conferences, not realizing that much had gone into the referral and the effort had already been exhausted. It was an awkward and delicate situation for Kate to communicate with this new administrator about what the expectation was when they referred a student. They expected the student be suspended.

When we had met for the interview, Kate had 14 students in her program. Out of the 14 enrolled there only two were girls. All of the students in the program identify as Black except for the two sisters, which were the two girls accounted for, who identified as White. Kate had described that in years she had always had boys but was unsure if there was significance in the fact that majority were Black considering the population at Denton Middle School.

Behavior and Restrictive Environments

Britt

One of the biggest issues with her inclusion style classroom was addressing behaviors with students, while providing accommodations and modifications. Britt had expressed that often times it is the general education students that are the most misbehaved. These overt mannerisms by the general education population take priority at times and Britt, an experienced teacher, felt helpless by not being able to provide assistance to the students in her class that needed help. She attributed this to the mix of students that are being placed within the inclusion classes. These are the general on-grade level courses that provide students the general curriculum. Many guidance counselors notice that it is a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, and in

effect, place all varieties of struggling students into the class. During our interview, Britt was desperate for a class that actually included all students. She is questioning whether the stratified class system is the most appropriate for all students to learn. The integration of high performing students with our lower students that have special needs would allow for a better experience in Britt's opinion.

However, her class changed significantly from first quarter to second quarter. When students are introduced into Denton Middle School in 6th grade they are coming from the elementary school environment. In elementary school, there are very little times in the schedule that would allow for a self-contained classroom. Therefore, during their first quarter in middle school, all students are placed into inclusion style classes. After a quarter of data collection, students are identified for the self-contained setting and moved into this different location. Britt experienced a shift in the classroom population after the first quarter due to those students whom were monitored as needing a self-contained setting. This process is very similar to the surveillance system that Ray McDermott (2006) described in his article, since these students are functioning in the inclusive setting without restraints. As Britt has indicated, the special educators are trained in finding the disability of students, which facilitate identification.

In terms of the SST process, Britt believed that the majority of reason why a student would be referred to this process was because of behavior problem. She made a sarcastic remark to the effect that students are not introduced into the SST process because they have bad fluency. Britt supported this statement by explaining that a student is referred usually because they do not have their homework, or if they cannot sit. The implications that are attached to this indicated the students who experience behavior problems are more susceptible to the identification process for special education by teachers than those that are actually dealing with a deficit.

To combat this, Britt has been listening to others conversations. When she hears of a student that another teacher is describing as a behavior problem and needing special education, Britt explains how this could be that the teacher is dealing with a normal 6th grade student who developmentally is very active. She further described that she does not believe that something is wrong with the student's mental capacity, but rather, the student is just experiencing specific behavioral needs. I have also had a similar experience with fellow educators. More often than not, teachers expect a level of behavior that all students at the age level are not able to demonstrate. Often times, teachers were expecting behaviors such as sitting down and not speaking for an entire day are behaviors that even I have difficulty complying with.

When parents do refer their students their students to the IEP process at times they are not educated in the area of special education. Britt offered a story that she had lived through this year. Basically a parent had referred their student for special education testing because of the difficulty the student was having during Britt's math class. When they came to the initial IEP table, they decided to test. From the testing, they found that the student actually was very proficient in the area of math. Britt determined that this was due to the fact that the student actually did not know how to pay attention in class and was more concerned to socialize with others than learn the content.

Meaghen

One of the biggest problems that Meaghen had with students is when they were behaviorally fine, but exhibited significant struggles in Language Arts. Meaghen relayed one story that elaborated about a boy in her class who struggled significantly, but was willing to attempt work. She exclaimed how it was hard to watch because they are being left behind even without a behavior problem. Upon reflecting on the situation, she explained that an IEP could

have given the extra support that she could not give. The student's parents were also on board with his progress and making sure that they helped in him succeeding. Even with this support, the student was falling behind. Nothing was done to enroll the student in the IEP tracking process because this teacher did not understand how to help their students that needed specific support. Meaghen had tried her own strategies of speaking to the guidance counselor and the reading resource teacher but this did not help her particular student to succeed in her class.

Amy

Amy described that there was a huge difference between elementary and middle school. The children in elementary school acted much "sweeter and cuter" but they needed more guidance to be successful. On the other hand, middle school students, although they may be behaviorally unstable, are usually more self-efficient. Because of Amy's background in elementary school, she did notice an increase in the identification of students with attention problems as they entered middle school. She noted that it was harder to identify the students with attention problems as needing special education in elementary because the discrepancies between their performance and their IQ was not there. However, as these students get older, the gap between their IQ and their actual performance become wider if no one is actively working to correct this. Amy attributes their identification into special education as years of not being able to focus to a particular task in school.

In a particular story that she had shared, Amy described a student that was a more difficult case to identify. When a student withdraws in, it seemed to puzzle this special educator. She mentioned that a particular student would shut down and quit during class. The student would refuse to do any kind of work and had a difficult time expressing himself. Amy described that the next step into figuring out if there was a way to help him to avoid shutting down. She

would observe to see if the student was displaying this type of behavior in other classes or was the student attempting work. In this particular case the student was avoiding to attempt work that seemed too difficult.

Amy also spoke to her self-contained classroom and how the make-up of the class is constantly changing from year to year. She explained that some years she could have a large group of “high” students to other groups that are extremely “low.” It just depends on the special educator deciding which students can benefit from a smaller group setting. This piece of information confirms that is self-contained is available to the population, then the seats within the classroom will be filled. It does not really depend on ability; it is more the case of addressing the lowest students in comparison with the norm.

Kathy

Kathy compared her teaching experiences in the Southern state she worked in as compared to the Mid Atlantic state that she currently employed in. The students in the Southern state seemed better behaved to Kathy. The students would address her as “Ma’am” and that to her was an important quality. She did mention that the students did have the same issues with behavior; however, their level of respect was a bit higher in her opinion. She further describe that they would do something behaviorally wrong and when she would address them, they would reply “Yes Ma’am.” This lightens the action in a certain way for Kathy.

When interacting with special education students in her current situation, Kathy usually only works with them when she has discipline issues. There are times when she will go into other teacher classrooms to observe the students and teacher informally. This helps Kathy to understand how some of the behaviors are occurring within the classroom. Kathy also has teachers submitting lesson plans to her and this allows her to have knowledge on some of the

differentiation that the teachers are creating within their classrooms to fit the needs of their special education population.

There are times when Kathy will see a student repeatedly for disciplinary reasons and this sends her a red flag. She finds that when a student is “showing out” in class, it is because they hiding something, such as a deficit. To get to the heart of the situation, Kathy calls the parent and conferences with the student. She also observes the student’s academic progress and has a conversation with the teacher that might have referred the particular student for discipline. Teachers are Kathy’s “first eyes” in finding an issue with a student in the classroom and Kathy has determined it her job to dig deeper into these problems.

Special education is a hurdle for administration to deal with because of legal restrictions. Kathy explained that the law ties their hands in administration to deal with behavior concerns because they cannot be suspended for more than 10 days during the school year. Kathy recognizes that if the student is suspended for 7 days, then a manifestation meeting to determine if the behavior is part of the student’s disability. She described that the student and team would need to attend hearings if they would like to change placement, or a program review.

In her brief time as an administrator at Denton Middle School, she had been on many committees where the student in special education was suspended to the superintendent. This indicates that the student was removed from the regular setting and placed into an alternative settling based upon the infraction. These infractions that would result in an alternative placement would include having drugs, alcohol, or weapons. There are also occasions when the student is suspended to the superintendent for being a disruption, especially after going through a series of interventions to help the child succeed in the general education classroom.

As I was listening to this administrator, I could not help but think about how laws to protect the rights of the student to be educated, seemed to be a hindrance to those in Kathy's position. There are many other ways in order to deal with a particular student that is struggling with appropriate behavior. Denton Middle School is a PBIS school which means that they should be implementing ways to deal with behavior that are other than suspending a student. In this particular case, Kathy felt as though the only option in many cases is to suspend a student and the special education law prevents her from completing this action consistently. For a student that is academically behind, it is essential to be implementing behavior strategies for keeping students in school.

In speaking about her role in the SST process, she mentioned that goals for the student could include goals for reading and math; however, there are many issues that deal with attempting to build the student socially. Kathy recalled a goal that a student had this year of inappropriate touching. The team set up a behavior plan in order for this particular student to be successful. Similar with the 504 process, most students that are involved have ADHD, ADD, mood disorder, and other health impairments (sickle cell, diabetes). Those who had attention deficits or emotional disabilities, the team must look at them as if they are not medicated. When they think about the student in this way, the team usually will create a plan that supports the student's academic goals.

Kate

Kate's entire program relies on student behavior. To be introduced into the program, the student is supposed to have intense behaviors that prevent them from being in the regular education setting. The student should be able to complete the same work as peers in their own grade level and do not need additional assistance to behave more appropriately. The behaviors a

student displays cannot be just disrupting the class by speaking when it is not their turn or staying in their seat, it has to be an extreme behavior that involves calling the vice principal and sending the student out for suspensions consistently.

For student with emotional disability, when they are provoked, they cannot hold a conversation to explain what has happened or what they are feeling for a good 10 to 15 minutes after the incident occurs. Aggression toward many students and the staff would be another example of an extreme behavior that is not always seen in students. If the student does become aggressive with the staff of the school, it would result in an immediate referral to their program. The IEP for the student would be changed in order to be placed within this program. It needs to include seclusion and exclusion clauses, along with a restraint piece stating that Kate and the rest of the staff can put their hands on the student. It also has to indicate the behavior intervention point system that the program is based upon.

Their point system is based from 11 point that a student can earn each block. Each 90-minute block is divided into half because they are very long. In elementary and high school, they do not have the block system and can earn a total of 7 or 8 points per class. They receive a point for preparation, which is determined by if the student has their materials for class and they started their warm up. The student receives a point for being on task and following directions. They receive points for appropriate interactions, completion of the assignment, and their effort. Each student has a personal goal on their behavior charts that they are working toward mastering. This goal could be that the student is using appropriate language or getting started with assignments. The program also has levels that are numbered 1-4. Each level is more difficult to obtain because they rely on the student's appropriate behavior. In level one, the student might

receive two or three prompts to improve their interactions, while on level four they receive one prompt and if they do not change their conduct, then the student will lose a point.

Level one should technically only take 3 days to accomplish and move on the level two. It becomes a screening process because if the student cannot be successful in attaining level one then Kate comprehends that they have a bigger issue on their hands, and might require an even more restrictive placement. However, students at this level have a tougher time understand the reasons behind not being able to attend lunch with other students in the same program. These students are not allowed to do this at level one because it is usually the period when the student is being introduced into the program and the staff is beginning to learn the student's behaviors.

In higher levels the student can also attend classes with their general education peers. When the general education teacher explains that they are having problems with their student, Kate might just show up in the room or have a smaller conversation to prevent the behavior. She explained the student changes their behavior because they do not want the other students to know that Kate is with them. I consider this to be a shaming tactic in order to have the student behave better.

If a student does buy into the point and level system, which is an integral part of her program, it becomes very easy to work with the students. If a student is getting off task, Kate just has to give one prompt for the student to get back to what they were doing. This system does become biased between the teachers within the emotional assistance program because Kate finds herself more lenient than other teachers. She might give a few reminders before she actually takes action against the behavior while some of her coworkers stick with one prompt. I imagined this to be confusing for the students in the very restrictive program to learn which teacher expects specific behavior. This mixed message occurs in another aspect of the program

when thinking about consequences for behavior. Kate spoke about the 10-day limit and how she feels like she needs to “save” these suspension days. An incident that she might consider suspension worthy at the beginning of the year might go unaddressed because she realizes that in the spring the same student might get into a severe fight with another student, which warrants a more worthy of a suspension. In her dealings with Kathy, Kate mentioned that the vice principal was helpful because she would suspend kids when the staff needed it. Kate illuminated that there are times when the staff just needed a break from the student because it was “so draining” to work with the student every day. She mentioned that, “and I don’t have enough sick days to do that so you need to take a suspension day.”

The actual space where this program takes place is within Denton Middle School wall; however, the student does not ever even have to enter the school’s main hallways to change classes. There are two classes on one side of the suite and another class at the other end of a small hallway in the suite. In between these, there is an ISR room. ISR stands for in school retention and it is utilized if the student needs to have a break from whatever stimulus is causing them to become angry. The student is brought to this room and they may take a five minute break and with the hope that they will be ready to be productive again. This room is also used as a place to send a student for causing too much of a disruption or not concentrating in class to finish their work. The final way that Kate uses this ISR room is for students to be placed if they curse when addressing another student or if they become angry with a particular teacher. Whichever staff member was in the room with the student when the incident happened, would then have to sit with the student to problem solve for the future. The student is not allowed to leave the room until this conference happens and a productive solution is attained.

The ISR room used to be a larger room that had windows; however, due to Kate's incident with the student that locked her in the ISR room, the room has been changed. Kate mentioned that the space was too open/airy and was way too much room for them. The students could look outside to see other students and it was too much of a possibility of not becoming a punishment. Therefore, the ISR room is now what used to be a storage room for the EA staff, which is more confined.

Also within this space, there is a time out room, which is strictly used if the student is a danger to themselves or others. In a case where the student would be subjected to this placement, Kate would take everything out of their pockets; take off any belt that they have on, and take off their shoes (and anything else that could be considered a weapon). They would then place this student into the room and lock the door with the gravity locks. Ideally they would stand outside the door and let them cool down; however, this is not always the case. There are times when the EA staff will have to enter the room to physically restrain the student. For example, a student was placed into this room during the school year and began to hit his head against the wall. Legally, Kate cannot simply watch the student hurt themselves, so a restraint is necessary. In the case of restraint, there has to be an additional teacher standing outside of the door that would prevent the student in the case of escape.

When Kate first came into this restrictive program, she was a new special educator that had graduated from college. She remembers asking the program director for the county when she interviewed what percentage of students are successfully exited from the program. This person could not give her an actual number because it rarely happens. Kate further explained that in her five years of experience, she had only one student exited from the program. I questioned further about why this was the case that students were never exited, because the

program seems to be built upon it. Kate illustrated that it is a little unrealistic to place a bunch of students that do not know how to behave appropriately in the same room together and expect them to learn strategies on how to act right. She struggles with the issue because she notes that it is also not fair to have them in the classroom with 25 to 30 of their peers and drag down the entire class. In the end, Kate believes the program allows for these students to graduate. Kate described that beginning her career in the EA program was an eye opener for her. She stated, “I didn’t necessarily realize that these kinds of things occurred in the public school system.”

Blame Placement and Unspoken Truths About the Current System

Britt

With her recent transfer into the subject of math, I had asked Britt how it felt changing from a non-tested subject to one that was tested often. She mentioned that she was worried at the beginning of the year to the point where she felt ill. After her first quarter county testing, she found that her students were kind of performing in the middle when compared with other schools in the county. She described this as an unofficial pressure to her because no administrator or anyone else directly came to her to explain she needed to be better. This was implied though, that her class needed to be better and towards the top when compared with others in the same county. That could have been the intent by having her class compared with others. As educators, we are constantly being told that creating competition in the classroom is healthy, and it would almost make sense for administrators to utilize these same strategies in delivering their own messages: that their own school needs to be the best.

When she classifies a student as needing extra services, Britt realizes that her role is done; however, she has learned this only through experience. Britt explains that you have to “put the bug in the ear” of those you referred the student to. This follow up is essential if you

want others to follow through because there are many times when other people let these students “fall through the cracks” in the system. Britt describes that it does not necessarily mean that her coworkers are not responsible enough fulfill their duties, but it is one of those things that need to happen if you would like the process to begin. It is this type of advocacy that she carries through the entire identification process.

During many Kid Talk meetings, Britt felt as though nothing was being accomplished. She also had heard that the guidance counselor was attempting to not hold team conferences because the 6th grade team had held too many of them. However, having one-on-one parent conferences, Britt has often felt that the parent begins by attacking her teaching ability. Britt expounds that when it is a team conference, and her colleagues are unified in their message, the parent is more willing to listen to the team. This is when more positive solutions occur.

In the SST, Britt senses that the team is able to accomplish more than if they were working with the initial IEP meeting. She has witnessed educators more willing to implement an SST plan that are individualized for the student. She feels that with an SST one can complete more and have more teachers invested in it; however, if no one follows through there are no repercussions because it is not a legal document as an IEP. This could be due to the fact that she has experienced the SST process to be more focused on the general educator.

There are times when a student is going to the initial IEP meeting and Britt is not being pulled into the meeting because of a number of variables the IEP facilitator concocts. Britt interprets this to mean that she needs to be the advocate for the student and explain exactly why she felt it appropriate/inappropriate to refer the student. This is necessary for Britt to accomplish because the teacher might not feel that the student needs extra support; yet, they are the ones that

are actually supposed to know the student in the IEP meeting and have the voice to speak for the other general educators.

Britt has sensed that in many cases, a team already knows whether they will test a student, even before the parent enters the room. Having the parent come in for a meeting is just a formality in her mind because while she sits in these meetings she knows that no one was actually questioning whether they would test the student or not. Whether or not a team decides to test a student really depends upon if the team already has their minds made up as to what the student should need. When there are team members that are not unified in their thoughts on testing a student, the student will typically not be tested. To Britt it was interesting that when everyone has a similar idea of what the student should be receiving for services because then the decision to test does not require any fight. If there is not this common feeling, Britt decides to continue to fight for the student and herself to have her opinion respected. When the parent actually enters the room it is more a persuasion game as to what the rest of the team feels they should test or not. As a general educator, Britt is not always privy to this information before the parent enters the room. While the meeting ensues with the parent, she becomes frustrated when her opinion is not the same as the teams and she feels empathy for the parent in the similar situation.

At the end of the day, Britt believes that her role in the initial IEP meeting is very unimportant and a waste of her time. Her contribution is limited to the student's grade, what they do well with or struggle with in her class. To her, this could all be turned on paper to be read by the special educator along with every other general educator that was not invited to the meeting. In her opinion, created by her experience, she feels that her presence in the meetings is also a formality. She realizes that the team's goal is to have less testing because everyone cannot

have an IEP but at the same time, she feels as though it would help them to know if there is truly a disability or gaps due to environmental issues.

At all of the meetings, the IEP team would ask for her to give her grades in her class. This bothered her in particular because not everyone's grades are similar since they grade assignments differently. Also because Denton Middle School requires teachers to weight grades, each may weight tasks differently. In essence, a student could have an F if they don't turn in homework or do not take classwork seriously in certain classes but not in other ones. Britt wishes that the teams would ask for reading scores or performance-based scores, since grades are subject to the teacher's purgative.

Throughout the interview Britt offered examples of the students she had during the year. In one particular case, a student was on an SST plan. His case manager would seek out the other professionals in the building to find out his progress. The student, she recounted, liked the attention and seemed to improve. She attributed this to the student not getting enough attention at home. This is a common thought that I have heard teachers explain as well. It is easy to explain improvement in the classroom due to intervention by also blaming the student's home life.

Britt also blamed the system for being too lengthy because it is based on the parent's investment in the system. She described a case when a student was referred to the process in September because he was performing not as well in his classes. This particular student did not get an SST plan until April of that year and his mother would not attend the meetings. When they would meet on the student, the mother would participate by speakerphone. To Britt, this was a display that demonstrated that the parent was not supporting their child. She described how the student obviously had no support at home because each time they would have a meeting

the parent would come up with an excuse for not showing up. Her biggest frustration in this situation was in the fact that she had wished they could have done more for the student at the school level. Apparently she had felt that since the process was taking a while to react to this child that nothing productive was done for this particular student. My thoughts were why did they have to wait for an official plan to be put in place? The teachers could potentially implement any strategy that would work for the student before coming to the SST meeting.

In describing the disparity of the identification process, she explained that she had a student whose aunt worked in the building. Having this type of support within school walls, the student was given all teachers that would be extremely supportive to the student; yet, the student was still underperforming. The aunt knew the process for special education and had the parent put in writing that she wanted her child to be tested for special education. In having the parent write this, the whole Kid Talk, SST meetings, and struggle teachers have in identifying a student are bypassed. The student was automatically tested and they found that the student's strongest area was in math, the same subject that the parent perceived the student to be struggling the most in. Britt attributed this student's struggle to his less than perfect home life that allowed him to "get away" with choosing not to do math.

Britt was aggravated because there are many students who have parents that are not knowledgeable in the special education identification process that definitely need to be tested. Their lack of knowledge places the student at a disadvantage for receiving services. As with everything, Britt illustrated, that there are people who will manipulate the system, but she hates to see parents that are not as bright or don't care as much because their students will not receive what they need unless the teachers persevere through the identification process. She wishes that

there were more that a school could do for their students to step in during these situations when the parent takes a “back seat” to the issue.

One of her most memorable accounts was with a student who was underperforming significantly. He came to her from a neighboring county, but the student’s father worked at a neighboring high school. When a parent works in the system, their child can attend any school within the school’s zone. This student had a medically documented illness and the father had refused his son the 504 to ensure that he could use the bathroom or go to the water fountain when he needed to. Britt thought that this was not giving his child some of the basic things he needed to be comfortable in school. Britt thought the child needed more than a 504 plan because he was not being successful in school throughout all of his classes. The student was brought up in the Kid Talk meeting and effort was made to organize a team conference for this student. However, his father would not come in, which Britt attributed to the father not wanting to be attacked.

When Britt would contact the father about the issues with his son, the father would blame her for not having proper classroom management skills. Britt admitted to not being the best teacher when it comes to classroom management, but she believes that she is also far from the worst. It became vexing for her because she would listen to this parent place blame on her and she would think that all she needed was his father to tell his student that he could not play with his shoes during the first 25 minutes of class before even taking out of the needed supplies. Britt began her own behavior charts to track this student’s progress to demonstrate to the parent that it was only his son that was displaying problematic behaviors in her class.

During their last communication, the dad of the student explained that Britt needed to watch the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, and that she was racist. He planned on placing a call into the Board of Education to explain to them that she was an inadequate teacher. The

following day, the student was taken out of the school and placed into his home school in the neighboring county. This whole interaction stirred up a lot of emotion within Britt. She certainly does not consider herself to be racist and it was an incident that she believed she would be thinking about for years to come wondering about the progress of the student. She specifically stated that she enjoyed the student very much but was extremely concerned about his academic progress. She did not feel it warranted being called a racist.

Later she found that a teacher she worked with had the student in 4th grade. This teacher helped her by confirming the student's family background. She also told Britt that the father was definitely in denial about what his son needed. To this day, Britt knows that a face-to-face interaction would have helped to diffuse the situation. In support of her abilities, Britt described that she was able to see progress with some of the toughest students and could work with them; however, with this student, based upon all of the factors, she could not yield any results. I felt for Britt as she was reflecting upon these experiences. The feelings of helplessness and exasperation when you are invested in your students' progress are not unfamiliar to many teachers.

Meaghen

Due to being a new teacher, Meaghen struggled with realizing the identification process for special education. It was her understanding that a student had a progression from 504 to an IEP when the 504 was not working for the student. Meaghen's inexperience was apparent when she was explaining that she wished that there were a standardized process for identifying students into special education. Not that the process itself is very structured but it is important to know when a class is full of struggling learners. She felt that the current process was just a

complex system of one professional pushing responsibility to another professional without anyone ever taking accountability for the student to ensure progress is being made.

As a result, Meaghen would take a lot of responsibility into attempting to find the root of the student's struggle. She would test her students with a QRI, which helps the examiner in understanding grade level and comprehension needs. It also aides in understand how a student is attacking words in order to read. If actual skill of reading was not the issue, she would touch base with the guidance counselor to assess if there was anything happening at home that would constitute a challenge toward their learning. When she was too busy to test students, she would seek out the support of the reading resource teacher. However, she never got specific result back from this professional other than the student was performing two or three grade levels below what was expected. Megahen never received any kind of strategy that she could use in the classroom with the students when she would ask for help. It was concerning to her because in her past experiences in high school, if a student was a few grade levels behind they would place the student in a Wilson remediation course to learn how to red independently.

Kid Talk meetings for Meaghen felt useless. Teachers would explain their issues with particular students but she knew that no one really had any specific strategies to offer that could be attempted with the student. She portrayed the event by sitting and hoping that someone will offer some insight that would be beneficial. Britt would turn to the guidance counselor during the meeting in hopes that they would say some important background information that had been overlooked. Meaghen felt that many teachers are only concerned with their own classes and if the student was passing then the student was successful. Meaghen was also wondering about the follow through after the Kid Talk meeting. She was thinking that they have that time to

communicate but do they extend their thoughts past the meeting to follow up with the initial problems. To Meaghen's knowledge most teachers on her 8th grade team did not.

Meaghen did not think that the SST process was very effective because of the amount of time that passes between the team meetings. The meetings happen at the beginning of the year and half way through the school year. As a case manager, it was hard for Meaghen to receive the data back from the student's actual teachers. The data that the team asks for the teachers to respond to was a simple checklist to check to see if the student is completing homework, bringing his agenda to class. The teacher is allowed to check either always, sometimes or never for each behavior. Meaghen viewed all of these behaviors that were part of this checklist as out of the teacher's control. Meaghen wished that this list was actually sent to the student to self-reflect and make their accountable for themselves. She had known teachers that were not even implementing the SST plan to fidelity. Instead they would stick the plan into their cabinets only to be pulled halfway through the year when they were being asked for progress.

Meaghen was a case manager for a particular student and at the meeting the mother was irritated that her son was not bringing home any homework, yet his progress reports reflected that he actually had homework that he was not completing. The parent felt helpless because the student was not getting his agenda book signed by teachers and that he constantly stated he did not have any homework. This type of behavior exhibited by the parent aggravated Meaghen because she did not think the parent was actually parenting her child. The guidance counselor offered the strategy that the parent should bring him to school to pick up his materials after school to do whatever work the parent felt like should be addressed and if it was not homework then the child will learn to actually write the homework in their agenda book in order to get

credit for the work. Meaghen explained that it was a really good suggestion and that the SST process does help to get parents, students, and school professionals all be on the same page.

When a student is suggested for special education services, Meaghen assumes that the behaviors and progress of the student is beyond the team's control. She wants to be very optimistic that the teachers are consistent by not letting the SST plan fall through the cracks but it is more of the student's challenges. However, when these plans are drafted, they expect teachers to be signing agenda books and giving preferential seating. Meaghen explains that she cannot keep up with ten different students with different needs in her class and remember to ask them to raise their hand or give her their agenda book, or check that they are on task. In general, she is attempting to have every student stay together in their progress throughout the lesson but she does not know of a best way to follow through with multiple students with SST plans. In her own words, Meaghen explained that unless the teachers and students are 100% invested in the SST plan it will not be successful. I found this to be fascinating because in one breath, Meaghen had criticized the parent for not completing their duties; however, she was also struggling with her responsibilities. It demonstrated that blame is thrown around when students fail.

Another student that Meaghen shared as an example was given an SST and the parent also felt as though she was helpless. The team determined that they were going to attempt to support the student in any way possible. Each time, after the meeting the student seemed more positive toward his chances of receiving better grades in the class. When he would see a progress report with the past grades on it, he would go back to his old behaviors. Meaghen considered that the boy had given up on himself and stopped bringing his agenda book for the teacher to sign. When Meaghen would ask for the agenda book, the student would mumble and walk away. Meaghen then would become bothered by the lack of effort on the student's part

because he was not helping his own situation. She understood that she could not give up on the student but it is hard to find what motivates certain students. Meaghen also mentioned that this particular student did not seem to care about attending summer school or being retained because he was not following his own plan. I felt that this particular teacher had higher expectations on every other person in the equation than on herself. As soon as she showed the student his progress report, the student demonstrated he felt that he could not accomplish what he wanted. It would seem that the teacher essentially set the student up for failure instead of empowerment.

Amy

The hardest part for Amy is working in the general education classroom because of the demands that every student has. She explained that the special education students are held to the same standards as the other general education students. Amy feels the unspoken pressure that dictates that the students need to pass classes and succeed, while receiving the services that are indicated on their IEP no matter what setting within the school building. What I found to be problematic is Amy's distinction that those students labeled as special education, who are in the general education setting, are expected to be held to the same standards. This infers that those who are in self-contained settings do not need to be held into the same standards. It was always my impression that all students are expected to be involved and have access to the general education standards and programming, even outside of the general education setting.

The SST plan is geared toward simpler strategies that general educators can implement into their classroom. Amy did not think that teachers would need help in implementing the SST plan unless the behavioral piece. However, there is no one that is checking these teachers' classes to see if these plans are being executed. Amy did believe that having a professional that is devoted to holding classrooms accountable for implementing these plans would be a good idea

in the future. I personally believe it is essential because if these plans are not carried out in the way intended how are we to determine if they worked?

When considering students with specific needs, Amy did not feel that students whom are not motivated to complete tasks should be identified as special education. She exclaimed that as long as students are attempting to complete their work they should be considered for referral. If a student is not putting forth the effort and is shutting down in their performance because they do not care, then Amy knows that the student will be identified for special education. A discrepancy will be formed between the student's actual ability and what they do accomplish. Amy does not believe that special education is for that purpose. She asserts that special education is only for those students that struggle no matter how much they are trying.

In the identification meetings that she has attended throughout her years of experience, Amy has observed a lot of parents who do not want to parents as she says. She has found that more times than not, a parent will not know the status on their child's homework and passing in their assignments. She explained that she has observed that many times a parent will insist that the student does not know how to read the assignment and request special education testing as a result. Amy believes that parents should spent more time working with their children on their school work at home even at the middle school level. This could include just setting up a safe space for the student to work in and beginning an incentive system. Amy states that this is not something that schools can ever improve on but is more of an issue that society, as a whole needs to work on.

Kathy

Kathy observes that parents are becoming the driving force that would identify the student for an IEP. Teachers do their job as much as they can but parents are speaking to

community members. They are neighbors with other parents who are illuminating some of the services that are possible for the students. Kathy has seen parents wanting accommodations for their student that other students have. They enter these identification meetings being very informed with advocates at times that will push the school system towards having these students receive services. Kathy believes that these parents might be too informed because although they want what is best for their student, the student may not be eligible for the services that the parent might believe they need.

Another factor that makes parents interested in having their student receive services is that there are resources that will give money to their child for college. Kathy also thought that there was some money that social security will give the parent if the student is identified with a disability. In our present economy, these are very enticing motivators that would have parents fighting for the special education label if they are proven true. Kathy believes that parents abuse the system in this way because they are looking toward the long-term benefits for themselves instead of being concerned for what their child actually needs.

Kate

When entering the special education field out of college, Kate assumed that all her students would have very involved parents. In her particular program, many of the parents of her students are making lower incomes and are not existent in their student's educational lives. Kate might make it an entire year without speaking to a parent except when they come to the IEP meeting. Even at this meeting, she has noticed that parents will not always come into the building but participate by phone or just let the team make decisions without them and sign the paperwork when it is mailed home. Kate becomes annoyed because she comprehends that no real change can occur for the child if no one cares at home. This is also a reason she attributes to

their child acting the way they do. I could almost sense a feeling of defeat during our interview when Kate explained, “but like if the parent’s aren’t involved then...” She let the sentence trail off which created an effect that demonstrated the hopelessness she feels for her students.

The dynamic of the program has begun to change over the years. The students being introduced into Kate’s program are not supposed to be experiencing learning disabilities because it is supposed to be pure behavior problems. The behavior is what is supposed to be too extreme to be in the general education setting rather than they are behaving poorly because they are having a difficult time with completing the work. However, recently there has been a shift towards more students being introduced into this restrictive environment that have significant learning disabilities. Kate has been spending more time devoted to modifying lessons or creating alternative curriculums for her students.

She expounded that the line should have been drawn with the 6th graders while they were in elementary school when they had been introduced in the program. The IEP team should have looked at the educational assessment scores and the student’s IQ scores and figured out that the behavior problem was a result of the learning disability. Kate does admit that there is potential that these students could have displayed some significant behaviors in elementary school but she is not given the files to disprove her thoughts. I probed her to find out the possible reasons for this new emergence. Kate explained that the program in the county has low numbers and recently they had to close a section of the program in one of the middle schools. If the program does not have enough students then the county will not be funded for the program. The maximum amount of students they can have in a program is 24. If they can get to that number of students in the EA program, then the county will be able to reopen the middle school section that

had to close. Therefore, the EA program is taking any student that is referred into the program in order to sustain itself.

The fashion in which students are introduced into the EA program is either hit or miss describes Kate. If a school is interested in placing a kid in the program it is more likely that the student will be introduced. However, it is debatable if teachers are actually attempting to implement the accommodations for the student. Kate accounts for this as whether the teacher wants the student to be successful in their class or if they want the student removed from the setting. If the teacher wants the student to stay within their environment, the teacher will be more apt to allow the student to have breaks, modify the work, to let them cool down to ensure the student does not become overwhelmed and freak out. For the more experienced teachers, they know what needs to happen in order for a student to be placed within the EA program. When they are asked if they completed certain accommodations, the answer the teacher will give is they are doing them all the time, whether their statement is true or not. Kate believes it is far too often that there is no accountability for teachers completing these accommodations. The administration is not addressing this issue even though they are aware. On occasion an administrator might give a blanket statement to the entire special education staff; however, those that the administrator intends to address are usually the professionals that do not think the statement pertains to them. Kate urges for stricter standards in accommodation implementation for special educators.

Parents also can decide the placement of their students into the EA program, which might not be appropriate for them. Kate described the sisters that are in her program. One of the sisters had been in the program for two years because she had attempted suicide. When a student attempts to commit suicide it results in an automatic placement into the program without the

whole referral process due to the therapeutic portion. The parent knew this information and wanted her other daughter to be part of the program as well. In writing, the parent mentioned that her other daughter had also attempted suicide and the daughter was immediately admitted to the program. Kate is still undecided on whether her younger daughter actually needed to be in the program, but it was taken out of her hands.

On the other hand, there are many students that never introduced into the EA program that Kate believes should be. When she has held conversations with their teachers, they explain how the data collection that is needed to enroll a student into their program is too much of a hassle for them to complete. Kate views this decision as a direct lack of professionalism by the teacher because the student is prevented from being in the program that they need.

When the meeting is to take place for a student to be introduced into a more restrictive setting, Kate explains that the decision is basically already decided. The special education director and the EA coordinator will meet before the meeting and determine what particular environment will be the most beneficial for the student. Kate explained that they have the official meeting at the board to make parents feel as though they are the ones making the decision; however, the teams also know which program to “sell” the most during the meetings. This way the parent will pick the same program that the county is also promoting. This kind of practice is called predetermination and goes against special education law because placement should be considered a team decision. However, the structure described by Kate is a defense mechanism that many counties have implemented in order to be able to carry out their own agendas.

When examining which kids are mostly placed into her program, Kate explained that students who are left to raise themselves are the most common. Many of the parents to her

students are single and working multiple jobs in order to make enough money to survive. There are also a few pupils that are being raised by other family members because their parents abandoned them. The majority of her students are Black boys. These students come into the program with parents, guardians, and other professionals expecting them to figure out their behaviors but some students never really do. She attributes the rare student success to their parents also being involved in the process. Kate knows which students to challenge more than other through being strict with her behavior point system. However, a mixed message is sent because some students that Kate believes will never be mainstreamed might earn the same amount of points as the students that Kate challenges to strive for more. This is not necessarily what the EA program actually promotes but it is what she believes is the best for her students.

Perceptions and Challenges of the Current Process for Special Education Identification

Britt

Britt began by questioning how her administration knew she was an effective teacher for students with special needs and general education students. The administration told her she did a great job at the end of the school year. Britt wanted to know what exact data they were using to support their perceptions. She explained that she could act like an awesome teacher but in practice be terrible. At the same time, she did want to believe she did a good job at the end of the year when her principal congratulated her. How you are viewed as a teacher also effects how much people respect your opinions. Britt describes that many teachers do not care what others are saying about them, but the fact of the matter is, that is how people are creating their perceptions, whether it be founded or unfounded. These perceptions affect your ability to be an advocate for your students. The more other professionals respect you, the more you will be able to accomplish by obtaining the services you believe your student needs.

Britt recognized that the dominant story in many classrooms is one that depicts special education students as not able. Her students that were identified with special needs were some of her highest performers on the bi-weekly assessments. Britt claims that even though the student might have needed an accommodation or modification, they are still able to complete the assignments. She related these accommodations and modifications to physical disability. Britt rationalized, “yea you give her a calculator but that is like saying someone with one leg couldn’t have a crutch, like this is the tool to help her.”

Britt was asked to describe her perceptions of the identification process in its entirety. She explained that if the parent is behind the process, people will treat it differently than if it is just teacher or team driven. It was fascinating to Britt how the identification process was not the same for each student. Most often, Britt feels as though professionals want to make the process about behavior instead of about the entire academic performance.

The identification process needs more communication between professionals. Britt made this comment under the pretense of how many special educators do not have the time to address each of the teachers that have a particular student before going into the meeting. After the meeting, Britt wished that there would be more a personal recap of the events that occurred for those that were not involved. The special educators would also personally discuss what changes were made to the student’s program. Because more often than not a brief e-mail is sent out of the changes to a student’s IEP and the IEP is then placed into the teacher’s mailbox. Britt further wished that the timeline between meetings in the identification process did not take as long. There are times when she felt that she knew a student would qualify from the beginning; yet, it would take 6-8 months before an SST and possibly a year before the student was introduced into special education.

Meaghen

When asked about her perceptions of the system, Meaghen stated that there needs to be a statewide mandated process that is grade-by-grade and school-by-school. She mentioned this under the pretense that she just might not know the actual process that is in place. During her first years, she did not even know who to go to when she did suspect that a student might be experiencing a learning disability. She also had difficulty discriminating between a student needing extra support or an IEP. She asserted that there needs to be someone in the school that is making sure that the process is being implemented throughout the entire school building because if that was the case, she would be more informed of what the actual process is. She articulated boys that boys are more identified as special education because of ADHD or other behaviors that stray away from what she considered to be the “norm” amongst children. This aberrant behavior demonstrated by boys became a reason for referral at greater rates than girl in Meaghen’s eyes. To her, it allows for boys to be identified while some girls who struggle continue to be left behind.

One of the needs she identified was the slow speed in which the student is identified into special education. In one of her classes she is taking with her graduate program, she has understood that if a student is not receiving services by 3rd grade it is extremely difficult for the student to ever be on the same course as their peers. To her it is sad when a student is just being referred to the process when they are in 8th grade because she suspects that the system could have done more for the student in effort to close the gaps.

Megahen also asserted that when she began teaching, she was not prepared to handle students with special needs. During her undergraduate she had only one class in special education. When she started her career, she described that she was thrown into a room with a

book and administration explaining to her that she now needed to teach all children. There were no parameters and it ended up being a lot of trial and error to learn how to be effective in her career. This process is still continuing for her. There was a certain lack of support in dealing with special education in particular. To improve this, Britt offers that the process needs to be communicated to all teachers and give them some strategies that will aid in her students' comprehension. There also needs to be more professional development in terms of learning all aspects, such as co-teaching, implementation of IEPs, and how to do data collection.

In terms of her own role during the initial IEP meeting, she expressed that she felt useless. Meaghen is being pulled from her classes to speak about data that is already on a sheet for the team. She expounded that her opinions during the meeting are not really asked even though she had identified earlier in the interview that one of her responsibilities was to give input on whether the placement in her class was appropriate. Meaghen was unsure if this could be resolved unless she was instructed about what was expected of her during these meetings.

Amy

When asked about the process, Amy explained that she believed that we are still over identifying many boys with ADHD as other health impairment. They are given an IEP, which Amy does not readily agree with. She suggested that this needs to be monitored more effectively because if a student has a medical diagnosis, they can be identified under the label other health impairment. What it ends up being for special educators is that 75% of their caseload is kids who have ADHD, behavior concerns, and cannot focus. Amy asserts that a special educator should be spending time with students that do not know how to read or need to catch up in their math, instead of dealing with behavior constantly.

Amy also considered the makeup of the actual team members that are gathered for the initial IEP meeting. She exclaimed that she really did not think general educators have a big role in the meeting. They simply speak to their own class, which is a small percentage of the student's actual day. Amy believes that the data the special educator brings to the initial IEP meeting has more value because it encompasses the student's entire day within the school building.

A challenge of the current identification system that Amy mentioned are the laws in which surround it. She explained that you cannot refuse a student once they are qualified. Therefore, if a student is not trying and attempting to complete work on the exam their academic scores will be low. If their IQ scores come back as in the average range, the student will qualify because both tests demonstrate a discrepancy. To make this better, Amy explains that teachers should be given more time and be patient with testing. Also parents should not immediately request testing when their child is performing poorly. Amy did not understand why a parent would want their child in special education, and advised that parents should parent and attempt to work with their students.

Kathy

Kathy thought that the system did work for the needs of the school, when thinking about parents in particular. To her, it gives those parents that are not as informed about the process a chance to receive options for their children. For the parents that were more adamant about their students being in special education, the process can discriminate who actually needs services through testing. The process also brings together stakeholders who are knowledgeable of the student within different contexts to give the child the best support that they can provide. In terms of a 504 plan, Kathy spoke of comparing students to a regular education student in order to

determine if services are necessary. It was another instant where a “norm” reference was used to determine identification; however, there was no explanation as to what this comparable behavior was other than using the words “regular” or “normal” to describe it.

There are not many changes that Kathy would like to see with the process, because she feels that it already does a great job. One aspect to change would be the lengthiness of the process. Kathy illustrated that if the team would like the move a student into a more appropriate placement, then the process does tie their hands. She would like the ability to move the student more freely into the placement that she believes to be more appropriate by cutting some of the “red tape” that the IEP utilizes.

Kate

Kate perceived that the whole system of identification was completely biased and depended upon who is completing the paperwork, what teachers attend the meetings, and what the parent would like to see for their child. She acknowledges that many students can slip through the cracks of the system, and these children are usually the ones that need the most help. Kate illuminated that parents can also be pushy to the point that a student who might have just needed a 504 ends up being in an extremely restrictive environment. Teachers and case managers in these meeting vary in their personal feeling towards their jobs. A student might have a very proactive case manager that attempts to put every accommodation in the IEP possible that the student could need, while others do the bare minimum.

Consistency is of the utmost importance in the system according to Kate. It is the biggest need within the system. Kate understands that when it comes to special education students, nothing is exactly cut and dry because they usually will not fit neatly into the boxes we create. However, if there were specific criteria that place students into particular labels and their

environments, Kate believes that the system would consist of less grey areas. She does acknowledge that it would not be clear for all students, but sticking with the criteria that was put into place would help the situation.

V. Findings and Conclusions

I began this research project taking a look around my self-contained classroom and asking myself, “Why are all my students Black boys?” As a new special educator in a public school, the overwhelming number of students of color in my classroom puzzled me, despite the passage of civil rights acts and desegregation. It was a conundrum that I was not sure if I would ever be able to answer completely. Learning how to become a special education teacher during those first few years was hard because the structure of the department, the reasoning behind our identification process, and the expectations on special educators was not clear. I would ask my colleagues for clarification on these things and they did not have answers. They seemed to be working within this system that they did not fully understand either.

I began by immersing myself in the literature that had been written on disproportionality. I found there to be much research on disproportionality within special education, but I also detected the call for viewing this phenomenon through the lens of the identification process. This research has confirmed in general what the literature was describing; however, it builds upon it. The study connects how the identification process is affecting disproportionality within the special education programming. Due to its qualitative nature, the study was allowed to determine some of the complexities that affect identification of students into the program in order to illustrate a clearer picture of how some student populations are introduced at greater rates than others.

The identification process of special education is the gate by which all special education students must pass. The people that attend the meeting were the gatekeepers allowing some to pass while turning others away. I became fascinated by each stakeholder's reasoning for the admittance/rejection of specific students into special education because each case seemed to have a different story. Although the identification process is individualized for a particular student, there did not seem to be anyone considering the bigger picture by examining patterns in who is being introduced as a means of holding the process accountable. I wanted to understand how each professional was interacting with the process and making these high stakes decisions about students.

I structured my first question around general educators and understanding their rationale for choosing student to introduce into the process. Once in the identification process, I wanted to know what kind of data all stakeholders were sharing during these meetings in order to make their "case" that the student needed more support. The last was more concerned about how each person involved in the initial IEP meeting was facilitating to determine a common decision to test or not. As I systematically interviewed my subjects I began to understand the answers to a few of my questions and realized that there were many more factors impacting decisions. This study is a crystallization of the thoughts and feelings of those interviewed who are part of a system that dictates many of their actions.

First Research Question

What rationales do general education teachers utilize to identify potential students for special education services? Through the interviews I conducted with the general educators, I found that teachers usually rationalize by comparing students to the norm as a means of identifying students. There is no standardized procedure into how this is accomplished.

Therefore, this process is extremely subjective. The teacher observes the students' grade to understand their performance on assignments in comparison to their peers. These grades are also subjective because they are dictated by a teacher's educational philosophy. Some teachers could feel that they should place more weight into classroom grades while others prefer test and quizzes to be their main form of assessment. This inconsistency permits bias to permeate this identification process.

Other times, the teacher will track a student's behavior as a means to further understand if the child's deficits. If a child is acting out, many teachers believe it could be that they are hiding some struggle they are experiencing with the content. Their means of collecting this data is mainly through observation and not a standardized process. Behavior can coincide with disability; however, not every student that has a disability also has challenges with behaving appropriately. Depending on how frustrated a teacher is with the student's behavior might also dictate if the teacher will enact the identification process.

Once the student enters into the special education identification system, the teacher needs to become an active advocate for the student. If a teacher is motivated by behavioral issues, the more likely the professional will push to have the student placed within education, no matter the cost. As Kate indicated, there are times when teachers simply cannot be bothered to actually implement all of the accommodations that would qualify students and yet the student continues to be admitted into the special education programs under false pretenses. However, if the student is liked by their teacher, it is more probable that educator will attempt to implement the strategies as an effort to keep the student in their classes without special education services. Freire (1970) would connect with this idea because of the idea that students are to be passive receptacles for information. The more meekly the student inherits information from the teacher, the better

student they are. If they do not possess this quality of docility, it is more probable that the teacher will be motivated to enact the special education identification process.

Inexperience can be paralyzing to many teachers. These teachers can feel helpless in dealing with students that are struggling because of a lack of knowledge about special education as seen with Meaghen. They suspect that it is not possible to implement these accommodations and modifications to everyone within the classroom. When this occurred in the cases described, the teachers tended to deflect blame from themselves and push it on the student or family in order to proceed with the identification process. Based upon Meaghen's experience, there is a demand to implement more teacher preparation courses geared toward the components of the special education process. There might also be similar training in strategies to use when teaching students with special needs for general educators. The reality of today's classroom is that all teachers will be interacting with students that are labeled special education and need to be prepared to effectively teach them.

Second Research Question

During the actual meeting (Kid Talk, SST Team Meetings, and Initial IEP meetings) how the stakeholders (general educator, special educator, administrator) frame their "case" for a student's need for special education services? I have discovered that teachers are coming into these meetings with very little preparation concerning the particular needs of the student. They attend meetings with grades and an account of observations they have seen in their class.

In Kid Talk, the format varies upon the different teams. Depending on the team of individuals, the student could potentially be admitted into the special education identification process like when Britt described her meetings. However, Meaghen explained that these meetings were pointless to her and very little was actually accomplished by her team to begin

any process of aid for the student. The teachers interviewed would sometimes attend these meetings with a grade sheet; however, some merely shared an oral account of challenges.

SST meetings were geared toward the general educator. Depending on the group of professionals the plan would be implemented; however, there is currently no law that is binding these professionals to enacting the plan. Essentially, a teacher is given the option to not act on an SST plan and the ability place it in their drawer until the midyear meeting. During this meeting, general educators are able to decide what they would like to do for their struggling students and in that way it empowers these individuals. Educators would bring their progress on the student's grades into these meetings and whatever other observations that have noticed about the student.

During the initial IEP meetings, the general educator does not feel like they have a purpose in attending. They are there to report their grades and explain how the student performs in their class. Both general educators that were interviewed expressed the same feeling of worthlessness throughout this meeting. Even one of the special education teachers also determined that the general educator had very little to contribute because it is only a fraction of the student's day. These professionals are attending these meetings as a formality.

Third Research Question

At the initial IEP meeting, what perspectives do the stakeholders bring to the meeting in order to justify their recommendations for student services? The special educator is attending with the background of understanding the process. More times than not, they are wondering if they will have to complete the testing for the individual who is being discussed during the IEP meeting. To avoid this, they will suggest strategies to use before the initial IEP meeting, as Amy indicated, to prevent the student from being considered at the initial IEP meeting. They are

reviewing the progress given to them by the teachers and attempting to understand if the student is experiencing a deficit or if they are the victims of difficult environmental factors.

The general educator is reporting their knowledge of the student through grades and whatever memories come to mind during the meeting. They do not participate as much because their voices are not always heard and their knowledge about the process is not always complete. Due to this factor, depending on the educator and the student, the general educator can choose to not participate or continue to advocate.

The administrator is involved only with behavior concerns. They deal with the discipline aspect of the student and can provide insight in how the student is viewed behaviorally. To report this, they bring their data folders and their observations into the meetings in effort to help create a clearer picture. They are concerned with a bigger picture because they are responsible for their entire grade level.

Additional Findings

After conducting my research, I found there were many other factors that were impacting team decisions. The perception that people hold of the particular teacher ends up being a determining factor as to whether or not the student is introduced into the special education identification process. If the teacher has a positive imagine in the school, their thoughts and opinions will be taken more seriously.

Inexperience of the teacher also takes a role into whether a student is placed within the special education identification system. If a teacher is unaware of the structure that the school currently has for the student to become identified, they will not know how to introduce their potential candidates for special education. These students essentially are left behind to potentially fail or barely pass for the year.

There is the debate of what qualities that a student possesses warrants receiving special education services. As Amy indicated, she believed that student who had attention or motivational problems should not be introduced into the special education process. Others, like Kathy, believe that when a student is exhibiting these behaviors it demonstrates that they have a deficit. When a member on the team believes this, it is possible that they would carry this belief into the initial IEP meeting. When thinking about Freire (1970), these teachers are identifying students they believe to be marginals that exist outside of the population; however, even these marginals can be discriminated against. Freire (1970) would suggest that instead of concerning ourselves with who is outside and planning how to incorporate them into our structure, we need to transform this special education structure. The reality is that these students have always been a part of the Denton Middle School structure; we need to find other ways to serve all student needs.

Once in the process, there are political reasons as to whether students are introduced into particular programs. As with the case in EA, they are introducing more students into this restrictive setting because the number of students became low. The county would like to continue to receive money from the government for having the program. Therefore, the message has been relayed that all students will be introduced into the EA program if they are hinted to need to this service. The lax of requirements for introduction into this program is a scary notion due to its severe restrictions.

Our current identification system has many needs in order to become a more fair system that benefits all. I believe that Kate said it the best when she thought our system needs more consistency. Based on the evidence uncovered through this study, I completely agreed with her statement because the interviews and observations revealed how the process relies on who is at

the particular meetings, their interactions with the student, and the belief systems they hold toward education. When teachers do not act upon referring students that are in need, there needs to be accountability. On the other hand, there also needs to be a surveillance system in place for teachers that are not actually implementing accommodations to their students who are continuing to be unsuccessful.

There also needs to be more professional development on the structure of the special education identification process and how disproportionality is an infused into it. Not only do professionals need to understand how the process works, they need to know what to expect when they are invited to meetings and how to prepare. All teachers need to be given information on their duties within their classroom when they have special education student. They need to obtain knowledge in the collection of data in order to discern what is appropriate versus unnecessary. All professionals need to be aware of their reasoning behind their referrals and analyze these reasons in order to make more informed decision for the student.

The communication between professionals needs to improve. When they relate information to each other it needs to be clear and consistent. Instead of sending an e-mail to discuss changes made to an IEP, it would be best practice to speak to the teachers that work with the particular student. This way, it does not leave anything for interpretation.

General educators also need a more pertinent role within the initial IEP meeting. The general educator, with the majority of cases, is the only representative at the meeting that has interacted with the student beside their parent. Making sure that their voice is heard essential because predetermining an outcome without their input is not what the special education law had intended.

How does this all connect with disproportionality within special education? Through each interview there was this idea of “norm” referencing; however, there was very little discussion towards the specific behaviors dictated by the “norm.” If a behavior or performance level is other than the “norm” (as dictated by the teacher), a referral to the special education process is more likely. Even in special education there seemed to be a “norm” of what kind of behaviors special educators should be concerning themselves with. In Amy’s dialogue, she indicated that special educators should not be working with students who have behaviors problems; but instead, be aiding students that solely struggling with academics. Considering that there is no real description of “norm” as a way to reference it allows for subjective decision making to occur by all professionals involved.

Similarly, the factor that the special education identification process is not consistent for each student, allows it to be susceptible to bias and subjectivity. Students are not systematically introduced into special education programming, and therefore, certain populations will be introduced at a greater rate than other based upon assumptions. In this particular case, Black males happen to be the population that is most likely to be introduced and be more restricted. Unfortunately this is not an isolated case, because it is a challenge that our nation’s school systems are facing. If we can construct a more methodical identification system then we can begin to combat the discrimination that has been taken place within special education identification process.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview Questions: General Educator and Special Educator

1. What is your grade/content area do you teach and how long have you been working in your current position?
2. Can you describe the responsibilities of your position?
3. Have you held any other positions in education and if so please describe them?
4. Do you have any special education students in any of your classes?
5. Overall, what have been your experiences with special education students in your class?
6. In your experience, what kind of challenges do you see with a student that would lead you to recommend an initial referral for special education?
7. What is your understanding of the process that would result in special ed placement?
8. What do you see is your role as a teacher after you or a colleague have referred a student for Kid Talk or SST?
9. Have you been a part of a Kid Talk Conference?
10. In what ways did you prepare for this Kid Talk meeting?
11. Can you describe the experience for me and how you might have contributed?
12. Have you been involved in an initial IEP meeting?
13. What kind of information about the student did you prepare and/or bring for this meeting?
14. Can you describe your experience during and how you might have contributed to the meeting?
15. Have you been involved in a Student Support Team Meeting?
16. If so can you describe your experience at this meeting and how did you might have contribute to the Student Support Team meeting?
17. What kind of information about the student did you prepare and/or bring for the Student Support Team meetings?
18. Overall, what are your perceptions of the identification process for special education services?
19. What are some of the challenges or things that can be strengthened in this process?

Interview Questions: Administrator

1. What is your current position and how long have you been working in it?
2. Can you describe the responsibilities of your position?
3. Have you held any other positions in education and if so please describe them?
4. In what ways do you serve special education students in your position?
5. Overall, what have been your experiences with special education students in your position?
6. In your experience, what kind of challenges do you see with a student that would lead you to agree with a recommendation of an initial referral for special education?
7. What is your understanding of the process that would result in special ed placement?
8. What do you see is your role as a vice principal after a colleague has referred a student for Kid Talk or SST?
9. Have you been a part of a Kid Talk Conference?

10. In what ways did you prepare for this Kid Talk meeting?
11. Can you describe the experience for me and how you might have contributed?
12. Have you been involved in a Student Support Team Meeting?
13. If so can you describe your experience at this meeting and how did you might have contribute to the Student Support Team meeting?
14. What kind of information about the student did you prepare and/or bring for the Student Support Team meetings?
15. Have you been involved in an initial IEP meeting?
16. What kind of information about the student did you prepare and/or bring for this meeting?
17. Can you describe your experience during and how you might have contributed to the meeting?
18. What has been your experience with dealing with 504 documents?
19. Can you describe a typical meeting that would happen to determine a 504?
20. What kind of information is brought to these meetings and how do you contribute?
21. Overall, what are your perceptions of the identification process for special education services?
22. What are some of the challenges or things that can be strengthened in this process?

Appendix 2: IRB

Principal Investigator/ Project Faculty Advisor <i>(NOT a student or fellow)</i>	Sherick Hughes	Email Address	Shughes1@umd.edu
		Telephone Number	301-405-5783
Co-Investigator		Email Address	
		Telephone Number	
Student Investigator	Carlin Danner	Email Address	Danner.carlin@gmail.com
		Telephone Number	401-862-7089
Project Title	How do teachers describe disproportionality in schools?		
Department/ Unit Administering the Project	Teaching, Learning, Policy, and Leadership		
Where to send Approval Documents	11201 Valley View Ave Kensington, MD 20895		
Check if this is	Student master's thesis <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OR Dissertation research project <input type="checkbox"/>		
Funding Agency(s)	N/A		
ORAA Proposal ID Number			

Target Population: The study population will include (Check all that apply):

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> pregnant women | <input type="checkbox"/> neonates | <input type="checkbox"/> individuals with mental disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> minors/children | <input type="checkbox"/> prisoners | <input type="checkbox"/> individuals with physical disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> human fetuses | <input type="checkbox"/> students | |

Exempt (Optional): You may suggest this protocol meets the requirements for Exempt Review by checking the box below and listing the Exempt category(s) that may apply. Please refer to the Exempt Category document for additional information.

Exemption Category(s):
Rationale:

Date	Signature of Principal Investigator [REQUIRED]
Date	Signature of Co-Principal Investigator
Date	Signature of Student Investigator
Date	Signature of IRB Liaison/Department Chair [REQUIRED]

Print Name _____ **Title** _____
(Please print name of IRB Liaison/Department Chair)

1. Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to understand how teachers view disproportionality in special education. Disproportionality has been identified as when students' representation in special education programs or categories, exceeds their proportional enrollment in the school's general population. Educational resource allocation, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and inadequate teacher preparation have all contributed to the problem of disproportionate representation of minorities in special education (Blanchett, 2006). The fact that there is this overrepresentation of minorities in special education and underrepresentation of minorities in post secondary education demonstrates that historical legacies of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, that have been engrained in our society, continue to influence our educational practices (Reid, Knight, 2006). All participants in this study will be given an interview where they will be asked their viewpoints on disproportionality in their schools. All participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All participants will be given an IRB approved consent form before the study begins. All interviews will be conducted in a secure room. Information collected will be securely stored and disposed of in a timely manner.

2. Subject Selection:

a. The population sampled will be teachers or those that are experts in the field of education. The teachers who are interviewed will be educators/ professionals who play an integral part of the identification process. Professionals that are chosen for this study will be well versed in the identification process of special education students or the disproportionality of these students. I plan to recruit participants by inviting them to join the study through chain sampling. Informants who have a great deal of information about disproportionality will choose participants through recommendations.

b. The participants will be eligible based upon whether they are a teacher or scholar in education that is knowledgeable in the identification process of special education students and/or disproportionality. They will not be discriminated based upon age, sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, or economic situations.

c. This study is geared toward understanding how educators identify disproportionality. Therefore teachers and scholars on the subject will be selected.

- d. There will be approximately 10 interviews conducted.

3. Procedures:

1. A discussion will occur with those who are informants to the researcher. These would be comprised of Special Educators, General Educators, and Professors.
2. Participants will be invited to be a part of a one on one interview with myself. After an invitation is extended, a consent form will be given to the potential participants.
3. Once the participant has accepted the agreement, the interviewer will agree upon a time and place with the participant.
4. When the interviewer and participant meet for the interview, an audiotape will record the interview.
5. Throughout the interview, all of the participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
6. The duration of the interview should be approximately 30 minutes. (A list of question is attached to the as a supporting document.)
7. After the interview is completed, the interviewer will ask the participant if he or she would allow interviewer to conduct observations of their normal routines/initial IEP meetings/SST Meetings (as long as permission is granted by all parties).
8. After the interview and observations have been completed, the dialogue will be transcribed on the computer. The computer is locked with a password that only the researcher has access to.
9. Once the notes have been used for the researcher's purpose, those and the audiotape will be locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's classroom for no less than five years.
10. When five years have passed, the audiotapes and notes will be disposed of by shredding.

4. Risks:

A potential risk could be that participants would feel uncomfortable with the topic of study. To ensure that this is limited, all participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

There is also a chance that there will be sensitive questions that are asked. It will be made clear that participants will not be expected to answer questions that will make them uncomfortable. All participants will be informed of this prior to the beginning of the study.

Another risk would be that I am going to be conducting research at the school that I work at. I would triangulate by being a participant/observer, interviewer and document viewer. I would lessen the risk of influencing other's opinions by making them feel comfortable to share, explaining that they have the option to not answer questions if they are not comfortable, and using neutral language that would suggest a personal opinion. I would also iterate that I would like to learn from them because they are an expert in the area.

5. Benefits:

The overall benefits include new knowledge about disproportionality with possible new practices that could aid in stopping this phenomenon from occurring in the future.

6. Confidentiality:

Names will remain confidential by giving each participant a pseudonym. A pseudonym will also be given to the school and district. Once data is collected, it will be worked scripted on a password locked computer. All audiotapes and notes will be locked in a teacher's room filing cabinet. The only person to have access to these notes will be the researcher. After 5 years, all notes and audiotapes will be shredded and disposed of in a garbage can.

7. Consent Process:

All participants will be given a written informed consent form. All participants will be handed the consent form before the initiation of the interview sessions. All participants will receive a copy of the consent form for their records. All forms will be given to participants behind closed doors in order to protect participant privacy. No part of this of this project involves deception.

8. Conflict of Interest:

No conflict of interest.

9. HIPAA Compliance:

Not applicable

10. Research Outside of the United States:

Not Applicable

11. Research Involving Prisoners:

Not Applicable.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Each copy of the application must include the IRB application cover sheet, the information required in items 1-11 above, and all relevant supporting documents including: consent forms, letters sent to recruit participants, questionnaires completed by participants, and any other material that will be presented, viewed or read to human subject participants.

For funded research, a copy of the Awarded Grant Application (minus the budgetary information) must be included. If the Grant has not been awarded at the time of submission of this Initial Application, a statement must be added to the Abstract Section stating that an Addendum will be submitted to include the Grant Application once it has been awarded.

NUMBER OF COPIES

Please send 1 original application including the signed cover sheet to:

**IRB Office
1204 Marie Mount
College Park, MD 20742-5125**

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